Tasting Physical Expression:
A Sensorial and Cultural Analysis of the Notion of *Rasa* in Classical Indian Dance

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ABSTRACT

Tasting Physical Expression: A Sensorial and Cultural Analysis of the Notion of *Rasa* in Classical Indian Dance

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This dissertation is a detailed study of the notion of "*rasa*," a Sanskrit term that translates as "juice," "essence," or, in the performing arts, "aesthetic delight." The research has two goals: (1) to determine what *rasa* means within Indian neo-classical dance, especially in Eastern Canada (Quebec and Ontario), by contrasting the classical theory of rasa to its present actualization in the performing arts through foundational moods and emotions (erotic love, mirth, repugnance, terror and so on); (2) to provide a more complex understanding of the senses and emotions in Indian society and beyond through a sensory and affective anthropological analysis of *rasa.* Data for this project was collected from interviews with Montreal- and Toronto-based professional Bharatanatyam and Odissi dancers as well as participant sensation in India and Canada. The data was complemented by the study of (translated) Sanskrit theory on *rasa* (*Natyashastra*, *Abhinaya Darpana*, works of theorists Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Bhojaraja, Rupa and Jiva Goswamin, etc.).

The research shows that *rasa*, understood as an *experience* in the viewer, is not limited to the expert spectator (*rasika*) as classical theory would have it, but rather expands to the performer and emerges out of the relationship that is built between dancer and audience (including uninitiated spectators). *Rasa*, in fact, is an aesthetic experience that can be *learned* by performers and spectators—a process coined as "*rasik* literacy." Spectators develop their *rasik* literacy through the exposure to the aesthetics of Indian performing arts via visual, imaginative, aural and aesthetic savouring. In addition to these, dancers acquire theirs through internal perception such as kinaesthesia, proprioception, equilibroception, (embodied) rhythm and flow, thus forming body memories that are eventually associated with the emotional hues of *rasa*. Hence, *rasa* is a rich emotional, sensorial and aesthetic concept that greatly enriches the field of sensory anthropology and demonstrates the inadequacy of the mind-body opposition in the study of cultures. As an "embodied thought" (Michelle Z. Rosaldo), this concept also expands the understanding of the aesthetics reception of emotions in the performing arts by inviting spectators and artists to taste performances, rather than just looking or listening to them.

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Hopefully, you, the new audience, will enjoy the result of this finger-dance-performance. Let the show begin.

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Notes on Foreign Words and Diacritics

In an effort to make this thesis as accessible as possible to a wide and interdisciplinary public, academics or not, the foreign words used throughout this work – mostly Sanskrit, Tamil and Hindi – have been Romanized and phonetically adjusted for readability. All "s" diacritics are replaced with *sh* (as in "shiver"), "c" is replaced by "ch" (as in "child"). Long vowels ("aa," "oo," "ii," etc.) are not indicated. The "*v*" and "*w*" will be used interchangeably throughout, since the pronunciation of the *v/w* is somewhere in-between those two. The combination "*jñ*" was preserved as such in writing, but is pronounced "gy" or "gya" (as in "gyoza" — in this dissertation, "*jñ*" will most often appear in the words "*jñana,*" which means knowledge, or "*yajña,*" which designates Brahmanic fire rituals).

As an alternative, all foreign words included in the Glossary are indicated in "popular" Devanagari transliteration as well as with diacritics (following the IAST).

Foreign words are always shown in italic, with the exception of word "rasa" and names of dance styles, which are capitalized but not written in italic (e.g., Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kathak, etc.). Lastly, all foreign words are Anglicized as well: their plural form will include the final "s," as used in the English language.

The spelling "Bharatanatyam" (ending with an "m") will be used throughout this dissertation, as opposed to the "Bharatanatya" (no "m") spelling. This is a conscious choice, as the use of the "m" at the end of the word denotes a vernacular, Tamil use of the word, rather than the Sanskrit version of the word (which, some say, is made up of *bha* for *bhava* [emotion], *ra* for *raga* [musical scale], *ta* for *talam* [rhythm] and *natya* [dance]). By using the Tamil spelling of the word, I want to highlight the importance today of rasa in practice and thus make a distinction with its theoretical use in the *NS* and following philosophical debates. I consider that the word Bharatanatyam is more widely used today, while Bharatanatya relates to a form of Sanskrit elitism and/or post-reformist approach that seeks to put forth the "pure," post-*devadasi*, non-hereditary and/or classical status of the dance style.

Sanskrit Texts Abbreviations and Translation[1]

Sanskrit Text Name	Abbreviation	Translation	Author
Abhinavabharati (*Abhinavabhāratī*)	*ABh*	*The New Dramatic Art* (commentary on Bharata's *Treatise on Drama*)	Abhinavagupta
Abhinayadarpana (*Abhinayadarpaṇa*)	*AD*	*The Mirror of Gesture*	Nandikeshvara
Alankarakaustubha (*Alaṅkārakaustubha*)	*AK*	*Divine Jewel of Ornamentation*	Kavikarnapura
Avaloka (*Avaloka*)	*AL*	*Observations* (commentary on Dhanamjaya's *Ten Dramatic Forms*)	Dhanika
Bhaktirasamritasindhu (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*)	*BhRAS*	*The Ambrosial River of the Rasa of Devotion*	Rupa Goswamin
Dasharupaka (*Daśarūpaka*)	*DR*	*The Ten Dramatic Forms*	Dhanamjaya
Dhvanyaloka (*Dhvanyāloka*)	*DhA*	*Light on Implicature*	Anandavardhana
Dhvanyalokalochana (*Dhvanyālokalocana*)	*DhAL*	*The Eye for Light on Implicature* (commentary on Anandavardhana's *Light on Implicature*)	Abhinavagupta
Hridayadarpana (*Hṛdayadarpaṇa*)	*HD*	*Mirror of the Heart*	Bhatta Nayaka
Kaivalyadipika (*Kaivalyadīpikā*)	*KD*	*Lamp of Transcendence*	Hemadri
Kama Sutra (Kamasūtra)	*KS*	*The Guide to Love*	Vatsyayana
Mahabharata (*Mahābhārata*)	*MBh*	*The Great Warrior*	Vyasa
Natyashastra (*Nāṭyaśāstra*)	*NS*	*Treatise on Drama*	Bharatamuni
Pritisandarbha (*Prītisandarbha*)	*PS*	*Treatise on Divine Love*	Jiva Goswamin
Ramayana (*Rāmāyaṇa*)	*RY*	*Rama's Journey*	Vyasa
Rasamanjari (*Rasamañjarī*)	*RM*	*Bouquet of Rasa*	Bhanudatta
Sarasvatikanthabharana (*Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*)	*SKA*	*Necklace for the Goddess of Language (Saraswati)*	Bhojaraja
Shringara Prakasha (*Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*)	*SP*	*Light on Passion*	Bhojaraja

Glossary

In the following glossary, names are first written in Devanagari transliteration and then reproduced with diacritics in parenthesis, following the IAST guidelines. The glossary was created based on various sources, which are cited when necessary.

Abhimana (abhimāna)	Sense of self (Pollock 1998, 126). A synonym of *ahamkara* or *shringara* in Bhojaraja's theory of rasa.
Abhinavabharati (Abhinavabhāratī)	The *New Dramatic Art* (Pollock 2016). A commentary written by Abhinavagupta *c*. 1000 CE on Bharata's sixth chapter of the *NS* on rasa.
Abhinavagupta (Abhinavagupta) (c. 950-1015 CE)	An influential Indian philosopher and theorist originally from Kashmir. He became, and still is, a leading figure in Indian aesthetics starting in the 11th century CE. Many scholars assert that his theories were largely influenced by his Shaivite religious beliefs. His most known texts, both commentaries, are the *Abhinavabharati* (*The New Dramatic Art*) and the *Dhvanyaloka Lochana* (*The Eye for Light on Implicature*).
Abhinaya (abhinaya)	Expressive dance; the "outward expression of the innerself" in dance (Narayanan 1994, 32). From the prefix *abhi*, "towards," and the root *nī*, "to carry," thus meaning "representing (carrying) a play to (towards) spectators" (Nandikeshvara 1957, 8). *Abhinaya* is divided into four distinct categories: *angikabhinaya*, "the use of artistic gestures" to convey emotions to the audience (Nandikeshvara 1957, 11); *vachikabhinaya*, "the use of proper pronunciation, modulation of voice, accent and rhythm" (13); *aharyabhinaya*, "the costume and the appearance of the nata [performer]" (14); and *sattvikabhinaya*, "the representation of eight psychic conditions arising from the vital principle itself" (ibid.), or psychophysical reactions to emotions.
Adavu (aḍavu)	Dance movements. The combination of hand gestures (*hastas*) and footwork (*chari*), usually used in *nritta* (non-expressive dance) segments of a dance piece.
Adbhuta/adbhutarasa (adbhuta/adbhutarasa)	The rasa of the marvelous (awe, surprise).
Advaita (advaita)	Without form, atheistic. A word that is used within Shaivite traditions which see God – Brahman – as an invisible force with no physical representation.
Ahamkara (ahaṃkāra)	Self-consciousness or consciousness of one's ego, leading to self-love and, accordingly, love of others. The "virtue of which we enjoy ourselves, our mental conditions and their projections

1. Based on translations from Pollock 2016.

	in the world outside" (Raghavan 1963, 446). The ultimate and all-encompassing rasa, according to Bhojaraja, because our whole enjoyment of the world depends on this *ahamkara*. This state of self-consciousness can only be acquired through good deeds and actions in past lives. Sometimes called *ahankara*, *ahamkara-shringara* or *abhimana* (sense of self).
Alankara/Alamkara (alaṅkāra/alaṃkāra)	Figure of sense or speech; ornamentation (in Indian literature).
Alarippu (alarippu)	The first segment of a Bharatanatyam recital which consists exclusively of *nritta* (technique) accompanied by *sollukattu* (chanted syllables).
Alaukika (alaukika)	Non-worldly, supramundane, extraordinary. A "subjective transcendental state" (Raghavan 1963, 460) or an experience out of the ordinary (aesthetic, religious, etc.). In Nyaya philosophy, *alaukika*, extraordinary perception, represents the opposite of *laukika*, which relates to worldly things, states and feelings.
Aksha (akṣa)	Sense-organ.
Ananda (ānanda)	(Religious) bliss, a state of beatitude that rejects all form of individuality.
Anandavardhana (Ānandavardhana) (c. 850-900 CE)	An Indian philosopher and theorist from Kashmir known for his theory on *dhvani* (suggestion, implicature), which stated that rasa could not be expressed or implied, but only manifested or suggested. His most known work is the *Dhvanyaloka*.
Anubhava (anubhāva)	In rasa theory, reaction or consequent.
Arangetram (arangetram)	Debut performance (first public performance of a full dance recital) of a Bharatanatyam dancer, usually around the age of 18 (if the student started dancing as a child).
Arti/Arati (ārti/ārati)	A key element of any *puja* (devotional ritual) during which the divinity is offered light by waving a platter with lightened candles in a clockwise circular fashion, facing the image or statue of the deity. The *arti* is believed to protect the deity (or any individual) from the evil eye.
Asamyuta hasta (asaṃyuta hasta)	Single-hand gesture. See Figure 7.
Ashtanayika (aṣṭanāyikā)	The eight basic heroines used in Bharatanatyam and other classical dance forms, which are attached to eight distinct states of love (see Table 5).
Ashtapadi (aṣṭapadī)	"Eight steps"; a piece of poetry/song consisting of metrical couplets grouped into eights (eight sets of two lines). A segment of classical Indian dance recitals performed in styles like Bharatanatyam and Odissi, which consists exclusively of expressive dance (*abhinaya*) and tells the (erotic) stories of

	Krishna, Radha and the milkmaids (based on Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*).
Ashuba (aśubha)	Inauspiciousness.
Atodya (ātodya)	Instrumental music, without words. Also called *vadya*.
Balasaraswati, T. (1918-1934)	One of the last *devadasis* to fight for the hereditary preservation of dance within the traditional artistic caste of the *isai vellalar*.
Bani (bāṇī)	The traditional lineage or school of a dance form transmitted from *guru* to student. By stating their *bani*, performers attest of their teacher's lineage (hence, prestige) and their particular dance style. Sometimes called *gharana* (especially in northern states).
Bhagavata Purana (Bhāgavata Purāṇa)	A Sanskrit epic poem dedicated to the many forms and avatars of the god Vishnu, in particular the life of his incarnation Krishna. This Purana, which is only one example of many others, is one of the most popular *puranas* in medieval and modern-day devotional Hinduism.
Bhakti (bhakti)	Religious devotion; participation; (in rasa theory) the feeling of intense love or *rati* towards God. This religious tradition became highly popular between the 12th and 16th century with the rise of devotional poetry (such as the *Gita Govinda*) and key religious texts like the *Bhavagad Gita*.
Bhanudatta (Bhanudatta) (c. 1500 CE)	Northeast Brahmin poet who worked at an Indian southwest Islamic court. Author of *Rasamanjari* (*Bouquet of Rasa*). His work became highly influential in Rajasthani painting in the 17th century (Pollock 2016, 280).
Bharatamuni (Bharatamuni) (c. 2nd-4th cent. CE)	The sage Bharata, a mythical figure acting as the narrator of the *Natyashastra* (*NS*). Bharata was most probably a fictional character and the *NS* resulted from the combined works of several authors.
Bharatanatyam (Bharatanāṭyam)	One of eight (or nine) classical dance styles recognized by the Indian government. Bharatanatyam ("The dance of Bharata," or the expression in dance-drama [*natya*] of *bhava* [emotion], *raga* [musical scale] and *tala* [rhythm]) originates from the state of Tamil Nadu (southeast India). The style has a complex history and is the result of the "revival" of *sadir*, a type of dance that was performed by *devadasis* in temples and royal courts (see Appendix 4). Bharatanatyam, especially the Kalakshetra style, is characterized by energetic *nritta* (technical dance) that often take up the whole stage and subtle yet expressive *abhinaya* (expressive dance).
Bhatta Nayaka (Bhatta Nayaka) (c. 875-925 CE)	An Indian philosopher and theorist based in Kashmir. Although his writings, including the *Hridayadarpana*, have been lost, several authors mention him in their works. Bhatta Nayaka is known for shifting the attention of theorists "away from the

	process by which emotion is engendered in the literary text" and "toward the subjective experience of the viewer/reader" (Pollock 2016, 145)—a perspective that Abhinavagupta will later borrow.
Bhatta Tota/Bhatta Tauta (Bhatta Tota/Bhatta Tauta) (c. 950-1,000 CE)	An Indian philosopher and theorist based in Kashmir, the teacher of Abhinavagupta.
Bhava (bhāva)	Emotional states played onstage; bodily experiences of affects in the aesthetic context (Ram 2011, S162).
Bhavaka/Bhavuka (bhāvaka/bhāvuka)	One, often a spectator, who "actualizes" the emotions of a narrative within oneself.
Bhavana (bhāvanā)	In Bhatta Nayaka's aesthetic theory, the aesthetic efficacy of a combination of determinants and consequents, which has the power of realizing or bringing about a rasa; the experience of feeling with intensity (Vatsyayan 1996, 146, 148). David Shulman (2012) also translates it as "imagination," while Nyaya philosophers understood the word as a "disposition" that caused recollection.
Bhayanaka/bhayanakasarasa (bhayānaka/bhayānakarasa)	The rasa of the terrifying (terror, fear).
Bhojaraja (Bhojaraja) (c. 975-d. 1055 CE)	King of the Paramara dynasty who ruled in the city of Dhara (today's Madhya Pradesh) until his death in 1055 CE. He is the author of many works on aesthetics, the most significant being the *Shringaraprakasha* (*Light on Passion*) in which he claims that *shringara* (erotic love), or rather *ahamkara* (love caused by a sense of self), is the supreme rasa from which all other rasas derive.
Bhoga (bhoga)	Enjoyment or relish.
Bibhatsa/bibhatsarasa (bībhatsa/bībhatsarasa)	The rasa of the disgusting or repugnant (disgust, disdain).
Chamatkara (camatkāra)	Aesthetic delight; the spectator's consciousness of a played emotion, but free from egoism, in Abhinavagupta's theory of rasa. According to Jonathan Voyer (2018; interview, 1 Aug. 2017), *chamatkara* involves an aspect of surprise and awe.
Chari (cāri)	Foot movements, which are usually inserted into *adavus* (combinations of hand gestures and footwork).
Darshan (darśan)	The reciprocal glance between a devotee and a divinity (in physical form, such as image or statue) in Hindu devotion (*bhakti*). *Darshan* can also be granted by saint persons or important political figures.
Dasi attam (dasi attam)	Traditional temple dance performed by *devadasis*. Sometimes called *sadir* or, later by colonizers, *nautch*.
Dasya (dāsya)	Servitude.

Devadasi (devadāsī)	"Temple servant" or temple dancer. A woman (accompanied by male teachers, *nattuvanars*, and musicians) that was ritually married to a Hindu temple divinity and would serve this deity – which included dance (*sadir* or *dasi attam*) – on a daily basis. The consecration of temple dancers was abolished in 1947, leaving *devadasis* with no livelihood. (See Appendix 4).
Devi Arundale, Rukmini (1904-1986)	Theosophist and founder of the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, India. Devi was born on February 29, 1904 in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, from a Brahmin family already involved in the Theosophical Society. She married Theosophist Dr. George Sydney Arundale at 16 years old, who introduced her to Theosophist Dr. Annie Besant whose work she pursued in India. In 1933, she started learning *sadir* and presented her debut performance (*arangetram*) in 1935 against her *guru*'s wishes. From there, she undertook a full revival of *sadir* – renamed *bharatanatya* – through a Sanskritization and institutionalization of the traditional dance form. In 1936, she founded the Kalakshetra school of dance at the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Chennai, which she transferred to a new campus close by in 1962. Beyond her reformation of classical Indian dance, Devi is known for her contributions to Indian arts, education and animal welfare (Meduri 2005).
Dhvani (dhvani)	Reverberation (Vatsyayan 1996); Suggestion or evocation (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990); Implicature (Pollock 2016). *Dhvani* was the central concept of Anandavardhana's theory of rasa, in which rasa could only be suggested (*rasadhvani*).
Drishti (dṛṣṭi)	Glance, gaze or eyes (eye movements). *Drishti* can also designate a perspective or way of seeing things.
Dupatta (dupatta)	A piece of sash-like cloth draped over the left shoulder and tied at the hips, typically worn by female classical Indian dancers, both during rehearsals and concerts. Dupattas are also an essential part of female clothing in most parts of India.
Dvaita (dvaita)	With form, theistic; duality, dualism. A word that is used within devotional Vaishnava traditions which see God – Bhagwan – as manifested through physical form on earth via various forms (murtis).
Gandha (gandha)	Smell.
Gaudiya Vaishnava (Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava)	A Bengali sectarian movement of devotion to Krishna inspired by Rupa and Jiva Goswamin's writings on *bhaktirasa* and launched by Chaitanya in the 16th century CE.
Gharana (gharana)	See "*Bani*."
Gita (gīta)	Music with words; song. Music without words would be *ātodya* or *vādya*.

Gita Govinda (Gītagovinda)	The *Song of the Lord*. A narrative poem written by the poet Jayadeva during the 12th century CE. This devotional poem tells the love story between the god Krishna and the milkmaid Radha—as well as many other milkmaids. The poem has become immensely popular in devotional Vaishnavism over the 16th century and is used profusely in Odissi and Kathak performances.
Gopi (gopī)	A milkmaid. *Gopis* are important characters in Lord Krishna's *lila* (divine play) on earth.
Goswamin, Jiva (Goswāmin, Jīva) (b. 1513/1523-c. 1550 CE)	The son of Rupa Goswamin's younger brother who settled in Vrindavan with his uncle to study Vaishnava theology. He built on Rupa's theory of rasa and claimed that divine love (*krishnarati*) could constitute a stable emotion and was accessible to devotees, thus applying the aesthetic principles of rasa theory in theatre and literature to religious devotion. His works include the *Durgamasamgamani* (*Passage Through the Impassable*) and the *Pritisandarbha* (*Treatise on Divine Love*).
Goswamin, Rupa (Goswāmin, Rūpa) (1470-1557 CE)	Philosopher and theoretician born in Karnataka who lived in Bengal. After meeting the religious reformer Chaitanya (founder of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition), Rupa left political life to dedicate himself to Vaishnava theology in Vrindavan. He established a taxonomy of twelve rasas in which a group of five – the erotic, the peaceful, the affectionate, the friendly and the servile – represented the "chief *bhakti* rasas," while the other seven – the remaining rasas from Bharata's list of eight – only constituted "subordinate" rasas. His most popular work is the *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* (*Ambrosial River of the Rasa of Devotion*).
Gunachandra (Gunacandra) (*c.* 1200 CE)	Jain theoretician, student of Jain scholar and cleric Hemachandra. Known for his work *Natyadarpana* (*Mirror of Drama*), co-authored with Ramachandra.
Guru (guru)	Teacher. In traditional Indian teaching, the *guru* is respected and revered as one who has knowledge over a discipline or topic; hence, students are to follow their *guru*'s instructions without asking any question.
Guru-shishya parampara (guru-śiṣya paramparā)	Master-disciple tradition, in which the student lives in the *guru*'s house and takes part in everyday chores and activities, alongside receiving (dance or music) instruction.
Hasta (hasta)	Hand gesture; sometimes called *hasta mudra* or simply *mudra* (the latter mostly in a religious context). *Hastas* are used both in pure dance (*nritta*) – thus holding no particular meaning – and in expressive dance (*abhinaya*), where they act as a sign language. Each hand gesture has various uses: for instance, *pataka hasta* (flat hand facing forward, fingers together) may be used to show sweeping, waterfalls or a flag. *Hastas* are

	divided into two categories: single-hand gestures (*asamyuta hastas*) and combined hand gestures (*samyuta hasta*). (See Figure 7, Figure 8 and Appendix 3.)
Hasya/hasyarasa (hāsya/hāsyarasa)	The rasa of the comic (mirth).
Hemadri (Hemadri) (*c.* 1300 CE)	An Indian theorist and chief minister of the Yadava kings of Devagiri who worked in the fields of law as well as rasa theory. The teacher of Vopadeva, Hemadri endorsed the former's new rasa, *bhaktirasa* (devotional rasa), and its many sub-rasas as part of the devotee's emotional experience towards the god Krishna (when hearing devotional poetry, chanting his virtues, remembering his deeds, etc.).
Jatisvaram/Jatiswaram (jatisvaram/jatiswaram)	The second piece of a Bharatanatyam recital in which the dancer executes *nritta* (technique) on lyrical music and *sollukattu* (chanted syllables).
Javali (javali)	A segment that follows the *varnam* in a Bharatanatyam recital, and that consists exclusively of *abhinaya* (expressive dance). The narrative of the *javali* is oftentimes lighter and includes more sexual elements than the *padam*. Accordingly, it is more of a traditional segment that was performed by *devadasis* and that is not often included in modern *margam* (seven-part recital); modern performances more often include a *padam* and/or an *ashtapadi*.
Kalakshetra Foundation	The Kalakshetra Foundation is a dance institution founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1936 (as part of the Theosophical Society) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Its current 40-hectare campus was inaugurated in 1962. The institution comprises many schools and departments, including the Rukmini Devi College of Arts (performing arts – dance and music – and visual arts), the Besant Theosophical Higher Secondary School, the Besant Arundale Senior Secondary School, the Craft Education and Research Centre, as well as a museum, two libraries, an audio archive centre and a publishing branch. Degrees offered include Bharatanayam four-year diplomas and two-year post-diplomas, Carnatic music four-year diplomas and two-year post-diplomas (vocals, violin, veena, flute and *mridangam* [drums/percussion]), and four-year diplomas in the visual arts (various techniques, traditional and contemporary). Bharatanatyam students (as those in other fields) are introduced to the visual arts and music as well as part of their curriculum, and receive training in other dance forms such as Kathakali (with focus on *abhinaya* and face-muscle training). The most recent Kalakshetra artistic directors, who traditionally received their dance training at the institution (with the exception of Govind), were Leela Samson (2005 to

	2012, when Punthambekar and Chenthy studied there) and Priyadarsini Govind (2013 to 2017, during my own visit of the campus). The current director is Revathi Ramachandran.
Kama (kāma)	Desire, amorous love.
Karana (karaṇa)	Dance posture; a specific configuration of stance, hand and foot movement and position. The *NS* lists 108 *karanas*, which are carved in the *gopurams* (temple gateways) of the Chidambaram temple in Tamil Nadu, India.
Karuna/karunarasa (karuṇa/karuṇārasa)	The rasa of the pathetic/tragic (grief). Karuna relates to compassion and its resulting states (sadness, affection, etc.) as well as to grief and sadness.
Kathak (Kathak)	One of eight (or nine) classical dance styles recognized by the Indian government. Kathak originates from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (northern India), where strong Persian and Mughal influences have created a singular form of dance that combines Hindu and Muslim elements and narratives. Kathak is characterized by frequent turns, which are emphasized by costumes made of a long skirt.
Kathakali (Kathakali)	One of eight (or nine) classical dance styles recognized by the Indian government. Kathakali originates from the state of Kerala (southwest India), where it grew out of the theatrical form of Kutiyattam (Sanskrit theatre). Kathakali, a narrative form of dance, is characterized by heavy costumes and colorful makeup. It is also known for introducing characters to the stage from behind a flag that is eventually taken away. It is only accompanied by drums and vocals. Kathakali's *abhinaya* (facial expressions) is very expressive and exaggerated, as opposed to the more subtle *abhinaya* style of Odissi or Bharatanatyam.
Kavikarnapura (Kavikarnapura) (c. 1550-1600 CE)	Poet, dramatist and poetician from Bengal. Author of the *Alankarakaustubha* (*Divine Jewel of Ornamentation*).
Kavya (kāvya)	Literature; a word most often referring to poetry.
Kuchipudi (Kuchipudi)	One of eight (or nine) classical dance styles recognized by the Indian government. Kuchipudi originates from the state of Andhra Pradesh. It is similar to Bharatanatyam in many aspects.
Lasya (lāsya)	Gentle, "feminine" form of dance.
Laukika (laukika)	Worldly, ordinary. In Nyaya philosophy, *laukika* refers to ordinary perception.
Laulya (laulya)	Passion. Used by Abhinavagupta in the *ABh* to define Ravana's love towards Sita.
Lila (līlā)	Krishna's divine play, which is usually enacted through his daily life as an adolescent cow herder in Vrindavan, a village

	next to present-day Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, northern India where he was born and raised by his adoptive (human) mother Yashoda.
Lokadharmi (lokadharmī)	"Mundane world," meaning realistic acting. *Lokadharmi* is the closest Indian equivalent to realism in European and North American theatre.
Madhura (madhura)	Amorousness, a sub-category of *bhaktirasa* in Rupa Goswamin's theory of rasa.
Mammata (Mammaṭa) (c. 1050-1100 CE)	A Kashmiri theorist, author of the *Kavyaprakasha* (*Light on Poetry*).
Manas (manas)	Mind. A sensory faculty that regroups and transforms gross external perception into conceptual knowledge.
Margam (mārgam)	"Path"; a course of action. In the context of the performing arts, a Bharatanatyam *margam* is a full recital, which includes an *alarippu*, *jatiswaram*, *shabdam*, *varnam*, *padam*, *ashtapadi* or *javali* and *tillana*, in that order. This typical *margam* is based on the format created by the Tanjore brothers (the "Tanjore" or "Thanjavur Quartet") during the late 19th century at the Thanjavur royal court (Puri 2004; Krishnan 2012).
Mudra (mudrā)	Hand gesture; sometimes called *hasta* mudra or simply *hasta*. (See "*Hasta*")
Nandikeshvara (Nandikeśvara) (undated)	Author of the *Abhinaya Darpana*.
Narayanan, Kalanidhi (1928-2016)	An *abhinayacharya*, or master/*guru* of expressive dance, that was highly influential on today's Bharatanatyam global scene. Narayanan began her dance training at the age of seven. She had a short dancing career until she turned 16 (her last public recital was in 1943) and put her dance career on hold to raise her family. Some thirty years later, she resumed her dance career and specialized in *abhinaya* training, soon teaching to students all over the world, including in Toronto (Narayanan 1994, 83–84). Narayanan has taught *abhinaya* to many of the collaborators to this project, including Lata Pada, Neena Jayarajan and Nova Bhattacharya, as well as Priyadarsini Govind, who was director of the Kalakshetra Foundation between 2013 and 2017, and her student Apoorva Jayaraman, who, at the time of my visit of the campus, was Kalakshetra's outreach coordinator.
Nattuvanar (naṭṭuvanār)	Dance master who sits on the stage with other musicians during performances (when a live band is present) and is in charge of keeping count of the rhythm (*nattuvangam*). The dance master, who is often the dancer's *guru*, will chant the rhythmic syllables (*sollakattu*) that are part of many segments of the

	recital and will also beat the rhythm with a pair of small cymbals called *talam* (Puri 2004).
Natya (nāṭya)	Dance-drama, dramatic art.
Natyadharmi (nāṭyadharmī)	"Dramatized world," meaning aestheticized or conventional mode of acting. In this form of acting, movements and gestures are generally codified, giving them a purely aesthetic quality, yet corresponding to a local variety of sign language (that goes beyond hand gestures).
Natyashastra (Nāṭyaśāstra)	The *Treatise on Drama*, written by Bharatamuni (the sage Bharata). Its sixth chapter, known as the *rasadhyaya*, is the basis of all subsequent theories on rasa.
Nautch (nautch)	Dance. The word *nautch* was mainly used by colonizers and reformers in their opposition to temple dance (*dasi attam* or *sadir*) performed by *devadasis* (see Appendix 4). In fact, *nautch* was a less "refined" form of dance performed by village dancers (*dasis*) that was eventually associated with erotic dance soirées in private salons.
Nayaka/Nayika (nāyaka/nāyikā)	Hero/heroine (of a story or drama). The *NS* lists eight types of nayikas or women in love. (See "*Ashtanayika.*")
Nirveda (nirveda)	Indifference, despondency. One of the many *sthayibhavas* attributed to *shantarasa*.
Nrtyakala Academy of Indian Dance	The first Canadian school of Indian classical dance based in Toronto and founded by Menaka Thakkar in 1972 (formally incorporated as a non-profit in 1981). Nrtyakala provides professional (7 years; junior *arangetram*) and post-graduate (3 years; senior *arangetram*) training programs in Bharatanatyam and in Odissi, but also offers workshops in other styles like *kalaripayattu* (Kerala martial art), Chhau (Bengali dance style that includes martial arts, acrobatics and athletics), Japanese *butoh* and yoga with the help of invited guest teachers. Nrtyakala is associated with a dance company, the Menaka Thakkar Dance Company, where post-graduates are invited to perform as part of a dance troupe. Collaborators Neena Jayarajan (Bharatanatyam, Odissi) and Nova Bhattacharya (Bharatanatyam) have both graduated from Nrtyakala.
Nritta (nṛtta)	"Pure dance," technique. Abstract and rhythmical dance sequences with no particular meaning (as opposed to *abhinaya*, expressive dance).
Nritya (nṛtya)	Expressive dance, focusing on facial expression and hand gestures that seek to evoke a narrative and sentiment to an audience. Performers usually use the word *abhinaya* (the art of conveying emotion) instead of *nritya* to refer to expressive dance.

Odissi (Odissi)	One of eight (or nine) classical dance styles recognized by the Indian government. Odissi, sometimes called Orissi, originates from the state of Odisha (eastern India). Odissi is characterized by hip movements and subtle expressive dance (*abhinaya*). It is also known for focusing on devotional and erotic narratives taken from Jayadeva's poem *Gita Govinda*, in which devotees hear about the romantic adventures of the god Krishna with the *gopis* (milkmaids), including his favorite, Radha.
Padam (padam)	A segment following the *varnam* in a Bharatanatyam recital, in which the dancer focuses solely on narrative and subtle *abhinaya* (expressive dance) accompanied by lyrical music. The narrative enacted is usually devotional in nature.
Pramana (pramāṇa)	Knowledge; the instrument in the act of knowing (Chadha 2016).
Prasad (prasād)	"Favor" or "grace." The last part of a *puja* ceremony during which food and other offerings (mainly flowers) made to the deity are consecrated and given back to devotees. Such remains are not *ucchishta* (human food remains or leftovers which are therefore polluted), but sacred remains that are highly auspicious.
Pratibha (pratibhā)	Creative imagination; also understood as poetic intuition, inspiration or instinct, when talking about the poet's *pratibha*.
Pratyaksha (pratyakṣa)	Perception, perceptual experience; sensory awareness.
Prayoga (prayoga)	Practice, performance; the application of theory into practice.
Prekshaka (prekṣaka)	Spectator.
Preman (preman)	Any form of love. In Bhojaraja's aesthetic theory, *preman* is a stage in which all *bhavas* are a form of love, *preman*, and these types of love ultimately refer to the love of the *atman* (soul, true self), *ahamkara* or *shringara*. As such, *preman* is sometimes equated to the ultimate and all-encompassing rasa of ahamkara suggested by Bhojaraja.
Preyas (preyas)	Non-sexual love, affection, friendship. One of the four additional rasas suggested by Bhojaraja, but one that had already been part of rasa theory since Rudrata (c. 825-850 CE).
Priti (prīti)	Attachment (or affection) between a teacher and his followers, or between a master and his servants.
Puja (pūjā)	Hindu devotional ritual which involves the washing, dressing, feeding and worshipping (including *darshan*, *arti* and *prasad*) of a deity, either in image or statue form. A *puja* can be as "informal" as a ritual done in a home shrine in the morning, or as "formal" as a brahman- (priest) led complex ritual in a major Hindu temple or as done every morning and evening for hundreds of years near the Ganges in Varanasi.

Pushpanjali (puṣpāñjali)	The invocation piece performed at the beginning of a Bharatanatyam performance, in which the dancer offers flowers to the divinity on stage.
Raga (rāga)	In Indian performing arts and music, a melody or musical scale that conveys specific emotions. In Jiva Goswamin's aesthetic theory, (sexual) passion, love that consists in an immense desire of a subject for union with an object (Haberman 1988, 70).
Rajas (rajas)	Passion, dynamism, vigor, energy. One of the three *guna* proprieties associated with kshatriya warriors.
Ramachandra (Ramacandra) (c. 1200 C*E*)	Jain theoretician, student of Jain scholar and cleric Hemachandra. Known for his work *Natyadarpana* (*Mirror of Drama*), co-authored with Gunachandra.
Rasa (rasa)	Juice; extract; essence; flavor, taste. In Indian performing arts, sentiment, aesthetic pleasure or delight; aesthetic or imaginative experience (Masson and Patwardhan 1970); impersonal, disinterested and universal delight (Krishnamoorthy 1979).
Rasabhasa (rasābhāsa)	A "false" rasa or semblance of a rasa.
Rasadhyaya (rasādyāya)	Chapter on rasa (Chapter 6 of the *NS*).
Rasavada (rasavāda)	Theory of rasa, discussion on rasa.
Rasika (rasika)	A person who has, tastes or experiences rasa; a connoisseur of rasa. Oftentimes in classical theory, *rasikas* are believed to be spectators of great knowledge who can appreciate as well as critique rasa in a play or a poem.
Raudra/raudrarasa (raudra/raudrarasa)	The rasa of the furious (anger).
Riyaz (riyaz)	Rigorous practice, discipline (in the arts); the practice of an art form (dance, music) based on a daily rigorous and repetitive training of the body and mind, allowing movements to become of "a second nature."
Sadhana (sādhana)	Rigorous practice, discipline; a path or means towards a goal, often as part of a religious context (e.g. meditation, yoga and ayurvedic diet). Usually referred to as "*riyaz*" in the performing arts.
Sadir (sadir)	Temple dance performed by *devadasis*, which acts as the "ancestor" of Bharatanatyam. Sometimes called *dasi attam* or *nautch*.
Sahridaya (sahṛdaya)	In Indian performing arts, one who is "of the same heart" or the same background as the poet or interpreter; a sympathetic viewer. The ideal spectator in Indian classical dance; a synonym to *rasika*, in this case.
Sambhoga (saṃbhoga)	Love in union, or the Erotic enjoyed. (See "*Shringararasa.*")

Sampradaya Dance Academy	Bharatanatyam dance school founded by its current director and principal instructor Lata Pada in 1990 in Mississauga, ON. The school offers a series of programs, including a professional training program (38 weeks a year for eight years, with ISTD curriculum), an *arangetram* training program (two-year one-on-one training in preparation for the solo debut), a joint program with York University's undergraduate degree in Dance, a general training program, a teacher training program, as well as a ten-day summer intensive program. Sampradaya (which means "tradition") also maintains a resource library and a documentation centre that includes books, audio and audiovisual material in Indian visual arts, dance and music. The dance academy is closely associated with the Sampradaya Dance Creations, its professional dance company.
Samskara (saṃskāra)	In Nyaya philosophy, memories, impressions or memory-impressions.
Samyuta hasta (saṃyuta hasta)	Double-hand or combined hand gesture. See Figure 8.
Sancharibhava (sañcāribhāva)	In Indian aesthetics and the *NS*, transitory emotional states. Also called *sancharin*. (See "*Vyabhicharibhava*.")
Sattva/Sattvika (sattva/sāttvika)	Purity, goodness; knowledge. One of the three *guna* proprieties, associated with *brahmin* priests and gods. In the *NS* and Indian aesthetic theory, *sattvikabhavas* describe "pure," uncontrollable psychophysical reactions of the body (horripilation, perspiration, fainting, etc.).
Sattvajñana (sattvajñāna)	In Indian aesthetic theory, the realization of the Self. One of the many *sthayins* (dominant emotions) of *shanta* (the peaceful) suggested by theoreticians.
Sattvikabhinaya (sāttvikābhinaya)	In the *NS* and Indian aesthetics, the incontrollable psychophysical reactions of the body caused by emotions. The art of expressing the inner emotional world of a character in Indian performing arts (Raina 2019, 114).
Shabda (śabda)	Sound, speech. In Nyaya philosophy, verbal testimony.
Shabdam (śabdam)	The third segment of a Bharatanatyam recital, in which the dancer starts introducing elements of *abhinaya* (expressive dance) to her *nritta* (technique), accompanied by a short playful, lyrical composition.
Shaiva (Śaiva)	An adjective referring to one's religious affiliation to the god Shiva or any of his forms. Shaiva devotion is stronger in the southern regions of India.
Shama (śama)	In Indian aesthetics, detachment (Raghavan 1975) (the equivalent to the Self, *atman*, according to Abhinavagupta); serenity, tranquility, absence of passions, peace (Ramachandran 1980). One of the many *sthayins* (dominant

	emotions) of *shanta* (the peaceful) suggested by Indian aesthetics theoreticians.
Shanta/Shantarasa (śānta/śāntarasa)	The rasa of the peaceful. Although *shanta* became a standard rasa with the works of Abhinavagupta (*c*. 1000 CE), this rasa had been part of rasa theory since Udbhata (c. 800 CE). According to Abhinavagupta, *shanta's sthayibhava* (dominant emotion) is *nirveda*, "the indifference to worldly things" (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 521). Bhojaraja also included *shanta* in his list of 12 rasas, but it was surpassed by the ultimate rasa of *ahamkara* or *preman*, as it was believed to be yet another form of love.
Shloka (śloka)	Verse, or a series of verses recited in metres (often in Sanskrit). Verses often acted as basic statements that were memorized and used to illustrate a point in classical Indian philosophy and aesthetics; they are also memorized by dancers, often in chanted *shlokas*, which help performers remember, for instance, the name and succession of hand gestures (*hastas*) or the theory behind movements. (See Appendix 3.)
Shringara/Shringararasa (śṛṇgāra/śṛṇgārarasa)	The rasa of the erotic; the sentiment or mood of love. In Bhojaraja's aesthetic theory, Pollock (1998; 2016) translates the word *shringara* to "passion." *Shringara* manifests itself through two major sub-sentiments love in union or the erotic enjoyed (*sambhoga*), and love in separation or the erotic thwarted (*vipralambha*), the latter being the most popular one in representation for the strong emotions it triggers.
Shubha (śubha)	Auspiciousness.
Sneha (sneha)	Friendship, affection.
Sollukattu/solkattu (sollukaṭṭu/solkaṭṭu)	Conventionalized rhythmic syllables chanted by the *nattuvanar* or *guru* during a dance performance or rehearsal, which guide the *nritta* (pure dance) segments of the representation. The *sollukattu* is accompanied during public performances by a *talam*, an instrument that consists of small finger cymbals, or a short wooden stick and block during rehearsals and practice. Together, the *sollukattu* and *talam* are part of the art of nattuvangam, keeping rhythm.
Sparsha (sparśa)	Touch.
Sthayibhava (sthāyibhāva)	Dominant or stable emotion; "the permanent or established emotion or the state of mind of the actor when portraying a particular bhava" (Narayanan 1994, 47). Each rasa has a corresponding *sthayibhava*. Also called *sthayin*.
Sukha (sukha)	Pleasure.
Talam (tālam)	Rhythm, time-measure (in Sanskrit, *tala*). In Indian performing arts, instruments that are used by the *guru* or *nattuvanar* (dance

	master) to count the beat and keep the rhythm during dance practice and public performances. The *talam* used on stage are two small hand cymbals, and those used during rehearsal are a wooden stick and block.
Tamas (tamas)	Inertia, dullness, darkness; ignorance. One of the three *gunas* proprieties, associated with *shudras* (servants) and outcastes.
Tandava (tāṇḍava)	Vigorous, energetic, "masculine" form of dance. The *NS* states that this form of dance originated from the god Shiva.
Tapas (tapas)	Heat (generated from ascetic practices); efforts in achieving self-realization; penance, expiation. Austere and/or ascetic spiritual practices, often in the form of meditation or yogic practices.
Tattvajñana (tattvajñāna)	Realization or knowledge of the Self (*atman*). One of the many *sthayins* (dominant emotions) of *shanta* (the peaceful) suggested by Indian aesthetics theoreticians.
Tillana (tillana)	The final segment of a Bharatanatyam recital in which the dancer executes intricate and often symmetrical patterns of *nritta* (technique) dance to lyrical music and some *sollukattu* (chanted syllables).
Tribhanga (tribhaṅga)	Basic stance in Odissi, in which the hips a pushed away from the head and knee axis, resulting in a "tripartite" body posture. (See Figure 2 and Figure 3.)
Trishnakshayasukha (tṛṣṇākṣayasukha)	Cessation of all desires, tranquility of mind, contentment. One of the many *sthayins* (dominant emotions) of *shanta* (the peaceful) suggested by Indian aesthetics theoreticians.
Udatta (udātta)	The noble, dignity. One of the four additional rasas suggested by Bhojaraja. Sometimes called *urjasvin*.
Uddhata (uddhata)	The vainglorious, pride (sometimes, the imperious). One of the four additional rasas suggested by Bhojaraja.
Vaishnava (Vaiṣṇava)	An adjective referring to one's religious affiliation to the god Vishnu or any of his forms and incarnations (like Krishna and Rama). Vaishnava devotion is stronger in northern regions of India.
Varnam (varṇam)	Color. The fourth and longer segment of a Bharatanatyam performance (sometimes up to 45 minutes), in which the dancer presents a mix of *nritta* (technical dance) and *abhinaya* (expressive dance) accompanied by lyrical music.
Vasana (vāsanā)	Mnemonic traces or perfumes; karmic traces – sometimes experienced in present life as *déjà vus* or impressions – that attach to the mind (*manas*) and migrate from one life to the next along the self (*atman*).
Vatsalya (vātsalya)	Non-sexual love; parental love, affection of parents towards children. Sometimes written *vatsala*.

Vatsyayana (Vātsyāyana) (*c*. 2nd-3rd cent. CE)	Indian philosopher and author of the *Kama Sutra*. (Not to confuse with scholar Kapila Vatsyayan or Indian philosopher Pakṣilasvāmin Vātsyāyana, author of the Nyayasutrabhashya.)
Vibhava (vibhāva)	Cause, factor or determinant.
Vipralambha (vipralambha)	Love in separation, or the erotic thwarted. (See "*Shringararasa*.")
Vira/virarasa (vīra/vīrarasa)	The rasa of the heroic (energetic, courageous).
Vyabhicharibhava (vyabhicāribhāva)	Transitive emotions, transitory states. Includes emotional and physical states, qualities and traits. Sometimes called *sancharibhava* or *vyabhicharin*.

Introduction (*Alarippu*)

Figure 1. A Bharatanatyam dancer. (Drawing by the author.)

The stage is dark. The dancer has extended her gratitude to the audience, her *guru* (teacher), the musicians and Mother Earth. The gods have been honored and thanked as well through the *pushpanjali*, the invocation. It's showtime.

Guided by the *nattuvanar*'s chanted syllables, who is herself accompanied by the drummers and other musicians, the performer stands tall, her arms extended at shoulder-height, palms facing forward, fingers together. Her neck quickly moves sideways from one side to the other as her gaze anticipates her neck's subsequent move. She starts moving her wrist and forearm as her hand forms a straight line with the rest of her arm; as she extends the hand, her head turns toward the same direction, her eyes once again showing the spectators where her next movement will take them. She keeps on doing the same kind of gestures—only now, her shoulder moves along with the rest of her arm and hand, the eyes still following her everywhere the hand goes. The *alarippu* is set in motion.

As the *alarippu* unfolds, the dancer keeps on showing her physical and gestural prowess. She squats, kneels, stands on one foot; she starts moving across the stage and combines intricate footwork with her complex hand and neck gestures. Her eyes follow every motion of her hands—the eyes tell the audience where to look, in fact. "Where the hand goes, the eyes follow" says the *Abhinaya Darpana*: she is surely putting these words in action.

The *alarippu* – just like this thesis' introductory words – acts as a framework for the upcoming performance. This first segment of a Bharatanatyam recital – a form of classical Indian dance-drama that, while claiming to be the oldest and thus most authentic form of dance in India, carries a heavy and complex history (see Soneji 2012a) (see also Appendix 4) – acts as a dictionary of movements, an introduction to the art form for the audience, as well as a way for the dancer to warm up before the gruelling performance to come. The *alarippu* does not introduce the spectators to *rasa* yet, but only to *nritta*, or pure, technical dance—movements divided into various combinations of footwork (*charis*) and hand gestures (*hastas*), as well as eye (*drishti*), face, neck and body movements, which all combine into various rhythmic dance sequences known as *adavus*.

Rasa is the centrepiece of the performance. Often named "aesthetic delight" or "imaginative experience" (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:1), it is a very wide and complex aesthetic concept that includes the general mood of the plot (a romance, for instance), the experience and sensations felt by the spectators (audience reception, in other words) – and, as will be discussed later, performers as well – but also the "umbrella emotions" that are danced onstage. A dancer, for instance, will say that she is performing or embodying *bhayanaka* (terror), even though she is in fact dancing *bhavas*, emotional states that are associated with specific rasas and that cover a wide spectrum of dominant emotions (*sthayibhavas*; e.g. desire, disgust, amusement) discernible through the physical manifestation of psychophysical (*sattvikabhavas*; e.g. fainting, crying, blushing) and transitory emotional states (*vyabhicharibhavas*), which include emotions (e.g. jealousy, shame), qualities and flaws (e.g. cruelty, recklessness), physical states (e.g. sleeping, dreaming), sensations (e.g. numbness), actions (e.g. waking up) and mental processes (e.g. remembering). This is why, in *The Number of Rasa-s*, V. Raghavan proposes that "[a]n emotion is recognized as Rasa if it is a sufficiently permanent major instinct of man, if it is capable of being delineated and developed into its climax with its attendant and accessory feelings and if there are men of that temperament [i.e. *rasikas*] to feel imaginative emotional sympathy at the presentation of that Rasa" (Raghavan 1975, 17). Based on classical rasa theory, which is dominated by theories

from early eleventh-century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta, the mainstream understanding of the concept (even today) states that rasa is an uplifting, delightful and wonderful aesthetic experience (*chamatkara*) analogous yet distinct from illumination (*ananda*) and possible within the heart of the spectator who is both a connoisseur of rasa (*rasika*) and a sympathetic viewer (*sahridaya*).

Nevertheless, rasa is not restricted to the realm of the performing arts. Beyond its application in other artistic forms (poetry, sculpture and the like), rasa also refers to the array of Indian tastes, which includes six flavours: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent. Every Indian meal must include a combination of these six flavours in order to provide the eater with a tasteful, pleasurable, balanced experience—a concept that also applies to rasa in the arts, where the ingredients are *bhavas* and the resulting tasting experience is rasa. But rasa is also the extract or essence of things, such as orange juice is to an orange, or rose essential oil is to a rose. Once again, this facet of rasa applies to the arts, where the (emotional) essence of a play is its rasa.

My main concern in this dissertation is to better understand what rasa represents today, how it is perceived and what new interpretations of rasa can tell us about the sensory state of those who inhabit the aesthetic world(s) of rasa. While I could have studied rasa from a number of perspectives – Ayurvedic medicine, culinary arts, philosophy, Sanskrit texts and so on – I have chosen the performing arts because I feel that dance as a manifestation and actualization of rasa provides rich data for anthropological and interdisciplinary inquiry. Through dance, one becomes manifestly aware of the social, historical, religious, philosophical, aesthetic, gendered, political and sensory dimensions of rasa. Indeed, dance contributes "to our understandings of culture, movement and the body; the expression and construction of identities; the politics of culture; reception and spectatorship; aesthetics; and ritual practice" (Reed 1998, 504). Dance acts as a nexus for the examination of embodied knowledge and alternative ways of sensing the world as well, as it combines the sensible and the intelligible as well as emotional and kinesthetic knowledge, and considers "experience as intrinsic to meaning, action in dialogue with thought, and the actor (dancer) improvising within the social and cultural rules of her environment" (Bull 1997, 270–71).

INCEPTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first time I was exposed to Bharatanatyam was during an undergraduate seminar. My professor – an amazing woman and scholar who was, and still is, a great source of inspiration and a mentor of mine – was this tall, thin woman who always dressed in black but who could spark people's imagination with bright colors. The seminar was about women and spirituality. One day, the professor showed us a documentary film which discussed a woman's relationship to God through Indian classical dance. At the time, I did not really make much of this art form—it was nice, colorful, but it did not grab me. My professor, on the other hand, was uplifted by this performing art. She could not stop talking about it: she would go on and on about its colors, its playfulness, the way it allowed women to be free through body movements. When I think about it, she felt rasa:

she was truly in awe in front of this art form. Little did I know, this professor had triggered something in me. Perhaps her *rasik* enthusiasm had bounced on me[2].

Years later, I was working on my master's thesis, which consisted of a sensorial analysis of *pujas* (devotional rituals) at a local Hindu temple in Ottawa. As I was examining the various senses engaged in ritual – sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch – I came upon the notion of rasa, which translates as "taste." I knew back then that this concept was too complex to include in my Masters' project, which is why I kept it for my doctoral research. I came upon Bharatanatyam once again during this endeavor. This time, I was hooked. Why is it that Indian dance did not produce the same exhilarating feeling a few years back? I do not know. Perhaps I was not ready to experience rasa back then. Perhaps my senses were not willing to welcome rasa into my emotional life. But this time, as I rediscovered Bharatanatyam, I was in awe, just like my professor had been years before. I was experiencing something I had never felt before—excitement, butterflies in my stomach, an eagerness and thirst for more. I was really falling in love. And I am still much in love with this performing art: it still breathes life into my body, it makes me forget about time and space. It simply moves me. Perhaps the difference between now and then is simply rasa, the joyful experience of dance-drama. Maybe I was not prepared to experience rasa before; and maybe I am not even experiencing it today. One of the aims of this thesis will be to clarify this point.

I was discussing raw and organic wines with a wine expert one day. He told me that these new types of agriculture were modifying the grapes because of a lack in the use of pesticides, which in turn altered their taste. As such, organic agriculture is changing what people believed they knew about wine. This expert was trained the "classical" way – he received his training in Bordeaux and bathed in this somewhat conventional microcosm of wine enthusiasts – and although he was eager to turn to organic and raw wines for environmental reasons, he was still reluctant because of their inconsistency. Indeed, he was often surprised and destabilized by the flavours and variations he found in these bottles. He realized he had to learn to savour wine again, to disconnect from his previous set of sensory markers to appreciate organic and raw wines. He had to learn to drink wine once again, it seemed, simply because of an environmental change.

I believe that the climate in which rasa currently blossoms is similar to the wine industry. The migration of rasa from its land of origin to countries scattered around the globe, including Canada, is altering the taste that rasa had embodied for so many centuries. The environment and climate transformed. The public has changed. The upbringing of dancers has been altered as well. The whole context surrounding rasa has morphed drastically. These elements need to be considered in the study of rasa today.

In a broader sense, the main goal of this research is to redefine – or perhaps, readjust – the current understanding of rasa, with a special focus on its interpretation within the Indian diaspora of Eastern Canada. In parallel with classical rasa theory, I will ask:

- How is rasa interpreted today, especially within the Indian diaspora and performing community in Ontario and Quebec? What is its nature and its essence?

2. In fact, I believe I was so mesmerized by my professor's fascination for Bharatanatyam that I offered her two drawings of Bharatanatyam dancers, which she still has in her possession today (see Figure 1 and Figure 12).

- Where is rasa located today? Is the spectator still the only recipient of such experience? Is rasa still understood as an experience?
- How does classical rasa theory translate within and resonate with the contemporary practice of classical Indian dance-drama? Are there correspondences between the actualisation of rasa in the performing arts and rasa theory?
- What is the significance of rasa's main definition – taste – within its understanding and application today? What is the significance of rasa as taste, of the gustatory equivalence between tasting and experiencing aesthetic delight?

This vast exploration of the concept of rasa will in turn unveil emotional and sensory models within the Indian diaspora. As suggested by Odissi dancer Scheherazad Cooper, rasa "can be a useful place from which to begin to understand just how codified performance traditions are, and how much this codification is associated with the particular cultural identities involved in shaping them" (Cooper 2013, 346). What can the notion of rasa tell us about ways of feeling, emoting and sensing within Indian cultures across the globe, but more specifically in Canada? What triggered the shift in the location of rasa from the character to the text and later to the spectator, and even to the actor-devotee? And most importantly, why was the actor dismissed from this shift? As will be demonstrated, the current practice around rasa and its classical theory are different from what they used to be, even though, technically speaking, they should not. The interpretation of rasa, of emotions, has changed due to many factors, most of which have been triggered by colonization, globalization and migration. The inclusion of foreign influences and international spectators within the classical and traditional framework of Indian dance, the pre- and post-colonial redefinition of "classical" dance and its shift from a devotional to a performative art are all elements that altered the interpretation of rasa. In this, rasa reflects William Reddy's concept of "emotional regimes" which are shaped, contained and channelled on the local level and are navigable (Reddy 2001). In other words, emotional norms can change based on historical and contextual factors.

Throughout this research, I also give great attention to the most valued and significant aspect of rasa: taste. Gustatory analogies in rasa theory are plentiful and essential in understanding the complex relationship that exists between the creator of rasa (the poet or chef), the provider of rasa (the character or meal), the vessel or transmitter of rasa (the actor or server) and the receiver of rasa (the spectator or taster). What can rasa tell us about taste within Indian thought? Of all senses, why does taste occupy such crucial role in the Indian aesthetic experience?

When this project started, I had planned on examining the religious aspects of rasa and classical Indian dance as well. However, as I gathered data and spoke to artists, I soon realized that what would be deemed "religious" by a scholar of religious studies did not apply to the world of Indian performing arts. Every dancer I had the chance of discussing this with was clear that danced narratives, which often involve stories of Hindu gods and goddesses, are simply *material for dance*: material that illustrates deep connections and relationships between people, whether they are deities or not, but that has nothing to do with "religion." Even though such material might have been "religious" or "devotional" in the art form's past, it is relegated to the world of the performative today. Some collaborators mentioned the *practice* of dance as spiritual or ritualistic to some extent; but they never entailed that their practice was religious or that a previous affiliation to some form of Hinduism was necessary for one to engage with the art form. On the contrary,

today's dance classes are full of students coming from outside of South Asia and Hindu traditions. Hence, while this topic may arise at different points in the thesis, it will not be addressed directly because it was not understood as *relevant* by my collaborators. Nevertheless, questions relating to the blurry boundaries between "culture" and "religion" in India and Indian arts often emerged from those discussions and certainly constitute a significant portion of the analysis.

METHOD AND INTERVIEWS

The Method: Participant Sensation (Sensory Anthropology)

Starting from the premise that emotions are (socially) perceived, interpreted, embodied and reproduced through sensory means as well as social and cultural relations (Michaels and Wulf 2014, 6), the present cultural study of rasa will harness methodologies from sensory and emotion studies, with a special focus on sensory anthropology and the method of participant sensation. Sensory anthropology – which we treat as synonymous with the anthropology of the senses (Pink and Howes 2010) – argues that the senses and perception are not limited to their biological nature, but are rather mediated by culture. Hence, sensory anthropologists seek to better understand culture through the study of its pluralistic sensory practices and their significance, as well as the contexts –whether historical, social, personal or beyond – in which the use of particular senses are proscribed or encouraged (Howes and Classen 2014, 5). In short, sensory ethnographers strive to "read between the lines of an ethnography for information on a culture's sensory profile," meaning a culture's preferred and shared use of the senses and symbolic understanding of perception (Howes and Classen 1991, 257).

But there is much more to sensory anthropology. It not only treats the senses as objects of study, but also fosters "a sensory approach to the study of culture" (Howes 2019, 18). Howes calls this sensory and embodied methodological approach to ethnography "participant sensation," a multisensory alternative to participant observation that invites anthropologists to "sense culture" rather than to "write culture" (Howes 2012). In participant sensation, the ethnographer engages with her or his own embodied experience of fieldwork – including sensory inputs like hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and seeing – as crucial means of understanding culture. These sensory impressions, which are typically limited to field notes, thus become integral to the analysis of data as they have the capacity of reactivating mnemonic traces of a total experience (Okely 2007, 77). It is through participant sensation that ethnographers engage in "an experience of sharing in the sensible" (Laplantine 2015, 2) as they "become of two sensoria" (Howes 2003, 12; 2015a, viii; 2019, 18). Furthermore, in making the ethnographer particularly aware of her or his own sensory biases – which in academia are often based on logocentrism, ocularcentrism and scriptocentrism – participant sensation encourages the researcher to address such sensory preconceptions in her or his research. In this, participant sensation opens academia to alternative ways of understanding, analyzing and expressing embodied knowledge, thus making for novel means of producing ethnographies that go beyond traditionally written texts.

Howes' method of participant sensation shares many similarities with several anthropological methods of enquiry that are based on the sensory knowledge produced by the researcher's corporeal experiences during fieldwork. A significant advocate (and precursor) of this approach to culture is Paul Stoller, who conducted fieldwork among the Songhays of Niger and Mali. During his apprenticeship in sorcery, Stoller soon realized that, as both an apprentice and an ethnographer, he had to smell and hear like a sorcerer would (Stoller 1989). He later termed this

methodology "sensuous scholarship," following the idea that tasteful anthropology depends on "an assortment of ingredients – dialogue, description, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, smells, sights, and sounds – to create a narrative that savors the world of the Other" (Stoller 1989, 32). Sensuous scholarship and ethnography thus entail that, for ethnographers,

> embodiment is more than the realization that our bodily experience gives metaphorical meaning to our experience; it is rather the realization that, like Songhay sorcerers, we too are consumed by the sensual world, that ethnographic things capture us through our bodies, that profound lessons are learned when sharp pains streak up our legs in the middle of the night. (Stoller 1997, 23)

Howes' and Stoller's methodology provided a framework to many subsequent scholars in sensory studies and beyond who have followed and built upon their embodied approach to fieldwork (e.g. Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips 2006; Geurts 2002a; Harris 2016; Hirschkind 2006; Skeates and Day 2020; Sutton 2010). Moreover, sensory anthropology has been enriched in recent years not only by the works of ethnographers engaging in participant sensation, but most importantly by practice-based ethnographies produced by scholar-practitioners who, based on their artistic embodied experiences, apprenticeships and practices, take into account their sensory input in practice in making sense of the embodied knowledge their craft entails (e.g. Hahn 2007; Hahn and Jordan 2017; Nuttall 2018; Samudra 2008; Weidman 2012; as well as all scholar-practitioners in the field of classical Indian dance that are mentioned throughout this dissertation).

Likewise, Sarah Pink (2009) proposes a sensory approach to ethnography that starts from "the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice." She calls this approach "sensory ethnography" and defines it as "a process of doing ethnography that accounts for how this multisensoriality is integral both to the lives of people who participate in our research *and* to how we ethnographers practise our craft" (Pink 2009, 1; emphasis in original). However, Pink's emphasis on place or emplacement – or "the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment" (25) which recognizes that human beings are shaped not only by a changing culture, but by an evolving environment too – as well as on memory and imagination in the ethnographic process, sets her method apart from Howes' participant sensation. In Pink's approach, ethnographers are expected to engage in both discussions and activities—sharing movements and becoming, like Stoller, apprentices in cultural activities. However, Pink understands the senses as "interconnected and inseparable," a perspective that aligns with Howes in appearance, but that in fact diverges from participant sensation in stating that "our perception of social, material and intangible elements of our environments [are] being dominated by no one sensory modality," thus dismissing our own sensory biases as (Western) researchers. Consequently, Pink's embodied approach to ethnography is rather grounded in a phenomenological method reminiscent of Tim Ingold's own (universalistic) perspective on sensoriality and perception (see Ingold and Howes 2011).

One should note that what participant sensation or sensory ethnography offers to anthropologists has already been part of methodologies in ethnomusicology and dance and performances studies for a few decades, where it is interchangeably called research-creation,

practice-as-research, practice-based-research or practice-led-research[3] (Purkayastha 2018, 194). Given that much of the material I use in this thesis comes out of such approach to dance, in which knowledge emerges out of practice, it becomes even more relevant for me to adopt a complementary sensory approach to the study of rasa in dance. In addition to sensation and emotion as vectors of knowledge, attention will be given to the "sixth sense" of kinesthesia, alongside movement and proprioception – a topic that is increasingly the object of sensory and dance studies (e.g. Foster 2011; Michaels and Wulf 2014; Reynolds 2007; Sklar 1994; 2007; 2008) – in the formation of *rasik* knowledge in dancers and spectators.

In reflecting Kalpana Ram's approach to research in South Asian diaspora, I want to focus on legitimizing and valuing a phenomenological approach to lived experience that takes seriously "the forms of agency, temporality, and affective involvement that the performance of [dance practices] solicit from participants" (Ram 2011, S160), whether informants reinforce values of "Indianness" and "timelessness" within Indian classical dance forms – which have been consistently criticized in recent years, and rightfully so, by scholars who have brilliantly demonstrated that these forms of discourse reflect the hegemony of an Indian nationalist post-independence identity formation – or, on the contrary, seek to deconstruct the historical and gendered biases of Indian performing arts. This approach allows me to recognize the value behind embodied forms of knowledge within dance training and to build a bridge between the theory and practice of rasa.

The Interviews

Most data for this dissertation were collected through semi-directed interviews (see Appendix 2) with professional classical Indian artists[4]. The interviews (and ongoing conversations) were conducted within a period of four years, from July 2015 to February 2019, in Chennai and Hyderabad, India, and Montreal and Toronto, Canada. A first set of informal interviews and preparatory fieldwork was conducted at the Department of Dance at the University of Hyderabad and at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai in July 2015. I was able to speak with two faculty professors at the University of Hyderabad (including Dr. Aruna Bhikshu; see Aruna 1995) as well as a number of people at Kalakshetra: dance professors, senior performers, senior students, as well as the institute's director, Priyadarsini Govind[5], and the outreach coordinator, Apoorva Jayaraman (a dance disciple of Govind). Formal and in-depth interviews were later conducted with professional dancers in Montreal and Toronto, between August 1st, 2017 and October 27th, 2018. Below is a list of those collaborators (see Appendix 1 for further information on each person). Since all participants formally agreed to their name use in my work, I am including their full name.

3. I will most often use the expression "scholar-practitioners" when referring to dancers who use praxis as their focal research method in academia.

4. By "professional," I mean dancers who have completed their (senior) *arangetram*, have performed and toured with dance companies and have taught dance. A little percentage of classical Indian artists can make a career out of their art, and oftentimes dance becomes a sideline. Nevertheless, many of my collaborators earn their living from dance (performance and/or teaching) exclusively, including Julie Beaulieu, Lata Pada and Nova Bhattacharya.

5. Govind, a renowned Bharatanatyam performer known for her *abhinaya* preciseness, was the director of the Kalakshetra Foundation between 2013 and 2018, and the only director who has not received training from the institution before.

- **Julie Beaulieu** (interview conducted on August 1st, 2017 in Montreal; together with Jonathan Voyer): Julie Beaulieu is a Quebec-born, Caucasian Bharatanatyam dancer. She first trained in contemporary dance (UQÀM), which she taught and is still teaching at the Cégep level. She then started focusing her training on Bharatanatyam, which she studies to this day under the tutelage of her *guru*, Rohini R. Imarati, who is based in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. In addition to her artistic duo with Jonathan Voyer called *Samskara*, Beaulieu often collaborates and attends workshops with Canadian-based Indian classical and contemporary dancers in Canada.

- **Jonathan Voyer** (interview conducted on August 1st, 2017 in Montreal; together with Julie Beaulieu): Jonathan Voyer is a Quebec-born, Caucasian singer and musician who plays *santoor*, an Indian Hindustani (North India) hammered dulcimer instrument. Voyer's education started in religious studies at UQÀM and organically moved to music. He received his PhD in the program of "Étude et pratique des arts" from UQÀM in 2018, where his work examined in part the significance of rasa in Indian music from a practice-based research.

- **Neena Jayarajan** (interview conducted on October 1st, 2017 in Toronto): Born in Toronto from a Kerala family, Neena Jayarajan started training under Menaka Thakkar[6] around the age of 6. Thanks to her *guru,* she was able to receive training in *abhinaya* from leading figure Kalanidhi Narayanan and Odissi exponent Sujata Mohapatra as well. Jayarajan is no stranger to the academic world, as she holds an M.A. in Dance from York University, where she did a comparative study of ballet and Bharatanatyam dance techniques, with a special focus on the basic positions of *plié* and *aramandi*. She has trained in Bharatanatyam and Odissi, but now acts as a permanent collaborator at Nova Dance.

- **Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar** (first interview conducted on October 2nd, 2017 in Toronto; second interview conducted on December 4th, 2017 via Skype): Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar is a Bharatanatyam dancer from Bangalore, Karnataka, but has lived abroad in Dubai during the first years of her life. After receiving an undergraduate degree in Economics and working for a few years in Hyderabad, Punthambekar decided to study Bharatanatyam at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, where she received her diploma in 2010. She immigrated to Canada the next year and worked at Sampradaya Dance Academy in Mississauga for about three years before moving to Toronto and developing a career in arts management. She now lives in Ottawa.

- **Supriya Nayak** (interview conducted on October 4th, 2017 in Toronto): Supriya Nayak is an Odissi dancer who grew up in Delhi, India. She received her dance training in Delhi under *guru* Kiran Segal but decided in her 20s to switch to two other *gurus*, the mother-daughter duo Ambika and Aloka Panikar. She moved to Toronto in 2015, where she slowly got involved with Nova Dance. While she maintains her Odissi practice, she is now exploring more hybrid forms of dance.

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6. Menaka Thakkar, the founder and artistic director of the Nrtyakala Academy of Dance, is one of Canada's most recognized Bharatanatyam artists. Based in Toronto and trained in Bharatanatyam, Odissi and Kuchipudi, Thakkar has been a key player in the popularization of classical Indian dance in Canada. She received the Governor General's Performing Arts award for Lifetime Achievement in Dance in 2003, which stands for her great contribution to the Canadian dance landscape.

- **Lata Pada** (interview conducted on July 6th, 2018 in Mississauga): Lata Pada is a Bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and choreographer originally from Bangalore, Karnataka, India. She received her training from *guru* Kalyanasundaram in Kochi as well as *abhinaya* training from Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan during her visits to India, and still periodically visits her main *guru* when she travels annually to India. Pada moved for the first time to Canada in 1964, then lived abroad for many years but came back in 1990, after loosing her husband and two daughters in a plane crash (the 1985 Air India terrorist attack)—an event that marked her life but also propelled her teaching and choreographic career. She opened her dance school *Sampradaya* in Mississauga in 1990. Over the years, she has adopted the ISTD British Bharatanatyam dance curriculum, which established her dance school as she has gained recognition from Canadian authorities. She still teaches at her Mississauga school and has been making a living from dance ever since it opened.

- **Nova Bhattacharya** (interview conducted on July 11th, 2018 in Toronto): Born in Nova Scotia from a Bengali family (Kolkata, West Bengal, India), Nova Bhattacharya was Menaka Thakkar's very first student in Toronto. Thanks to her *guru,* she was able to train under *abhinaya* leading figure Kalanidhi Narayanan as well. Bhattacharya moved away from classical Indian dance after completing her *arangetram* with Thakkar and eventually founded her own fusion/contemporary/Bharatanatyam dance company, *Nova Dance*. While her artistic work isn't in Bharatanatyam (from a purist's view), she confesses that, yet, "there's no getting away from Bharatanatyam" in her work, as her movement vocabulary and expression strongly stems from the Indian classical style she was trained in.

- **Rajesh Chenthy** (interview conducted on October 27th, 2018 in Montreal): Rajesh Chenthy is a Bharatanatyam dancer from Kerala, India who received his dance training starting at around 8 years old from various *gurus* in a variety of dance styles, including Bharatanatyam. After receiving an undergraduate degree in Commerce, he registered at the Kalakshetra Foundation, where he received a first four-year dance degree and a further two-year degree (post-graduate degree). He moved to Montreal in 2016, where he teaches Bharatanatyam on a part-time basis as part of his dance school, *Kshetram*. Chenthy was my Bharatanatyam *guru* for a few months during the spring-summer of 2016.

Other key artists are also mentioned in the thesis, such as acclaimed Bharatanatyam *abhinaya* (expressive dance) teacher Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan (whom I have not had the chance to meet) and seasoned performer and past director of the Kalakshetra Foundation, Priyadarsini Govind. As a key exponent of *abhinaya*, Narayanan has taught to many collaborators and key contacts to this thesis, including Neena Jayarajan, Nova Bhattacharya, Lata Pada and Priyadarsini Govind. Govind, whom I have met at Kalakshetra in July 2015, has also taught short intensive Bharatanatyam workshops in Canada, notably during *DanceIntense*, an event organized by Lata Pada at her school, Sampradaya. Julie Beaulieu has participated to one of those intensive workshops with Govind. Odissi world-renown leading artist Sujata Mohapatra is also mentioned several times, as she not only studied dance under the guidance of her father-in-law, the renowned dance reformer and *guru* Kelucharan Mohapatra, but she also taught Odissi to one of my collaborators, Neena Jayarajan. I have had the privilege of seeing one of Mohapatra's performances in Chennai in January 2019—a recital I relate in Chapter 2 that made a strong impression on me.

I have consciously opted to (formally) interview a small number of experts for this research, as my goal was to focus on the quality of information rather than their quantity. I believe that these seven interviews offer a good sample of artists from a variety of backgrounds and at different stages of their dance career, thus providing a rich and diversified account of rasa in the current Indian dance community. Some of them, like Beaulieu and Voyer, propose an outsider, more academic look onto the world of classical Indian dance and music, while others like Bhattacharya, Nayak and Jayarajan offer an insider's look at the Indian dancing community and its challenges as part of the Canadian dance scene, which is dominated by contemporary dance forms. Lata Pada is by far the most seasoned of these performers and presents a balanced, thoughtful reflection on what it means to teach Bharatanatyam in a Canadian institution while also providing an insightful interpretation of rasa in the dance community today. Chenthy and Punthambekar, who both grew up in India, trained at Kalakshetra and immigrated to Canada in recent years, depict institutional aspects of dance training that have grown in popularity over the past decades, while also highlighting the pedagogical gaps in the acquisition of *rasik* knowledge in India and in Canada. All interviewees developed their own views on rasa and highlighted elements that, to them, were the most relevant in their dance practice and the development of their *rasik* knowledge. This variety of inputs contributed to the analysis of rasa in my research and allowed me to push my reflections in directions I had not anticipated at the beginning of the project.

The Fieldwork

My fieldwork was divided into two constituent areas: my experience, as a spectator, of Indian classical dance recitals – even of Indian culture as a whole – and my experience of Bharatanatyam dance training, both as an observer and as a dance student, as well as a musician in the past. Let me elaborate on both.

My spectatorship-fieldwork was conducted in Montreal, Toronto and Chennai over many years. I have attended a number of Bharatanatyam performances (mainly by Rajesh Chenthy) and lecture-demonstrations in Montreal since 2015, including performances at the Bangladesh Hindu Temple and the ISKCON temple and lecture-demonstrations at the annual Artasia event organized by the Kabir Center and at the Centre de création O Vertigo during Supriya Nayak's artist residency of February 2019. I also attended a Bharatanatyam recital in July 2018 in Toronto, which I detail in Chapter 2, as well as a roundtable-workshop at Nova Dance during their Deep End Weekend 2018 event. In India, I attended several free and paying Bharatanatyam performances in Chennai during the (January) 2019 *marghazi* music and dance festival. Among these, I discuss Sujata Mohapatra's and Praveen Kumar's recitals at the Madras Music Academy, but I also saw other performances by other artists including Rajesh Chenthy and Parwanath Upadhye. In addition, I have visited the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple and witnessed first-hand the carvings of the 108 *karanas* (dance postures) that are listed in the *Natyashastra*, but I have also conducted preliminary fieldwork, as mentioned earlier, at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, where I had the chance to roam about the campus, visit its many facilities (including the libraries), discuss with professors and students and see some live *abhinaya* classes.

Hence, what I know about rasa as an (almost-)uninitiated spectator comes from my own embodied experience of witnessing those events, which I rely upon throughout the dissertation, especially in Chapter 2. In adopting the methodology of participant sensation, I have made conscious efforts during these fieldwork experiences to pay attention to sensations and emotions

that contributed to my own understanding of rasa as it translated (or not) in my body. These (field note) elements are foundational aspects of my analysis.

While participant sensation is not a perfect fieldwork methodology, it at least provides me with "a means of understanding how knowledge is generated as a process that is both somatic and abstract" (Sklar 1994, 18). Deidre Sklar, using her own ethnographic method which she calls "kinesthetic empathy" – an approach that is similar, but not identical, to Dee Reynolds' own use of the term[7], and that involves "the capacity to participate with another's movement or another's sensory experience of movement" through the recognition of "what is perceived visually, aurally, or tactilely" (15) – acknowledges that while reproducing the subjects' movements during fieldwork does not mean that she experiences events in the same manner as those who have embodied such gestures for generations, it provides the researcher with "a taste of the experience" and "an epistemological reference point from which to understand later conversations" (17–18). In addition to David Howes' call for the charting of sensory profiles across cultures, Sklar thus calls for the charting of "gestural regimes" or "vitality profiles." Building on Marcel Mauss' concept of "techniques of the body" (Mauss 1936) and Pierre Bourdieu's "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977), she presents vitality profiles as epistemological systems of movement and kinetic knowledge. She sees sensory and vitality profiles as "central not only to cultural organizations of movement but also to cultural organizations of thinking, itself" (Sklar 2008, 98) in a similar way to Michelle Rosaldo's idea of "embodied though," but through movement. In this, the concept of gesture "requires not only association with movement's kinetic qualities of vitality but also an accounting of the way the sensations of kinetic vitality are socially constructed, transformed, and mediated" (103).

In attempting to adopt Sklar's methodology, I have received a short Bharatanatyam training with the help of my collaborator Rajesh Chenthy. I joined a group of Chenthy's dance students (about five young adults in their early 20s) for one to two classes a week at the Montreal ISKCON temple between the months of May and August 2016. It is there that I have learned, the "Kalakshetra way," the opening and closing practice prayer to Mother Earth, a few basic *adavus* (dance sequences), body postures (including the foundational *aramandi*), hand gestures (through gestured recitation—see Appendix 3), stylized gaits and walks, and introductory Sanskrit *shlokas* (recitations and prayers). It is also there that I endured the damp Montreal summer heat – not unlike that of India at times – and continuous muscle pain as I tried, the best I could, to follow my *guru*'s lead in executing increasingly fast-tempo movements. Through dance, I was able, for a short period of time, to "embody cultural ways of doing and knowing through apprenticeship" (Nuttall 2018, 428), a skill that helped me better grasp foundational elements of rasa in action and training.

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7. The concept of kinesthetic empathy/sympathy dates back to the early 1900s with works in the visual arts and dance (Reynolds and Reason 2012, 19). Sklar's and Reynolds' use of the same concept, which stem from this notion, can become confusing, I must admit. One major difference between the two is that Sklar approaches kinesthetic empathy as a participant during fieldwork – in that recreating observed movements can result in the formation of embodied knowledge – whereas Reynold's kinaesthetic empathy is usually addressed as spectators and audience reception theories—in this instance, a person's apparent passive observation of a dancer's movements results in an implicit mirroring of those gestures which trigger corresponding and culturally-mediated affects. Consequently, Sklar's kinesthetic empathy will be more relevant in sections dealing with method (participant sensation) whereas Reynolds' kinesthetic empathy will mostly be addressed in Chapter 2 as I examine the experience of rasa in the audience.

Because my Bharatanatyam training was very short, and in attending "to the ensemble of sensory-embodied ways of knowing and doing prior to, during and following the 'field'" (Nuttall 2018, 428), I also supplement my own lived experience of dance with my embodied knowledge about piano, an instrument I have played for about ten years (and taught for approximately three years). As an artistic person that yet is not experienced in dance – I have always loved theatre, improvisation, drawing and painting, especially during high school and my undergraduate studies – I try to use my previous emotional and sensory experience in my performing and visual arts' artistic practice as an anchor point to my own embodied analysis of rasa in the spectator and, at times, in the performer. I borrow Samudra's (2008) idea of "thick participation"[8] and Nuttall's (2018) "performing-sensing body"[9] to hopefully render the significance of my own artistic embodied experiences, both in Bharatanatyam and piano, in my own interpretation of rasa. But when it comes to better defining rasa, my collaborators have the last word, as their embodied knowledge of performed emotions in classical Indian dance is far more advanced than mine.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The structure of this thesis echoes the typical recital format (*margam*) of a Bharatanatyam performance, in which we find a gradual transition from *nritta* (pure dance or technique) to *nritya*/*abhinaya* (expressive dance, mainly through facial expression; representing *bhavas* and transforming them into *rasas*), with a mix of both in many sections. This structure, as established by four brothers known as the Tanjore Quartet[10] in the early nineteenth-century Thanjavur court (see Krishnan 2012), consists of the following:

- ***Alarippu***: The initial segment of a recital in which the dancer warms up and gradually shows off her technical skills, starting with eye and neck movements, and slowly moving to arm and foot movements, with a growing combination of all of these and an increasing rhythmic complexity. This section's music usually focuses on chanted, rhythmical syllables (*sollukattu*) that match the dancer's movements.

8. Samudra defines thick participation as "cultural knowledge recorded first in the anthropologist's body and only later externalized as visual or textual data for purposes of analysis." As such, it reflects Geertz' thick description in its attention to detail but differs from it as it does not focus on an analysis of social discourse, but is rather interested in the sharing of social experiences. Samudra proposes three ways of translating kinesthetic knowledge into textual data: by providing kinesthetic details, sensory impressions and somatic narratives (Samudra 2008, 667–77).

9. For Nuttall, who has been a *tabla* apprentice for many decades, the performing-sensing body acts as both a site of ethnographic discoveries in the embodiment of the radically empirical and a way to better understand fieldwork, either while focusing on the performative and sensory as subject matters or not (Nuttall 2018, 428).

10. To be clear: this structure was intended for *sadir*, a traditional type of dance performed in temples and later in royal courts and private salons, by *devadasis* (female temple dancers/servants). Bharatanatyam is but the culmination of a modern, yet "classical" and "pure" dance style created by post-colonial nationalist reformers who, during the twentieth century, decided to preserve the art form of *sadir* by dissociating it from its original lineage (the *devadasis*). This re-appropriation, which entailed the synthesis of a number of sources (*sadir, dasi attam*, *NS*, temple sculptures) to bring dance back to its "original" form, allowed middle-class and upper-caste men and women to perform. The *margam* designed by the Tanjore Quartet was adopted by those reformers as the basis of the Bharatanatyam recital, especially regarding the *arangetram*, the first public performance of a young dancer. For further detail, see Appendix 4.

- ***Jatisvaram***: In the *jatisvaram*, the dancer will execute *nritta* only, i.e. technical movements without meaning, on lyrical music as well as chanted, rhythmical syllables (*sollukattu*).

- ***Shabdam***: The *shabdam* is the first glimpse into expressive dance (*abhinaya*). During this segment, we start to see some expressive dance (*nritya*) as well as technical passages (*nritta*) as part of a short, simple and playful composition.

- ***Varnam***: The *varnam,* which means "color" (Ram 2011, S165), tells a story in dance using longer *nritya* (expressive dance) segments accompanied by lyrical music, which are interspersed with *nritta* passages and *sollukattu*. A dancer's performance will generally be judged according to her *abhinaya* and *nritta* during the *varnam*, since this segment of the recital is the longest, and thus much anticipated by spectators.

- ***Padam***: *Padams*, alongside *javalis* and *ashtapadis*, consist exclusively of *abhinaya* and expressive dance. Like the *varnam*, the *padam* shares a narrative using *nritya*, but the story is usually of a devotional nature. The narrative often involves a romantic (or devotional) encounter between a man (*nayaka*) and a woman (*nayika*).

- ***Javali***: Like the *padam*, the *javali* consists exclusively of expressive dance. However, the narrative is usually of a lighter nature and deals with erotic and romantic scenarios.

- ***Tillana***: This concluding piece consists of complex pure dance (*nritta*), often made of geometrical and symmetrical patterns, with lyrical music and some chanted syllables (*sollukattu*), in order to bring the dancer to a climactic finale.

This dissertation will mirror this typical structure by substituting *nritta* segments with theory/methodology and *abhinaya* elements with narrative writing and interview excerpts from collaborators. Although this work's choreography is inspired by the typical Bharatanatyam *margam*, it is of course grounded in academic writing. Yet, by borrowing elements of a *margam*, I hope to provide the reader with a structure that privileges affective moments and interpretations and that balances those *rasik* experiences with more theoretical and methodological inputs—just as a recital builds up *rasik* experiences by alternating technique and expressive dance. I believe that by mirroring the structure of a Bharatanatyam *margam*, in which the spectator becomes slowly familiar with the gestural vocabulary and musical landscape before dealing with the emotional flavour of a performed poem, this dissertation, too, will provide the basic vocabulary and elements of rasa theory required before immersing the reader into more lyrical, practical examples of rasa as it applies to the performing arts. This structure will allow the reader to slowly get familiar with the concept and better understand how it applies to dance (and sometimes beyond) before digging into specific examples of rasa's eclectic personality in practice. Hopefully, the structure will also trigger "moments of rasa" in the reader, like they would in the audience—times during which the reader will lose track of place and time to evaluate emotional episodes and their application in academia and beyond, or sentences that will ask the reader to examine her or his ways of sensing the world by temporarily adopting a *rasik* sensorium.

Beyond the thesis's structure, the main subject of the research – rasa – will inform the writing style and the evolution of the thesis. In the performing arts, the main goal of a play is rasa: both spectators and performers judge the overall success of a dance-drama based on its main flavor,

rasa, and the execution of emotions (*abhinaya*) by the dancer. Rasa thus happens in episodes at sporadic times throughout the performance. As a result, the focus is on the process of a play, and not so much on the outcome of its narrative. Rasa is about moments of high and deep emotions, about the absence of a sense of self, time or space; it's about the mood of a whole, about a shared moment between dancer(s) and spectators, about the creation of these moments known as rasa, where nothing else matters.

Accordingly, this dissertation will flow in and out of moments of rasa—the emphasis will be on the process and not so much on the resulting problem-solving that is typical of a North American social-scientific approach to the world. Is there even something to solve about rasa? Perhaps not. However, rasa can teach us a lot about ways of sensing and emoting, ways of learning and ways of being—which is why the process of the thesis (in writing or reading it) will become essential. Rasa can teach us about the value of embodied knowledges, get us out of our comfort zone. Rasa can reflect the pulse of a nation as well; it can point toward the challenges and successes of immigrant Indians in Canada, their hopes, their experience of the foreign landscape they wish to shape and be shaped by.

Chapter Outline

In a similar way to a danced *alarippu*, the present introduction is the "opening of the body" (Samyuktha S. Punthambekar, 4 Oct. 2017) of this dissertation: it provides the technical details about the forthcoming written performance. Beyond discussing the thesis' structure and goals, the introduction acts as an overview of the current state of rasa and its possible futures. It also explains the style of the performance – the method of the study – and how this form will lead and contribute to the analysis of rasa in its cultural, geographical and historical specificity.

The first chapter will act, just like a *jatisvaram*, as a continuation of the *alarippu,* by addressing the theoretical backbone of rasa throughout its history. Here, the reader will gain enough knowledge of the concept, as presented in classical Indian philosophical and literary thought, to get a basic grasp of rasa. These elements, once presented, will apply to the remainder of the project in multiple ways, whether in more theoretical passages (*nritta*) or in narrative form (*abhinaya*/*nritya*). In this first chapter, the technical aspects of rasa will unveil through a philosophical and theoretical unfolding of the concept and its evolution throughout history. I will explore theories around the concept of rasa elaborated by key Sanskrit philosophers, playwrights and poets – including Bharata (*Natyashastra*), Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Bhojaraja and Rupa and Jiva Goswamin – as well as their significance to the intellectual evolution of the concept. Different aspects of rasa will also be examined, including the roles and locations of rasas, their number, their value and their effects.

In Chapter 2, the *shabdam* of my research, I will focus on the spectator's experience of rasa, including my own sensory experiences of various dance performances and contexts, but also my collaborators' experiences of rasa as spectators as well as the theoretical interpretation of the ideal audience member. Here, narrative form (*abhinaya*/*nritya*) will flirt with academic writing in taking a closer look at audience reception in rasa theory (*nritta*). I will try to draw a new picture of the ideal spectator and of the experience of rasa in the contemporary audience, focusing on the non-*rasika*, North American audience. In this chapter, I argue that rasa is accessible (to some extent) to all spectators, whatever their background, and that the discrepancies between the experience of rasa in classical Indian aesthetics and in modern audiences results from the many

environmental changes that occurred around the actualization of rasa on the stage (globalization of dance, diasporic communities and new publics, etc.). It is also in this chapter that I first propose that rasa is an aesthetic sensibility that can be acquired through the development of *rasik* literacy.

The *varnam* – the main piece of the recital and the third chapter of this dissertation – will be an opportunity for dancers to tell their own stories, their own perception of what rasa is and feels like to them. In this lyrical, expressive part of the thesis, I will use accounts from scholar-practitioners' published works as well as data provided by the experts I have interviewed in Canada and in India to build a phenomenological account of rasa, unfolding from tales by those who experience it on a regular basis, thus contributing to a new – and more accurate – definition of rasa today. Therefore, this chapter will act as a condensed account of the raw data used in this research. The *varnam* will examine how people learn to create rasa in both themselves as artists and in the spectators by focusing on the training of *abhinaya* in various teaching settings and through their corresponding pedagogical approaches. Rasa, in fact, is rarely addressed directly in training, but rather taught through the embodiment of codified emotions. It is generally later in their dance career that artists reflect on the meaning and significance of rasa in their practice, and the ways in which rasas have been internalized and interpreted in bodily form throughout their training.

The analysis of the fieldwork data will unfold in the *padam* and *javali* of the research, chapters 4 and 5. Here, new interpretations of rasa will solidify as I take a deeper look at the accounts provided during the *varnam* of the performance-thesis. In the fourth chapter and *padam*, I will evaluate the sensory experience of rasa in the spectator as well as the performer, while also examining the meaning of such embodied approach to emotional knowledge within the pedagogy and training of classical Indian dance. In this instance, rasa is interpreted as emotions transformed into affective knowledge through various sensory means, such as sight, imagination, hearing, aesthetic taste and mind (*manas*). In addition to these sensory channels, dancers experience rasa on different kinesthetic levels. For them, rasa takes form through the embodiment of the characters' emotions, their response to the audience's emotional experience, their own emotional response to kinesthetic cues, their transposition of lived experiences on the stage, as well as through inner qualities associated with emotional authenticity.

In Chapter 5 – the *javali* – I will turn to the sensuousness of rasa in situating this Indian concept within the larger scope of anthropology, with special attention to sensory anthropology. I will first present a sensory layout of Indian classical dance, as informed by rasa theory, performed *abhinaya*, and Bharatanatyam training both in India and in Canada. By "sensory layout," I mean the significance of the various sensory modalities used in dance—the complex relationship between emotion and sensation, and the ways these translate in the experience of rasa. As such, this chapter – which is largely influenced by Tomie Hahn's (2007) magnificent research on sensational knowledge in *nihon buyo*, a Japanese traditional dance – will act as a demonstration of my main technique, or analytical tool, namely sensory anthropology. I will demonstrate that the traditionally embodied pedagogical approach to teaching *abhinaya* reflects an understanding of rasa that is embodied as well, as opposed to a theoretical understanding of the concept in dance training. In the last section of the chapter, I will discuss the contribution of the concept of rasa to the larger field of anthropology. As a notion that invites us to taste performances and to savour emotions, I will indicate what rasa can teach us about emotions, sensations, embodied thought and embodied knowledge across cultures.

The *tillana* – the concluding chapter – will offer a synthesis of this written performance and open avenues for future research. Here, I will come back to academic analysis (*nritta*) as I expose rasa as a theory of relationships, a concept that has proven to be malleable throughout the centuries as well as a form of embodied knowledge implicit to Indian society and pedagogy. The overly rich concept of rasa will evoke new questions and research choreographies – and possibly even a few novel feasts – as I close the final chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 1 (*Jatisvaram*)–
Rasa from a Theoretical Perspective

The present landscape of the literature pertaining to rasa and rasa theory is both wide and narrow: the theory of rasa has been extensively covered by literary studies, Indian philosophy and aesthetics for over 1,500 years, but studies about rasa specifically in action, within the performing arts, are still rare.

Most research on rasa theory today is limited to the discipline of Sanskrit studies. Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, French Indologists such as Paul Regnaud (Shudraka 1876), Joanny Grosset (Bharatamuni 1898) and Sylvain Lévi (1890) – the latter involved with the École française d'Extrême-Orient – explored rasa theory indirectly with the transcription in Devanagari (and their romanisation), French translations and commentaries on key Sanskrit texts, plays and myths, including the *Natyashastra* (*NS*) and famous plays by playwrights such as Shudraka, Bhasa and Kalidasa. A little later, several Indian scholars, including Ananda Coomaraswamy (Nandikeshvara 1917), Manomohan Ghosh (Bharatamuni 1951; Nandikeshvara 1957) and others (Krishnamoorthy 1979; Raghavan 1963; 1975; Vatsyayan 1968; 1992; 1996) published English translations and commentaries on texts as well, including the *NS* but also philosophical and literary treatises and commentaries by key authors like Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Bhojaraja. Other European and North-American scholars soon joined them in the English (and French) translation and commentaries on such texts, including Raniero Gnoli (1968), Jeffrey M. Masson, M. V. Patwardhan and Daniel H. H. Ingalls (Masson and Patwardhan 1969, 1970; Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990), Lyne Bansat-Boudon (1992a, 1992b) and Sheldon Pollock (1998, 2010, 2012, 2016; Bhanudatta 2009; Bhavabhuti 2007), to name a few. Others, like Barbara Stoller Miller (Jayadeva 1977; Kalidasa 1984) and John Stratton Hawley (1983, 2005; Hawley and Goswami 1981) translated famous plays, devotional and non-devotional poems – and thus rich *rasik* texts – such as the *Gita Govinda*, the *Ramayana* and poems by Mirabai and Bhanudatta, as well as other rasa-related works like the *Kama Sutra* (Vatsyayana 1994; 2009).

The other trend in the study of rasa concerns performance studies in the West. There, the concept of rasa became the inspiration for new actor training techniques focusing on the performance of emotions in theatre, something surprisingly lacking in Western actor training (Neuerburg-Denzer 2011). Anthropologists and performance studies scholars alike – Philip B. Zarrilli (1995; 2000; Zarrilli and Hulton 2009; Zarrilli, Sasitharan, and Kapur 2019), Richard Schechner (1985; 1993; 2001; 2003; Schechner and Appel 1990) and Eugenio Barba (1995; 2015; E. Barba and Savarese 2006) being the most significant – were inspired by their stay in India in the 1950s (and even earlier) to such an extent that they widely borrowed techniques and ideas they had encountered in Kutiyattam, Kathakali (Zarrilli, Schechner), Odissi (Barba) and other performing arts dealing with rasa and brought these back with them in Europe and the US. Schechner's "Rasaesthetics" (2001) and the Rasaboxes exercise is probably the most blatant example of this borrowing, as he freely uses the *navarasa* (nine rasas) outside of its traditional setting to train American actors in the expression of emotions on the stage (see Minnick and Cole 2002; Neuerburg-Denzer 2014).

While Barba and Zarrilli made an effort to respect the cultural and geographical roots of these styles (although Barba, working in theatre anthropology, saw within classical Indian dance-drama the source of many theatrical elements that were universal), Schechner has been criticized

for dismissing the historical and contextual specificity of rasa in theory and in practice with his Rasaboxes exercise (Mason 2006). Nevertheless, Indian theatre and rasa theory have without a doubt changed the landscape of European and American theatre thanks to these scholars, who have attempted to leave behind the hegemony of the Stanislavski technique based on (emotional) realism in favor of a more pragmatic, hands-on approach to training emotions (see Neuerburg-Denzer 2011 and 2014 for further details on this topic). Among other things, these scholars admired how Indian dance-drama is structured around dominant emotions or moods (rasa), contrary to Western theatre in which plays are written based on a narrative and a succession of actions (which are divided into acts). Hence, Indian drama privileges emotional episodes that reinforce the main rasa of a whole play over the rendition of a narrative, something that felt novel to Western playwrights and performance studies scholars.

Beyond classical rasa theory and the migration of rasa in Western actor training methods, there is still very little research done on the concept and idea of rasa in today's Indian society, whether in India or in the diaspora. With such extensive research on classical rasa theory and the application of the rasa model to Western actor training, it is surprising that so little is being done today on performed emotions and rasa within the field of Indian performing arts. While there is growing data on contemporary dance research – Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Kutiyattam, to name a few, all dance and theatre forms that engage with rasa in practice – scholar-practitioners rarely focus specifically on the topic of rasa and rather engage in feminist, political or post-colonial analysis and deconstruction of particular dance styles through an emphasis on history and the evolution of these forms of performing arts (e.g. Apffel Marglin 1985; Chakravorty and Gupta 2010; Chatterjea 2004; Gaston 1991; Kersenboom 1987; Meduri 2008; O'Shea 2003; 2007; Peterson and Soneji 2008; Soneji 2012a; 2012b; Spear and Meduri 2004; P. Srinivasan 2011).

Hence, what occurs to me as a first problem in rasa literature is that the current research is monopolized by Sanskrit studies scholars focusing on the translation of classical works on rasa, aesthetics and philosophy. Rasa is rarely given any attention in the humanities, with the exception of Sanskrit studies scholar Sheldon Pollock, whose recent anthology (2016), while also focusing on philosophy and classical theory, gives a much-needed intellectual history of the concept in and beyond the performing arts. Phenomenological accounts of rasa experiences – the mechanisms behind rasa – are still scarce[11]. The present dissertation seeks to fill this gap by providing an array of such *rasik* accounts by dancers and modern-day *rasikas*.

While the third, fourth and fifth chapters of the dissertation will take a closer look at this latter element, namely the place of rasa in practice within the discourse surrounding classical Indian dance today – with a special focus on Bharatanatyam – the present chapter will delineate the beginnings of rasa theory within classical Indian thought, starting with Bharata's *Natyashastra*, and progressing through theatre and poetry, all the way to devotional Hindu traditions (especially Vaishnava religious thought). By introducing the vocabulary surrounding the classical and

11. There are, of course, some examples of modern research in that field: see, for instance, Ram (2000, 2011), Cooper (2013), Coorlawala (2010a) and Chakravorty (2004; 2009a). These works will be further explored in the following chapters.

medieval theories and practices of rasa in India, I hope to allow the reader to get a better grasp of the *rasik* landscape that will inform the rest of this dissertation.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS RASA: THE *NATYASHASTRA*

The most ancient written trace dealing with rasa theory is attributed to the mythical sage Bharata's *Natyashastra* (*NS*), the *Treatise on Drama*, a massive Sanskrit account of dance-drama dating to sometime around 200 or 300 CE and made up of 36 chapters and 6,000 verses (Pollock 2016, 27, 47). While Bharata is most certainly a fictional character and possibly not the sole author of the *NS*[12], Sheldon Pollock claims that "there is no way of knowing how much the Treatise overlaps with or draws from […] older tradition," even though this major work – often referred to as the "Fifth Veda"[13] – was clearly re-edited and partly rewritten around the eighth or ninth century in Kashmir (Pollock 2016, 27). Davesh Soneji adds that the *NS* in its present form, as first published in 1894 in India, was most probably reconstructed by scholars Shivadatta and Kashinath Pandurang Purab from a number of found manuscripts; yet, the text only came to the attention of interdisciplinary scholars following the translation and publication of the *Abhinavabharati* (*ABh*) in the 1930s, a commentary on the *NS* written by philosopher Abhinavagupta (Soneji 2012a, xxv–xxvi; Vatsyayan 1996, 33).

In any case, the *NS* functions as the source material from which most commentaries and theories of rasa depart. Intended for poets, directors and actors (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:1), this Indian treatise on dance-drama and aesthetics acts as an "encyclopedia dealing with all possible subjects connected to the stage" (Bharatamuni 1951, 1:xvii) and as "a theory of praxis" (Vatsyayan 1996, 38): it describes how dance-drama was perfected by the gods and transmitted to humans; how to construct a playhouse; rituals required before, during and after the performance; the typical structure of a play; every type of dance, gestures, emotions, sentiments, states, gaits, characters, speeches and music to consider for the play; how to evaluate the success of a play; and so on. The document is divided into thematic sections: chapters 1 through 5 discuss the history of drama, its mythological origins and how to present a play; chapters 6 through 14 deal with the making of drama, namely emotions, gestures and gaits (*angikabhinaya* and *sattvikabhinaya*); chapters 15 through 19 focus on text, language and recitation (*vachikabhinaya*); chapters 20 to 26 as well as chapters 34 and 35 present the format of a play and its many paradigmatic characters, including their costumes and makeup (*aharyabhinaya*) and the physical representation of their mental states (*sattvikabhinaya*); while chapter 27 examines the success of a play, and chapters 28 through 33 are dedicated to music, both instrumental and vocal. The concluding thirty-sixth chapter mainly relates a dialogue between Bharata and the many sages and divine figures, focusing on the "descent" of drama on earth and the value of the *NS* in its actualization.

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12. Many hypotheses have emerged in this matter: whether Bharata is a single person, a group of scholars or a school of thought, or even only a mythical character created by using the first syllables of the words *bhava* (*Bha*, emotion), *raga* (*Ra*, melodic structure or scale) and *tala* (*Ta*, rhythm). See Vatsyayan (1996) for further investigation.

13. *NS* 1.16-17. In this passage, Bharata relates the mythical origins of the *NS*, which was the *Natyaveda* ("*Knowledge on Theatre*") turned into writing and compiled from the previous four sacred texts, the Vedas, by the god Brahma (or the Holy One, Bhagwan). The text (*patya*) came from the Rig Veda; the songs (*gita*) came from the Sama Veda; the acting registers (*abhinaya*), from the Yajur Veda; and lastly, taste or flavor (*rasa*) emerged from the Atharva Veda. See Bansat-Boudon (1992a, 138).

The treatise's sixth chapter, as well as the seventh one, are of particular interest when it comes to rasa theory, as they specifically discuss sentiments (*rasa*), emotions and other states (*bhavas*) produced during and used in performance. It is there that Bharata details the close relationship that exists between *bhavas* and rasas – where *bhavas* produce rasas and not the other way around[14] – and lists the eight rasas, eight corresponding *sthayibhavas* (stable or dominant emotions), thirty-three *vyabhicharibhavas* or *sancharibhavas* (transitory emotions and states) and eight *sattvikabhavas* (psychophysical responses) which represent the backbone of any dance-drama (see Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3).

All *bhavas* are complemented by, or can even work as, *vibhavas* (determinants or factors) and *anubhavas* (consequents or reactions), depending on the context. These are elements that depict the context around each dominant emotion as well as the visible/mimed traits that allows spectators to identify them. For example, the sentiment of the erotic (*shringararasa*) and its corresponding dominant emotion of desire (or what William Reddy [2012] might call "longing for association" or "love-lust"[15]), and more specifically love in union (*sambhoga*), is triggered by *vibhavas* such as pleasant weather and seasons, jewelry, flower garlands, pleasant scents, a loved person or object, fine homes, the enjoyment of objects and food (*upabhoga*), a stroll in a garden or sexual play. In turn, love in union causes (*anubhava*), and is thus visually recognizable via sidelong glances, movements of the eyebrows, flirtatious and gentle body motions, as well as pleasant words (NS 6.45, in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:108–9; in Pollock 2016, 52; in Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:49). Or, to use another example, we could say that heat – the *vibhava* – triggers sweating – the *anubhava* (which is, in this case, a *sattvikabhava*) – which will be recognizable by (the *anubhava* of) the swiping of the forehead with the back of the hand or by the waving of a fan; or, we could argue that the sweating is not caused by the heat, but by the *vibhava* of thinking about the beloved. In the case of *sambhoga*, love in union, all transitory emotions can be used, apart from *alasya* (torpor), *ugrata* (ferocity) and *jugupsa* (revulsion)[16].

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14. This is the famous *rasasutra* or *verse on rasa* which goes: "*vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisaṃyogād rasaniṣpattiḥ*" (Bansat-Boudon 1992a, 139n17; 1992b, 109n117; Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:46), or "Rasa arises from the conjunction of factors [*vibhavas*], reactions [*anubhavas*], and transitory emotions [*vyahbicharibhavas*]" (*NS* 6.31, in Pollock 2016, 50). Most theories produced around the concept of rasa departed from this fundamental *sutra* (48). The idea that rasas are produced by *bhavas* is reinforced later in the *NS* when Bharata is being asked whether rasa produces *bhava* or the other way around. To this question, Bharata answers: "rasas are produced by the emotions and other elements and not the reverse" (NS 6.33, in Pollock 2016, 51). Nonetheless, some theorists like Bhojaraja attested that the opposite was true, namely that rasas produced *bhavas* (Raghavan 1963, 25).

15. In his study of romantic love in India, Reddy (2012) makes a distinction between desire and romantic love. He states that *rati* cannot be understood as desire-as-appetite (sexual desire or lust in Christian thought), but rather as a longing for association with a this-worldly sexual partner, while *shringara* is directed towards "a heroic, sublime, godlike, or divine sexual partner" (225). He also describes both *rati* and *shringara* as "love-lust," arguing that "[n]either in Sanskrit nor in the local languages of *bhakti* practice were there any words available for distinguishing between love and desire in the way that the trobairitz and troubadours did [in Europe]" (254). Indian aesthetics do not separate soul from body, or sexual desire from romantic love, like Christian cultures do, says Reddy, and thus challenges our deeply embedded understanding of such concepts.

16. The list ends here in Pollock (2016, 52), while Ghosh (Bharatamuni 1951, 1:109) adds *bhaya*, or fear. As it will be demonstrated later in the *varnam* of the dissertation, those *bhavas*, especially *jugupsa*, can prove to be quite useful when performing *rati* onstage, as a *nayika* might be disgusted by her lover when she sees that his back is scratched from a previous sexual encounter with a different lover, for instance.

One will notice that *shanta*, the peaceful sentiment, is not included in Bharata's list of rasas. Indeed, this mood is a later addition that has been, to some extent, crystallized by Abhinavagupta during the eleventh century, even though Buddhist theorist Ashvaghosha, Kashmiri thinker Anandavardhana and Abhinava's teacher, Bhatta Tota – among others – had discussed *shantarasa* beforehand (Masson and Patwardhan 1969, 3–20). Abhinavagupta stated that *shanta*'s dominant emotion was the serenity (*shama*) that arises from the absence of passions, and that this rasa represented "the basic nature common to all the *rasas*" (Ingalls et al. 1990, 521). Before Abhinava's theory, aestheticians had already attributed the *sthayibhava* of *shama* (serenity, detachment) or *nirveda* (indifference) to this rasa after considering Bharata's former list of *vyabhicharibhavas* to support their theory.

Table 1. The *Navarasa* (Nine Sentiments) and *Sthayibhavas* (Dominant Emotions)[17]

Rasa	Translation	*Sthayibhava*	Translation	Attributed Color	Presiding Deity
Shringara	The Erotic	*Rati*	Desire, Delight	Light Green / Blue-Black (*shyama*)	Vishnu
Hasya	The Comic, Humorous	*Hasa*	Laughter, Mirth, Amusement	White	Pramathas (Shiva's attendants)
Karuna	The Pathetic, Tragic; The Compassionate[18]	*Shoka*	Sorrow, Grief	Ash-colored / Grey (*kapota*)	Yama
Raudra	The Violent, Furious	*Krodha*	Anger	Red	Rudra
Vira	The Heroic	*Utsaha*	Energy, Determination	Light Orange / Golden (*gaura*)	Indra
Bhayanaka	The Fearful	*Bhaya*	Fear, Terror	Black	Kala (Yama)
Bibhatsa	The Odious, Macabre	*Jugupsa*	Disgust, Revulsion	Blue	Shiva (Mahakala)
Adbhuta	The Marvellous, Fantastic	*Vismaya*	Awe, Amazement	Yellow	Brahma
Shanta[19]	The Peaceful	*Nirveda*[20]	Indifference to worldly things	(White?)	?

17. Based on Samyuktha Sharath Puntambekhar's provided material from her studies at Kalakshetra, as well as translations of the *NS* (Bharatamuni 1951; Pollock 2016; Masson and Patwardhan 1970, vol. 1). This *navarasa* is commonly used in dance today.

18. *Karuna* is also translated as "the compassionate" in Masson and Patwardhan's translation of the *rasadhyaya* (1970, 1:43-57). It is a common translation – and one that particularly appeals to religious traditions like Buddhism and Jainism – that rightfully renders the sentiment of *karuna*, which is both an experience of tragedy and compassion.

19. The last rasa and *bhava*, *shanta* and *nirveda*, are later additions (*c*. 8th – 9th cent. CE) and do not appear in the (modern and accessible) manuscripts of the *NS*. *Nirveda*, however, does appear in the *NS*'s list of thirty-three transitory emotional states, which explains why many subsequent theorists identified it as *shanta*'s dominant emotion.

20. While some theorists like Mammata believed that *nirveda* was *shanta*'s *sthayibhava*, Anandavardhana argued that it was in fact "that happiness which is the annihilation of all desires," known as *trishnakshaya-sukha* (Raghavan 1975, 16). Abhinavagupta rather suggested that it was *shama,* the absence of passion and the resulting sentiment of tranquility or serenity (Ramachandran 1980, 2:109).

Table 2. *Vyabhicharibhavas* (Transitory Emotions and States)[21]

Vybhicharibhava	**Translation**	***Vyabhicharibhava* (cont'd)**	**Translation (cont'd)**
Nirveda	World-weariness, Despair	*Garva*	Arrogance, Pride
Glani	Weakness, Fatigue	*Vishada*	Despair, Depression
Shanka	Apprehension, Disquiet	*Autsukya*	Impatience, Longing
Asuya	Envy, Resentment	*Nidra*	Sleeping, Sleepiness
Mada	Intoxication	*Apasmara*[22]	Epilepsy, Possession/ Misrecollection
Shrama	Weariness, Exhaustion	*Suptam*	Dreaming
Alasya	Indolence, Torpor	*Prabodha*	Awakening, Waking
Dainya	Depression, Despondency	*Amarsha*	Indignation, Vindictiveness
Chinta	Anxiety, Worry	*Avahittha*	Dissimulation
Moha	Distraction, Confusion	*Ugrata*	Cruelty, Ferocity
Smriti	Recollection, Remembrance	*Mati*	Assurance, Sagacity
Dhriti	Peace of mind, Satisfaction	*Vyadhi*	Sickness
Vrida	Shame	*Unmada*	Insanity, Madness
Chapalata	Rashness, Recklessness	*Marana*[23]	Death, Dying
Harsha	Joy	*Trasa*	Fright
Avega	Agitation, Panic	*Vitarka*	Deliberation, Perplexity
Jadata	Stupor, Numbness		

21. Based on translations of the *NS* (Bharatamuni 1951; Pollock 2016; Masson and Patwardhan 1970, vol. 1).
22. *Apasmara* and *marana* were replaced either by *sneha* (attachment) or *irshya* (jealousy) by King Bhoja (Pollock 2016, 419n1-2).
23. See note 22.

Table 3. *Sattvikabhavas* (Psychophysical Reactions)[24]

Sattvikabhava	**Translation**
Stambha	Paralysis
Sveda	Perspiration
Romancha	Horripilation, Goosebumps
Svarabheda	Change of voice, Broken voice
Vepathu	Trembling
Vaivarnya	Change of colour, Pallor
Ashru	Weeping
Pralaya	Fainting

Bhavas are to be performed using *abhinaya* – "histrionic representations" (Bharatamuni 1951, 1:103) or "registers of acting" (Pollock 2016, 50) – which can be further divided into four categories: gestures (*angika*), words (*vachika*; in the case of dance-drama, this would be the sung poem), costumes and makeup (*aharya*), and "representation of the temperament" (Bharatamuni 1951, 1:103) or "psychophysical acting" (Pollock 2016, 50), known as *sattvika*.

Evidently, the *NS* was solely created to help actors and other theatre crew to work around and grasp the complexity of *abhinaya*. To this end, Pollock states that Bharata's conception of rasa in the *NS* only concerns actors and most specifically characters in whom rasas exist, and not spectators (2012, 48–49). In fact, the treatise acts as a guide for actors, describing "how the components of drama, and the rasas in particular, are 'to be acted out'" by performers (49). This conception of rasa made sense as part of the world of theatre, where emotions need to be perceptible (using vision and hearing—hence drama being described as a spectacle) for spectators to witness them, to feel them and transform them into rasa. As will be explored later on, the tables will turn with the introduction of poetry as a means of transmitting rasa—simply because this medium allows spectators to get to the core of intimate feelings, thoughts and emotions that would not be visible or perceptible otherwise, as in the case of theatre.

The theory of rasas as laid out in the *NS* is arguably one of the most complex classical analyses of behavior and emotional relationships that exist in the performing arts, even in the study of cultures. Although the codification of emotions within the performing arts context is common in Asia[25], the model offered in the *NS* is certainly one of the most systematic and researched examples of the manipulation of emotions within the aesthetic context, as well as one of the oldest models known. The *NS* offers an analysis and reflection of Indian culture while proposing a paradigmatic model of an emotional regime (Reddy 2001, 2012) or emotive states. It has developed "a psychosomatic system" in which "[t]he psychical manifests itself in the physical and the physical can evoke the psychical" (Vatsyayan 1996, 19), which is representative of classical

24. Based on translations of the *NS* (Bharatamuni 1951; Pollock 2016).
25. A few examples would include China with the Chinese opera, Japan with Noh dance, and Indonesia with Javanese and Balinese dance forms, which both borrow from rasa theory.

and medieval Indian culture[26]. Far from being a prescriptive manual or commands based on sacred knowledge, Vatsyayan argues that the *NS* is in fact "a deduction from experience and practice" that systemized the actual experience of theatre into written form (43). She envisions it as "a fragment or a small prototype of a great monument, not of 'bricks' and 'stones', but of experience, speculation, thought and practice, shared and lived" (44), as well as a flexible manuscript, subject to interpretation and adaptable throughout time and space.

THE SHAPING OF RASA THEORY

It is not surprising that Bharata's guide to emotions became the source of debate as the centuries went by. Eminent theorists, primarily literary experts such as Dandin (late 7th – early 8th cent.), Bhatta Lollata (9th cent.), Anandavardhana (9th cent.), Bhatta Nayaka (early 10th cent.), Bhatta Tota (10th cent.), Abhinavagupta (late 10th – early 11th cent.) and Bhojaraja (11th cent.), took part in these lively debates, discussing the role of rasa and its location, as well as the number of rasas and which rasa (or combination of rasas) was the greatest, or rather the most efficient and evocative. Commentators and interpreters, writing in Kashmir for the most part, started producing works dedicated to "the nature of the aesthetic experience, the process of artistic creation and the response of the reader/spectator/audience" as early as the sixth or seventh century CE, up until the seventeenth century according to Pollock (2016), but as late as the eighteenth or even early nineteenth century according to Vatsyayan (1996, 116).

Sheldon Pollock's latest publication on rasa theory (2016) does a fine job retracing the intellectual evolution of the concept of rasa and its discourse among thinkers, beginning with Bharata's *NS* and concluding with Jagannatha's last and unfinished work, the mid-seventeenth century *Rasagangadhara* (*The Bearer of the Ganges of Rasa*) text. As such, I do not wish to repeat what has already been so skillfully done by Pollock, but I do want to summarize his work to give the reader a better picture of the many transformations rasa went through over the centuries—transformations that were all intricately linked to historical, religious and contextual evolving landscapes.

The Intellectual History of Rasa Theory: An Overview

Even though rasa was primarily applied to the performing arts, especially Sanskrit theatre, the concept was quickly appropriated by literary theorists and applied not only to the creation of plays, but mostly to poetry. While Bharata was mainly interested in the experience of rasa within the character and the consequent (visible) manifestation of rasa through the actor's performance, authors such as Bhatto Bhata, Bhatta Nayaka and Vamana were instead concerned with the mechanisms behind the formation of rasa in the reader (and in the poet) via turns of phrase, linguistic puns, the sounds, rhythm and melody created by recitation and specific rhymes.

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26. As a guide on drama which acts as "a mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in emotions, and which depicts different situations" (*NS* 1.111, in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:15), the *NS* is very careful in correctly associating social status and gender with their corresponding emotional regime. For instance, the rasa of *hasya* (the comic) would pertain more to women and lower status persons than to higher status ones (*NS* 6.51). Likewise, a person of lower status will show their teeth when laughing, while one from higher status would simply smirk (*NS* 6.52-59). Bharata thus classifies every aspect of social and emotional behavior based on social status, gender and age – and often even includes animals – such as gaits (*NS* 13), language (*NS* 18, 19), costumes and makeup (*NS* 23), or female and male behavior (*NS* 24, 25, 26).

Concepts pertaining to *kavya* (poetry) such as *gunas* (qualities) and figures of speech (*alarikaras*) were consequently the primary focus of these theorists. For them, beauty and rasa were present, or rather forged, using these linguistic strategies. In this analysis, rasa "defines literature," but also represents "the element to which all other features of the literary text are subordinated" (Pollock 2016, 87).

Then, during the ninth century, theorist Anandavardhana revolutionized the field of literary studies with the *Dhvanyaloka* (*Light on Implicature*), in which he argued that rasa could not be directly expressed, but only suggested, evoked (Ingalls et al. 1990) or implied (Pollock 2016, 87–97). He named this concept of suggestion "*dhvani*" and determined that rasa was the goal of poetry while *dhvani* was its means. The true aim of poetry, according to Anandavardhana, was thus to achieve rasa by means of *dhvani*. Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan interpret "suggestion as an independent semantic power," as the power of revelation, like a lamp that reveals the objects surrounding it (Ingalls et al. 1990, 13–14). With this new theory of rasa, Anandavardhana refuted – or rather adjusted – the statements of previous authors who believed that the real beauty in poetry and in rasa rested exclusively in the mastering of grammar and turns of phrases. Ananda did not reject those important qualities, but he claimed that they should be used skillfully alongside *dhvani*.

Later, during the first half of the eleventh century, the work of Bhojaraja (King Bhoja) decisively disrupted the basis of rasa theory by offering a brilliant yet contrasting theory of rasa that distanced itself from the foundational work of Bharata[27]. Throughout his many works[28], including the *Shringara Prakasha* (*SP*, *Light on Passion*), Bhoja argued for the multiplicity (and unity) of rasas and the supremacy of the erotic rasa, *shringara* or what he called *ahamkara-shringara,* which he understood as the foundation of the ego. It is through this complex – albeit confusing – interpretation of rasa, or passion (as translated in Pollock 1998 and 2016), that Bhoja was able to come up with a somewhat arbitrary list of twenty-four powers ensuring the presence of rasa, twenty-four types of figures of sense and figures of sound, as well as twelve types of word pertaining to rasa (Pollock 2016, 111).

Around the same era, Abhinavagupta, a Shaiva Kashmiri poet, philosopher, mystic and *tantra* practitioner, whose work dates from the late tenth and early eleventh century, proposed a more "conventional" interpretation of rasa (namely, one based on the *NS*)—and one that would dominate the landscape of rasa theory for centuries. A respected and sophisticated theorist and the first outside of literary studies to connect aesthetics and metaphysics (Pollock 2016, 188), Abhinavagupta proposed that rasa, which he described as "aesthetic enjoyment" (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 117), was "a supernormal [*alaukika*] relishing based on an involved sympathy" (36–37): rasa was not an object to be enjoyed, but an ongoing process of enjoyment in itself that was only accessible to spectators. In contrast with Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta

27. Surprisingly, Bhojaraja ignored Abhinavagupta's influential work, which was created at about the same time (Pollock 1998, 125; Raghavan 1963, 465). However, Raghavan (1963; 1975) as well as Pollock (1998; 2016) agree that Bhoja was aware of Bharata's theory and of the works of many other of his predecessors from Kashmir, including Anandavardhana.

28. Evidently, many Indian kings would take credit for works that were written by their court's intellectuals. However, Pollock (1998, 117n1; 2016, 110) and Raghavan (1963) both argue that there are reasons to believe that Bhoja was indeed the author of many works, or at least contributed to them in a significant way—one reason being that his novel and complex thought is consistent throughout these works, and thus possibly bears only one author.

argued that rasa, as opposed to *dhvani*, was the true soul of poetry, because it was only through suggestion (*rasadhvani*) that rasa could come to life (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 115).

Abhinava is known for many contributions—which are, to this day, still prevalent and accepted as the foundations of rasa theory. His first contribution is the addition of a ninth rasa to Bharata's eight rasas, namely *shanta*, the peaceful, thus crystallizing the *navarasa* (the nine rasas)[29]. His second contribution is the location of rasa within the audience – given its ability to keep an "aesthetic/emotional distance" from the drama – and excluding the actor and character from this equation. It is such affirmations that I wish to challenge in the next few chapters, as rasa in theory and rasa in practice offer diverging understandings of the latter statement.

Abhinava developed these theories in two major works: the *Abhinavabharati* (*ABh,* the *New Dramatic Art*), a commentary on Bharata's sixth chapter of the *NS* (the famous *rasadhyaya*, or chapter on rasa), and the *Dhvanyaloka Lochana* (*DhAL,* the *Eye for Light on Implicature*)*,* a commentary on Anandavardhana's study on suggestion (*dhvani*). The former work is based to a large extent on Abhinava's interpretation of Bharata's *sutra* on rasa, in which the latter stated that rasa emerged from the combination of *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* and *vyabhicharibhavas*. Abhinava used the *sutra* as a starting point by providing an overview of what had been said about it by his predecessors[30] (Bhatta Lollata, Shankuka, Bhatta Tota and Bhatta Nayaka) and in turn providing a reply as to the correct interpretation of the *rasasutra*. Unlike the scholars that preceded him, Abhinava proposed that rasa could not be reduced to a simple reproduction of its stable emotion (*sthayibhava*) nor to an object that could be produced or one of conceptual knowledge. Instead, Abhinava stated that, as "a purely experiential, quasi-physical phenomenon of tasting" (Pollock 2012, 429), rasa was in fact perceived by the spectator (in large part by the *manas*, as an internal form of perception) and manifested (with the help of suggestion*, dhvani*) by the poet who, overflowing with inspiration (*pratibha*), poured out his "excess" rasa in his poetic work. Hence he defined rasa as "a mental state which is the matter of cognition on the part of a perception without obstacles and consisting in a relish" (Gnoli 1968, 62).

In the *DhAL*, Abhinava used Anandavardhana's theory as a platform to develop his own theory of aesthetics in poetry. Abhinava stated in the *Lochana* that by revealing the nature of *dhvani* as the soul of poetry, Ananda allowed hearers/readers to experience "bliss (*ānanda*), which is a sort of delight (*nirvrti*) also known as 'rapture' (*camatkāra*)" (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 69). Unlike Ananda, but in a similar fashion to Bhatta Nayaka, Abhinavagupta compared the experience of rasa to that of religious ecstasy and explored this idea more thoroughly than Ananda did via the concept of *shantarasa*, arguing that *shanta* could legitimately be a rasa because it had *vibhavas*, *anubhavas, vyabhicarins* and *sthayibhavas* just like any other *rasas* (522).

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29. It is worth noting, however, that Abhinavagupta is not the first theorist to discuss *shanta*—others, like Anandavardhana, Bhatta Tota and Bhatta Nayaka, mentioned it before him, and modern scholars also believe that some versions of the *NS* did mention *shanta* (Masson and Patwardhan 1969, 34; Raghavan 1975, 70). Arguably, *shanta* is a sentiment, just like *karuna*, that had resonated for already some time within the religious ideologies of Buddhism, Jainism, as well as Shaivism (Advaita Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism), the latter corresponding to Abhinava's religious background. Nevertheless, Abhinava's thought became so prevalent in literary theory after the eleventh century that he is often recognized as the one who at least "cemented" the concept of *shanta*.

30. This is one of the main reasons why Abhinavagupta's work has been valued to such an extent: in the *ABh*, he provides a great overview of his predecessors' theories on rasa, whose manuscripts are either only partial or missing.

Lastly, during the fifteenth century with the rise of the *bhakti* (devotion) religious movement, rasa underwent yet another significant migration from "entertaining" art forms to devotional poetry, and thus to the lives of devotees themselves, transforming the philosophy of aesthetics from "a theory of beauty" to "a formula for action" (Gerow 1994, 188), and transferring rasa from poetry to theology exclusively (Pollock 2016, 302). Key authors in that trend are Jiva and Rupa Goswamin, strong adherents of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement (in Vrindavan, next to Mathura, northern India). This religious tradition, which was well documented by David Haberman in his book *Acting As a Way of Salvation* (1988), entails that devotees of Krishna realize the ideal *Vrajaloka* – the life of paradigmatic characters in the *Krishna lila* (play, life on earth) of Vrindavan or Vraj (the birthplace of Krishna) – by engaging in the *raganuga bhakti sadhana*, a method or physical means to reach this ultimate reality via service (*puja*, recitation, readings, chants, etc.) and, most importantly, mental exercises, especially in the form of meditative visualization of their life as paradigmatic models in Krishna's entourage. These devotees are said to embody whichever character was assigned to them by their *guru*—mainly people from Krishna's entourage*,* ideally a *gopi* (milkmaid). Haberman sees in this *sadhana* a sort of theatrical performance by devotees, an embodiment of Vraj paradigmatic characters which in turn leads to a transformative, new identity in devotees. This new identity is their "true" identity—their character (and body) in this *lila* (divine play) that is visualized through meditation (Haberman 1988).

Haberman reveals, through his study of the *raganuga bhakti sadhana*, a new theory in which the aesthetic (and here salvific aesthetic) benefits resulting from the artistic experience (theatre, poetry, music, etc.) – in other words, rasa – are available not only to audience members, but first and foremost to *actors* themselves. Haberman indeed states that the "[r]eemphasis on the actor, as opposed to the audience, constitutes one of the main contributions of Rupa's *rasa* theory" (1988, 37). As opposed to Abhinavagupta, who considered that the actor was too involved emotionally to experience rasa, the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement holds that it is specifically this absorption into deep emotions that enables devotees to experience rasa.

Despite the wonderful array of rasa theories and the plethora of ideas that were suggested around the concept, the chief point of reference in rasa theory to this day is undoubtedly Abhinavagupta. One only need do a short survey of the current Sanskrit studies landscape to realize that Abhinavagupta, besides Bharata and Anandavardhana, is one of the most researched and translated theorists in the field of Indian aesthetics (see, for instance, Gerow 1994; Gnoli 1968; Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990; Masson and Patwardhan 1969; 1970; Pollock 2012; 2016; Raghavan 1975, to name a few)[31]. As observed by Pollock (1998, 125–26; 2012, 430), his whole theory (as summarized by Mammata in the *Kavyaprakasha*) was hereafter endorsed – but much later – as the literary theory canon of modern India. Masson and Patwardhan even note that

> his terminology became standard to the point where it is not possible to pick up any book on literary criticism after the twelfth century and not come across expressions like:

31. Abhinavagupta's success can be explained by the fact that much of his work was preserved and that other philosophers mentioned him profusely in their work, especially Mammata with his *Kavyaprakasha*, a work that "became the foremost textbook of literary theory in early modern India" (Pollock 2012, 430). Pollock questions Abhinava's standing, arguing that a critical intellectual history of rasa "cannot be reconstructed simply by following that dominant lineage" (431); his 2016's *Rasa Reader* as well as his study of Bhojaraja's *Shringara Prakasha* (1998) certainly act as a response to this statement.

> *hrdayasamvada* (sympathetic imagination, rapport), *tanmayi-alaukikacamatkara* (complete identification), *carvana* (aesthetic relish), *alaukikacamatkara* (extraordinary artistic beauty), *sadharani-karana* (universality) and so forth, all of which are for the first time carefully elaborated by Abhinavagupta. (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:4)

Abhinava, more than any others, argued about the role, number (including the value) and the location of rasas in his many commentaries, and has been very influential to subsequent scholars of rasa theory, both classical and contemporary—as he remains to classical Indian dancers today. This will surely reflect in the remainder of this discussion, which will now turn to the various roles, locations, numbers and value given to the concept of rasa over time.

The Many Roles and Locations of Rasa

Over the centuries, rasa has been attributed a plethora of locations, and with them, different roles and natures that, to some extent, came full circle by the end of the literary and philosophical debates around the seventeenth century. Theorists, with a clear majority coming from Kashmir, were concerned with issues of the "aesthetic experience from the point of view of the artist, the aesthetic/artistic object, and the evocation of a similar, if not identical, experience in the aesthete/receptor or audience" (Vatsyayan 1996, 138). Moreover, each of those scholars' affiliation with distinct philosophical schools (*darshanas*) – Mimamsa, Samkhya, Nyaya, Yoga, Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism, mainly – is apparent in their theory.

As opposed to Haberman, whose reading of the *NS* led him to believe that Bharata located rasa within "the cultured spectator (*sumanasaḥ preksakāḥ*)" (1988, 23), Pollock argues that the sage first located rasa in the character (2016, 48–49; 1998, 123). At the time, rasa was a sort of quality present in a character and "channeled" through an actor. "For Bharata," Pollock explains, "the *sthāyibhāva* and the *rasas* they produce are located in the character (though 'tasted' by the audience)" (1998, 124). By seeing and hearing the actor's performance, who used several strategies ranging from speech and makeup to gestures and psychophysical acting (*abhinaya*), the spectator could thus witness the rasa experienced by the character and relish it. This stance, in which rasa is located in the character, was supported by Bharata as well as a number of his successors such as Bharata Lollata, Shri Shankuka and Bhojaraja[32] (Ramachandran 1980; Pollock 1998; 2016).

From the seventh century onward, rasa migrated from the stage to paper and recitation, namely poetry (*kavya*), a means that allowed authors to go well beyond visible emotions to delve deep into the psychology and inner emotions of characters. Philosophical debates on Indian aesthetics shifted to the idea of rasa as an *object* present within linguistic strategies. While some argued that rasa was only located in the characters evoked by poets, or essentially in poets who could only evoke their own *rasik* experience to the spectatorship, the main location of rasa was thereafter within figures of speech (*alarikara*) and qualities (*gunas*), both literary categories that

32. Pollock argues that nowhere in Bhoja's theory – in particular the *SP* – does it say that the author was targeting the spectator as the seat of rasa. As such, Pollock suggests that Bhoja's conception of rasa might well be centered on the character's ability to produce and experience rasa, simply due to the fact that the location of rasa within the audience was not yet the dominant position in rasa theory at that time (1998, 128–32).

allowed literary authors to express and evoke the emotional world of characters within the reader (Pollock 2016, 10–11, 58–74).

With the introduction of rasa theory in Kashmiri poetry during the tenth century, and most notably with Abhinavagupta's influential work, rasa migrated to the spectator.

> A new shift of attention from modes of literary production (writer-centered, prescriptive theory) to processes of literary cognition (reader-centered, descriptive theory) brought with it a growing concern with the affective response to literary representations, whereby the principal locus of *rasa* – the site of its effect and the realm of its investigation – was transferred from the text to the reader. (Pollock 1998, 124)

Yet, other theories regarding the location of rasa were suggested prior to Abhinava's commentaries. Bhatta Lollata, for instance, situated rasa in the "idea" grasped by the author or poet when creating their work, thus "pointing at the source of inspiration and imagination, and the process of artistic creation" (Vatsyayan 1996, 141). As such, permanent emotions (*sthayibhavas*) were thought to be generated in the original character that was played or evoked and recognized by the spectator, thus leading to the experience of rasa (Ramachandran 1980, 2:86–87). Shri Shankuka had a similar theory. He made a point that rasa, which was not an aesthetic object, was destined to be grasped by the spectator's consciousness (Vatsyayan 1996, 141–42). In this case, the spectator would believe that the emotions of the character re-enacted by the actor were truly experienced by the performer, thus leading the spectator to rasa (Ramachandran 1980, 2:87–90).

However, it was the efforts mobilized by scholars such as Bhatta Nayaka and Abhinavagupta, who questioned the nature of rasa and whether it emerged in the actor/poet or in the audience, that truly triggered the "migration" of rasa from the text to the reader, as it became an experience, a "process of tasting" (*rasyamana*) (Pollock 2016, 191). Rasa was not about the meal (character) or the chef (poet) anymore, but about the *act of tasting* the meal (the viewer's experience). Abhinavagupta stated that rasa was "[b]orn in the heart of the poet, it [flowered] as it were in the actor and [bore] fruit in the spectator" (Vatsyayan 1996, 155). Furthermore, as opposed to many of his predecessors, Abhinava refused to believe that rasa could be located in the actor. He specified that "[t]he actor […] is the means of the tasting, and hence he is called by the name of 'vessel'" and further indicated that "[t]he taste of wine, indeed, does not stay in the vessel, which is only a means necessary to the tasting of it" (ABh, in Gnoli 1968, XXXVI). Indeed, given that "rasa is characterized by an enchantment" in its recipient, what would become of actors if they got absorbed as much as spectators in the performance? "Abhinavagupta concludes that this would throw off the whole pace of the performance" (Bansat-Boudon 1992a, 143–44; my translation).

These new theories of rasa shifted the previous understanding of the concept as an object that could be manipulated using figures of speech. Rather, rasa became "an experience which is trans-personal, detached and unified" (Vatsyayan 1996, 144). Rasa was not *in* the poem anymore, but was only *suggested* (*rasadhvani*, using figures of speech and qualities) and later apprehended by the reader. Vatsyayan sees this period as shifting the focus of rasa theory onto "the nature of the aesthetic experience, the quality of the experience, the poetic form, relationship of 'word' and 'meaning,' as also the response of the reader and hearer," based on each theorist's commitment to schools of philosophy (*darshanas*) such as Mimamsa, Samkhya, Yoga, Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism (1996, 132).

This "*rasik* revolution" would not only widen the scope of *kavya* to all forms of poetry (even all forms of art), but it would also slowly bring rasa back to performance. Attention was turned to the spectator's experience of rasa in savoring the essence of the play, and during the fourteenth century, to the devotee's blissful *rasik* experience of the divine. In this latter context, rasa became a means to reach God, communicate with the divine and share blissful experiences with deities, most often Krishna. The works of Rupa Goswamin, such as the *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* (*BhRAS, Ambrosial River of the Rasa of Devotion*) – a sixteenth-century text at the foundation of the Gaudiya Vaishnava religious tradition – or pervasive poems like the *Gitagovinda* (the *Song of the Lord* [Krishna]) written by Jayadeva in the thirteenth century, certainly illustrate this new application of rasa to Hindu religious devotion, in which *shringararasa* (erotic love) and the more recent *bhaktirasa* (devotion/devotional love) dominate.

Even if such application of the concept of rasa is arguably made outside of the aesthetic context, Haberman (1988) states that with the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, we see a shift of rasa from spectators to actors—who, in this case, are devotees themselves. It is through acting, using the act of visualization, that devotees can experience powerful emotional states of devotion and love towards the Dark Lord. Such experience of the divine – which could be compared to Abhinavagupta's experience of *shantarasa* as *ananda*, the self-consciousness which unites one with God – is equated to a form of rasa: *bhaktirasa*, or the rasa of love and devotion toward the divine. This new aesthetic theory is one of participation (*bhakti*) and relationship with the divine, and more specifically of a relationship with Lord Krishna and his most faithful devotees in the sacred land of Vraj, Vrindavan and the sacred pond of Radhakunda. Salvation is achieved through these relational dynamics and devotion (*sambandha nipa*) and through direct perception of the *krishnalila* using the means of disciplined meditation (*sadhana*), which in turn produces *bhaktirasa* (devotional love). "Thus, acting becomes a way of salvation," indicates Haberman (1988, 37).

The Battle of Rasas: Which One Is the Best?

Shantarasa: Unveiling the True Nature of the Self

The religious and philosophical inclinations of classical Indian aestheticians, as well as their social status, conclusively guided their respective theories of rasa, often leading them to value some rasas over others. In the case of Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Bhatta Nayaka, who all came from a Shaivite background, the aesthetic experience was thought to be akin to the state of awareness and consciousness that is found in the experience of the divine Brahman. In such instance, the aesthetic experience in general – whatever the rasa – was deemed commendable, as it was different from ordinary (emotional) experience and one of the closest to the divine experience of *ananda*, which excludes all form of individuality (Vatsyayan 1996, 146–47).

Shaiva metaphysics in particular became prevalent between the ninth and eleventh century in Kashmir and surely influenced the migration of rasa from the character to the spectator. In line with such theology as Kashmiri Shaivism, "Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta develop[ed] a theory of aesthetics on the premise that 'art' is another path for the same goal of experiencing, if not permanently attaining[,] the absolute freedom of universal and unmediated (*anupāya*) consciousness" (Vatsyayan 1996, 145). In parallel, Bhatta Nayaka, following Vedanta philosophy, argued that the aesthetic experience embodied and stimulated "a state of awareness and consciousness which is akin to the experience of Brahman" (146).

As a result, for Abhinavagupta (to which Bhatta Nayaka would probably agree), the best rasa was clearly *shanta*, tranquility or emotionlessness. Abhinava explored the paradox of *shantarasa*, in that it did not emerge from emotions, but from the *absence* of emotions (Gerow 1994), forming "an aesthetic emotion of emotionlessness" (Pollock 2012, 429). Hence, he believed that *shanta* was akin to the blissful state of *ananda*. "If the artist or poet has the inner force of the creative intuition," explains Vatsyayan (1996, 155), "the spectator is the man of cultivated emotion in whom lie dormant the different states of being, and when he sees them manifested, revealed on the stage through movement, sound and decor, he is lifted to that ultimate state of bliss, known as *ānanda,*" as the experience of rasa represented "flash-like" momentary glimpses into self-consciousness (156). Like his teacher Bhatta Tota, Abhinava thus concluded that "as the *rasa* of peace leads to *mokṣa*, which is the highest aim of man, it is the most important of all the *rasas*" (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 525).

One of the major difficulties with Abhinavagupta's theory of *shantarasa* probably lies in the fact that this ninth rasa is often considered inadequate for stage acting (but might perhaps be better fit for poetry). Playing the absence of emotions on the stage can be, indeed, quite the challenge (Raghavan 1975, 53)—but not impossible because the *atman*, according to Abhinavagupta, was at the source of the experience of *shanta*. Indeed, in the *Shantarasaprakarana* section of the *ABh* (as translated in Gerow 1994), Abhinava argued that indifference (*nirveda*) – which is difficult to play onstage – was not the basic stable emotion of *shanta*, but rather the Self (*atman*) or knowledge of the Self (*tattvajñana*), as "possessed of untainted qualities such as knowledge and joy, and untouched by affections for presumptive objects" (Gerow 1994, 199), which was thus equivalent to *shama* or detachment (Raghavan 1975, 56, 101–2). The concept of the "Self" that was elaborated by Abhinava in this case was one of stableness, given that the Self serves as the "wall" on which various *sthayibhavas* attach themselves for a limited period. *Shama*'s "consequential factors [*anubhavas*]," thus argued Abhinava, "are concern for teaching about liberation, etc." while its transitory emotional states (*vyabhicharibhavas*) are "indifference, reflection, recollection, and steadfastness" (Gerow 1994, 206) and its teachings are "abstinence, suppression, and contemplating the Lord" (208).

Shringararasa and Bhaktirasa: Love Toward Women and Gods

While in northern India, and more importantly in Kashmiri Shaivism, *shantarasa* and the absence of desire seemed to be the norm within rasa theory, in the western parts of the country where Vaishnavism prevailed, *shringararasa* – which feeds on desire – dominated. There, from the eleventh century onward, love was – as it still is today – a recurrent theme in all forms of Indian arts, especially drama and poetry, and held a special status in medieval royal courts (Ali 2004), as shown by Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* (Vatsyayana 1994, 2009). The erotic thwarted (*vipralambha*) in particular is a powerful sentiment that fueled drama and poetry for centuries, as it broke the monotony of love in union, illustrated the true feelings of love felt by the couple, and fed the romantic intrigues that constructed the courtly culture of medieval India as studied by Daud Ali (2004). In fact, the sentiment of erotic love became so important to courtly life that king Bhoja's *Shringara Prakasha* (*SP*, *Light on Passion*) "made it the basis of a superordinate experiential 'sense of self' which encompassed not only erotic love, but all the emotions and sentiments of an exalted life" (Ali 2004, 209).

As a guide about the art of love and its many rules (mainly in courtly culture), Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* (*KS,* the *Guide to Love*) is another strong advocate for the primacy of *shringara*. For the *nagaraka,* the Indian wealthy and cultured "dandy," *shringara* – or rather *kama,* "the mental inclination [*pravritti*] toward the pleasures of touch, sight, taste, and smell," with a special emphasis on the sense of touch (Vatsyayana 1994, 28) – concerned the love of women[33], but also of the arts (7). In other words, the ideal *KS* lover was a *rasika*—"not merely a literary connoisseur," as Ali reminds us, "but a man who cultivated a certain meta-disposition towards his entire affective life" (2004, 201).

The *KS* thus illustrates a way of life that was central to Indian medieval courts, which was the central nervous system of the performing, literary and visual arts in medieval and early modern India. Even though Vatsyayana's work concerned everyday life (*lokadharmi*) rather than the aesthetic context, it holds definitive links with the rules of *shringara* as laid out in the *NS*. These included the rules and manifestations of unfaithfulness (having a relation with a married woman, for instance), the intrigues surrounding love, the necessity for letters and messengers in romantic intrigues, the locations of love play (in gardens, bedrooms, in private or with other people assisting, etc.), and so on. As argued by William Reddy (2012), the idea of *kama* thus became entangled with that of *shringararasa* in medieval royal courts. He highlights the importance of understanding *shringara* as "longing for association," meaning a form of love that both includes and encompasses desire and romantic love—something he likes to call "love-lust," arguing that "[n]either in Sanskrit nor in the local languages of *bhakti* practice were there any words available for distinguishing between love and desire" (Reddy 2012, 254).

Likewise, Bhojaraja elevated the rasa of love, which he called *ahamkara-shringara*, above all others in his major work of the *SP*. In essence, the king – who considered that the basic number of eight rasas, or ten (even twelve) according to him, was completely arbitrary (*SP* 1.7, in Pollock 1998, 143–44) – merged all rasas and *bhavas* into two "new" *shringara* rasas: a "minor" *shringararasa* of *rati* (between a man and a woman), and a major *shringara* named *ahamkara*, or sometimes referred to as *ahamkara-shringara* or *abhimana* (Raghavan 1963, 8). *Ahamkara* was "the truly central and permanent ego" (Haberman 1988, 28–29), the notion of self-consciousness that allowed a man to love himself as well as the people and objects around him. Pollock defines this rasa, which he translates as "passion," as "what enables a person to experience the world richly. It represents the capacity for emotional intensity as such, and hence may be taken as the origin of all other affective states, or *rasas* (plural)" (1998, 126).

Indeed, Bhoja stated that there was only one rasa, love (whether carnal, *shringara*, or non-sexual, *preman*), from which derived all 49 *bhavas.* The king boldly asserted that rasa was not born out of *bhavas*, as was established by Bharata (*NS* 6.33), but that *bhavas* were born out of rasas—in this case, *ahamkara-shringara*. Bhoja's notion of *preman*, which acts as a "synthesis of all Rasas" (Raghavan 1963, 25), worked in a similar fashion by addressing "a fundamental love lying at the root of all forms of attachments" and of all *bhavas*, in the same manner that *ahamkara* lay at the root of all rasas. *Preman* was thus the love that initiated any *bhava*, the motivation behind

33. In this version of erotic love, sentiments and pleasure were solely reserved for men, given that women were seen as the objects of *shringararasa*. This interpretation of the erotic is undoubtedly based on Bharata's examination of *shringararasa*, which "relates to [the union of] man and woman" (*NS* 6.46, in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:109).

emotions: “If a person laughs,” Raghavan explains, “it is because he *loves* to laugh; if he fights, he *loves* to do so” (1975, 201). This is how Bhoja also addressed *shantarasa* and its dominant emotion, which included *shuddharati* (superior love) and emerged from the concept of *atma-rati* (love for the soul, *atman*) (192).

Reddy suggests that with the coming of the *bhakti* medieval movement, the relationship to gods and goddesses changed from an impersonal one to an intimate and highly emotional rapport. *Rasa* then transformed into the “the joyful experience of the love relationship between a human being” and a deity (Toomey quoted in Reddy 2012, 253). Such is the case within the works of the Goswamins, which advocated for a new rasa of devotion, *bhaktirasa*. Love being a central aspect of religious devotion, *shringararasa* had naturally become intertwined with religious affect, where it was transformed into *bhaktirasa*, the sentiment of devotional love. Gaudiya Vaishnavism is a prime illustration of this transition, in which *bhaktirasa*, and the greater rasa of *premarasa* sometimes called *madhurarasa*, was thought to be “the one and absolute *rasa*” (Haberman 1988, 31).

Shringararasa, under various names, was thus accepted as the chief rasa in Rupa and Jiva Goswamin’s theology, with *rati* (or rather *krishna-rati* or *krishna-prema*) for God as its main dominant emotion (*sthayin*). Furthermore, Haberman (1988) states that the love of the already-married *gopis* towards Krishna (called *madhura*, *shringara* or *ujjvala*) is the most valuable of all rasas because they unite with him physically, but especially because they risk everything – including their marriage – to experience this love for the Lord (*krishna-rati*). As such, the *gopis* were the most desirable roles to obtain in the *raganuga bhakti sadhana*, as they not only engaged in physical play with Krishna, but they most importantly embodied ultimate love and devotion towards the ideal female model, Radha, who in turn was the perfect example of *Krishna rati bhava* towards the Dark Lord. By extension, the *gopis* thus adored both Radha and Krishna.

Abhinavagupta claimed in the *ABh* that *shringararasa* was first mentioned by Bharata and was emphasized “because sexual love is easily accessible to all people, is exceedingly familiar to them, and is attractive to all” (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 2:61n355). He was, as previously illustrated, an advocate of *shantarasa* over *shringara*. Yet, Bharatamuni and Vatsyayana had praised *shringararasa* before him, as well as Bhojaraja and Goswamin after him. Masson and Patwardhan in particular notice the resemblance between the *NS* and the *KS* in the importance they both place on the sexual. The various ways of interpreting *shringararasa* on the stage and in poetry were reflected in the behaviors that were reproduced in medieval courtly life: for instance, a courtesan would not have the same gait and ways of expressing *rati* as a queen of the court. These variations as well as the rules of love and of interactions between a man and a woman are thoroughly described in the *NS*, especially in its twenty-forth chapter, which appears to be reflecting much of the courtly culture of medieval India as explored by Ali (2004). The fact that treatises such as the *NS*, the *KS* and the *SP* elevate *shringararasa* above all other rasas might reflect the functioning of at least Indian medieval society, in which love was also ubiquitous and experienced by all (but in different ways).

Rasabhasa and the Ethics of Rasa

Abhinavagupta and other theorists before him such as Udbhata also contributed to the debate on *shringara* by discussing the concept of *rasabhasa*, or semblance of rasa, with special attention to the erotic sentiment. Typically, a semblance of rasa was believed to be “the presence of rasa in

characters of low status, animals, antagonists, or entities referenced in a merely metaphorical manner" (Bhojaraja, in Pollock 1998, 117). Consequently, any semblance of dominant emotion or other emotional states should lead to a semblance of rasa, which itself always results in *hasya* (the comic)—because any imitation or false emotion would lead to ridicule or become a farce (ABh, in Pollock 2016, 212–14).

In the *DhAL*, Abhinavagupta claimed that *shringararasa* could only arise from true *rati*, from a love that was in its later stage and thus no longer limited to desire (*laulya,* or even to *kama*) and that, more importantly, was mutual (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 217).

> The love which is a *sthāyibhāva* (a permanent emotion) is altogether different from a mere (one-sided) feeling in the form of a desire felt by one person for another and which is found to be present (only) in the earlier stages of attachment. The love which is a *sthāyibhāva* progresses continuously from its faint beginnings upto [*sic*] its final realisation and it ends in the attainment of complete happiness (in sexual union). (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 2:79n413)

This mutual longing was, in fact, the essence of love for Abhinavagupta: mutual longing was one of the main aspects that differentiated *shringararasa* from *shringarabhasa* (non-genuine or deceptive love) or from *karuna* (in *vipralambha*) (Raghavan 1975, 172).

The most obvious example of a deceptive rasa is discussed by Abhinavagupta in the *Lochana*: Ravana's love toward Sita. In the epic tale of the *Ramayana*, princess Sita, the wife of the hero Rama, is abducted by the demon-king Ravana and imprisoned in his Sri Lankan residence. Abhinavagupta argues that this love is in fact a *rasabhasa*, and more precisely a *shringarabhasa* – a non-genuine or false love – since it relates to an "imitated love" (*shringara-anukriti*), a "spurious love" that is not shared, that is only one-sided (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 2:76–78n399). In this case, this love cannot be defined as *shringararasa* because it is not ethical according to an Indian understanding of that sentiment. Indeed, only Ravana shows signs (*anubhava*) of *ratibhava*, whereas Sita mainly displays characteristics of *bibhatsarasa, karunarasa* or perhaps *vipralambha shringararasa* because she was separated from her true love, Rama.

This story raises the issue of the intention behind a *bhava* and its corresponding rasa: if the emotion is genuine and heart-felt, but produced by an evil character or in an immoral context, does that count as a valid rasa? Abhinavagupta denied such case and thus called it *rasabhasa*, although he recognizes that, from Ravana's perspective, there were true feelings of *ratibhava* towards Sita[34]. Nevertheless, the spectator has the moral duty of being on Sita's side and will therefore see Ravana's sentiment as *laulyarasa* – vile passion, which may even translate as *hasyarasa*, ridicule – rather than *shringararasa* (Raghavan 1975, 125).

Yet, when it comes to the *gopis*' illegitimate relationship with Lord Krishna, theorists do not talk of *rasabhasa*, but of one of the purest forms of rasa, despite the immoral act of cheating on their husband. If Ravana's love towards Sita is *shringarabhasa*, could we also say the same of

34. This is something that has been argued in the past few decades in films such as *Raavan* (2010, by Mani Ratnam) or even in parts of South India and Southeast Asia where Ravana is instead seen as the hero of the Ramayana because of his genuine and truthful behavior.

the *gopis*' love towards Krishna? The majority of thinkers, Abhinavagupta among them, argued that technically, such adulterous love would be *abhasa* – even if many poets have proven otherwise – including cases where a man is in love with another man's wife (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:42). Notwithstanding, Abhinavagupta – as well as Vatsyayana – was clear in saying that, in *shringararasa*, men were the enjoyers and women were the objects to be enjoyed, thus legitimizing a man's multiple romantic pursuits and dismissing the aesthetic value of such experience for women (2:84n427). With the Goswamins and devotional poetry, however, the roles are inverted in the case of the *gopis*, who were celebrated for their union with Krishna, even though they were cheating on their husband[35]. In the latter case, their love towards the Dark Lord was so powerful and so true that they were willing to risk their status only to be with him—a virtue that is seen as admirable to devotees (Haberman 1988, 55–56).

What Abhinavagupta and others bring to the debate on *rasabhasa* is an ethical perspective on emotions in Indian society: some feelings are legitimate, while others are immoral. This was in fact what was meant by the term *abhasa* by Udbhata, who used it "to characterize narrative that was 'contrary to social propriety' and thereby violated a core feature of rasa, its ethical normativity." Hence, Pollock states that identifying an emotion or sentiment as *abhasa* "is to make a judgement, not on the quality of the poem, but rather on the nature of the aesthetic experience it produces" (2016, 28). Abhinavagupta's praise of *shantarasa* as the most important of rasas reflects such criticism and judgement as well. In this case, he was arguing for *shanta*'s supremacy because this sentiment is about the *absence* of emotions, the detachment from worldly matters such as mundane affects, which, according to the Kashmiri Shaiva doctrine, brings the spectator – or rather, the devotee – closer to the awareness of one's own consciousness and accordingly, the plenitude of liberation.

Negative Rasas and Displeasure

Of the many paradoxes raised by rasa, the most challenging one is probably the experience of (aesthetic) pleasure in the presence of negative sentiments, such as *shoka* (sorrow) or *krodha* (anger). Indeed, how can negative emotions produce pleasurable feelings in the spectator? "[T]he fearful, macabre, tragic, and violent bring those savoring the rasa into a state of perturbation that is almost indescribable" claimed both Jain thinkers Ramachandra and Gunachandra (Pollock 2016, 241). Contesting Abhinavagupta's claim in which rasa is always pleasurable, both argued that, in fact, rasa could be unpleasant as well. Other theorists followed this novel maxim and even suggested adding a new rasa, *duhkha* (unpleasantness), to resolve the question (Raghavan 1975, 184)! Ramachandra and Gunachandra, however, indicated that there was in fact a missing element in Abhinava's theory. They stated that the experience of rasa could in reality be pleasurable (in the cases of the erotic, comic, heroic, fantastic and peaceful) or painful (in the cases of the tragic,

35. According to dramatist and poet Kavikarnapura, a contemporary of Jiva Goswamin (late 16th century), the reason why the illicit relationship of *gopis* with Krishna was suggestive of rasa is that such emotions were addressing "supermundane" rasa (which concerns characters of deities), as opposed to "ordinary" rasa (which concerns human characters). He stated in the *AK* that "it is precisely desire for a married woman that is taught as desire's highest form of all. This is not occasioned by impropriety, both because it is proven to be something supermundane—which, as the maxim goes, is not only not a failing but also a strength—and because it is beyond the capacity of reason to understand" (*AK* 133, in Pollock 2016, 296).

violent, macabre and fearful), and that bliss was only possible during an additional phase following rasa: "rapture is something that happens only *after* the savoring of rasa has itself ceased, and is the result of acknowledging the genius of the poet or the skill of the actor in showing things as they really are" (Pollock 2016, 241; emphasis in original).

Bhojaraja's theory, in which all rasas are nothing but *ahamkara* (sense of self and self-love), presents another solution to this paradox. In this case, the experience of rasa is not about relishing good or bad emotions, but rather about being aware – in a pleasurable fashion – of the ways in which they cause pleasure or pain in the subject through *ahamkara*, which meant the bliss of self-realization (Raghavan 1963; Pollock 1998). In the *SP*, Bhoja assures the reader that rasa "goes beyond the plane of production and hence is one's very 'sense of self,' that is, the experience of pleasure even in the presence of pain and the like, which thereby become agreeable to the mind" (*SP* 11, in Pollock 2016, 125). A similar view was shared by thinkers Vishvanathadeva and Jagannatha who "Vedanticized" rasa by attributing the aesthetic experience to the "removal of the veil of unknowing," which in turn allowed one to enjoy "a state of pure, joyful awareness" (Pollock 2016, 311). This removal of the obscuration of the self, *atman*, was the same for all rasas – including negative ones like *karuna* – and thus resulted in bliss, whatever the context.

Likewise, Abhinavagupta argued that the *experience* of rasa meant that there was only one *type* of experience, whatever its name. This meant that if one were to witness a negative emotion like *shoka* on the stage, they would still feel the unique *experience* of rasa, which was always pleasurable (*chamatkara*). Hence, it would go against the concept of rasa to talk of a "painful rasa" since the term *rasa*, as an aesthetic experience that is *alaukika* (beyond worldliness), implies enjoyability, as opposed to worldly emotions (*laukika bhavas*) which are either pleasurable or painful (Ramachandran 1980, 2:53). Ramachandra reminds us that a "*bhāva* becomes *rasa* only when aesthetically transformed," which explains how a painful *bhava* can transform into pleasurable rasa (54).

Abhinavagupta was clear on this topic and argued that the spectator could only feel pleasure from relishing emotions on the stage, even negative ones: "The outcome of drama for spectators is joy and that alone, not grief or other such feeling" (*ABh* 1.283, in Pollock 2016, 205). This was possible because the emotions portrayed and the rasas that resulted from such *alaukika bhavas* were not from the ordinary world, but from an aesthetic context—in other words, emotions on the stage could not affect the audience on a personal level. In fact, in the theatre, spectators are "outside both time and space altogether" (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:32). This distancing or detachment from the emotions experienced by the character (and accordingly, the actor) is specifically what allowed spectators to experience the bliss of rasa, a form of rapture in which all attachment to worldly things and desires dissipated in order to reveal the true essence of the soul – even when witnessing negative *bhavas* and rasas – stated Abhinava.

The Number of Rasas

Despite Bharata's *rasadhyaya* canon in which we find only eight rasas – or nine according to some lost manuscripts of the *NS* which were consulted by theorists like Abhinavagupta (Raghavan 1975, 70; Masson and Patwardhan 1969, 34) – many aestheticians following the sage suggested modifying or adding other rasas to this list. Over the centuries and many debates around rasa theory, scholars and poets alike have therefore argued for a wide range of "sets" of rasas, going from one all-encompassing rasa to eight rasas in the *NS* and nine with the *navarasa*, up to thirteen

rasas with King Haripala, who included the basic eight from Bharata, as well as *shanta* (with its *sthayin* of *nirveda*), *vatsalya* (non-sexual love), *sambhoga* (union), *vipralambha* (separation) and Brahma (very similar to *shanta,* but with the *sthayin* of *ananda*) (Raghavan 1975, 64–65). Sometimes, these numbers would vary as theorists would subdivide a rasa or use a different name for one that was already part of Bharata's eight-fold rasa theory (within his 33 *vyabhicharibhavas*, for instance).

For Bharata, rasas were thought to be sentiments experienced by the character and mimicked by the actor that would cause "pleasure and satisfaction" within cultured people. Rasa thus resulted from the tasting within one's mind of dominant emotions (*sthayibhavas*) represented on the stage via the various acting registers (*abhinaya*) (*NS* 6.31, in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:105–6; in Pollock 2016, 50–51). Bharata suggested that there were four original rasas – the erotic, the furious, the heroic and the odious – and four corresponding subaltern rasas that would derive from the first set – the comic, the pathetic, the marvelous and the fearful, respectively –, leading to the eight-fold theory of rasas (*NS* 6.39-41). But according to Abhinavagupta, there were in fact *nine* rasas, "for only so many have been taught either as serving the purpose of instruction or as adequately pleasurable" (*ABh*, in Pollock 2016, 206). He added *shanta* rasa to Bharata's list because of his philosophical take on rasa. The concept of *shantarasa* in and of itself clearly shows Jain, Buddhist (Masson and Patwardhan 1969; Raghavan 1975, 23–25), as well as Shaiva influences, and Abhinavagupta's philosophy of aesthetics certainly evokes an understanding of *shantarasa* that reflects his personal religious beliefs as a Kashmiri Shaiva mystic (Gerow 1994). By elevating the rasa of *shanta* above all others – as all other rasas derived from or summed up to this one – Abhinava was thereafter both suggesting a model based on nine rasas and one supreme rasa that could eradicate all other eight.

On this topic, King Bhoja stands apart once again. In the *SP*, he listed ten rasas, including *shantarasa* but also *vatsalya* or *preyas* (non-sexual love), and this list extends to twelve if we add his two rasas of *uddhata* (pride) and *udatta* (nobleness) to the basic eight rasas (Raghavan 1963, 438; 1975, 124, 132–34; Pollock 1998, 143; 2016, 132–33). Bhoja's understanding of rasa and *bhava* was quite complex, in the sense that he was both "a monist and a pluralist" (Raghavan 1975, 132), going from the one all-encompassing rasa of *ahamkara* (self-consciousness) or *preman* (love) to his ten or twelve rasas, or even so far as to consider all *bhavas* as forms of rasas. "Authorities traditionally reckon ten *rasas*," Bhoja stated, "namely, the passionate, heroic, pitiful, wonderful, violent, comic, loathsome, affectionate, terrible, and tranquil (*śṛṇgāra, vīra, karuṇa, adbhuta, raudra, hāsya, bībhatsa, vatsala, bhayānaka, śānta*). We, however, admit only one rasa, *śṛṇgāra*, insofar as it alone is what is tasted (*rasanāt*)" (Pollock 1998, 143).

If Bhojaraja introduced so many rasas, it is because his understanding of the concept was much more flexible and versatile (if not too vast) than that of his predecessors—which also sets him apart from previous and following theorists, philosophers and poets. Like his predecessors Rudrata and Lollata, Bhoja thought that all *bhavas* could ultimately become rasas in their "developed state" since any *sthayibhava*, *vyabhicharin* or *sattvikabhava* could act as a transitory state depending on the circumstance, condition and nature of man, thus giving Bhoja much more liberty in his theory of rasa (in terms of number, nature, and so on) (Raghavan 1963, 439). Raghavan even goes as far as to say that Bhoja "calls almost anything Rasa" (442), including *vyabhicharibhavas* and *sthayibhavas*, but also somewhat contradicts himself by stating that there

is only one rasa worthy of that name—*ahamkara*[36]. Yet, his perspective was certainly not unique, as other theorists like Dhanamjaya added the rasas of *mrigaya* (hunting) and *aksha* (gambling) to the list, therefore expanding the concept of rasa well beyond mental and emotional states to concepts and activities (Raghavan 1975, 125–26)!

With Rupa and Jiva Goswamin, we witness a new extended set of rasas through the "evolution of a full-fledged theory of *bhakti rasa*", the rasa of love towards the divine, and more precisely love for Lord Krishna. Here, the bliss of *ananda* as exposed by Abhinavagupta with *shantarasa* is replaced by the "ecstasy of *surrender*" (Vatsyayan 1996, 159; emphasis in original). The elaboration of Rupa Goswamin on *shringararasa* was directly influenced by the Bengal Vaishnavism school of thought, rather than by Abhinavagupta's Shaivite theory. Moreover, Goswamin's ultimate rasa of *shringara* (or *bhakti*) was further subdivided into "minor" rasas. Starting with the ultimate rasa of *bhakti* (devotional love), Rupa Goswamin presented an impressive list of what could be called "*shringara*-derived" sentiments, such as tranquility (*shanta*), servitude (*prita* or *dasya*), friendship (*preyas* or *sakhya*), parental affection (*vatsalya*), passion (*laulya*), affection (*sneha*) and amorousness (*madhura*), which were all integrated into Bharata's categories of *sambhoga* and *vipralambha,* as lovers as well as friends and family of Krishna in Vraj all felt the joy of being united with him and the pain of his absence (Haberman 1988, 50–51; Raghavan 1975, 130, 145). Rupa Goswamin presented a list of twelve rasas, which started with the *mukhya bhaktirasa* ("chief rasas of devotion")—a category that was commonly acknowledged by theorists from Vaishnava Bengal and included *shanta, vatsalya, dasya* (servitude) and *sakhya* (alliance, friendliness) alongside *madhura* (Raghavan 1975, 145). These five *bhaktirasas* were completed by the remaining seven rasas established by Bharata (*hasya, karuna, raudra, vira, bhayanaka, bibhatsa* and *adbhuta*) (Pollock 2016, 300) (see Table 4).

Nonetheless, the notion of non-sexual love had already been analyzed by authors such as Rudrata and Dandin with their notion of *preyas* (Raghavan 1975, 121) prior to Bhojaraja's work or to the devotional Vaishnava wave that invaded the Indian subcontinent. This concept of platonic love included Bhoja's *vatsalya* ("affection of parents and elders for children and youngsters"), but also *sneha* (friendship), *priti* ("the kind of attachment like that between a leader and a follower, a king and his officer or court-poet") and *bhakti* ("reverence to elders and devotion to God") or, in some cases, *bhagavad-rati* (love for God). These were originally grouped within the term *preyas*, non-sexual love (120–21). Later, all these non-sexual rasas were in fact absorbed into *shanta* by Abhinavagupta. Faith (*shraddha*) had also been mentioned as a distinct rasa, just as Jain theorists had suggested adding *vridanaka* (modesty) to the list (159).

For T. P. Ramachandran (and Abhinavagupta), debates around the number of rasas are unnecessary, given that the essence of all rasas is "a mood of impersonal, joyous emotional exaltation" that captures the experience of each rasa and *sthayibhava*. Whether one is witnessing grief (*shoka*) or laughter (*hasa*), one will go through the pleasurable experience which is known as "rasa," whether we call it *karuna* or *hāsya*. "Hence the question of the number of rasas is really a question of the number of *sthāyibhāvas*" says Ramachandran, and the discussions surrounding

36. Raghavan adds that *ahamkara* should be thought of as a *sthayin* (permanent emotion) and *shringara* as its rasa, while all 49 *bhavas* enumerated by Bharata act as *ahamkara*'s transitory states (1963, 461).

the legitimacy of *shanta* or *bhaktirasa* are in fact really concerned with the inclusion of their respective *sthayibhavas* (1980, 2:53).

CONCLUSION

Ever since Bharata's *NS*, which acts as the source of rasa theory, philosophers and poets alike have questioned the nature, role, location, number and supremacy of rasa. Theorists have somewhat agreed on the nature of rasa, which consists of the mood or sentiment that arises from stable emotions (*sthayibhavas*) – whether in aural and visual form through the performing arts or in writing within poetry – as well as from arising transitory emotional (*vyabhicharibhavas*) and psychosomatic states (*sattvikabhavas*). As such, rasa is not an object, but is said to be an *experience*—and a pleasurable one at that. Thinkers and poets have time and again returned to Bharata's original analogy between rasa as taste and the preparation, presentation and enjoyment of food to solidify this view of rasa as a pleasurable experience. Whether confronted to pleasant or unpleasant *bhavas*, modern theory has assessed that the spectator goes through an aesthetic well-being that suppresses the sense of time and space, and hopefully, gives one a sense of self-consciousness that is akin to *ananda* or bliss.

Following the "golden age" of rasa theory between the ninth and eleventh century in Kashmir, the *navarasa* became the foundation of rasa theory. Many theorists – mainly from an Advaita, Shaivite background – were thus in favor of the primacy of *shantarasa*. Despite this, most poets and aestheticians – especially those from Dvaita and Krishnaite traditions – would agree that *shringara*, the erotic, or *bhaktirasa*, devotional love, was a more powerful and accessible sentiment. By the eleventh century, theorists from across the subcontinent had firmly located rasa within the spectator (although proponents of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition located rasa within the devotee-actor), and more precisely the *rasika*, while attesting that rasa could only be suggested (*dhvani*) to them and "awakened" within their heart and mind, based on their past experiences (in their current life and past reincarnations). This perspective bears the mark of Abhinavagupta's thought, a view that still dominates the landscape of rasa theory to this day.

As debates surrounding the notion of rasa slowly faded toward the seventeenth century in India, theorists were perhaps under the impression that there was nothing more to learn about rasa or that all issues surrounding the concept had been resolved (Pollock 2016, 41). It is clear from all examples provided so far that the understanding of the concept of rasa has always varied and modulated based on contextual factors, whether religious, political, social or other. The wide variety of rasas should not lead one to believe that there is indeed a *right* number of rasas – as one could presume today with the prevalence of the *navarasa* scheme – but, on the contrary, that there are as many rasas as there are *interpretations* of them.

In the next few chapters, I will challenge the assumption that there is nothing more to learn about rasa by putting the concept back on the table and questioning its nature and interpretation today. As examined by a number of scholar-practitioners such as Janet O'Shea (2003, 2007), Uttara Asha Coorlawala (2010a) and Priya Srinivasan (2003, 2011), the standardization of classical Indian dance forms, as well as globalization and the Indian diaspora, have disrupted the traditions of Indian culture across the globe. Indian art forms are going through a revolution in which tradition and modernity are merging, thus offering a more flexible rendition of what could now be termed neo-classical Indian dance. These elements are vital factors in the modern-day application of rasa theory and the knowledge that the artistic community possesses of that concept.

Chapter 2 (*Shabdam*)—
Rasa from the Spectator's Perspective

As explored in the previous chapter, the many iterations of rasa theory led most thinkers to believe that rasa could only be located in the spectator. Although some theorists such as Bhojaraja argued that any sentient and cultured being could be the seat of rasa, including the spectator, the poet, the actor and the character (Raghavan 1963, 433), the poet and actor were for the most part only believed to evoke or suggest rasa, as established by Anandavardhana in the 9th century and reiterated by Abhinavagupta in the 11th century. This statement is supported in modern days as well by Sanskrit studies scholars such as Manomohan Ghosh, who states that "[t]o evoke *rasa* in the spectator is the aim and object of the Hindu play-wright" (Nandikeshvara 1957, 7).

The present chapter's principal objective is to challenge such claim by examining the experience of the seasoned rasa expert, the *rasika* spectator, and find out who that "refined taster" truly is in contemporary India, but most significantly in its diaspora. I will first examine the experience of rasa in classical aesthetic literature—and, as such, I will pay particular attention not only to what theorists had to say about the locus of rasa, but most importantly to the role of the senses in that experience. What is said about the senses in classical rasa theory? What senses are essential in grasping and, in turn, actualizing rasa? Here, the sensory and emotional experience of rasa will amalgamate with the Hindu sensorium and the Indian understanding of perception—which will act as a rich follow-up to my M.A. research (Blanchard 2011a).

Following this exploration, I will question classical and modern Sanskrit studies literature which state that the *rasika* is essentially a cultured spectator with theoretical knowledge of rasa. With today's internationalization of Indian classical dance, performers are exposed to new types of audiences that were not encountered before: the "un-*rasikas*," spectators that are no longer familiar with the rules of Indian aesthetics. Despite the fact that the core of today's international audience is mainly made up of members of the Indian diasporic community, a growing number of uninitiated spectators is developing an interest for such art form, creating challenges for dancers, teachers and choreographers alike, and consequently posing new problems and questions that were not encountered in classical rasa theory prior to the 20th century. If there are no more *rasikas* within the audience, how is rasa to be evoked? How can the uninitiated audience experience rasa?

In attempting to explore the deep affective experience of such audience, I will present, in the *abhinaya* sections of this chapter, narratives from my own embodied experiences of classical Indian dance performances in Canada and in India—from the standpoint of a white, middle-class Acadian woman in her thirties, scholar of religion and anthropologist. The fieldwork I conducted in January 2019 during the dance festival season (known as the month of *margazhi*) in Chennai, India triggered much of the questions and themes that will be addressed. In this sensory ethnography and segments of participant sensation, I will demonstrate that, by educating one's senses and affects to that of Indian culture and performing arts, it is possible for the non-Indian audience to experience rasa—or at least, an affective experience that presents similarities with the concept.

I will conclude this chapter by exploring the idea that the modern *rasika* might very well be today's experts on rasa—namely, performers themselves. As repositories of an ever-changing tradition that is still rooted in a classical understanding of rasa and Indian performing arts, yet

adapting to the realities of life outside of its original subcontinent, modern-day dancers are perhaps the best persons to not only appreciate rasa (whether as members of the audience or as performers on the stage), but to share their knowledge on such notion and to apply it to their interpretation of rasa in the contemporary and diasporic context as well.

THE *RASIKA*'S EXPERIENCE, IN THE CLASSICAL SENSE

Even though the *NS* was designed as a guidebook for actors and playwrights, Bharata still gave credit in the treatise to spectators. Evidently, a *bhava* without an audience to relish it could never transform into rasa, just as a perfect dish could never be savoured without someone to taste it. Bharata stated that the success of a play rests entirely in the spectators' hands through their manifest appreciation of the performance as it is being presented (*NS* 27.48-62). The best audiences were in fact those who "felt along with" the characters and manifested their sympathy in physical form: "(True) spectators at a drama are those who, (when the character) is depressed, become themselves depressed; when (the character) is in sorrow, are themselves in sorrow" (NS 27.42, in Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:20).

> Hence, for Bharata, the ideal spectators (*prekshaka*) were
>
> those who are possessed of (good) character, high birth, quiet behavior and learning, are desirous of fame and virtue, impartial, advanced in age, proficient in drama in all its six limbs, alert, honest, unaffected by passion[,] expert[s] in playing the four kinds of musical instruments, acquainted with the Costumes and Make-up [*aharyabhinaya*], the rules of dialects, the four kinds of Histrionic Representation [*angikabhinaya*], grammar, prosody, and various (other) Śāstras [*vachikabhinaya*], are very virtuous, experts in different arts and crafts, and have fine sense of the Sentiments and the States [*rasas* and *bhavas*, *sattvikabhinaya*], should be made spectators in witnessing a drama. Anyone who has (lit. is characterised by) unruffled senses, is honest, expert in the discussion of pros and cons, detector of faults and appreciator (of merits), is considered fit to be a spectator in a drama. (NS 27.49-53, in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:519)

While this impressive list is undoubtedly intimidating, Bharata adds that such qualities cannot be present in one person only, as the objects of knowledge are too many for one to acquire them within one single lifetime. Consequently, Bharata knows that the audience will consist of a variety of people from different walks of life, and that every one of them will find pleasure and satisfaction within the play, albeit on different levels.

Bharata did not talk of the *rasika*, the one with rasa; such omission probably derives from the fact that he believed rasa to be present within the character, not the spectator. Only later in the history of rasa theory did scholars' interest turn to the spectator's experience of the drama, with authors like Bhatta Nayaka, Dhanika, Dhanamjaya and Abhinavagupta. Others did address it indirectly as well, like Bhojaraja.

According to Bhojaraja, the true *rasika* – "he who 'has *rasa*'" (Pollock 1998, 128) – was in fact the character himself. Yet, he also acknowledged that the actor, the poet and the spectator who possessed *ahamkara*, or self-consciousness leading to self-love, could – and should – experience rasa. *Ahamkara* was in fact considered the prerequisite for being a *rasika*. Since the *rasika* was the beholder of rasa, it was only logical for him to become the bearer of *ahamkara* as

well. Accordingly, the experience of rasa went "beyond being felt […], since it is the self's awareness of experiencing pleasure […] in the face of pain and the like (insofar as these have become, to the man of Passion) not disagreeable to the mind" (SP chap. 11, in Pollock 1998, 155).

Yet, in order to have *ahamkara*, one needed to have done good deeds and actions in previous lives: "[o]ne has to come by it [rasa/*ahamkara*], as by genius, by birth and one must have done numerous good deeds in the past lives to possess it" (Raghavan 1963, 434). Indeed, rasa – or rather *ahamkara* – was thought to be a *guna* (quality) of the *atman* (soul) of a person according to Bhoja, thus explaining the necessity of past good acts for one to experience rasa and deserve the name *rasika* (453–63). Bhoja believed the word "*rasika*" was in fact referring to "*some excellence in man's personality which goes to make up the grace that distinguishes his behaviour in society from that of another*" (466; emphasis in original). Only "cultured men" were said to have access to rasa in classical theory, and true *rasikas* were thus rarely encountered (461).

But the true "aesthetic revolution" (Pollock 2016) at play, in relation to the experience of rasa in the *rasika*, was launched by Bhatta Nayaka (*c*. 900 CE), whose concerned manuscript, the *Hridayadarpana* (*Mirror of the Heart*), has been lost for the most part. However, Pollock reconstructs his thought by examining the writings of his two disciples, Dhanamjaya and Dhanika, who in fact summarize their teacher's doctrine on rasa. Bhatta Nayaka took the attention of scholars of Indian aesthetics away from the emotion engendered in the literary text and instead redirected it toward "the subjective experience of the viewer/reader" (Pollock 2016, 145). Given that rasa is about tasting or relishing emotions, Bhatta Nayaka stated that rasa could not be an object, but was in fact an experience. As such, Dhanamjaya asserted that "[r]asa belongs to the spectator experiencing the rasa, and to him alone, because he is alive and present," as opposed to the character, who could nott relish the emotion physically within the aesthetic context (Dhanamjaya, in Pollock 2016, 174). Furthermore, Bhatta Nayaka, as well as Dhanamjaya and Dhanika, rejected Anandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* on the grounds that rasa was in reality a perceptual process, rather than an inference—or *anumana,* an indirect perception (Chadha 2016): "Talk of engenderment, inference, and manifestation makes sense only in reference to the character; you do not, as reader, 'infer' that you are feeling rasa," Pollock explains (2016, 145).

Hence, with Bhatta Nayaka, Dhanamjaya and Dhanika, rasa not only sums up as an experience, but also becomes exclusive to the spectator. According to Dhanika, only *rasikas* could relish rasa – "those who can actually understand the full complement of the aesthetic elements brought into play" and "have the capacity for the 'actualization' of the particular stable emotion at issue in the work" – because they were present, as opposed to the character (Dhanika, in Pollock 2016, 171). He argued that aesthetic emotions would transform into rasa once the *sthayibhava* present within the *rasika* would reach "the state of 'being savored,' that is, intensely blissful consciousness" (174).

Abhinavagupta picked up on that theory by both critiquing Bhatta Nayaka's work and yet adhering to his views on rasa as an experience exclusive to the spectator. A fundamental element to Abhinava's theory is that the spectator should not completely identify with the protagonists of the play: for the spectator, rasa is not about a cathartic experience, but a state that consists in apprehending "the emotions within a performative context" (Coorlawala 2010a, 119) without identifying to it—in an impersonal or "supramundane" manner. In Abhinava's theory, the spectator

> does not identify [with the character's *sthayibhavas*] completely; he retains a certain *aesthetic distance*, the name for which is *rasa*. The actor, in the opinion of Abhinavagupta and most later writers, does not experience *rasa*, nor does the original character, not even the author. For rasa implies distance. Without this aesthetic distance, there cannot exist literature, only the primary world. (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:24; emphasis in original)

Lyne Bansat-Boudon refers to the effect of this aesthetic distance as a "depersonalization of the emotion, free from any bond to the ego, resulting in its universalization" (1992a, 145)[37]. Abhinavagupta's conception of aesthetic distance thus involves an absence of empathetic identification with the protagonist at the risk of hindering the experience of rasa (Coorlawala 2010a, 123). The necessity for an aesthetic distance also entails that rasa cannot be located in the performer nor in the character because they are too absorbed in their own performance or emotional experience to live rasa adequately. The spectators, on the other hand, have the ability of experiencing rasa as long as the performance is being stylized using conventional expression (*natyadharmi*) and language (*bhasa*), which contributes to "direct the movement of the senses inward, towards reflection and subjective experience rather than towards external and discrete sense objects" (124).

Unlike Bhatta Nayaka and his disciples, Abhinavagupta did not reject Anandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* completely, as he acknowledged that rasa was manifested, although not in the text but "by the activation of the 'predispositions' associated with the stable emotions that preexist in the heart of the sensitive reader" (Pollock 2016, 189). Abhinava argued that everyone possessed *sthayibhavas* in latent form within their heart (as mnemonic traces from previous lives, vasanas; Haberman 1988, 38; Bansat-Boudon 1992a, 109) which could be "called forth by appropriate stimuli" and transformed into rasa (Ramachandran 1980, 2:98–99). This conception of the "activation" of *sthayibhavas* mirrors Dhanika's theory in which the stable emotion existed within the *rasika* (in Pollock 2016, 174). Thus, rasas were but the manifestation or perception of the lingering perfume (*vasana*) of previously encountered dominant emotions, whether in this life or in previous lifetimes. In Abhinava's view – as well as in the theories of Bhatta Nayaka, Dhanamjaya and Dhanika – rasas were not, as argued by predecessors, inferences formed by witnessing someone else's mental states, but a personal experience, as spectators would trigger within themselves the same mental states as the ones experienced by the character (Gnoli 1968, 80 n1). The experience of rasa within the audience was thus different "from memory, inference and any form of ordinary self-consciousness" (81).

In addition, many theorists discussed the role of the spectator's senses in the experience of rasa. Abhinavagupta, for instance, acknowledged that, within the aesthetic context and because of the distancing phenomenon, the viewer could engage in a direct perception of the play since he saw the true form of the character embodied by the actor, as opposed to real life in which the truth is not as easily recognizable (*pratyakshakalpapratiti*) (ABh 1.119, in Bansat-Boudon 1992a, 146–47). Most importantly, he recognized that rasa was perceivable through extraordinary types of perception such as taste (*charvana*), relish (*asvada*) and enjoyment (*bhoga*) (Ingalls, Masson, and

37. My translation. Original quote: "dépersonnalisation de l'émotion, affranchie de toute référence au moi, et corrélativement son universalisation."

Patwardhan 1990, 224), and that "this perception in the form of aesthetic relishing is *physically produced* (*utpadyate*)" (225; emphasis added). As such, Abhinava argued that rasa was an aesthetic enjoyment, a "super-normal (*alaukika*) delight" (192) and pleasure that represented "the intense relish occasioned by the audience's (*pratipattuḥ*) tasting of the basic emotional element when their understanding of this basic emotion has arisen from the combination of the *vibhāvas, anubhāvas*, and *vyabicāribhāvas*" (218). The relishing of aesthetic emotions was the same as the "experience of [savoring] one's own pure consciousness" (Pollock 2016, 190), which Bhatta Nayaka believed was even superior to the religious experience of bliss, but which Abhinava said was still inferior to religious rapture. Abhinavagupta's defended this claim on the ground that rasa was the "very process of relishing, which exists only as long as the relishing itself exists and does not last beyond it," as opposed to the experience of religious rapture (ABh 1.278, in Pollock 2016, 201).

Then, rasa from the perspective of the spectator – from a strictly classical aesthetic point of view – sums up as an active experience of "relishing" or "tasting" an emotion being offered on the stage or in textual form. Because rasa was believed to represent an experience, a process – as opposed to being implied or inferred from the text – and because the ultimate goal of the literary text (or drama) was to "make sensitive people feel aesthetic bliss," as opposed to "produce rasa in characters" (AL 217, in Pollock 2016, 174), rasa could no longer be located in the character (or the actor) and thus migrated to the spectator exclusively.

Additionally, rasa was believed to be always pleasurable—and, according to poetician Kavikarnapura, this was the very reason why only spectators could feel rasa, since characters would go through both feelings of pleasure and pain (Pollock 2016, 292). Spectators who possessed rasa, namely *rasikas*, were able to experience relish and pleasure because the aesthetic context triggered corresponding stable emotions (*sthayibhavas*) within them—emotions that were, in fact, simply waiting in latent form to be activated. In Kavikarnapura's words, this stable emotion could be described as "that particular mental property at the root of savoring, which alone is susceptible to the manifestation of any rasa" (AK 130, in Pollock 2016, 294). Lastly, as proposed by Abhinavagupta in the *ABh*, aesthetic pleasure was in fact a form of awareness, as the state of rasa resulted from the relishing of this same consciousness freed from all hindrances. For Kavikarnapura, however, the aesthetic pleasure experienced by the spectator, which was the essence of rasa, was rapture in the form of "an intense vision of the fantastic" (AK 137, in Pollock 2016, 297).

In any case, all rasa theories advocating for rasa as an experience in the spectator converge to this central aspect: the pleasurable experience of the spectator seeing a play or hearing/reading a poem, which is a form of relishing and of rapture—whatever the root of this rapture reveals to be (religious rapture, aesthetic relishing, awareness of one's true consciousness, etc.).

Rasa, Perception and the Senses Within Hindu Culture

The experience of rasa – of relishing emotions – is undeniably melded with Indian aesthetics and sensory culture. The scholarship on Indian ways of sensing is continuously growing, but studies so far tend to isolate the senses from each other: Diana Eck's (1998) pivotal study of sight and *darshan*; Harold Coward and David Goa's (2004), Annette Wilke and Oliver Moebus' (2011) and Guy Beck's (1993; 2006; 2012) research on *mantra*, sound and music in India; Lawrence Babb's (1970; 1975) and McKim Marriott's (1990) overview of touch, pollution and purity within the Indian caste systems; Arjun Appadurai's (1981) article and Ravindra Khare's (1992) edited work

on food transactions and their social meaning (see also Doniger 2014, 70–71); as well as James McHugh's (2012) and David Shulman's (2006) historical survey of smell in the Indian landscape are but a few examples. While these studies are invaluable contributions to the reconstruction of the senses within medieval and modern India, an encompassing understanding of the Indian sensorium is still somewhat lacking.

What these studies demonstrate, however, is twofold. First, they highlight the significance and the value given to perception (*pratyaksha*) in India, which is directly associated with the acquisition of knowledge (*pramana*) (Chadha 2016). To describe Indian society as one in which "seeing is knowing" (Eck 1998, 11) is too simplistic since, in Indian thought, to *perceive* is to know. The sheer fact that divinities can take form within Hindu religion – make themselves available and known to devotees via material form (*murti*) – is a strong evidence of the centrality of materiality, the senses and perception in Indian culture, as illustrated by Eck herself.

> [Hindu worship] is sensuous in that it makes full use of the senses—seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing. One "sees" the image of the deity (*darśan*). One "touches" it with one's hands (*sparśa*), and one also "touches" the limbs of one's own body to establish the presence of various deities (*nyāsa*). One "hears" the sacred sound of the *mantras* (*śravaṇa*). The ringing of bells, the offering of oil lamps, the presentation of flowers, the pouring of water and milk, the sipping of sanctified liquid offerings, the eating of consecrated food—these are the basic constituents of Hindu worship, *pūjā*. (Eck 1998, 11–12)

Second, these studies point toward an imminent association between all sense organs (*aksha*) and the sense of touch (*sparsha*) within the Indian perceptual landscape. One could easily talk of haptic senses: sight-touch, hearing-touch, smell-touch, taste-touch. Indeed, all senses show an ability to "grasp" things – usually essences or universals (in the case of sight; see Eck 1998 and Chadha 2016), sometimes particles (in the case of smell; see McHugh 2012) – from their surroundings, allowing one to acquire knowledge. This contact between the senses and the objects is in no way metaphorical, but actual (Dasgupta 1957, 1:335), and consequently marks a distinction between the direct perception of the essence or qualities of objects through the senses, and their indirect interpretation by the mind (*manas*).

Such is the case with the concept of *darshan*—an experience described by Eck as the "visual perception of the sacred" or "to see and be seen" either by a deity, a sacred site or a holy person (Eck 1998, 3–5). *Darshan* illustrates how vision and the body are permeable entities that grasp the environment and are grasped by it in return, as highlighted by Babb.

> In the Hindu world "seeing" is clearly not conceived as a passive product of sensory data originating in the outer world, but rather seems to be imaged as an extrusive and acquisitive "seeing flow" that emanates from the inner person, outward through the eyes, to engage directly with objects seen, and to bring something of those objects back to the seer. (Babb 1981, 196)

Sight, it seems, becomes "a form of 'touching'" (Eck 1998, 9) that allows one to come "into contact with, and in a sense [become], what one sees" (Babb 1981, 396–97).

The widespread idea of the evil eye – or "the *powerful eye*" (Maloney 1976, 109; emphasis in original) – is another example of the haptic power of sight within Indian culture: a simple (inauspicious) glance is sufficient to ruin a perfectly good meal being cooked or for someone to fall ill (Maloney 1976, 106–7; Blanchard 2011b, 94). While this infectious power of sight applies to those jealous of their surroundings, divinities also hold such power through *darshan*. A worthy example comes from the Odisha deity Balaji who has such an intense *darshan* that devotees need to filter his powerful gaze by applying a piece of cloth over his eyes and by having visitors wear sunglasses (Shukla 2008, 39). Lord Shiva is known for his powerful third eye as well, which *tapas* (heat produced from ascetic practices) is enough, once the eye is open, to burn down entire forests or to reduce the god Kama to ashes (O'Flaherty 1981, 314).

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (1981), through her translations of Hindu myths about Lord Shiva – the "erotic ascetic" as she calls him – demonstrates the many abilities and powers held within sounds, through which the world can be created or destroyed. In these instances, sounds have a palpable, concrete effect on the environment. The syllable *Om* (formed of A-U-M) – "the divine seed sound from which all other sounds are said to arise" (Coward and Goa 2004, 2), sometimes referred to as *Shabda-Brahman* – is believed to embody the eternal, authorless and primeval sound that generated the universe (Beck 2012, 25, 47). In parallel with Eck's statement about the visual experience of the divine, Coward and Goa claim that "in India the central act of worship is hearing the mantra or sacred sound with one's own ears and chanting the mantra with one's voice" (Coward and Goa 2004, 5). In this sense, sounds – just like sights – are ubiquitous to the Indian landscape and act as "sonic experiences of the divine" in which reciprocity – hearing and being heard – is as important as it is when taking *darshan*. In fact, even texts in Sanskrit Hinduism are meant to be heard rather than simply read (Wilke 2014, 121). Moreover, sounds do not only concern what is heard and described in words, but "the complex vibration or feeling tone" they create within the individual as well (Coward and Goa 2004, 6).

Like sights and sounds, smells are ever present, if not overwhelming, within the Indian subcontinent. In Indian thought, in which odors are good or bad, auspicious (*shubha*) or inauspicious (*ashubha*), smells possess powerful moral value (McHugh 2012, 75) and are thus "above all social, connecting people to other people and to the things in the world" (102). The action of smelling is believed to be possible because the nose grasps odorous particles that are carried by the wind – which McHugh calls "tactile wind" (57) – bringing object and subject (haptically) closer to one another.

Because of their affective nature, odors trigger strong feelings of longing and a powerful desire to bring the "smeller" closer to the source of the perfume. There is certainly a close relationship between smell and memory, as proposed by Shulman (2006) and Doniger (2014). The latter brings up the notion of *déjà vus* from past reincarnations, described as longing perfumes.

> We remember something that we cannot remember, from a lost past, through the power of the invisible tracks or traces left behind on our souls by those events; these traces the Hindus call *vasanas*, "perfumes," scents that are the impressions of anything remaining unconsciously in the mind—the present consciousness of past perceptions. (Doniger 2014, 108)

Karmic traces, then, are understood as olfactive remnants that attach to the soul (or the *manas*, mind). They have the ability of being perceived in a vague manner or triggered by environmental cues. Therefore, *vasanas* certainly resonate with Abhinavagupta's concept of dormant *sthayibhavas* within the *rasika*, which are triggered in a similar way by performative cues.

Yet, McHugh argues that odors within the Indian landscape do not so much allow one to remember past events as they possess the ability to bring people longing for one another closer in space, and sometimes in time. Indeed, fragrances do not "make people who experience a smell recall a moment in their lives from another *time*" but rather "seem to have the result of uniting people and smell-sources (flowers, people) in space" (McHugh 2012, 101; emphasis in original). As will be explored in the next chapters, McHugh's interpretation of smell certainly applies to stage performances of love thwarted (*vipralambha*), in which the woman desperate to be reunited with her lover reminds herself of his sweet presence via numerous sensory cues, including fragrances.

Taste, obviously, requires a contact between the tongue and the food. Nevertheless, as with odors, taste carries moral value, as certain flavours are associated with pollution while others are with purity. In this case, the system of *gunas* – qualities that are inherent to objects as well as persons and food – taints the quality of food. *Tamas* (inert) food such as mushrooms, garlic and onions – all vegetables that grow within the earth, within darkness – are thus associated with lower castes and impurity, while *rajas* (passionate, dynamic) food, mainly meat and alcohol, is said to be energetic and thus associated with the military caste of the *kshatriyas*. *Sattva* (pure) food like milk, clarified butter (*ghee*) and sweets such as *gulab jamun*, on the other hand, are associated with purity and thus consumed by *brahmins* and gods alike. Each god also has their food preferences: for example, young Krishna, the "butter thief," is particularly fond of *ghee* and *gulab jamun*, a spherical bite-size dessert perfect for a child's small fingers and mouth. Some village goddesses, or even the fierce goddess Kali, are known for demanding *rajas*, violent forms of food: meat, smashed heads and blood, or red drinks and broken coconuts that represent them. Such items will affect their temper, "heating" it with the help of *rajas* food and thus leading to violent behavior, or "cooling" it with *sattva* food, resulting in a calmer composition. Devotees sometimes have to adapt their food offerings to modify the deity's mood: an irritated divinity will thus need cooling food like milk and butter, while an inactive god might be offered warming food such as spicy meals or alcohol (Khare 1992; Ferro-Luzzi 1977; 1978).

These qualities of the Indian and Hindu sensorium indisputably apply to Indian drama, which Manomohan Ghosh defines as "a poem to be seen" (*drishya kavya*) (in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:XLIV; Nandikeshvara 1957, 6, 9), a spectacle (*preksha*) or "a poetical composition capable of being enjoyed not by its reading, but from its stage representation" (Nandikeshvara 1957, 6), which reflects Wilke's (2014) previous remark. In the *NS*, *natya* (dance-drama) is said to have been designed for amusement and entertainment, while also having an educational purpose (*NS* 1.106-121). But most notably, *natya* is something to be looked at, to be visualized. The audience is indeed always referred to as "spectators" or "observers" (*prekshaka*) in the *NS*. Some Indian thinkers, including Bhatta Tota (Abhinavagupta's teacher), even argued that drama was the highest form of art because sight and hearing, which are specifically targeted within such context, are the only senses that are capable "of rising above the boundaries of the limited 'I'" (Gnoli 1968, XIV). Lyne Bansat-Boudon mirrors this statement.

> A written play – as brilliant or perfect as it might appear – is but an incomplete text that is missing something for it to reach complete existence: that moment when the actors incarnate it, transforming it into something to be seen and heard. We could not stress enough how this spectacular dimension is essential to the wit of Indian theatre: by putting into play not only acting, but also chanting, music and dance, is it not a total work of art, a sumptuous feast of the senses? (Bansat-Boudon 1992b, 22)[38]

Bharatamuni emphasized that not only should drama be a pleasant audiovisual experience for spectators, but that it should also leave them with a positive feeling (*NS* 1.111–121). Rasa is a major part of this (visualized) enjoyment and lingering pleasant sensation. But the experience of rasa is not restricted to the senses of vision and hearing, as it is also characterized by a rich *exchange* and *interaction* between, as well as a *participation* of both, spectators and performers. On several occasions, Bharata has pointed to such characteristics when describing the gustatory qualities of rasa. In these analogies, the taster *interacts* with the meal by both touching and being touched by the food, and *participates* in the act of tasting.

> Theoretically, therefore, *rasa* can be regarded in three dimensions: as a property of a textual object, as a capacity of a reader-subject, and as a transaction between the two. The whole process, in fact, exists as a totality even while its moments can be analytically disaggregated. (In this, *rasa* is indeed precisely like the "taste" it metaphorically references, which may be regarded as existing in the food, in the taster, and in the act of tasting.) (Pollock 1998, 122)

Besides being reminiscent of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception (1971; 1989), this idea of both touching and being touched is certainly ubiquitous in Hindu devotional traditions, and even Indian thought in general (as explored in the previous section). In this instance, the haptic qualities of the Indian senses play an important role in understanding the *rasik* experience (see Blanchard 2011a).

Rasa calls for one more "way of sensing" (Howes and Classen 2014): *manas* or the mind. While the sheer composition of a drama – its technical and expressive dance (*nritya*), its sung poems (*gita*) and its music (*vadya*) – outlines the importance of vision and hearing, it also requires one to use a sense of imagination (*pratibha*) and of the mind (*manas*) to fully grasp the spectacle being offered—two forms of perception that are specific to the Indian experience of aesthetics. Jessica Frazier points to the latter sense when discussing the reception of Indian religious arts, which she says should be "encountered as a presence, and undergone as an experience" that seizes "the six senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell and thought" of the Hindu devotee (Frazier 2010, 9). When talking about rasa, Abhinavagupta even explained that "[a]esthetic gustation is nothing but a perception *sui generis*, differing from all others" (Gnoli 1968, XXXV). The *manas* – to which I will return in Chapter 4 – certainly plays an important role in the perception of rasa, as do other sense organs. Coorlawala supports such sensory-based understanding of the experience

38. My translation. Original quote: "un texte de théâtre, si savant, si parfait soit-il, reste un texte lacunaire auquel il manque toujours quelque chose pour accéder pleinement à l'existence : le moment où les comédiens l'incarnent, le donnant à voir et à entendre. On ne saurait trop souligner combien cette dimension spectaculaire est essentielle à l'intelligence du théâtre indien : en convoquant sur la scène non seulement le jeu de l'acteur, mais aussi le chant, la musique et la danse, ne se veut-il pas un art total, une somptueuse fête des sens?"

of rasa for the spectator, as she states that rasa "is a reflective experience of actively tasting rather than of devouring or being devoured by emotions" that involves "seeing with an inner eye, hearing resonances, and touching inner spaces" (Coorlawala 2010a, 119).

THE DE-HIERARCHIZATION OF RASA

The present research focuses on the experience of rasa in Eastern Canada. But is rasa the same abroad as it is in India? What happens to rasa once it is taken away from its roots and evolving abroad? Is it still rasa? Can the uninitiated audience appreciate rasa as much as a "classical" *rasika*?

With the current realities of rasa, which has migrated across the globe alongside the Indian diaspora and their traditional performing arts, a rasa "revolution" is ongoing. The tenets of classical theories of rasa are no longer applicable for one main reason: the public of Indian performing arts – and the environment and context surrounding this audience – has changed, due to migration, globalization and the internationalization of the Indian performing arts. Indeed, as highlighted by Coorlawala, "[w]ith the current changing demographics of urban audiences, profoundly conflicting constructs of perception, knowledge, and art can be read, misread, or remain unseen by persons sitting next to each other at the very same performance" (2010b, 78). The heteroclite nature of audiences and the introduction of uninitiated spectators have drastically transformed the interpretation of rasa in the current global context, resulting in several challenges for modern performers—but many possibilities as well (see O'Shea 2003).

As of today, not only are there very few researchers who have addressed rasa specifically in their research, but there is even less scholarship dedicated to the topic of the non-Indian audience's experience of rasa. There are, however, a few exceptions. Relying on classical theory and modern audience reception theory, Ram analyzes rasa as a complex blend between sensory knowledge, emotional knowledge and techniques of the body (Ram 2000, 266). She acknowledges the strong relationship between class privilege and access to aesthetic expertise: "This is art for the cognoscenti, for *rasikas* who can appreciate the nuances of experiences whose essences, the *rasas*, are distilled and re-presented for their enjoyment" (Ram 2011, S161). Rasa is thus not quite "accessible to all" as Bharata would have it (*NS* 1.106-121; 27.48-62), but has historically – and even today, but to a lesser extent – been the privilege of individuals of high social standing[39].

Yet, Ram rightfully argues that, because rasas are about extracting the emotional essence of daily interactions, such embodied ways of living and basic styles of representing emotions are not limited to middle-class and high caste Hindus, but rather "belong as much to Muslim and Christian traditions in south Asia […] as they do to non-elite performative traditions" (Ram 2000, 271). As she describes the experience of the diasporic Indian audience to Bharatanatyam performances, Ram highlights that the art form is accessible to all, in that it acts as a nostalgic

39. Indian classical forms of dance are not the only ones to have undergone a de-hierarchization during the 20th century. Just as the *devadasis* were stripped away from their exclusive rights to *sadir* or "classical dance" – and thus expanding the viewership outside of temple and royal court walls – so too have the artists of the Chakyar caste been deprived of their exclusive rights to the performance of Kutiyattam in Kerala. With this demise – in part due to the rise in popularity of Kathakali, the "Kutiyattam of the poor," and of Ottan Tulan, a satirical version of Kutiyattam – the public of Kutiyattam expanded as well (Lal 2009; Madhavan 2010).

reminder of a previous life in India. The (Indian) spectator is generally not surprised by the content of the performance but is rather delighted by the way it is actualized.

> The dancer provides an opportunity for the audience to re-remember and re-savour these episodes, but also to see them brought to life in new ways through nuances of gesture and facial expression, new forms of emotion that are brought to bear as the performer shifts from one episode to another. (Ram 2011, S162)

What is lacking from Ram's research is a study of non-Indian spectators, as she exclusively examines audience reception among the Indian diaspora of Australia, a public that is already familiar with Indian aesthetics. As stated by Rajika Puri (2004, 60) and in fact re-enforced by Ram (2000; 2011), Indian audiences will probably have enough knowledge of the fundamental aesthetics and mythological references of classical Indian dance to navigate the storyline and feel rasa to some level. They may, for instance, understand the "*emotional logic*" of the narrative; an aspect of dance that is accessible to all, according to Maratt Mythili Anoop (2016, 134; emphasis in original). This emotional logic asks spectators to grasp the non-propositional meaning of the dance-drama and actively interpret it. In reality, in the setting of the live performance, the spectator (and performer) does not respond to the recital as if it was a text, a fixed entity, but as an ongoing creation that will never be the same from one representation to the next (132). Yet, the European and North American audiences are rarely suitably familiar with Indian aesthetics and narratives to fully appreciate the stories enacted on the stage on a *rasik* level.

Since Indian narratives are not part of the non-Indian imagination, and because very few spectators can now understand the sung languages in performances, the fundamentals of the presentation can easily be lost and weaken the affective experience of the audience. As such, the issues of the accessibility of the Indian performance and rasa have been at the heart of the internationalization of classical Indian dance styles during the past few decades. Performers in the diaspora try in their own way to make the experience of rasa accessible to a maximum of spectators, as many scholars and performers now argue that "[a]udiences do not need to know the intricacies of [rasa theory] to respond with appropriate affect and emotion" (Ram 2011, S164). Likewise, performers work from "the very basis of the rasa aesthetic" which "is to take aspects of daily existence (for example, interactions between mother and child, or between lovers) and to extract their emotional essence through a process of stylisation, exaggeration, and elaboration" (Ram 2000, 270), an experience that would arguably be available to all on an affective level.

Another solution provided to resolve this issue of *rasik* transference, starting in the 1980s, was for performers to offer a translation of the danced stories, often alongside gestures (*hastas*), prior to the performance. On some level, Maratt Mythili Anoop (2016) argues that by first explaining the plot through translated words and codified gestures, the audience is later able to focus on the details of the performance and the dancer's abilities rather than trying to figure out what the narrative is about. Such adaptation, thus, enables the spectator to focus on *abhinaya* (expressivity) and on the experience of rasa.

> While the uninitiated audience may not be able to appreciate the intricacies of the rhythmic patterning of movements or the innovations in the conventional format of compositions, with the abstracts and orientations provided by expert performers, they are able to comprehend and appreciate the narrative aspect of dance. (Anoop 2016, 139–40)

Many modern dancers maintain that such translation is necessary. In reality, there are dozens of languages and even more dialects in India, which renders unintelligible any given poem for most spectators and even dancers themselves, who seldom know the spoken languages of the poems they perform[40]. As a result, even dancers need to translate poems before they interpret them in dance; and the audience is no exception, whatever their origins (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017; J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017).

Nevertheless, scholar-practitioners remain divided on this topic, as the translation of the plot lines up two thought systems, "an English verbal framework and a South Indian choreographic one" (O'Shea 2007, 177). During our interview, Beaulieu shared similar reservations towards the translation of the narrative, comparing the approach to an "organized tour of performance"[41] in which the tour guide explains everything that will happen to the spectators and creates expectations that may not be met (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017). The translation of the narrative is also somewhat problematic to Uttara Asha Coorlawala, as it proves "didactic and incompatible with the American vision of art as phenomenologically accessible to all" (2010a, 131). In fact, she does not believe that rasa is accessible to the uninitiated spectator due to the culture-specificity of knowledge, skills and social memory in the experience of rasa (Coorlawala 1996, 9). As such, within an art form that relies on the audience's knowledgeable participation, it is difficult for non-experts to drop their preconceived notions about dance and its reception (25).

Hence, Coorlawala insists upon the cultural background of the spectator, including the *rasika*, in that the reception of traditional Indian performance is informed by a specifically Indian perception of emotions, one that understands emotions as "appraisals, as judgments of situations based on learned beliefs and values"—which may not be the case in Western audiences where emotions are often equated with passivity and irrationality, and understood as "natural, universal, and female" (Coorlawala 2010a, 128). As such, the performer should always adapt to her audience, to the spectators' expectations – which are in fact "shaped by the social vectors of race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc." (Pillai 2017, 32) – and their reactions throughout the performance. A recital's segments need to be carefully selected and researched in order to appeal to the most people and thus "maximize" rasa, mostly because the culture-specific experience of rasa is not accessible to all. Such strategy should trigger shared emotions in the audience and enable a relationship with the performer

Much of the latest research in rasa theory converges with Coorlawala's "American vision of art as phenomenologically accessible to all," with the emergence of neurobiologically- and philosophically-based analyses of the spectators' affective experience. Research in affect theory – in which affect is understood as an event, an intensity that happens prior to any emotion, action or reaction, and is characterized by a potential or an appetite for an action/thought (Massumi 2002) – and mirror neurons – neurons in the brain that reproduce the same sensory-motor registers that are observed in someone else's movements (see Mee 2015) – both advocate for a universal,

40. Indeed, contributors I have spoken with have consistently stated that before working on a piece, they will sit down with their *guru* and translate the poem word by word, before moving on to a more sensible interpretation of the text.
41. My translation. Original term: "voyage organisé du spectacle. "

phenomenologically-accessible experience of emotions and rasa. In this scenario, emotions, and especially affects, are accessible across cultures[42].

However, one should be careful when making such assertion, as studies in neuroaesthetics and mirror neurons often fail "to persuade that the brain somehow eludes interpretative and experiential factors" (Wolff 2016, 197). Theories in mirror neurons, indeed, can prove reductive and universalistic in bypassing the role of personal histories and learning and cultural contexts in our empathetic engagement with the emotions of others (Fensham 2014, 101)[43]. Susan Leigh Foster (2011), for instance, warns us that a direct neurological connection between performer and spectators bypasses context, politics, cultural and historical moments, sensations and subjectivity—a fundamental variable that Dee Reynolds (2007) addresses as "kinesthetic imagination." Instead of mirror neurons, the concepts of kinesthetic empathy (Reason and Reynolds 2010; Reynolds and Reason 2012) and choreographic empathy (Foster 2011) propose more culturally-sensitive approaches to the emotional response of audiences. As an interdisciplinary concept, kinaesthesia "enriches research into the ethical and political dimensions of embodied knowledge" (Fensham 2014, 101) while the notion of empathy, which is distinct from sympathy (an emotional response marked by sentiments) or emotional contagion (being "contaminated" by others' emotions), refers to an incorporated simulation or substitution, a response that is both physical and emotional (Reason and Reynolds 2010, 53). In this sense, empathy deals with "the fundamental entwinement of motion and emotion" (Foster 2011, 178). Kinesthetic and empathetic responses would therefore be the source of the pleasure experienced by spectators (Reason and Reynolds 2010, 50).

Although Reynolds' interpretation of kinaesthetic empathy distances itself from the "mirror neurons" hypothesis in audience reception, it favors affect over emotion. Reynolds adopts precepts from affect theory which, she argues, are more adequate in "relating to choreographed movement in a performance" that is not founded on defined narratives and characters. As such, she uses the term "kinesthetic affect" and "affective empathy" to address the spectators' experience

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42. Research in psychology and neurobiology, with special emphasis on the role of mirror neurons in the perception of emotions across cultures, is starting to emerge within studies in rasa theory, as exemplified by the works of Neuerburg-Denzer (2011), Bhikshu (1995) and Nair (2015a), and especially Erin B. Mee's chapter on rasa as emotional contagion. Mee argues that spectators mentally mimic gestures and facial expressions presented onstage via the work of mirror neurons, and therefore argues for "a theory of embodied understanding" in which "we understand others directly motor neuron to motor neuron, auditory neuron to auditory neuron, or affective state to affective state, rather than resorting to or engaging in another type of brain activity" (Mee 2015, 168). On the other hand, research on mirror neurons also points to the importance of familiarity with culture-specific facial expressions. In parallel with previous statements by Puri (2004) and Ram (2000; 2011), and although most scholars believe that neural response to affective information are not culture-specific, Mee still claims that "culture shapes how and when particular facial emotions are expressed" as well as "the appropriateness of expressing certain emotions at certain times" (2015, 164). Accordingly, reactions will be more important when seeing an emotion from a person of the same cultural and/or dance background, an argument supported by Foster (2011, 55).

43. However, Dee Reynolds (2013, 214–20) argues that the mirror neurons system is not necessarily incongruous with a culturally-emplaced interpretation of emotions and affects, because the reaction engendered by their activation is based on previous (cultural and personal) memories. Likewise, in proposing that rasa is immersion (in the sense of immersive experiences of spectators in the arts), Royona Mitra acknowledges the role of mirror neurons in the immersive experience of rasa while accounting for multiple culturally-specific and co-existing affective experiences, in that "audiences can observe, mirror and execute gestures that they are witnessing at a neuronal level before they are mediated and interpreted through audience members' own socio-cultural realities" (2016, 99).

of pre-cognitive emotions "still in the process of forming" and not yet having a definable identity (Reynolds 2012, 124). She also argues that affect, because it is "highly contagious and does not respect individual boundaries," is closer to the notion of contagion, which is involuntary, rather than empathy, which is conscious (Reynolds 2013, 214). Kinesthetic affect, then, relates to embodied responses that translate an "affective encounter" rather than an "emotional identification" with others, which would in fact correspond to a form of kinesthetic empathy (212). Unfortunately, I feel that this approach bypasses the cultural motives at the root of the aesthetic appreciation of the performing arts, whether abstract (as in contemporary dance) or concrete (as in Bharatanatyam). In fact, as spectators, we develop our aesthetic sensibilities and inclinations towards art forms as mediated by our cultural and personal backgrounds. I can come to appreciate contemporary dance and experience kinesthetic empathy towards the performer *because* of cultural and aesthetic foundations – because of "formed emotions" – not *in spite* of them[44].

Nevertheless, we could perhaps see resonances of kinaesthetic empathy in Abhinavagupta's concept of sensibility (*sahridayata*, "to have a heart") or sympathy (*hridayasamvada*, "corresponding hearts") within the aesthetic context (Bansat-Boudon 1992a, 148). But to experience empathetic rapports in the performing arts also entails the acquisition of techniques of perception that are culturally bounded. Rasa, as highlighted by Coorlawala (2010a), is a culture-based concept that is thought to trigger a very specific aesthetic, almost other-worldly reaction in the spectator. Although a performance can affect all audience members, it does not mean that spectators are experiencing rasa per se. Without proper knowledge of Indian culture, habitus and techniques of the body, Hindu religion and Indian aesthetics, the emotions felt by the uninitiated spectator will most probably be different, if not opposite, from those of the Indian spectator—and even more so from those of the *rasika*.

While opinions on the topic of rasa within the uninitiated audience still diverge, most performers and theorists seem to agree that rasa is accessible to some extent to the uninitiated audience, so far as the dancer adjusts her performance to the audience. This experience of rasa, however, would be different from that of the *rasika*, theorists insist. But while *rasikas* and uninitiated spectators may go through very different *rasik* experiences, the presence of *rasikas* in the audience can contribute to an informed and more powerful emotional experience for other spectators who do not share the same knowledge about rasa. Coorlawala provides an example of such experience, as she was attending a Kutiyattam performance in Chennai with a *rasika* friend who would provide ongoing comments throughout the representation.

> Instead of being disturbed by this, members of the audience around us would lean over to listen in and join in the commentary. I was very grateful for this, for surely I would have

44. What I want to highlight here is the danger of ranking affect over emotion because of its universalist application, especially in codified performing arts. While spectators may indeed experience "kinesthetic affect" or "affective empathy," this does not mean that the affective response corresponds to the rasa that was intended. For example, if an uninitiated spectator sees the dancer smiling and nodding during a deeply tragic scene (*shoka*), the response might be one of confusion or shock – why is this person happy to see someone suffering? – instead of compassion (*karuna*), as is intended. Because rasas are produced from the physical portrayal of emotions, and because emotions are mediated by culture, it is risky to assume that a direct affective rapport is established between performer and audience. Nevertheless, emotional empathy may turn into affective empathy through one's active education in *rasik* literacy, as will be discussed shortly.

missed so many wonderful finer points of the performance but for their participation. (Coorlawala 2010a, 127)

Current research by scholar-practitioners thus suggests that, in theory, the non-*rasika* can experience rasa on a superficial level, but not in a profound manner like the connoisseur who will not only be familiar with Indian narratives and the subtle changes that have been made to them in choreography, but who is also knowledgeable in the musical and rhythmical techniques of Indian classical dance-drama. This knowledge surely gives a head start to the *rasika*; but it does not necessarily discredit the uninitiated spectator's experience of rasa, as both experiences, while different, are certainly valid on a phenomenological level.

"Maybe, Maybe Not"[45]*: Rasa in (Uninitiated) Audiences*

During the many discussions I have had with classical Indian dancers living in Canada, I have heard numerous viewpoints on the issue of the uninitiated spectator. Most of the time, professional dancers believe that rasa is accessible to all. In fact, collaborators Julie Beaulieu and Jonathan Voyer both warned me about underestimating the public, even when a performance is held in front of an uninitiated audience: "I think that we need to be careful, because we can't tell who's sitting [in the audience], [we shouldn't] assume that they won't be able to appreciate it. […] there's something that reaches people […] … the arts transcend cultural and physical boundaries, and there's something that moves people" explains Voyer (J. Beaulieu & J. Voyer, 1 Aug. 2017)[46]. In parallel, the status of classical theory and its role in the experience of rasa can be overestimated. In fact, "[a]udiences do not need to know the intricacies of such theories to respond with appropriate affect and emotion," claims Ram, because whether the spectator recognizes the *bhavas* or not, the resulting state will be one of enjoyment (2011, S164).

Despite the culture-specificity of the concept, I would also suggest that rasa is accessible to all. It has simply adapted to its environment, just like the grapes of organic vineyards adjust to external weather and insects without the use of pesticides or chemical fertilizers. The new context in which rasa is now evolving in Canada is asking dancers to present their art in front of uninitiated audiences while still connecting with them. As "an ongoing dialogue between performer and spectator" (Coorlawala 2010a, 118), performances undoubtedly change based on this new context, and so does rasa. In this instance, rasa is not an objective quality of a dramatic artwork, nor a subjective feeling experienced by the spectator, but "a commensurate operation that distinguishes and relates the artwork and the audience, and through which the audience comes to know its self" (Mason 2015, 105).

As a spectator, I can relate to the complex relationship that is slowly built between performer and audience throughout classical Indian performances. I specifically remember one representation in Toronto which I attended with my partner and a friend. The performing artist, Arrthami Siva-Kuruvinth, was a young woman in her early twenties who was proposing a full-length Bharatanatyam recital—a rare treat in the diaspora nowadays, or even in India. Once we

45. Julie Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).
46. My translation. Original quote: "Je pense qu'il faut faire attention, parce qu'on ne sait jamais qui est assis [dans la salle], [il ne faudrait pas] penser qu'ils ne seront pas capables d'apprécier ça. […] il y a quelque chose qui parle […] … les arts traversent les cultures et les frontières, puis il y a quelque chose qui vient toucher."

arrived at the venue, we were warmly greeted by the organizers, who accompanied us to the auditorium. As we stepped into the room, I was instantly hit by the sweet smell of fresh jasmine flowers, a perfume I never get tired of—and one I seldom encounter in my native land. I could already picture the jasmine flower garlands that were decorating the dancer's hair. We were told we could sit anywhere we would like, and because we got in early, I instinctively dragged my small group in three front seats located at the centre of the third row, just behind two VIP rows.

Slowly, people started coming in, wearing beautiful attires and colorful saris. It was becoming evident that we were in clear minority, as the rest of the audience was undoubtedly of Indian origins, which made us somewhat uncomfortable—a feeling that, as white persons, we rarely get to experience, but that I have become accustomed to because of my fieldwork topic. Embracing this awkward, uneasy and rare feeling – one that reminded me of the privileges I have in my daily life – I started observing the crowd to see what type of audience attended the event. There were people of every ages: children, adults, elderly people. Most of them knew at least a few people in the room and were engaged in lively discussions, greeting each other joyfully and laughing at jokes.

Then, the room suddenly went silent. I thought the performance was about to begin, but I was wrong: Menaka Thakkar, one of Toronto's most celebrated classical Indian dance artists, choreographers and *gurus*, had just entered the auditorium with her brother, Rasesh Thakkar. Despite her advanced age and her small size, Menaka exuded a confidence as well as a kindness that made her presence known. People welcomed her with reverence, smiling and holding their hands together in the *namaskar* gesture to show their respect and the joy they felt of having her amongst them. Coincidently, Menaka Thakkar and her brother sat right in front of me. This was a blessing: two of Toronto's most renown *rasikas* were right in front of me for the performance! Slowly, the room started buzzing again, as people resumed their conversations.

Finally, the room went dark. The stage lit up. The evening *margam* was starting. Four musicians were sitting down on the left side of the stage: a violinist, a drummer, a singer and a *nattuvanar* (dance master). From then on, every piece was introduced in English by an invisible MC, who explained and translated, when needed, the sung poems. The recital would follow a typical format: a *pushpanjali* (to *Nataraja*) and an *alarippu-jatiswaram* dedicated to the Goddess would open the evening, followed straight away by a *varnam* and a succession of *padams* dedicated to Krishna, Rama and Murugan. A *tillana* in honor of the god Shiva would close the evening performance.

The dancer entered the stage in an egg-white sari and a red and gold sash (*dupatta*), with jasmine flowers decorating her hair, which released a pleasant fragrance each time she would come back to the stage. She kept this egg-white outfit throughout the performance. As the recital progressed, people in the audience would shake their head, keep the pace with one hand on their thigh, and sometimes sing or hum along, especially during the Rama piece which included a popular poem by Tulsidas. Towards the end of the recital, a small group of young girls, probably under the age of 10, even started dancing along with the performer in front of their seats, trying to mimic her movements and having much fun in doing so.

It was clear that Rasesh Thakkar was a keen music *rasika* – he particularly seemed to enjoy the introductory *raga* (musical scale) at the beginning of each song as well as the virtuosity of the

musicians – while his sister Menaka was more into the intricacies of the dance, as she would applaud and sit on the edge of her seat during intricate technical (*nritta*) segments or particularly beautiful expressive (*abhinaya*) sections. Surely, the *rasik* experience is one that runs through a performance, and not just at the end—just like rasa itself consists of a process and not an end-product. I have witnessed similar appreciations during a recital performed by my collaborator Rajesh Chenthy in India, as a *rasika* sitting close to me would hum the music throughout the performance and stood up while shouting "Splendid! Splendid! Perfect!" at the end of the representation.

The Toronto performance's *varnam*, which lasted for at least 30 minutes, made a significant impression on me. Not only was the *nritta* and *abhinaya* skillfully performed, but there was a sort of electricity in the air that could be felt all around the room. Menaka Thakkar enjoyed that segment immensely. She would applaud often, encourage the dancer, and even gave a standing ovation at one point. I felt as if I was at a hockey game where people get excited and really absorbed in the play, as the rest of the audience seemed to tag along with her appreciation of the *varnam.* This speaks to Ram's claim about the contagious quality of the audience's appreciation of *bhavas*, as "members of the audience […] feed off one another's bodily gestures of appreciation — the shaking of the head […], the murmured '*besh*', '*vah*', '*kya bat*', the varied hand gestures that indicate levels and different kinds of appreciation, from enjoyment of a technical flourish to a surrender to the emotion in the performance" (Ram 2011, S165).

As for me, I was moved and completely absorbed throughout the performance. I had an uncanny impression of the feeling I get when I fall asleep—and especially during my first visit to India in 2010, during which I was so exhausted at the end of each day that my body seemed to both sink into my mattress and get pushed into it each time as I felt into slumber. During the recital, my mind was solely focused on the performance happening on the stage. I periodically emerged out of this state when Menaka Thakkar would have a particularly intense reaction, or when I consciously reminded myself that I was doing fieldwork and needed to pay attention to the people surrounding me.

When we left the theatre, it was almost 10pm—we had spent nearly three hours in that amphitheatre. I could not believe that time flew by so quickly, whereas my friend and partner both thought the recital would never end. As opposed to them, I was going through a constant feeling of well-being and enjoyment throughout the representation as I momentarily forgot about time and space, about my day-to-day troubles and emotions. For me, the performance was a pure delight—and this relish continued after, although in a different way, as we all enjoyed *samosas* and Indian sweets that were handed to us as we left the auditorium (which is customary of Indian dance recitals).

This wondrous emotional experience is one of many I have lived so far. Even after seeing dozens of Bharatanatyam, Odissi and Kuchipudi performances, both live and online, I am still hypnotized by the dancers' physical prowess in *nritta* (pure dance) and emotional vividness in *nritya* (expressive dance). I can feel butterflies in my stomach as I witness movements and *abhinaya* and as I am being transported by a music sung in languages I do not even understand. My theoretical understanding of hand gestures (*hastas*) allows me to follow narratives and my knowledge of Indian aesthetics and rasa theory gives me access to the intricate language of

abhinaya and performed emotions. Perhaps this knowledge has helped me focus more on the emotional spectacle on offer.

I am not a dancer, nor do I consider myself a *rasika* in the classical sense. Perhaps I am more of an apprentice *rasika*, someone who is slowly attuning her senses to those of Indian aesthetics schemes. Apart from the theoretical pool of rasa I have been bathing in for the past few years, I have sought to approach *rasik* knowledge via embodied forms as well. I have attended a few Bharatanatyam dance classes with my collaborator and teacher Rajesh Chenthy, a Kalakshetra alumnus. He believed that I was making great progress—but being realistic, I knew I would not turn into a virtuoso dancer over a few months only. As the training of emotions only happens later in the instruction of dance, I thought I would not be able to reach that level.

Nonetheless, as a pianist myself, I could manifestly understand the value of learning technique before jumping into the emotional interpretation of a piece: in piano, you first learn the score, given that you only have time, you only have the resources to *feel* the score once it is inscribed in your hands. As Beaulieu told me during our conversation, we are simply too busy dealing with technique, jumping from one segment to the next – "débordée" (overrun, overwhelmed) is the word she used (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017) – which is why the body has to somewhat dissociate from mental processes before one can focus on sentiments and feelings. "Performing multiple activities, multitasking intricacies, requires considerable processing" says Tomie Hahn, which is why "[e]mbodied knowledge, such as the multiple embodied skills used to ride a bicycle, must engage" (2016, 164). Only after reaching "an achieved command of bodily techniques" (Ram 2011, S167) can one perform "again with feeling," so to speak.

But my few dance classes still taught me a lot about knowledge in the body—about the pain and sweat that so many of my collaborators raised during our conversations, about that feeling of being "débordée," about the artificiality of the Bharatanatyam basic *aramandi* body posture – an artificiality that creates a rupture between stage and day-to-day movements and gaits, and that Eugenio Barba called "extra-daily techniques" (E. Barba and Savarese 2006) – and to which I can now somewhat identify. Yet, performers make it seem so easy. I could never hold that smile—that everlasting smile that never fades away. For many dancers, that smile is more of a façade; but for some, it truly feels genuine, authentic. When that happens, the spectator can truly feel the intense pleasure that the dancer is going through. I have the same type of experience when I play the piano; the emotions that are first learned in technical terms – a *crescendo* here, a *pianissimo* there, a *staccato* passage – become embodied, felt. They move through the body, the senses, and are felt through the music—which becomes manifest for the spectator.

As a spectator, I have felt particularly moved by a dancer's genuine emotion on two occasions, both at the Madras Music Academy in Chennai, India. The first performance was one that I was anticipating with excitement: a recital by Sujata Mohapatra, whose *guru*, the late Kelucharan Mohapatra, was recognized as one of the principal actors in the twentieth century's revival of Odissi. Sujata Mohapatra, who happens to be his daughter-in-law, is perceived as one of the central figures of Odissi today. My collaborator Neena Jayarajan had talked fondly of S. Mohapatra, as she had learned Odissi under her tutelage both in Canada and in India. I was finally going to see her dance in person—I felt like going to a rock star concert and finally seeing an idol of mine. And I was not alone in that feeling, as the woman sitting beside me in the auditorium

confessed that she was not an expert, but that she was very fond of the Odissi dance style and knew of Sujata Mohapatra, whom she wanted to see perform based on her reputation.

I was certainly not disappointed by Mohapatra's performance. She exuded elegance and sophistication throughout the recital, moving in slow, calculated gestures, with facial expressions that were calm yet intensely communicative. Odissi stands apart from Bharatanatyam in terms of the fluidity of movements and the serenity of facial expressions; in Bharatanatyam, as my *guru* always used to tell me, your movements and expressions need to be crisp, sharp, precise, square, energetic. In contrast, movements in Odissi do not feel square but round, not sharp or crisp but fluid, not energetic but smooth. As I was watching Mohapatra's mesmerizing performance, I could very well see why the reformers of the dance style we know today as Bharatanatyam – who wanted to dissociate the art form from its traditional practitioners, the *devadasis*, because of the ill reputation they had acquired as "prostitutes," or concubines at best (Peterson and Soneji 2008; Soneji 2012a; 2012b) (see Appendix 4) – had put so much emphasis on the statuesque or "square" nature of the aramandi position. In one of the basic postures of Odissi, *tribhanga* or *tribhangi* ("three parts"), dancers align their torso and legs while pushing their hips in the opposite direction, which was deemed by colonizers as too "sensual" or "vulgar" (compare Figure 2 and Figure 3 to Figure 4 and Figure 5 below). In fact, it is precisely these "torso movements (*bakshyachalana*), displaced hip line, and rounded curvilinearity" so characteristic of the Odissi style that were questioned among modern debates "in the field of Odissi technique precisely because of the allegiance to an image of classicism that was largely dictated by modern Bharatanaṭyam" (Chatterjea 2007, 26)**.**

Figure 2. Supriya Nayak (centre, front) shows workshop participants one of Odissi's *tribhanga* postures. (Image from Nayak's website, supriyaodissi.com.)

Figure 3. Sujata Mohapatra in *tribhanga*, at the Dancing the Gods festival in NYC. (© Keith Getter, 2019. DanceTabs.)

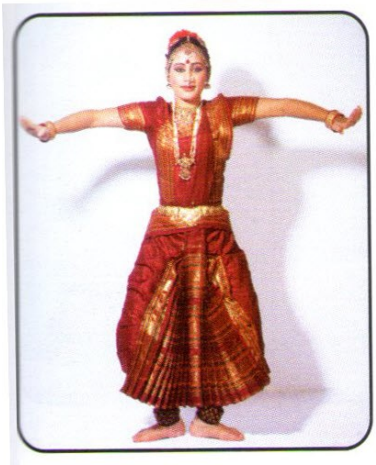

Figure 4. A standing Bharatanatyam *aramandi* position (Sarabhai 2018, 30).

Figure 5. A crouching Bharatanatyam *aramandi* position (Sarabhai 2018, 31).

Mohapatra's evening repertoire focused on stories between the god Krishna, Radha and the *gopis* (milkmaids)—a conventional choice in Odissi that depicts flirty and often promiscuous scenarios between the young divinity and his female entourage. Such *shringara*-rich stories are conducive to a wide array of founding emotions (*bhāvas*) and rich rasas—something that even traditionally-trained Bharatanatyam performers and *gurus* endorse (Narayanan 1994). Collaborator Neena Jayarajan, who received training in both Bharatanatyam and Odissi, compares Bharatanatyam facial aesthetics as that of someone who has had "one too many cans of Coke" or "too much coffee" when compared to Odissi *abhinaya*, which she perceives as "a *little* bit softer, a little bit more feminine, and a little more subtle, […] but still very clear" (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017). Mohapatra – who is in fact Jayarajan's Odissi *guru* – certainly reflected her pupil's observation through her *abhinaya*, which offered a plethora of emotions, states and psychophysical reactions, going from desire and love to jealousy, envy, sadness, pain, disgust and rage. Each one was represented with grace and control, with an aura of confidence as well as vulnerability. Facial expressions were not as "stereotypical" or exaggerated as one would see in Kutiyattam or Kathakali, for instance: they were measured, calculated, subtler.

Surprisingly, Mohapatra did not get as many reactions from the audience as I had experienced with Bharatanatyam performances in that same venue. I thought that this lack of reaction might stem from the fact that Odissi does not focus as much on energetic *nritta* segments as seen in Bharatanatyam. These dynamic segments can indeed leave quite an impression of awe in the audience because of the technical abilities they require. Yet, despite the more fluid form of dance she presented and the subtlety of her facial expressions, I feel that Mohapatra's *abhinaya* reached her audience more effectively than would be the case with a Kalakshetra-style Bharatanatyam performance, for example.

But perhaps this was only my own impression. I have come to realize with time that I have a preference for performances by female dancers, and I believe this inclination lies in the fact that women are more in the *lasya* register—a more gentle and sensual type of dance used in *shringara* that was named *sukmara* in the *NS* (*NS* 4.309-310), and that was said to have been taught to humans by Parvati, Shiva's consort (*AD* 2-7). Male dancers, on the other hand, are often associated with a *tandava* register, which stems from the energetic, sometimes violent form of dance that was first performed by the god Shiva and handed down to humans by his attendant Tandu (*NS* 4). As such,

Bharatanatyam performances can oftentimes leave one at the edge of one's seat during *nritta* segments, especially those by male artists and alumni of Kalakshetra who tend to prone a more energetic, *tandava* form of dance.

Yet, my preconceptions were altered in Chennai during the month of *marghazi*. I was blown away by a Bharatanatyam performance by Praveen Kumar, again at the Madras Music Academy. After a few tiring days of attending performances across Chennai and putting up with the city's hot weather, I had decided to buy balcony tickets for the Academy's evening programme—which meant that, as opposed to Mohapatra's performance, I was farther away from the stage and bothered by dim lights that were never shut off. From up there, I could also see the markups on the stage, which was somewhat distracting; the presence of lighting also unhinged my ability to stay focused on the performance.

As Kumar entered the stage, I saw a tall, lean man with soft features; a somewhat contrasting picture when compared to previous male dancers I had seen who had more robust traits. When Kumar undertook his *alarippu/jatiswaram*, I feared that I would not really enjoy the performance: I realized that his style in *nritta* segments, clearly closer to a *lasya* register, was not as sharp and energetic, or *tandava*-like, as I had witnessed before, although they were still intricate and well performed. However, my first impression soon vanished as Kumar transitioned to *nritya* segments. Despite being far from the scene, I was dazzled by the soft yet expressive performance he provided during *shringara* renditions, as well as his mischievous attitude as he presented a piece about young Krishna. I felt as if I was sitting next to him, being absorbed in his performance. His movements were calculated and delicate, with a flow that I was not used to seeing. It was clear that Kumar was known and appreciated for his skillful *abhinaya*, as the audience would provide equivalently expressive reactions and appreciation after each *nritya* segment, including the rendition of a *navarasa* during his *varnam*. Most notably, his piece on young Krishna had the crowd laugh and clap on many occasions. At the end of the performance, he received a standing ovation and much enthusiasm from the audience[47].

Kumar provided a completely different register of emotional interpretation and technique from male performers I had encountered before. The strong *abhinaya* he offered throughout his performance had nothing to do with the exaggerated emotional renditions of Kathakali or Kutiyattam, nor with the vivid movements and "caffeinated" expressions mentioned by Jayarajan earlier that are associated with Bharatanatyam. Kumar's rendition of emotions was closer to that of the Thanjavur style – sometimes called Pandanallur – of Bharatanatyam. Besides coming from a long tradition of one-on-one teaching in which the student lives with the *guru* and takes part in the everyday life of the household (*guru-shishya parampara*), the Thanjavur style is believed to date from the end of the 19th century, when the Tanjore Quartet – four brothers from the Pillai family – established the basis of Bharatanatyam's modern-day repertoire (starting with the alarippu and ending with the tillana; see Krishnan 2012. See also Appendix 4). This style stands in sharp contrast with the Kalakshetra style, notably on aspects of *shringararasa* which are believed to be, similarly to Odissi, too sensual and sometimes even vulgar by proponents of the Kalakshetra style

47. In fact, I learned later that Kumar won the Madras Music Academy's dance award in the Senior Category that year.

(on this opposition between the Kalakshetra and Thanjavur styles, see Devi Arundale 2012; Balasaraswati 2012; O'Shea 2007, chap. 1).

Hence, Kumar's *abhinaya* was quite subtle, yet efficiently communicative, even contagious. This nuanced and multi-faceted approach to *abhinaya*, which is believed to be closer to the expression of emotions performed by traditional *devadasis* in temple and court contexts, is endorsed by many Bharatanatyam *abhinaya gurus* from all training backgrounds, including Kalanidhi Narayanan, who taught *abhinaya* to many of my collaborators (Lata Pada, Neena Jayarajan and Nova Bhattacharya). Narayanan advocated for a balanced *abhinaya* that focuses on fine and varied expressions of emotions; in fact, she even warned people that the over-dramatization of emotions should be avoided at all costs because Bharatanatyam is an art form based on suggestion, subtlety and clarity (Narayanan 1994, 17). Kumar certainly adhered to this approach, which made him stand out from other performers in my mind. His genuine yet stylized facial expressions touched me and triggered an array of emotions in me, from mirth and awe to affection and sympathy.

On several occasions, I have tried to analyze these feelings and how they translated in my body. I have experienced true awe – perhaps *adbhuta* or *chamatkara*? – when witnessing the energetic, *tandava*-like *nritta* performances by Chenthy or by Bharatanatyam performer Parwanath Upadhye, whom I saw perform in Chennai at the Madras Music Academy. I was deeply moved – even shaken – by Kumar's subtle yet skillful, *lasya*-like *abhinaya* as he was performing at that same venue. And I was deeply moved by my collaborator Supriya Nayak's performance – as much as I was when I witnessed Sujata Mohapatra's mastery of Odissi in Chennai – at an artist residency in Montreal, during which she presented a simple *mangalachanaran*, the traditional introductory piece of the Odissi repertoire, that was dedicated to the elephant god Ganesh. Despite her simple clothing – she was not wearing her typical white half-moon shaped headdress, makeup or sari – her performance was deeply beautiful and inspiring, and made me feel at peace, happy, as I had shivers and tears coming to my eyes. There was a rawness about her performance, about her deep, low voice as she introduced the piece, that sincerely touched me (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6. Supriya Nayak performs an Odissi *mangalacharan* piece in simple attire during her artist residency at the Centre de Création O Vertigo in Montreal, February 2019. (Photos by the author.)

Perhaps the emotion and pleasure I felt were, at times, the result of surprise. As Ram points out (2011, S162), the pleasure that one gets from a performance does not so much derive from the narrative that is enacted – which is already familiar – but stems from the innovations that are made while presenting that narrative—in other words, in the novel interpretation of the piece. Tomie Hahn's most recent research speaks to this concept of innovation, as she studies the effects caused by disruption in the performer's anticipation of movements. When movements are disrupted because of a change in one's "embodied anticipation," one needs to adjust, or "re-orient" one's movements (Hahn 2016; Hahn and Jordan 2017). The same could apply to the embodied anticipation of emotions and emotional expressions, which is closely associated with the audience's expectations prior to a performance. During the performances by Nayak, Mohapatra and Kumar in particular, I was taken aback: I was expecting a product I was used to – probably a Kalakshetra-style, technical approach to dance – but instead witnessed a very organic, subtle interpretation of emotions which took me by surprise. I was unprepared for such manifestation of emotions. It stirred something deep within me, resulting in a novel emotional experience—one that introduced new ways of living and experiencing a performance, thus "re-orienting" my previous knowledge of Bharatanatyam (and Odissi) as a spectator.

But all those feelings, all those emotional rollercoasters I have been through… are they really rasa? How can I know? As a white, middle-class, French-speaking Acadian woman from the Canadian east coast, how can I relate to such foreign art, with all its codified emotional schemes and conventionalized gestural lexicon? Can I experience rasa, as a spectator? Do I even have the right to experience rasa? I know I am feeling something wonderful when I see a performance—but is this enough to be called rasa?

Rasik Literacy: Engaging With and Embodying Rasik Knowledge

As a scholar, looking at all these physical reactions I have experienced, I would tend to believe that I have indeed felt rasa—but this interpretation is solely based on "the American vision of art as phenomenologically accessible to all" previously highlighted by Coorlawala (2010a, 131), a framework that does not necessarily align with Indian aesthetics. In fact, why would I want to impose a Western framework onto a South Asian experience? However, such juxtaposition appears to reflect the current understanding of audience reception in the Indian diaspora and Bharatanatyam teachings today. Cooper, for instance, states that whatever the audience's background, the experience of rasa is possible: "The *sthayibhava* is played by the performer and presented to the spectator, and then the potential exists for that emission to encounter and mingle with the knowledge, experiences, and predilections of the spectator and be transformed into rasa" (Cooper 2013, 340). This experience is real, she insists, because it is *felt*.

My conversation with Lata Pada, a seasoned Bharatanatyam performer, choreographer and teacher based in Mississauga, led me to the same conclusion:

> Now, an audience member may say: "I can't put my finger on it, but, ah! that performance was just, it transported me!" You know? So, an audience member is not going to be able to describe what he or she felt—[but] we all know that that would be *rasa*. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

This inability to "put a finger" on such experience – the lack of words to describe a deeply embodied form of knowledge or a profound moment of "kinesthetic empathy" (Reason and

Reynolds 2010; Reynolds 2012; 2013; Reynolds and Reason 2012) – was raised during my discussion with Beaulieu as well. As both a contemporary dancer and Bharatanatyam performer, she confessed that she felt more compelled by the latter style, and had trouble explaining why:

> This joy is more present, more powerful for me […] within my Bharatanatyam practice [as compared to my contemporary dance practice]. Why is that? […] Can we explain it from the perspective of that theory [rasa theory]? Maybe, maybe not. (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)[48]

Explaining such embodied experience using rasa theory would entail the acquisition of what Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason define as "kinesthetic empathy training." The authors ask: "Is kinesthetic empathy the kind of thing one can 'learn'? Can one catch it, cultivate it, become an experiential expert in it?" (Reynolds and Reason 2012, 318). Central to this thesis is the importance of *watching* and learning via continued and repeated observation. While such understanding of kinesthetic empathy training is at play in the case of rasa within the uninitiated audience, it is not sufficient to account for the performer's experience of rasa onstage, in which case rasa might very well happen without the help of vision (as will be explored in the next chapter).

What I would like to suggest is at work here is the acquisition and development of "*rasik* literacy," which in fact depends not only on the visual acquisition of knowledge, but on aural, kinesthetic, proprioceptive and rhythmic means as well. I derive this term from the concept of "sensory literacy," which itself comes from the idea of "visual literacy" and other forms of literacies. In these new "multiliteracy" iterations, literacy is no longer restricted to alphabetical forms of knowledge, but rather offers a range of extralinguistic and extracognitive understandings of the term. The term "visual literacy," for instance, points to the ability to learn by seeing (texts, symbols, images, etc.) while integrating other complementary sensory experiences. In this instance, one "learns to see" a work of art just as much as one learns to decipher letters to read a book (Howes 2015b). Hence, Kathy A. Mills (2015) suggests that we adjust our interpretation of knowledge acquisition in addressing an assortment of literacies: socio-cultural literacies, critical literacies, multimodal literacies, socio-spatial literacies, socio-material literacies and sensory literacies.

The concept of sensory literacy aligns brilliantly with the research conducted in the anthropology of the senses, as it speaks to the many ways in which people from different cultures learn to "read" the world through multiple sensory means that cannot be isolated from one another. In this, literacy practices are not only multisensorial, but also cultural, material, kinesthetic and emplaced. As a form of meaning making inscribed in embodied forms of knowledge, the concept of literacy thus cannot dismiss the role of the body and the senses in the acquisition of knowledge. Sensory literacy therefore demands that we adjust our perception of what knowledge represents and how it should be mobilized in educational institutions and beyond (Mills 2015).

In proposing that spectators and performers alike work toward *rasik* literacy, I want to acknowledge this sensory turn in literacy studies – or, more broadly, in the scholarly and popular

48. My translation. Original quote: "[C]ette joie-là est plus présente, est plus puissante pour moi […] dans la pratique du Bharatanatyam [que dans la danse contemporaine]. Qu'est-ce qui fait ça? […] Est-ce qu'on peut l'expliquer du point de vue de cette théorie-là [du rasa]? Peut-être [que oui], peut-être que non."

conceptions of knowledge and meaning making – which distances the concept of literacy from the acquisition of strictly cognitive skills and instead opens new forms of knowledge emerging out of various interrelated sensory competencies. *Rasik* literacy involves that one "learns to read" rasa in performance through various sensory means—codified facial expressions, hand gestures and gaits, conventionalized melodies and musical scales, imagined landscapes and protagonists; but also movements and gestures that are felt in the body (of performers), to which I will come back in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. *Rasik* literacy also entails that rasa is not restricted to cognitive knowledge and skills, but rather comes to be known through numerous sensory means and embodied cognition. As such, anyone can learn to understand and embody rasa through means that are not restricted to skills, texts and theory. *Rasik* literacy, then, entails the acquisition of *rasik* knowledge, which itself involves the understanding of manifestations of rasa. It *is* possible to educate our senses to *rasik* ways of knowing, which is the primary goal of *rasik* literacy.

Rasa, as it stands, is going through a de-hierarchization[49]. *Rasikas*, Indian spectators as well as uninitiated audiences now have access to *rasik* experiences, as dancers are adapting their performances to accommodate this evolving public, which might include as many *rasikas* as uninitiated spectators (Coorlawala 2010a, 131–32). Anyone, it would seem, is now able to learn how to experience and interpret rasa. This acquisition of *rasik* literacy depends not only on factors discussed earlier – "being of two sensoria" (Howes 2003, 12; 2015a, viii; 2019, 18) with the Indian sensorium, and thus sharing its aesthetics as well – but on several additional elements, especially kinesthesia (and kinesthetic empathy).

But like any form of literacy, the acquisition of *rasik* literacy is a long process that can take years to master. The appreciation of a performing art such as Bharatanatyam depends on the spectator's capacity to taste the ingredients and flavors danced on the stage; but when using ingredients and flavours that are unknown to audience members, the only way they can make sense of them is by using their own registry of embodied knowledge. Accordingly, the resulting rasa could be miles away from the expert's codified experience of rasa. Or not.

What I argue, then, is that anyone can potentially learn to become a *rasika* and experience the joyful process of rasa. While we could, objectively speaking, persist in affirming that uninitiated spectators cannot experience rasa, we could adopt the opposite approach in inferring that they may very well be able to feel rasa despite their unfamiliarity with the art form and its culture. It is a matter similar to the Schrödinger's cat paradox; rasa is both possible and impossible within the uninitiated spectator. In Royona Mitra's words, this does not mean that rasa is a universal concept, but rather that "it can be experienced as multiple, (inter)culturally specific manifestations that coexist in parallel to each other" (Mitra 2016, 89). My own experience could never reproduce that of a seasoned performer or a knowledgeable Indian dance critic, but it does open doors to what could be the experience of rasa nonetheless. Deidre Sklar presents a similar argument in her own research and her fieldwork method which she calls "kinesthetic empathy"[50]. During her fieldwork among Catholics in New Mexico, she experienced the same dilemma.

There is no doubt that the chords struck in me were not the same as those struck in a lifelong

49. Many thanks to Dr. Angélique Willkie for suggesting this term (in place of "democratization") and to the rest of the committee for the rich discussion on this topic.
50. Not to confuse with Dee Reynolds' use of the same term, as noted in the Introduction (see note 7).

> member of the fiesta community. In addition to having different personal sensory memories, we could not have the same interpretations of such an event. Unlike them, I did not believe in the historical reality of Our Lady of Guadalupe nor in Catholicism as a world-ordering cosmology. Our differences were clear. Nonetheless, the combination of descending to my knees and feeling an enlivened connection to the figure depicted in the image gave me a taste of the experience whose expression I had been studying. Further, it provided an epistemological reference point from which to understand later conversations. When, for example, the community's religious leader instructed me in local Catholicism by describing a biblical scene as if he were there and feeling it, I could follow his process. This kind of rapport at the level of epistemological process would not have been possible through traditional verbocentric methodology alone. Complementing a hermeneutic approach with corporeally based methods offered a means of understanding how knowledge is generated as a process that is both somatic and abstract. (Sklar 1994, 17–18)

Perhaps what Beaulieu is experiencing as a Bharatanatyam dancer and what I felt as a spectator in Chennai and in Toronto can be summarized as rasa, simply because it *was* an aesthetic delight and pleasurable feeling that resulted from a stylization of emotional states. And because rasa seems to cross boundaries of language and cultural background (L. Pada, 6 July 2019), perhaps we can affirm that it was rasa—or perhaps we simply picked up on the flow of the performance and the resulting "pleasurable, even ecstatic atmosphere" only possible because of the embodiment of skills and abilities by the dancer (Hahn 2016, 165). We will never surely know. But despite our North American, Caucasian affiliation, both of us certainly acquired *rasik* literacy through our training; Beaulieu's is more embodied, while mine is rather theoretical, but also felt in my body as a spectator with knowledge of rasa, and with some previous embodied encounter with the dance form. Both of us made an effort in sharing sensoria with this Indian aesthetic context in which rasa flourishes. And this is what sets us apart from the typical uninitiated spectator—or rather, situates us in-between the non-expert and the *rasika*, in a liminal space in which, in fact, we will have to embrace the ambiguousness of our emotional experience.

The Dancer as Modern Rasika

During my conversation with the eminent Bharatanatyam artist Lada Pada, she confessed – and confirmed my suspicion – that the typical, classical *rasika* is slowly fading away:

> Let's face it: we do not have *sahridayas* [anymore], you know. […] *Ridaya* means "heart": one who is of the same background [of the same heart/heartbeat]. Same background, you know. Who experiences the art form, like the artist himself. We don't. We don't have an audience full of *rasikas* who know every *talam* [rhythm], who know every *ragam* [musical scale], the nuances of it, who know the principles of *abhinaya* [expressive dance], that they are, they know every little nuance, gesture. No. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

Hence, the ideal spectator is the *hridayasamvada*, the one who nurtures a sympathetic rapport and a "correspondence of the hearts" with the interpreter or poet (Bansat-Boudon 1992a, 145). But how are dancers to perform, and how are the spectators to experience rasa, when the foundation of the audience is now missing?

As I was sitting behind Menaka Thakkar in that amphitheatre in Toronto, I came to realize that there would be no better spectator than this woman: an artist trained in Bharatanatyam, Odissi

and Kutchipudi who, as a dancer, has accumulated knowledge in her body throughout the years and, as a teacher, has reflected on this knowledge in order to pass it on to students using a pedagogy that would fit a North-American public—meaning, in which students can ask questions and get some theoretical knowledge alongside practical skills (more to come on this aspect in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Thakkar was without a doubt the most eminent and knowledgeable *rasika* in that room and set the tone for the whole audience's appreciation of the performance. In a world in which theory is learned bodily through repetition and practice, what better *rasika* can there be besides a full-fledged and experienced dancer?

Coorlawala (2010a, 131–32) argues that performing for non-*rasikas* undoubtedly changes the aesthetic flavor of a performance, and that in a foreign context in which *rasikas* are rare, artists on the stage are their own best spectators; something that was confirmed by a faculty member at the Kalakshetra Institute in Chennai I have spoken with (14 July 2015). Dancers and musicians will encourage each other and show appreciation throughout the performance. Artists go from being performers to being spectators, taking time to appreciate the others' performance (Ram 2011, S165). Hence, it seems that on the global, contemporary scene of classical Indian dance-drama, performers themselves are the best audience possible, whether on the stage or among the public, since they are *rasikas* through their training and practice.

Therefore, I argue that the modern-day *rasika* is probably the dancer herself. Indeed, with globalization and the now widespread Indian diaspora, it has become clear that true *rasikas*, in the classical sense – upper-class connoisseurs well-educated in all Indian art forms and their aesthetics – are decreasing in number, while dancers are facing the opposite phenomenon. As experts who embody *bhavas* through dance and constantly reflect on the most effective ways to evoke rasa in the audience, contemporary classical Indian dance performers, choreographers and teachers are thus the most knowledgeable persons in terms of Indian aesthetics today. Such aesthetic literacy does not necessarily translate through theoretical frameworks – although most dancers today seem to have a curiosity and a thirst for learning about the theory behind their practice – but certainly lives through tacit knowledge. Truly, performers are the epitome of sensory and *rasik* literacy because of their multimodal, multi- and intersensorial access to *rasik* knowledge, which they can access through the same means as spectators in addition to proprioceptive, kinesthetic, balance and rhythmic ways. For artists, rasa is both externally and *internally* perceived and thus acquired. This claim will become central in the next chapter, as I will explore the location of rasa within performers themselves.

CONCLUSION

Classical rasa theory disseminates a very precise concept of *rasikas*: they are ideal spectators who can relish the emotional essence of a play because of the knowledge they have acquired in their current and previous lives. According to Bhojaraja, these forms of knowledge are nothing less than *ahamkara*, knowledge of the Self. The *rasika*, said Abhinavagupta, also has latent *sthayibhavas* within him that are only waiting to be awakened by the performance. The *rasika* in classical Indian thought is none other than one with infinite knowledge—one who has access to such knowledge based on his *karmic* achievements, which points towards acquired privileges. *Rasikas* were thus rarely encountered. To experience rasa, as explained by Pada (6 July 2018), "typically, you've got to be a *rasika*; you've got [to be] somebody who's been exposed to that art form, who's grown up with that art form, who is familiar with it, or knows enough about it to know."

However, this is hardly the case today, as Indian performing arts have migrated outside of their country of origin – and their original performing context within temple stages and royal courts – exposing rasa to an array of new spectators that may not adhere to such *karmic* standards, or that perhaps have not yet reached such privileged knowledge. Modern audiences in the diaspora are made of a mix of connoisseurs, amateurs, performers and uninitiated spectators—a blend that was not considered by classical rasa theorists. Today, as Ram explains, "spectators are not necessarily versed in Sanskrit aesthetic theory. Nor do they necessarily consciously remember Sanskrit antecedents to the performance they are watching. They are not in the business of making historical claims". Not only has the audience of rasa changed, it has expanded as well, giving each and every one the opportunity "to occupy the subject position of the spectator as *rasika*" (Ram 2011, S161). A de-hierarchization of rasa is currently in the making.

In today's global market, claims Coorlawala, professional dancers seek and try to satisfy two types of audiences: the *rasikas*, who will focus on the experience of rasa and the way it touches them internally, as well as the non-connoisseurs, those who will mainly focus their critique on what is materially observed (2010a, 132). Both experiences are valid, says Coorlawala, if only judged and lived in very different ways, according to different sets of knowledge and embodied cultures. Therefore, it appears that rasa is more than ever accessible to all—and performers are well aware of this fact. They adapt their performance to this new audience, relying on a number of communicative strategies that hopefully will allow this new uninitiated audience to experience rasa. Perhaps it is now possible to become a *rasika*, despite one's cultural background—the acquisition of *rasik* literacy may well be achievable, as one could potentially learn how to translate *bhavas* into rasas. Perhaps it is not too late for rasa to transform into embodied knowledge, or sensory/*rasik* literacy, within the uninitiated audience. Perhaps this new audience can experience rasa after all.

Like any wine or food connoisseur, spectators "too must be attuned, trained and initiated" in the art of receiving rasa" (Vatsyayan 1996, 91) and thus undergo a certain education in what could be referred to as the acquisition of *rasik* literacy—a concept I have introduced as the extension of visual and sensory literacy (Mills 2015). *Rasik* literacy addresses ways of "reading" and understanding rasa in embodied and sensory ways from a variety of perspectives, including those of spectators and performers. Therefore, I argue that, for the uninitiated spectator, the acquisition of *rasik* literacy – which stems from a sensorium, a habitus and techniques of the body deeply rooted in Indian and Hindu culture – is essential to fully enjoy the pleasurable experience of rasa. Such training (especially outside of the Indian subcontinent) entails the reorganization of sensory knowledge and the readjustment of perception to fit the aesthetic norms and meanings of rasa.

Following the previous examination of rasa in its original, historical setting, as well as its contemporary realities in the diaspora, I would further speculate that, to experience rasa, uninitiated spectators need to attune their senses, at least to a certain level, to those of the Indian audience. This means that tasting a performance is about sensing the world using an Indian sensory regime or acquiring *rasik* literacy. David Howes and Constance Classen define sensory regimes as "the ways we use our senses, and the ways we create and understand the sensory world" (2014, 1). In other words, sensations carry personal as well as social values. In fact, the Indian sensorium forms a holistic, intersensory experience in everyday life in which, as suggested by Indian philosophy, all senses are able to establish a contact with sense-objects and grasp them (Chadha

2016; Dasgupta 1957), thus constructing a very material, physical relationship to the world through perception (as seen previously with the works of Beck 1993; Blanchard 2011a; Eck 1998; and McHugh 2012). When seeing a classical Indian dance performance, then, the inexperienced spectator needs to encode the sensory information available and reroute it "via [Indian] social constructions, symbolic behaviours, and abstract dance" (Coorlawala 2010a, 125), thus engaging the senses through the mind, or *manas* (128), and deciphering the art form with the help of *rasik* literacy.

It seems that the experience of rasa is rapidly evolving and adapting to the new challenges imposed by modernity and globalization. While efforts are being deployed in keeping the "traditional" and the "classical" in Indian dance forms today – and at the same time redefining the traditional and classical roots of dance on the global, contemporary scene (see O'Shea 2007) – can we say the same about the audience? Is the reception of rasa still "classical"? Are the experts of rasa the only ones who can fully appreciate Indian classical performing arts? Can the non-expert spectator truly savour dance-drama today? Or, to quote Pada once again, "what do you say about audience members who say that [they "got it," that they were moved]? They know nothing about [rasa theory]. Something has been sparked" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018). So what exactly has been sparked?

There is no doubt that rasa is a concept deeply embedded in Indian culture; but the current scholarship hints towards a new, more flexible interpretation of rasa in which the experience rests in the relationship established between performer and audience, be them experts or not. For the spectator, rasa is not about a cathartic experience, but a state that consists in apprehending "the emotions within a performative context" (Coorlawala 2010a, 119). In parallel to Ram's (2011, S164) claim about the audience's capacity to experience "appropriate" affect and emotion without a thorough knowledge of classical rasa theory – which has also been highlighted by Beaulieu and Voyer (1 Aug. 2017) – I argue that there is a need to legitimize the non-expert's experience of Indian dance-dramas, an experience that is defined through a form of aesthetic pleasure which may or may not correspond to rasa, but that is still valuable.

The internationalization of classical Indian dance forms has given way to a paradoxical relationship between rasa theory and the performance of emotions in current practice. Such incongruity is due to the vast proliferation of performances and the establishment of teachers worldwide during the twentieth century, which in turn led to the introduction of a new international, non-expert audience in Indian performing arts. The notion of rasa has changed from its philosophical and medieval roots, forcing us to take a new look at the experience of rasa today: rasa has not necessarily changed, but the reception of rasa, its interpretation, is different. Given this new reality, I believe, classical theory of rasa – especially Abhinavagupta's widely accepted thesis – does not and cannot apply to the contemporary Indian global scene.

Chapter 3 (*Varnam*)–
Rasa from the Dancer's Perspective

It would be a remiss to exclude the main experts on rasa, the modern-day *rasikas*, from an analysis of rasa; namely, the dancers themselves. As pointed out by Jessica Frazier in her overview of Indian aesthetics, "the scholar who studies only the work, but not its reception (in the audience *and* the dancer), is in a sense only studying half of the artwork" (Frazier 2010; emphasis in original). This chapter is dedicated to this other "half of the artwork"—to the artists' reception and experience of rasa, and to the final piece of the "rasa migration" puzzle.

If modern performers are fine *rasikas*, it is because they have had to redefine their identity as part of the diaspora. Migration has not only forced artists to adapt their aesthetics to a new foreign audience; it has also provided dancers with many possibilities that, too, have altered the contemporary use and interpretation of rasa, as noted by Ketu H. Katrak.

> Change in geographical location may provide a dancer with access to different movement techniques, to new technologies of light, sound and multimedia facilities, to funding avenues and infrastructure support with the presence or absence of *rasikas* and *sahrdayas* (art appreciators with a sympathetic heart whether in Chennai or Los Angeles). (Re)location plays an influential role in the direction that Contemporary Indian Dancers take to explore contemporary themes like ethnicity, gender and sexuality, the environment, the use of dance as movement therapy for victims of violence, for the representation of social issues such as women's status and oppression, for the portrayal of political realities in India like communal-based violence, or for dealing with deeply personal matters of sexuality. (Katrak 2011, xxi)

It is precisely this last statement that is reflected in the current scholarship on Indian dance-drama, which will be discussed shortly. Prior to this overview, I will provide a gloss of the classical and aesthetics literature pertaining to the experience of rasa within the actor—which is, unfortunately, sparse. Most of this scholarship was written after the 15th century and deals with religious aesthetics rather than drama or literature; but such perspective, which focuses on the passionate experience of devotee-actors, will prove relevant to modern-day depictions of rasa on the stage.

This chapter will also pay special attention to the various mechanisms put into place to help the artist portray emotions and transmit them effectively to audience members. Such tools come both from classical literature and traditional training—and, in the diaspora, they often stem from other horizons as well, including foreign dance forms. Hence, this chapter will put a special emphasis on *abhinaya* – the communication of emotions using facial expression, hand gestures and body movements – and address the many ways in which performers engage with the body to enact emotions and transform them into rasa. As the chapter unfolds, it will become clear that *abhinaya* as well as the rigorous, disciplined practice that is required in expressive dance are key elements in the formation of rasa within performers. To this end, the chapter will explore the processes involved in the training of *abhinaya*, the ways in which *abhinaya* allows artists to experience rasa during performance, and the role of the audience in the cyclical experience of rasa.

As established in the Introduction of the dissertation, the *varnam* is the *pièce de résistance* of the recital and as such, it is much anticipated by the viewers. The *varnam* is the longest segment of the program (*margam*) because it showcases both elaborate expressive dance (*abhinaya*) and rhythmic technique (*nritta*), thus providing a platform to illustrate the artist's mastery of all aspects of the art form. Accordingly, this chapter is also the longest chapter of this dissertation. As the *varnam* of the thesis, its principal aim is to let dancers speak through moments of rasa, which will consist of segments of fieldwork interviews that will intersect with theory from the modern scholarship by scholar-practitioners **as well as from collaborators themselves**. These longer narrative sections will act as the *abhinaya* of the chapter, while elements from current and ancient theory and classical Indian dance scholarship will mirror the *nritta* portions of this word choreography.

THE ACTOR AS SUPREME TASTER IN VAISHNAVA DEVOTIONALISM

Prior to the works of Rupa and Jiva Goswamin, poets, philosophers and poets agreed, for the most part, that rasa resided exclusively in the spectator. Abhinavagupta laid the foundations of such assertion when discussing the location of rasa: "rasa exists only in drama – and not in the world – and poetry as a whole is nothing but drama. For the same reason, rasa is not in the actor." In fact, he argued that the actor could not be the seat of rasa for the simple reason that he was only a vessel or a "means of savoring" rasas: "there is no savoring of liquor that remains in the vessel" he explained, because "the vessel is [only] the means of savoring" (*ABh* 1.284.25, in Pollock 2016, 209-10).

It has become clear, however, that classical rasa theory has developed and mutated over the centuries. These changes oftentimes emerged out of new religious and/or literary perspectives on the pleasure produced by rasa, whether in the character, the poet, the text or the spectator. The migration of rasa from the spheres of drama and literature to religious and devotional poetry and practice had a strong impact on theories of rasa, as was explored in Chapter 1 with Goswamin's interpretation of rasa within the Gaudiya Vaishnava devotional system. The actor, who had been denied the experience of rasa up until the 16th century, could now fully engage in the high emotions triggered by religious scenarios—even though such passion would technically be that of the character that was channelled by the devotee.

In addition to his position on the locus of rasa – which was located in the *rasikas,* "those who can experience *rasa*" – literary theoretician Dhanika proposed a term that would designate "those who 'actualize' in themselves the emotion of the narrative": *bhavakas* or *bhavuka*[51]. With what Pollock calls the "theologization of *rasa*," this concept was applied to the world of religious devotion, deriving to a large extent from the widespread popularity of the *Bhagavata Purana* (a Sanskrit Vaishnava poem that includes stories from the life of Lord Krishna) and the revolution it brought to Vaishnava devotionalism (Pollock 2016, 22). Aestheticians started commenting on key parts of the *Puranas* and questioned whether rasa was in devotees within stories of the *Puranas* (meaning, in characters), or in human devotees hearing those stories (meaning, in spectators). Rupa and Jiva Goswamin had the answer: rasa was in the real-world devotees who take on the identity

51. By acknowledging the actualization of a *bhava* or *sthayibhava* within the spectator, Dhanika was perhaps supporting the argument that rasa was an "intensified" or "fully developed" *sthayibhava*—a position that was defended by Bhoja (Haberman 1988, 25–27) as well as Ramachandra and Gunachandra (Pollock 2016, 245).

of paradigmatic characters within the world of Krishna in Vraj where he lived. Rasa – which was foremost understood as passion for God – was for the first time transferred to the actor, albeit indirectly, and the aesthetic distance which was deemed essential to the experience of rasa in Abhinavagupta's work was therefore obliterated. Pollock thus claims that "the Bengali Vaishnavas transformed what for Abhinava had been the supermundane rasa experience of secular poetry into the mundane" (Pollock 2016, 23), as it transferred rasa from poetry to theology and offered "a new understanding of religion as aesthetic action" (302).

The correspondence between the emotional attitudes of devotees on earth toward Vishnu and the concepts of rasa theory first suggested by Vopadeva (14th century) therefore offered a paradoxical portrayal of rasa: rasa, which previously was said to be exclusive to the aesthetic context and accordingly supermundane, had now been introduced to the mundane itself through the daily lives of Vaishnava devotees. This new interpretation of rasa within the devotional tradition of the Vaishnavas not only highlighted the virtues and prominence of *shringararasa* within this highly passionate world, but brought forth new perspectives on the rasa of erotic love by introducing the concept of *bhaktirasa*, the devotional rasa (first suggested by Vopadeva's teacher, Hemadri)—a rasa that is certainly reminiscent of Abhinava's and others' *shantarasa* because of its connection with Advaita Shaiva devotion, only *bhaktirasa* applied to Dvaita Vaishnava religious traditions.

In Vopadeva's and Hemadri's writings, the authors describe the experience of the devotional rasa as ninefold, corresponding to Bharata's eight rasas and the additional one of *shanta*—in other words, the *navarasa* was but the manifestation of (or derived from) the supreme rasa of devotion, as it delineated "nine types of devotees or *bhaktas* [...], each associated with one of the nine *rasas,*" said Vopadeva (Haberman 1988, 31). In this interpretation, the devotional rasa is summarized as "the rapture produced from hearing or otherwise experiencing the deeds of Vishnu," which points to the presence of rasa in both the spectator (devotee) and the actor (character). Hemadri adds that this bliss "can be a matter of seeing, chanting, remembering [the deeds of Vishnu], or dramatic acting" (KD, in Pollock 2016, 287–88).

Rupa Goswamin picked up on Vopadeva's and Hemadri's work – while also being influenced by that of Bhoja, or even Abhinavagupta (Haberman 1988, 31) – to present his full-fledged aesthetic theory, which would become the steppingstone of the Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnava movement and its *raganuga bhakti sadhana* (devotional practice and ritual). Yet, rather than considering *shanta* (as Abhinavagupta did) or *ahamkara-shringara* (as Bhojaraja did) as the supreme rasa, Rupa selected this novel *bhaktirasa* or *Krishnaprema* – with its dominant emotion of love for Krishna (*krishnarati*) – as the main rasa from which all other *rasas, bhavas, sthayibhavas* and *vyabhicharibhavas* derived. In parallel with Vopadeva's nine types of devotees, Rupa believed that *bhaktirasa* could be divided into five sub-rasas that, too, corresponded to the five types of exemplary characters (and devotees) found in Krishna's entourage: tranquillity (*shanta*), experienced by Krishna's spiritual adepts; servitude (*prita* or *dasya*), experienced by his servants; friendship (*preyas*), experienced by his male cowherd companions; parental affection (*vatsalya*), experienced by his parents, especially his (adoptive) mother Yashoda; and amorousness (*madhura*), experienced by the milkmaids (*gopis*) (PS 66.9, in Pollock 2016, 307). The remaining seven rasas would support these five *bhaktirasas* (see Table 3). The goal of Rupa's thought system was to participate (*bhakti*) in the love of God (Krishna) by *seeing* him – rather than only *hearing about* him – which meant participating in God's ultimate bliss: in this scenario, the "true devotee

is no spectator at all, but an actual participant in the drama of Krishna that is life on earth" (Pollock 2016, 301). Religion turned into drama as devotees became actors and embodied the roles of supporting characters in a cosmic play where Krishna was the hero (*nayaka*). Hence, the *rasikas* were no longer "literary connoisseurs," but *bhaktas*—those with *bhakti* or devotion for Krishna (Haberman 1988, 32–33).

Table 4. Goswamin's Twelve Rasas

Bhaktirasa (replaced *shringararasa from the NS*)	*Prita/Dasya* (servitude) *Preyas* (friendship) *Vatsalya* (parental affection) *Madhura* (amorousness) *Shanta* (tranquility)
Remaining rasas *(from the NS)*	*Hasyarasa* *Karunarasa* *Raudrarasa* *Virarasa* *Bhayanakarasa* *Bibhatsarasa* *Adbhutarasa*

In Goswamin's novel religious system, the devotee as character (and as actor) is the "one who really experiences rasa in the primary sense of the term" (Pollock 2016, 301). This person could be anyone, in fact. While Rupa Goswamin raised the notion that the devotional rasa could only manifest in the hearts of those with predispositions to devotion toward Krishna (acquired during their current lifetime and in previous lives; BhRAS 2.1.6-11, in Pollock 2016, 303), Jiva maintained that it could in fact transform anyone, "even those without eyes to see or ears to hear, even the insensate man" (PS 67, in Pollock 2016, 307). This system gave a form of agency to the actor that was seldom encountered in rasa theory (apart from Bhatta Lollata's work), and as such, stands in stark contrast with previous Kashmiri theories, as emphasized by Haberman.

> Reemphasis on the actor, as opposed to the audience, constitutes one of the main contributions of Rūpa's *rasa* theory. The consequences of this shift in the theory are tremendous. Now the actor is allowed the loss of ordinary time, space, and identity, and a deep participation in the time, space and identity of the character being portrayed. Therefore, it is the *bhakta* as 'actor' who is judged to be in the best position to enter and participate in the dramatic world of Vraja and experience *bhakti-rasa*. (Haberman 1988, 37)

Actors, who are expected to act mindfully (PS 68.25, in Pollock 2016, 308), are not only given important roles in the experience of rasa, they are most importantly expected to *re-create* or *imitate* paradigmatic characters of Vrindavan so that the original protagonists can transfer rasa to the actor-devotees—actors are expected to *embody* (divine) *sthayibhavas* to *produce* rasa within

themselves[52]. This idea of embodying and expressing emotions *physically* in order to produce rasa (within the actor) will become central to my upcoming discussion on rasa within the classical Indian dancer.

RASA IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP AND DIASPORIC DANCE PRACTICE

Modern-day scholars and practitioners have shattered the restrictive classical Indian aesthetic framework of analysis by addressing dance via several perspectives (as high art, as folklore, as an expression of nationalism and "Indianness") and throughout locations (from regional specificity to trans-regional ethnoscapes and the global scene) (Coorlawala 2010b, 67). Questions of identity, gender imbalance, social status and politics are frequently examined in performance—rasa is more than ever being manipulated and remoulded to question what was never questioned before in Indian culture. Even though this approach is now common to Western audiences, it represents a concept that would have been unimaginable to the classical *rasika*, who was expected to leave the theatre free of unpleasant thoughts and feelings. The experience of rasa is not exclusively about pleasure and aesthetic delight anymore; on the contrary, it has now become a platform for performers to ask questions and for the audience to reflect on social issues (Katrak 2011, 17). In fact, rasa is now becoming a "resistant aesthetics" (Chatterjea 2004, 327).

With resistant representations of rasa come new ways of enacting emotions and a novel array of played narratives, a new element of traditional forms of dance that Ketu H. Katrak addresses as "contemporary Indian dance," in which artists retain the traditional dance vocabulary and infuses it with various other dance traditions such as modern, ballet, jazz and yoga. These innovations, says Katrak, are inspired by the "dancers' locations within diasporic communities where ethnic arts are reinterpreted and where the influence of new geographies and interculturalism assume increasing significance in the circulation of the expressive arts of dance and music from 'native' into transnational spaces" (Katrak 2008, 220)**.** Most of my collaborators – Neena Jayarajan, Supriya Nayak, Nova Bhattacharya, Lata Pada, Julie Beaulieu and Jonathan Voyer – have engaged and still do with such conception of dance, in which "they'll work with modern poetry, or they'll work with social issues that are going on, but still using the syntax, the movement syntax of Bharatanatyam [or Odissi]" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018). There is a profound desire for performers to involve the audience and have spectators follow them on a journey that may end up with more questions than answers.

My collaborators' wide array of performances[53] reflect the status of the scholarship on Indian classical dance, which is dominated by Indian scholar-practitioners living in the diaspora (Australia, the UK, the US, Canada). Little of this literature focuses solely on the concept of rasa,

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52. In fact, Jiva Goswamin even claims that the actor who imitates the characters from Krishna's entourage are necessarily devotees, "because no one else is capable of properly imitating" them—thus validating his theory according to which the actor can experience rasa (PS 70, in Pollock 2016, 309). This statement points to the necessity for the actor to actually *live* those strong feelings associated with devotion in their daily life, in actual form. Embodied knowledge, thereafter, is key to the manifestation of rasa within the devotee's heart—and, as I will transpose with my fieldwork, so too is the case for dancers.

53. These include several styles and their combination – mainly Bharatanatyam, Odissi, contemporary, and sometimes Kathak – as well as subject matters that are perhaps more personal, or more current than medieval poems and narratives. The example of Lata Pada's work *Revealed by Fire*, which acts as a cathartic response to the loss of her husband and daughters following the 1985 Air India terrorist attack and crash, speaks to the latter.

but all generally translate aspects of it. Writings often deal with the role of the audience in the representation of *abhinaya*, highlighting the dynamic that is formed between spectators and performer, and the role of this relationship in the experience of rasa in both. Most importantly, scholar-practitioners – in parallel with collaborators to this project – claim that performers can experience rasa onstage, based on a variety of mechanisms and actions happening during the performance.

Below is the main segment of this *rasik padam*, in which practitioners will speak from experience in trying to explain how the experience of rasa translates for them. Accounts from my collaborators[54] – Julie Beaulieu (Bharatanayam, contemporary) and Jonathan Voyer (*santoor*, music), Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar (Bharatanatyam), Neena Jayarajan (Bharatanatyam/contemporary, Odissi), Supriya Nayak (Odissi), Nova Bhattacharya (fusion/contemporary Bharatanatyam), Lata Pada (Bharatanatyam/contemporary) and Rajesh Chenthy (Bharatanatyam) – will entangle with those of important scholar-practitioners of Indian classical dance – such as Pallabi Chakravorty (Kathak), Uttara Asha Coorlawala (Bharatanatyam, contemporary), Maratt Mythili Anoop (Mohiniyattam), Ananya Chatterjea (Odissi, contemporary), Arya Madhavan (Kutiyattam), Janet O'Shea (Bharatanatyam, *kalaripayattu*) and Shanti Pillai (Bharatanatyam) – to create a vibrant narrative around questions of rasa in the performer, both within their interactions with the public and within their own body (and sometimes, outside of it). In compiling those accounts, I will explore three key components to the experience of rasa within the artist: the training of rasa (or rather, of *abhinaya*, expressive dance); how the experience of rasa translates into the artist's body once the art of *abhinaya* has been mastered; and lastly, the role of the audience in this physical experience of rasa.

Training Rasa: Embodying the Art of Abhinaya

It is becoming clear that rasa is now – and perhaps has always been – located in the dancer in addition to the spectator—a claim that is contrary to the mainstream understanding of rasa as conveyed by classical theory, in which the spectator stood as the sole locus of rasa. Scholar-practitioners such as Odissi performers Scheherazaad Cooper and Anyaya Chatterjea, Bharatanatyam-trained scholar Uttara Asha Coorlawala and Kathak practitioners Kalpana Ram and Pallabi Chakravorty, as well as all my collaborators, agree upon the ability of the artist to experience rasa during performance. This is an undeniable fact.

Moreover, the experience of rasa in the dancer is founded on one key element: the mastery of technical skills and *abhinaya*, the art of expressive dance. Indeed, the experience of rasa within the dancer lies in the perfection of her *abhinaya*. But how is one to train the expression of emotions and feelings—how is one to train rasa? As this chapter's main purpose is to examine the experience of rasa in the performer, I hence propose to turn to a key component in the formation of rasa within the artist: the training of *abhinaya.*

The Abhinaya Darpana and the Art of Conveying Rasa

The primary role of the classical Indian performer is to engage in *abhinaya*, the "outward expression of the innerself" (Narayanan 1994, 32), to convey emotions to the public (and, perhaps,

54. For more details – or a simple reminder – on the background of each collaborator, see Introduction, section "Method and Interviews," as well as Appendix 1.

to herself). *Abhinaya* training, depending on the context, can start as young as 5 years old – as is the case at Menaka Thakkar's Nrtyakala dance school in Toronto where Neena Jayarajan has been studying and teaching – or be postponed until the end of the training, once the technique has been fully assimilated – as is the case at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, where Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar and Rajesh Chenthy have received their training. During a typical *abhinaya* class, students would not dance, but learn facial expressions sitting on the floor while facing the *guru*. They would usually select or be attributed a poem – most probably not in their native language – that they would listen to, transcribe and translate with their teacher. In a setting like Kalakshetra, students would also start their *abhinaya* training by learning to sing the song alongside its rhythmic composition (*talam* and *sollukattu*) before delving into the "different colors" and "different flavours" of emotions (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018; S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017). But *abhinaya* training is not solely about learning to physically express emotions or to "tell stories with your face" (N. Jayarajan): it encompasses many peripheral skills that build up to its full embodiment, such as the training of technique (*nritta*) and character development. Both elements can be addressed in very different manners depending on the pedagogical setting.

The physical representation of emotions is paramount to the performer's training, which might explain why Indian reformers turned to the *NS* when reviving the art form of *dasi attam*, as the treatise offers a detailed description of techniques pertinent to *abhinaya.* However, Nandikeshvara's *Abhinaya Darpana* (*AD, Mirror of Gestures*) has much more salience today in the practical training of classical Indian dance due to its conciseness and relevance to the teaching of dance techniques exclusively, rather than incorporating acting guidelines as is seen in the *NS*. As such, it puts emphasis on certain elements that were not part of the *NS*, or not explored as thoroughly.

The *AD* is a short Sanskrit manual that is variously dated between the sixth and eleventh century (Vatsyayan 1996, 121) and would thus be a successor of the *NS*, although some scholars believe it would have preceded the *NS*[55]. The *AD* is similar to the *NS*, but only focuses on dance movements, and more specifically *angikabhinaya* (movements of the limbs and body), with special attention to single and combined hand gestures. As found in the *NS*, the *AD* enumerates all types of body movements: single-hand (*asamyuta hastas*) and combined hand gestures (*samyuta hastas*—see image below) – although their number differs from the *NS* – hand gestures according to context, in addition to footwork[56] and leaps, head and neck movements, as well as facial expressions (glances and brow movements) and gaits. Because of its conciseness and practicality for dancers and teachers alike, the *AD* became widely popular in modern-day classical Indian dance training – especially in Bharatanatyam – and was reproduced into many manuscripts. "For the practicing dancer," states Vatsyayan, "it became a textual authority for centuries and it is still followed" today (1996, 122)—a statement with which I concur, as my visit of the Kalakshetra

55. Evidently, many other works were created after the *NS* in regard to Indian dance. This text in particular was chosen because of its relevance today in the training of classical Indian dance. For further detail on major works that followed the *NS*, see Vatsyayan (1996, 121-124).

56. Coomaraswamy and Duggirala's 1917 translation of the *AD*, which predates Ghosh's translation, does not include foot movements, as well as many other passages that are included in Ghosh. For details, see the introduction in Ghosh (Nandikeshvara 1957). Vatsyayan suggests that the inclusion of *dashavatara hastas* and *nakshatras* (planets) in the *AD*, which are absent in the *NS*, points to an evolution of categories within the art form (Vatsyayan 1996, 121).

Institute's library in Chennai led me to discover a full shelf of *AD*s (for the most part Coomaraswamy and Duggirala's edition), awaiting curious students to borrow them.

Figure 7. *Asamyuta hastas* (single-hand gestures) in Bharatanatyam (Sarabhai 2018, 92–96)

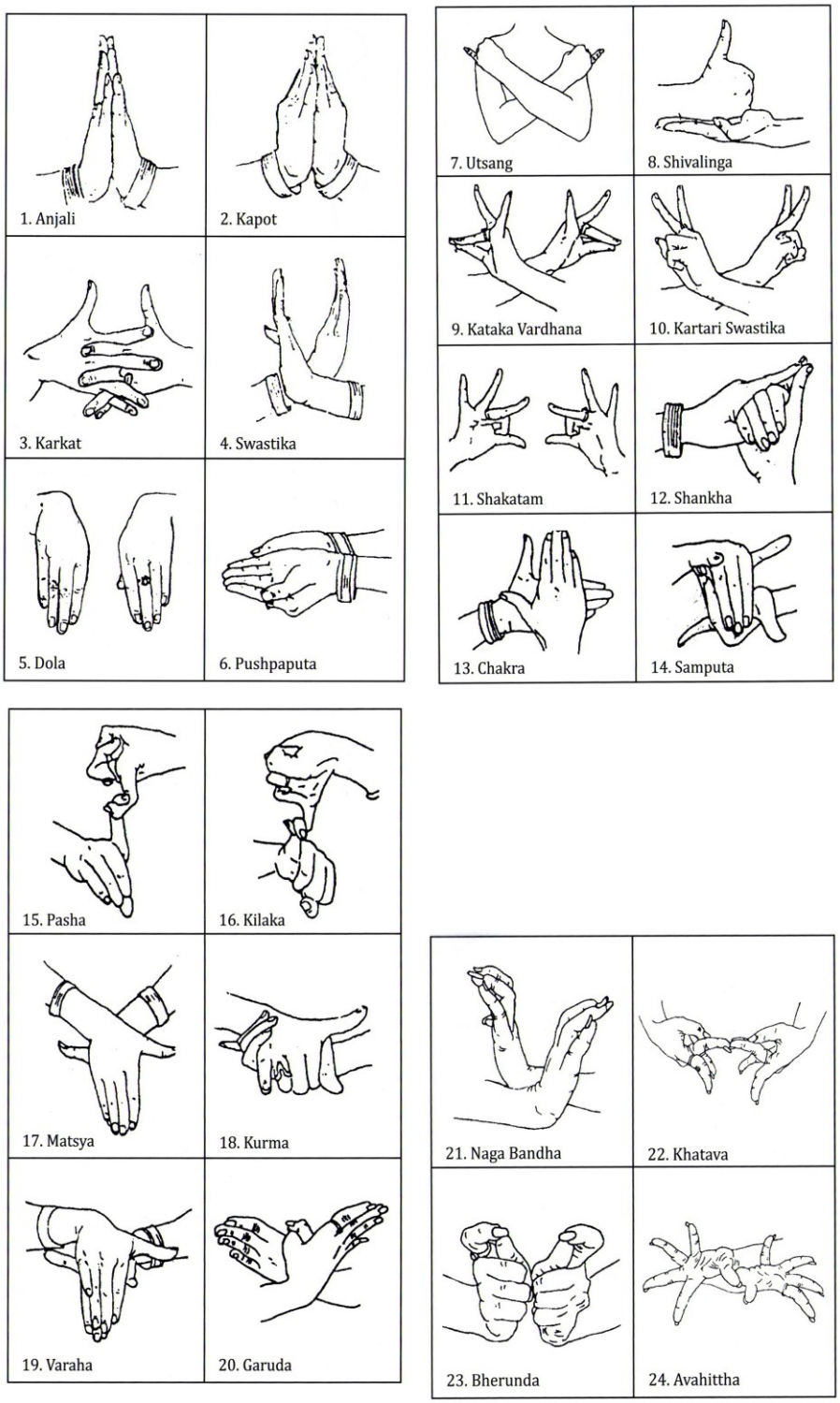

Figure 8. *Samyuta hastas* (combined hand gestures) in Bharatanatyam (Sarabhai 2018, 102–5)

In his translation of the *AD,* Manomohan Ghosh refers to *abhinaya* as a way of "disclosing to spectators the beauty or manifold pleasurable aspects of the play which cannot be adequately appreciated by simply reading" (Nandikeshvara 1957, 9). In aiding the dancer with the techniques of representation (*abhinaya*) on the stage, the *AD* acts as a guide in the suggestion of "ideas and

emotions to spectators" (11), and thus the evocation of rasa to the audience. But apart from its pragmatic approach to dance, the *AD* is widely known for one particular *shloka*, or verse, which goes as follows:

> Where the hands (*hasta*) go, the eyes (*drishti*) follow;
> Where the eyes go, the mind (*manas*) follows;
> Where the mind goes, there is an expression of inner feeling (*bhava*);
> And where there is emotion, mood or sentiment (*rasa*) is evoked[57].

This short *shloka*, which usually acts for dance students as the very first introduction to rasa, has become a sort of lullaby to Bharatanatyam dancers today, who can recite it by heart[58]. It stands as a reminder of the succession of movements in dance, which also helps performers in expressing emotions and conveying them to the public, thus leading the spectators to a *rasik* experience—as it does in evoking emotion within the artist herself. As discussed by Phillip Zarrilli, it is through the repetition of this chain of movements and thoughts that emotions are not simply acted out, but eventually become embodied:

> The external 'forms' of training have been gradually encoded into the neophyte's bodymind through repetition and drill to a point where they become part of his performative 'body-consciousness' and as such are ready-at-hand to be used 'unthinkingly.' Just as the accomplished yogi attains a state of actualization where he is able to transcend habitualized in-body processes to attain higher stages of meditations (*dhyana*, etc.), likewise the master performer is eventually freed from the flux of the normative, everyday psychomental stream of consciousness for the performative moment. He is freed from 'consciousness about' for a state of 'concentratedness' in and for the task at hand—fully embodying and engaging himself in psychophysiological actions through which his character is created in time. While the neophyte moves toward, the master 'is.' (Zarrilli 2000, 92)

This "is" that Zarrilli is referring to has applications to the concept of *sattvikabhinaya*, the latter of the four *abhinaya* registers in which movements come to translate the character's psyche (Nandikeshvara 1957, 14). As such, *sattvikabhavas* are often designated as psychophysical reactions, such as chills, tears and blushing. Kalanidhi Narayanan[59], an eminent Bharatanatyam *abhinaya guru* who has taught to many of my collaborators and contacts in India and Canada, identifies *sattvika* as the ability to convey emotions in their most subtle yet communicative state, using mostly facial expression. Hence, *sattvika* becomes a crucial part of the performance. More importantly, she sees *sattvikabhinaya* as the most significant aspect of *abhinaya*, as "it is in the satvika mode that the rasa of every idea" comes to life, Narayanan says (1994, 9).

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57. Translation based on a personal online conversation with Neena Jayarajan (Sept. 2018). For the original Sanskrit *shloka*, see Appendix 3.
58. This *shloka* was indeed evoked as the basis of the *abhinaya* training (and thus, the evocation of rasa) by many of my contributors, including Neena Jayarajan, Lata Pada, Nova Bhattacharya and Rajesh Chenthy.
59. Kalanidhi Narayanan (1928-2016) is a central figure of modern-day Bharatanatyam training. For a short biography, see the Glossary.

For all these reasons, *abhinaya* is probably the most challenging aspect of dance-drama for Indian actors and dancers, since their performance is not only judged on their *nritta*, meaning their ability to perform "pure dance" or technique – complex dance movements with no attached meaning – but the public always anticipates the *nritya* segment (expressive dance) of the performance with excitement, as *abhinaya* shows just how the performer is able to communicate ideas and portray emotions, thus evoking *rasa* within the audience. The *AD* plays an important role in perfecting such training to this day.

First Comes Technique

The first step in the training of rasa and *abhinaya* is, as simple as it may sound, the training of technical skills. Only once movements and gestures are deeply engrained within the body can the dancer focus not uniquely on the physical representation of her *abhinaya*, but on its efficacy—a skill that my collaborators have coined as "maturity" (Lata Pada), "authenticity" (Neena Jayarajan), "embodied performance," "magic" or "becoming the dance" (Nova Bhattacharya). Dancers cannot think of their technique as they perform, explains Odissi dancer and dance reformer Sanjukta Panigrahi, because if they do, they won't be able to go beyond technique to reach the world of rasa through *abhinaya* (Jenkins and Watson 2002, 70). "When you know your technique, when you are at ease with your technique and you are no longer struggling to control it, then the feelings come automatically" she adds (73). Therefore, the mastery of technique gained through repetitive practice (*riyaz*) is essential for the performer to experience rasa, because without it, she will focus on movements and not her actual experience.

The significance of acquiring perfect body technique via repetitious practice to gain access to the experience of rasa cannot be understated. With perfect dance technique, the performer is later able to reach emotional (and *rasik*) heights that would not be available otherwise. My collaborator Nova Bhattacharya, whose dance career rests on engaging with other artists from a plethora of dancing and acting practices, illustrates just how movements need to be embodied before being able to reach rasa in performance.

> In order for *rasa* to happen, it's that next moment—and whether that's a moment that happens in acting or in musicianship or any of those things… And having acted [in an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*], I have to say, I found it difficult in acting to get to that place because I had to hold on to the part of my brain that remembers words and language, right? Whereas in dancing, this moment does come where, if you have rehearsed it and you know the steps, or, like, you've done it enough times, this moment does come where you get to let go of those things. And for me, I think that's the moment where the dancer becomes magical, as opposed to still learning and doing and learning and doing. And when you can let go of that part of your brain, it's a fantastic thing. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018)

This statement reflects my collaborator Rajesh Chenthy's opinion on the *arangetram*, the dancer's first public performance of a full-length recital which represents the sum of all the technique they have learned thus far. Oftentimes, the *arangetram* symbolizes the last stage in a young girl's dance training, after which she slowly lets go of her dance practice to focus on her postsecondary studies and her family life. Yet, the *arangetram*, said Chenthy, is only the *beginning* of a dancer's performing career, the moment when artists "are ready to *start* performing" (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018).

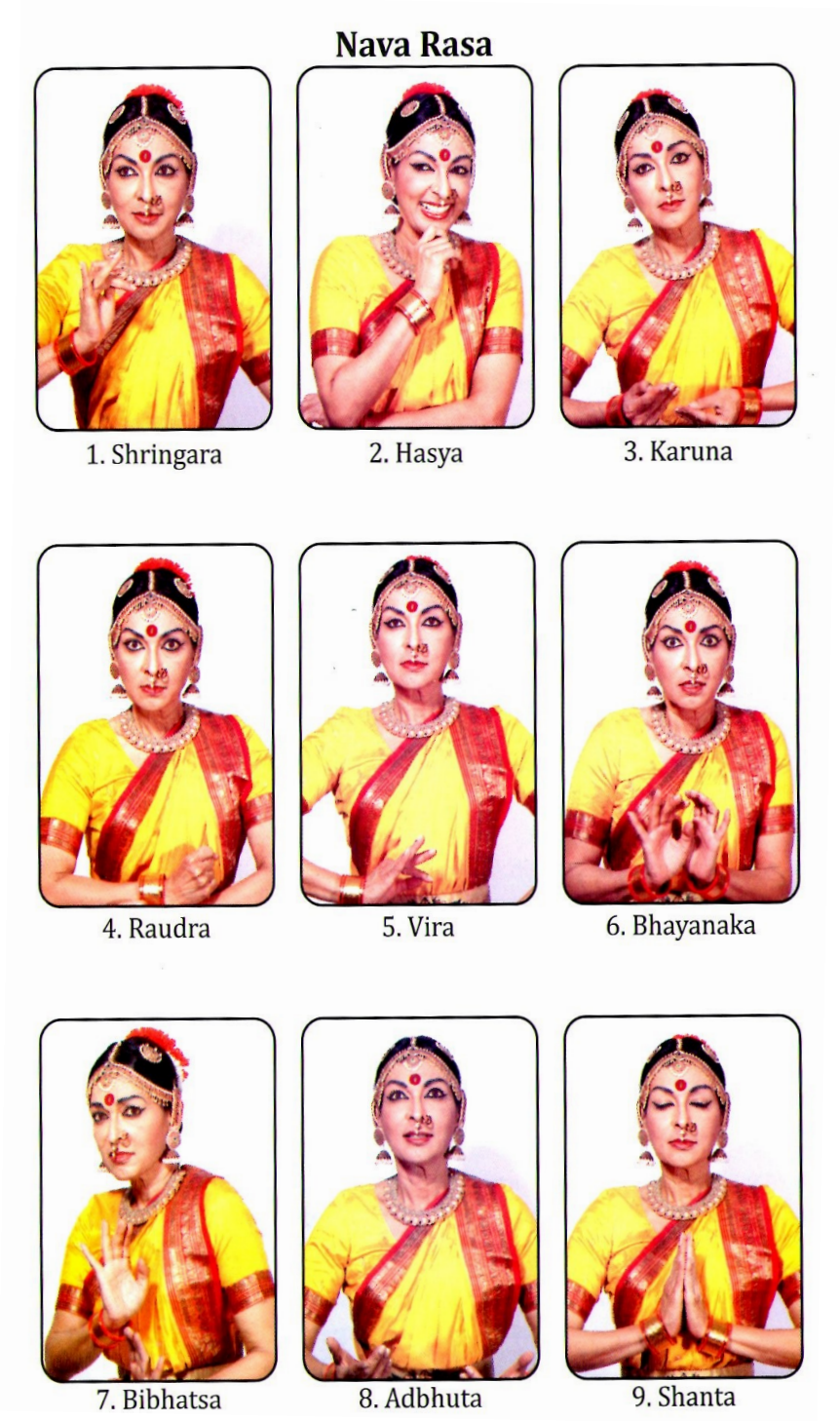

Figure 9. The nine rasas (*navarasa*) of Bharatanatyam, by Mrinalini Sarabhai (2018, 51).

Figure 10. The eight rasas (*ashtarasa*) of Bharatanatyam, by *abhinaya guru* Kalanidhi Narayanan (1994).

Therefore, for one to reach rasa in performance, one must first master codified movements, gestures and technique that are associated with a conventionalized range of emotional states. Several of my collaborators – especially those who have studied at Kalakshetra – as well as faculty members and students from Kalakshetra I have spoken with while in Chennai, were clear that dance students (most often children and teenagers) need to learn how to enact emotions on a technical level before they can embody them in performance, thus allowing for their transformation into rasa. In *shringara* (love), for instance, students will learn to look down shyly and throw quick glances at their imagined lover while moving their eyebrows up and down in a suggestive manner; in *bibhatsa* (repugnance), they will know they need to frown and look away while shaking their hands with straights arms; and so on. With time and practice (*riyaz*), they therefore come to associate certain gestures and facial expressions with specific emotions. As students engage in repetitive practice, they will then be able to let go of the technique and focus increasingly on emotions, thus creating space for the experience of rasa.

The (physical) presence of the *guru* is essential in the transmission of the gesture-emotion associations within students. The teacher not only describes these gestures and facial expressions, but oftentimes enacts them as well, expecting students to mirror the movements. The absence of mirrors in Indian dance studios acts as a reminder that the student is not supposed to look at her own rendition of emotions, but has to reproduce the description of gestures (and learn their correct interpretation through kinesthetic cues based on the *guru*'s adjustments) or mimic the teacher's movements. In the absence of the *guru*, students oftentimes rely on mirrors to practice their *abhinaya* or *adavus* (sets of dance movements), which can become a hindrance at times. When she left India, Samyuktha Punthambekar felt she was losing touch with her dance practice and could not find any meaning in it because of this lack of contact with a *guru* (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017). Supriya Nayak shares those feelings.

> And this is where I struggle, because I feel like I can't check myself enough. Like, if I can tell [my student] "I want to see it in your eyes" and I can't see it in her eyes, like, she gets it. I can't be watching myself in the mirror and seeing my eyes: it's impossible. […] I [also] like to sing it all to myself now because I feel like—and this is again something about being in Canada, where one of the things I started making very early on was not having a live

> singer. And then, being with that tape and feeling like I want to destroy this thing! I mean, it's a nice recording, but, you know, how many times can you try to feel the same thing with the *same* music? (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original)

Once the technique behind *abhinaya* has been mastered by the student, she will be able to navigate a plethora of emotional scenarios with ease—and it was this precise skill that was particularly admired by Western performance studies scholars like Richard Schechner or Eugenio Barba. But for an Indian classical dance performer, that is just part of the skillset that *must* be mastered in order to reach a heightened level of performance. Nova Bhattacharya, who has a "repertoire of movement that is in [her] body, which is 95% Bharatanatyam," but still works mostly with contemporary dance practitioners, finds this skill can be both a blessing and a curse when she collaborates with other people on projects.

> You know, a lot of people who are trained in Western contemporary dance […] will say about me […] that with my eyes closed, I can take them on a journey of what I'm feeling. But […] when I get those compliments from Western dance practitioners, there's a little piece of me that's, like, "[*whispering, angry tone*] That's just Bharatanatyam!!" [*laughing*] "[*whispering, angry tone*] We all do it!!" [*laughing*] "[*whispering, angry tone*] I don't think I'm that special!" [*laughing*] (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018)

Accordingly, this ability to switch quickly from one emotion to the next, and to be able to portray emotions with embedded technique, can feel unauthentic to performers outside of Indian dance traditions. Bhattacharya gave the example of a dance rehearsal in which her artistic director asked her to "keep it real" because she was so good at portraying emotions that he felt people could see her intellectually focus on the *technique* of portraying emotions and not on the *feeling* behind these. She further explained that "if I let go of really feeling the emotion, it was becoming technical on my face, as opposed to really feeling real and lived." Indeed, movements and *abhinaya* become so embedded in the dancer's body that it is difficult to step away from the technique that rests deep within the artist. Bhattacharya further noticed that it is difficult for Indian classical performers "to let go of that performative quality" which makes every gesture look overly stylized and, depending on the perspective, artificial, as opposed to more "casual" movement. "*Those* things I find are hard for us to figure out how to do," she confessed (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original).

Once More With Feeling

The insistence on perfecting technique and skills before jumping into the performance of emotional episodes using *abhinaya* was supported by one main factor by my collaborators: young students do not have enough life experience to enable them to portray complex emotions in a genuine fashion. As highlighted by Chenthy, because students prior to their *arangetram* are still focusing on acquiring perfect technique, "their mind is not open" yet to rasa or ready for the complexity of emotional portrayal (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018); or as Lata Pada stated, "their bodies still have to be molded into the form" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018). What this means is that personal emotions – emotions and feelings that are embodied, inscribed in one's muscles through everyday events – are what fuel the expression of played emotions on the stage, even though these emotions are conventionalized to a high degree. In a certain way, classical rasa theory supports this approach by arguing that the *rasika*'s body of knowledge emerges out of mnemonic traces (*vasanas*) and present life experiences. If we accept, as argued previously, that dancers are the modern-day

rasikas who can experience rasa onstage, then the necessity for them to acquire (*rasik*) knowledge through experiences is an important part of their own aesthetic experience.

Yet, the primary training of *abhinaya* focuses on the *AD*'s foremost adage: "Where the hand [is], there [is] the eye; where the eye [is], there [is] the mind; where the mind [is], there [is] the *bhava*; where the *bhava* [is], there is the *rasa*" (Zarrilli 2000, 92)[60]. This quintessential element of dance training is the student's first and continuous contact with the complexity and subtlety of rasa. The *shloka*'s purpose is relatively straightforward: in the rendition of emotions, the dancer's eyes should always follow the hands and their gestures (*hastas*), or point to their next location in space. As the hands describe the sung poems, the eye movements and expressive gaze will translate the emotions attached to *hastas* through the mindful interpretation of the song, one in which the gaze is most often directed towards an invisible interlocutor and making that character present via a shared imaginary and genuine movements. Only then is rasa possible. Bharatanatyam performer, teacher and choreographer Lata Pada always makes sure to highlight these succession of movements – hands to eyes to mind to emotion to sentiment – when training her students.

> Why is it so important to look at your hands? And how is it important to involve your mind in what to do? And when your mind is involved, […] you can tell that there is a certain sensation, a certain… you know, [a] sense of connection that you will feel. And when you do that, and when you express your emotion, when that emotion comes from a very honest and a deep place, you'll know that there's something that you might not be able to put your finger on, or to be able to describe it—but that then becomes, you know, kind of a *rasa*. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

Hence, the training of *abhinaya*, as illustrated by the *AD*'s *shloka*, is not limited to a mechanical understanding of emotions in movement, but goes beyond technique: "you don't just teach the hands, but *where* you're going to take [them]" as pointed out by Odissi dancer Supriya Nayak (4 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original). Students will require much direction in the early years of their training, a time during which they will focus more on the *technique* of showing emotions than the "honest and deep place" mentioned by Pada; but after much repetition and practice, they will be able to "personalize" their *abhinaya* and make it her own (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017).

Even though the very mechanical succession of movements described in the *AD*'s *shloka* is only interpreted to a first degree by students for the first few years of their training, it lingers within their mind and body for years, suggesting mild but growing hints of rasa. This was certainly the case for Nova Bhattacharya who felt that, from a young age, the idea of *abhinaya* was closely linked to rasa, flavor and food:

> [M]y earliest connection to the idea of *rasa* is, of course, you know, "*yatho hasta, thatho drishti*" [the *AD*'s *shloka*]. And so I think, from the very beginning, I was very fascinated

60. In line with his understanding of Nandikeshvara's *shloka* within the context of Kathakali, Zarrilli defines *bhava* as "the state of being/doing embodied by the performer/actor, as demanded by the dramatic context and interpreted within a particular lineage of acting," whereas he understands *rasa* as "'flavor,' or 'taste,' arising out of the act or practice of spectating which involves as complete as possible an engagement of the spectator in experiencing what the actor 'brings forward' and embodies" (Zarrilli 2000, 217n12-13). Hence, Zarrilli does not adhere to the modern school of thought in which rasa is also located in the performer.

> by this gradual working *towards* getting to *rasa*. And then, I remember it being described as taste and really loving this notion of being able to taste physical expression. As a Bengali, you know, I think we're called the French of India. Like, you know, you spend a lot of time talking about food [*laughing*]. You know, Bengalis, you know, you're eating one meal and you're talking about your next one. So, yeah, so that really appealed to me and engaged my imagination, […]. And also, […] the fact that we all taste things differently: that something that somebody finds wonderfully sweet and delicious, somebody else will find too plain. And how to find a balance […]. And I love to cook, so… […] So I think those are the things that, even at a very young age, even before I was officially thinking of it, as a class, as an *abhinaya* class, it [*rasa* and taste] was always there. […] So, yeah, so that was my sort of earliest connection to that idea that there's something to work towards in your craft that's more than knowing the steps. And that this idea of taste that's so personal and individual, and how to bring something like that to an audience, that can arouse everybody's imagination. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original)

As such, rasa is always there in the back of students' mind when learning *abhinaya*, even from a very young age. One way to stimulate the different shades of *abhinaya* in young students for Neena Jayarajan is to come up with imaginary dialogues that highlight the various emotional flavours of a danced episode. As she related to me how she would approach the training of emotions with her younger students, Jayarajan provided a beautiful example of such dialogue in which she was teaching children a song about young Lord Krishna in which the main line said "Oh mother, I have not eaten the butter." In order to teach children that this same repeated line held an array of emotional interpretations, she had to provide them with a scenario that would direct their *abhinaya*: "the first time you're supposed to say it being very cute and sweet. The second time, you're supposed to say it being sad, because she doesn't believe you. Third time, now you're getting angry." Yet, children needed to internalize this scenario by adding an imagined dialogue to their dance, otherwise they would simply do the same thing over and over again.

> You have to say, "[*in a cute voice*] Oh mom, you know I would never eat your butter, right? […] But look how sweet and cute I am! Look at me! Look at my eyes!" And then we say, "[*in a cute voice*] Oh, that didn't work… hum… [*in a sadder voice*] Mom, it's over there, why don't you believe [me]…" So you change it to make it into a sad dialogue. And, "[*in an angrier voice*] Mom, it's not fair! No, you're not right, I did not eat the butter!" So then we change the line. So that's the way they can get [children to enact emotions correctly], but otherwise, it's the same, three times. (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017)

It is within these imaginary dialogues that students can understand the deep relationships that are at play in poems. Many collaborators insisted on addressing *abhinaya* training through the characters and the dynamics between them, rather than dominant and transient emotions. One's relationship to a deity like Krishna will vary according to the god's form, for instance: if the narrative centres on Krishna as a young child, the dancer will act in a maternal way towards him; whereas if Krishna is a young adult that dances with the milkmaids, that personal dynamic will shift drastically (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017). Hence, it is hard to address the theoretical concepts of rasa directly in the training of emotions: "you can't be like: 'Show love! Show *shringara*!' […] it's hard to teach that to kids, especially if you've grown [up] outside of the cultural context," explains Jayarajan. "Whether [*rasa* theory is] the perfect tool to learn and teach [*abhinaya*], I

wouldn't say so. It doesn't encompass much other than a word and a descriptor word [*laughing*]." It is easier, however, to address the relationship between characters and how they will change the emotional dynamics between people: "I think it's more important to *build* on what the *shringara* is: is it love for the mother towards a child? Or love towards a lover who's scorned you? Or a lover who you are anticipating with excitement?" (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017). As such, the training of *abhinaya* will essentially revolve around relationships and how these relationships contribute to the construction of an environment (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017).

Another key element in learning how to do *abhinaya* effectively is observation and exposure to the arts. In her teaching, and based on the Canadian context in which live Bharatanatyam representations are rare, Pada likes to provide her students with links to Youtube videos and various articles so they can learn and see for themselves expert *abhinaya*:

> [T]hey need to watch as many Bharatanatyam performances as they can. Because it's only in that, that you're going to understand the way you need to animate your face, and your body, and your personality, to come across, you know. Because, yes, when you're watching it, you don't know the details of the mythological narrative; but if you're watching it, you'll see that there's somebody who's quite evil, you'll see somebody who's quite shy, you'll see some little Krishna, like, character behaving so mischievous[ly]. You get that. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

This exposure to classical Indian dance was easy for performers like Supriya Nayak who grew up in Delhi and would have access to many representations throughout her childhood. For those who grew up in Canada before the age of the Internet, like Nova Bhattacharya, there was already a curiosity about their entourage's emotional expressions. "[O]ne of my favorite things about going to dance shows, is to watch other people" she confesses, and that habit has proven useful during her entire dance training:

> [I]t's also been about research and observation, I think. Again, when I look back on it and I think about my fascination with watching movies and actor close-ups and, or theatre, and that intimate feeling of seeing somebody trying to communicate something to a number of people—I think those things also for me were very much a part of my *abhinaya* training. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018)

It is truly during the *arangetram* training – the classes that prepare a student, usually on a solo basis, for her first public performance of a full dance program – that the complexity of those relationships will be addressed in the *abhinaya* training and that *abhinaya* will in turn transform into "an emotion, a flavor that translates into movements, alongside music"[61] (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017). In this case, a one-on-one pedagogy is commonly preferred by teachers, including *abhinaya guru* Kalanidhi Narayanan, who has trained three of my collaborators in *abhinaya*[62]: Lata Pada,

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61. My translation. Original quote: "une émotion, une saveur qui se traduit en mouvement en jonction, ou avec la musique."

62. Having a separate teacher that will focus exclusively on the training of *abhinaya* is a common thing in Bharatanatyam. Oftentimes, students will learn the technique and the basis of *abhinaya* with one main *guru* and get further *abhinaya* training with a different *guru* like Kalanidhi Narayanan. This was the case for a number of my

Nova Bhattacharya and Neena Jayarajan. During those intimate sessions, the *guru* will "work with the student completely on a one-on-one basis" explains Pada. "And that is when you're sort of *really* going deeper into the meaning, into the connotations, into the subtext, into the context, into the interpretation, to be able to mine that kind of emotion from the student" she continues (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original). The teacher will also delve deeper into the various nuances of emotions—either within a single *bhava*, like the different expressions of disgust or love based on a given situation, or within a single context which could be presented using an array of dominant and transient emotions. Narayanan would always choose *abhinaya* compositions – most often *padams* and *javalis* – that would correspond to the students' sociocultural background, their ethos, their upbringing and their maturity. From there, she would work on the loaded subtext of the poem to bring out its multiple levels of emotional flavours through *abhinaya*.

A one-on-one training with an eminent *abhinaya guru* like Kalanidhi Narayanan can be quite challenging and intimidating, as pointed out by Jayarajan, because such teachers, who have years of training and experience, are able to express so much by doing so little. In such situation, the *guru* would improvise a series of emotional depictions over a single sentence that is continuously repeated, after which the student is expected to replicate what has been enacted by the teacher—an approach to the expression of emotions that Jayarajan defined as very organic. While young students would not be able to portray the experience embodied in the *guru*'s *abhinaya* during classes, and thus perhaps stick to a more "fixed" or technical rendition of emotions, the presence of the teacher is crucial in the acquisition of an emotional palette that will serve the dancer throughout her career. The *guru*, in a sense, becomes the mirror or the emotional "dimmer" or "conductor" that helps the student navigate her own facial expressions. Accordingly, as Julie Beaulieu explained to me, the student is, for the most part, replicating her *guru*'s interpretation of a poem.

> With [my *guru*], she's in front of me – sometimes standing up, sometimes sitting on a chair, sometimes sitting on the floor – so when I work on *abhinaya*, it's about… feeling what she is interpreting [from the poem]. That, that's my… that's my juice [essence], right there, that's my juice. […] [It's] her interpretation, because she won't tell me: "You need to smile a little more or a little less. That's right; that's not right." She doesn't say anything: she does it. We do it, we do it, we do it. […] And there are times when there aren't two bodies anymore: it's one body that, you know, that becomes… it's a sort of… it's mimesis—but it's more than mimesis to me, it becomes… it's an imprint of both bodies. That's how I learn *abhinaya*, the pantomime work, you know. […] She really becomes a sort of dimmer in front of me, a dimmer that controls the intensity of emotions. So, when she increases that intensity or she puts more emphasis on a certain emotion, it's because she finds that I didn't put enough in what I just did. [63] (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)

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collaborators – Neena Jayarajan, Nova Bhattacharya, Lata Pada – including those who studied at Kalakshetra (Samyuktha S. Punthambekar and Rajesh Chenthy), who would have separate group classes with an *abhinaya guru* as part of their curriculum.

63. My translation. Original quote: "avec [ma *guru*], elle est devant moi, parfois debout, parfois assise sur une chaise, parfois assise par terre, fait que quand je travaille sur *l'abhinaya*, c'est… c'est de sentir c'que elle, elle interprète. Ça c'est moi… c'est mon… c'est mon *juice* là, c'est mon jus là. […] Son interprétation, parce qu'elle va pas me dire :

That "Extra Special Thing"[64]

While students are expected to mimic what the *guru* shows them, they should also be able to let their own personality – or what Kathakali scholar-practitioner Arjun Raina calls "embodied emotional states" or *bhavarasa* (Raina 2015, 328) – shine through *abhinaya*. This quality was more or less directly associated with rasa by my collaborators. Punthambekar, for instance, implied during our conversation that because everyone is different, *abhinaya* will vary from one person to the next as well: "Sometimes, people can be fast; sometimes, people can be slow; sometimes, people can be shocked. You know, it's interesting. That is where your true personality comes in" (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017). Having received the title of "*Abhinaya* Queen," Punthambekar correlated this quality with what she called her "spirit," a trait that invigorated the technique she has learned at Kalakshetra. Together, her Kalakshetra technique and her passionate spirit made for "a deadly combination." She believed that this spirit, which she called her "EQ, Emotional Quotient" or "emotional *rasa* quotient" and associated directly with rasa, was in fact well ingrained within her blood. The fact that she was from a Tanjore Maharashtrian bloodline predisposed her not only to excel in the arts, but made her a highly emotional person as well: "our ancestors, we have it in our blood—like, arts, in our blood. We are very, very emotionally connected to the arts, which also makes us people persons" she explained. "It's just my sixth sense which is extremely strong, and I absolutely attribute it to my blood. […] I think somewhere that *this* has been an important aspect in […] me being called an *Abhinaya* Queen" she went on (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017; emphasis in original).

But how can the conventionalized, rigid physical training of emotional portrayal lead one to communicate this "extra little something" (N. Bhattacharya) known as rasa? The physical training of emotions as seen in the teaching of *abhinaya* is indeed a fundamental part of the training of classical Indian dance. *Abhinaya* is in fact a "learned thing" says Supriya Nayak: "it is expression, and it has to be done with the right emotion and all of that, but […] there's a technique to doing that" (4 Oct. 2017). In reality, students of classical Indian dance will learn to physically enact emotions in a very much circumscribed and controlled setting, and it is only later on in their training that they will associate inner feelings with the outward expression of those feelings.

A number of my collaborators spoke to the idea that movements trigger emotions in classical Indian dance, but most of them felt that if the gesture created the emotion in the body, it was because it had been associated with a specific performative emotion in the first place. For Bharatanatyam dancer Neena Jayarajan, for instance, although certain gestures and facial expressions were associated to the performance of Yashoda and her relationship with her child Krishna, it was only after experiencing motherhood in her own personal life that she was able to render the *abhinaya* in a powerful manner. She recounted her experience of a piece she had prepared for her senior *arangetram*, which she revisited years later for a performance at Nova

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"Souris un p'tit peu plus ou ben un p'tit peu moins. C'est juste, c'est pas juste." Elle dit rien, elle le fait. On l'fait, on l'fait, on l'fait. […] C'est que y'a un moment où y'a plus deux corps là, c'est un corps, qui t'sais… qui devient… c'est une espèce de… c'est d'la mimésie—c'est plus que d'la mimésie pour moi, là, ça devient… c'est une empreinte qui se fait des deux corps. Moi c'est comme ça que j'apprends l'*abhinaya*, le travail de la pantomime t'sais. […] elle est, elle est vraiment une espèce de gradateur en avant de moi, d'intensité sur l'émotion. Fait que, quand elle met plus d'intensité ou plus d'emphase sur une certaine émotion, c'est parce qu'elle trouve que c'est pas assez c'que je viens de faire."

64. Nova Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018.

Dance (Nova Bhattacharya's dance company), after giving birth to her first son. The piece was about "mother Yashoda chasing after Krishna and asking him to come quickly," a scenario she first had to imagine as a 22-year-old childless dancer. But when she revisited the song,

> it was *sooo* different! It was *so* different. It was, like, a brand new piece for me; it was like I never learned it before. […] there's a point [in the song] where [Krishna] eats mud then he opens up his mouth and… [mother Yashoda] sees the universe in his mouth. The line says something like: "You might be the universe to everyone else, because you are now a god" – and you have the realization that he's a god – "but the universe to me lives within you." So, for me, it's like: "Yes! Oh my god! That's what it is!" Right? And it [is] such an emotional line for me *now*, whereas before I was like: "OK, yeah, so the universe, yeah, I get it, he's the universe, he's everybody's god. It's just, now, she opened his mouth, so the universe is inside." That's all I got initially, but now, every time I do it, I get *really* emotional. And [when] I did it over at Nova Dance, I had the entire front row sobbing! […] And [afterwards] I'm like, "oh, that's good!' And they're like: "[*sobbing*] I'm sorry. You just… sorry if you saw us crying!…" "No, that's great! Because I thought that… you got it! And if you got it, then it means that *I* got it." Right? […] I had people who saw it back in 2002 [*laughing*]! And they were like: "This time, I got it!! You know, and I'm like, that's good, because I don't know if I got it back then. You know? I thought I got it, you know, but… (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original)

In Jayarajan's case, a personal experience has informed her codified performance of emotion on the stage—and it has showed, as illustrated by her audience's reaction. But the same is true of the *absence* of life experience, as Bhattacharya clearly illustrated with her *arangetram* (first public performance).

> The *shabdam* that I was originally being taught… was the one with mother Yashoda and baby Krishna. And I was just *really* resisting it. […] I was like: "No, I don't, like, I don't get it. Why? [*whining*] Oh, no, I don't wanna..." And I resisted it long enough that [my *guru*] finally gave me a different […] *shabdam*, which was more about Krishna and the *gopis* [milkmaids]. And I was probably about 16, so that idea of sexuality and sensuality in men and women was *far* more interesting to me than the idea of being a mother. […] when I look back at it analytically now, I think: "Wow, how weird that I just, I *so* resisted pretending I was a mother, but I was *perfectly* happy to pretend I was Lord Shiva, or Parvati," or you know […]—any of those other things, I was, like: "Yeah, bring it! I can do it, I can do it!" But [with mother Yashoda], "[*whining*]" – a baby – "No!" [*laughing*] (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original)

Certainly, teaching such episodes to "women in their late teens or early 20s, [who] don't have the experience of being a mother" is one of the biggest challenges for a dance teacher. "So if you want to show the relationship between Yashoda and Krishna, which is so full of *vatsalya* [motherly love], how do you do that?" asks Bharatanatyam teacher Lata Pada. You could always go for Bhattacharya's solution and find a narrative that best fits the student's personality and lived experience. Indeed, Pada acknowledges that, after working for many years with students, "you get a sense of their personality, you get a sense [of] their comfort zone with expressing certain things. Some are more comfortable doing a narrative from a mythological story; some are very good at, like, a *vatsalya*, you know, a mother-child relationship" (6 July 2018). Yet, says Bhattacharya, it

is very much possible for one to recreate emotions on the stage without prior personal connection with such feeling, based on "research and observation," but there is always the risk of missing that "extra special thing" in the performance—and without that "magic," without rasa, the performance may well feel like a toothpaste commercial in which one just smiles from beginning to end.

> It's really the difference between just doing the *mudras* [hand gestures] and the facial expressions—because it is possible, right? Physically, it's possible: it's possible to raise the eyebrow, it's possible… […] But until you put something into that; no, it's just this. […] So the technique gives you the physicality and gives you all the tools, but you know, in order for that, you know… what-is-the-dance-and-what-is-the-dancer moment to happen, that is that extra special thing. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018)

Likewise, Julie Beaulieu – also a Bharatanatyam dancer – believes that the physical representation of emotions alone is not enough to translate the deep feelings expressed by the characters enacted. As her partner Jonathan Voyer brought up Schechner's theoretical stance from "The Restoration of Behavior" (Schechner 1985, 35–116) and asked her whether she felt that Indian classical dancers could indeed bring up emotions from mere gestures and movements, she answered that it was a possible path, but that she still needed markers to allow gestures to trigger emotions.

> For sure, *abhinaya* cannot simply be about a fixed emotion or a fixed pantomime; otherwise, what's the point? […] Yes, you'll get there eventually [whether emotions trigger movements or movements trigger emotions], but you still have to connect it within, to have the emotion come to life. […] Both paths work, I'm convinced of that. […] [You learn] also by mimesis, so it's true that, traditionally-speaking, that's the path—to reproduce the emotion, you know, to translate it physically, to let it show in your face. But there's also an absorption happening, that pushes the performer to go further. That's for sure. Because it brings you—me, as a dancer, it transports me into a lived experience, into a relationship with the story, with the poem, with the god or goddess in question. (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)[65]

The optimal goal for the Bharatanatyam teacher, then, is to have students "understand and internalize [emotions], and then *feel* the *abhinaya*" and do it justice (L. Pada, 6 July 2018).

Today's Chief Rasa: Shringara

i. Ashtanayikas: Women in Love

Each discussion I have had with my collaborators often revolved around examples of *shringararasa*, the emotional state of erotic desire—which comes as no surprise, as romantic and

65. My translation. Original quote: "mais c'est sûr que l'*abhinaya*, ça peut pas être une émotion ou une pantomime plaquée, parce que sinon, c'est quoi l'intérêt, de toute façon? […] Oui, tu vas y arriver éventuellement, mais il faut quand même que tu arrives à ce que ça se connecte avec l'intérieur, que ça fasse vivre l'émotion. […] Les deux chemins fonctionnent. Ça, moi, je suis convaincue. […] Par mimésie aussi, tu vas l'apprendre par mimésie, fait que c'est vrai que, traditionnellement, le chemin est plutôt ça, de reproduire l'émotion, t'sais, la mettre physiquement, laisser le visage faire cette émotion, mais il y a une absorption qui se fait, qui amène l'interprète à aller plus loin. Ça c'est sûr. Parce que ça t'amène, comme, moi ça m'amène comme danseuse dans un vécu, dans une relation avec l'histoire, avec le poème, avec le dieu ou la déesse en question."

love-ridden dialogues can lead to rich displays of emotions. To borrow Kalanidhi Narayanan's words, "[i]n Abhinaya, the Rasaraja or the King of rasas is Sringara" (1994, 33). In Bharatanatyam, *shringarasa* is mainly highlighted in *padams* (often of devotional nature), *javalis* (segments similar to *padams* but with strong erotic notes) and *ashtapadis* (segments focusing on love stories between Krishna and Radha and the milkmaids, which is paramount to Odissi). In these segments, the erotic sentiment "lends itself admirably for the building up of emotions and sentiments" (Narayanan 1994, 9). The value attributed to this rasa even today highlights the importance that was attributed to *shringara* by theorists like Bhojaraja and Vatsyayana, or to *bhaktirasa* by Jiva and Rupa Goswamin.

The preeminence of *shringara* is justified by the ways in which it brings up the colors of other rasas as well, given that love – and especially love thwarted (*vipralambha*) – gives way to a plethora of subsidiary emotions such as anger, pride, amusement, repulsion or fear (Narayanan 1994, 35). Long before Narayanan, *devadasi* reformer T. Balasaraswati claimed as well that "[s]hringara stands supreme in the range of emotions" because it "is the cardinal emotion which gives the fullest scope for artistic improvisation, branching off continually, as it does, into the portrayal of innumerable moods full [of] newness and nuance" (2012, 200). This is no understatement, as demonstrated so far by the range of examples from my collaborators that relate to *shringara* scenarios. "A dance recital which does not give due importance to Sringara gets to be tedious after a time," argued Narayanan. "To be really unforgettable, a dance recital has to bank upon this rasa; then only has it a chance of haunting the audience long after the curtain has come down" (Narayanan 1994, 77).

In contrast to *shringararasa*, the topic of *shantarasa*, the rasa of peace and tranquillity (which was part of Goswamin's five *bhaktirasas*), was seldom addressed during my conversations with collaborators. The main reason probably lies in the fact that *shanta* does not give way to other emotions as does *shringara*—in fact, it is quite the opposite, as *shanta* results in the absence of emotions. In all other instances, however, the remaining four *bhaktirasas* delineated by Rupa Goswamin – amorousness, parental love, friendship and servitude (see Table 4) – are still recurrent moods in *abhinaya* pieces. In a more modern analysis of rasa in dance, Narayanan describes three dominant depictions of love: *ratishringara*, or romantic love between a man and a woman—which can be further divided into love in union (*sambhoga*) and love in separation (*vipralambha*); *vatsalya*, or love of a mother toward her child; and *bhakti*, or love of a devotee toward a god (1994, 33–34). Among these depictions of love, the two recurring ones my collaborators mentioned were parental love (often between young Krishna and his mother Yashoda) and romantic love, which, at times, intertwined with devotional love (with examples of romantic scenarios between Radha and Krishna, for instance).

To reflect the value ascribed to *shringara* in dance today, a significant amount of time is dedicated to the *ashtanayika* characters (the eight heroines) in *abhinaya* training. The *ashtanayikas* – a system that stems from the *NS* (chap. 24) – depicts eight major states of love pertaining to female characters: it stands for "the classification of the women […] in different states of love […]: the *khandita nayika*, the *vipralabdha nayika*, the v*irahotkanthita nayika,* each of them being separate states of emotion" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018) (see Table 5 below). These women, as discussed

at length by Lata Pada[66] during our interview, reflect the many shades of emotions within the major mood of love. In most of these scenarios, the *nayika* is separated from her lover or troubled by his behavior towards other women. Hence, her name derives from her reaction to these events. The *uttama nayika*, for example, corresponds to a woman who is "very dignified" and confident; as such, she will not "run after her man" even though she may be disappointed or abandoned by her lover. The *madhyama nayika*, on the other hand, is "capable of being both dignified and hold herself with restraint, *or* expressing her anger," while the *samanya nayika* "has no qualms about saying to [her lover]: 'How dare you behave this way? Go away! I don't want to ever see you again'" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018).

Table 5. The *Ashtanayikas* (Eight Types of Women in Love)[67]

Sanskrit name	Translation
Vasakasujja nayika	One dressed up for union
Virahotkanthita nayika	One distressed by separation
Svadhinabhartruka nayika	One having her husband in subjection
Kalahantarita nayika	One separated from her lover by a quarrel
Khandita nayika	One enraged with her lover
Vipralabdha nayika	One deceived by her lover
Proshitabhartruka nayika	One with a sojourning husband
Abhisarika nayika	One going to meet her lover

66. Pada's description of the various *nayikas* goes beyond the basic eight listed in the *NS,* and although they are based on the descriptions found in the treatise, they result more from performative tradition than written theory. The examples she provided are also discussed by Kalanidhi Narayanan in *Aspects of Abhinaya* (1994, 39), like the *swiya nayika* who is a married woman faithful to her husband (like Sita towards Rama), the *parakiya nayika* who is a married woman longing for another man (like the *gopis* or the poet Mirabai who were married but longed for Krishna's love) and the *samanya nayika* who is an unmarried woman.
67. Based on the *NS* 24.210-211 (Bharatamuni 1951, 1:467).

Figure 11. Examples of the *ashtanayikas* of Bharatanatyam, by *abhinaya guru* Kalanidhi Narayanan (1994).

The *ashtanayikas* illustrate just how much the rasa of love acts as a fertile ground for showcasing secondary emotions and states that may not feel as complementary to *shringara* in the first place, as would be the case with *bibhatsarasa* (disgust), for instance. The model also provides more context for the dancer to interpret emotions adequately, as Jayarajan explained.

> Let's say… you're waiting for Lord Krishna, and you've waited and waited, and you decide to send you friend to go find out why he's not here. And she comes back with her lipstick smeared and her hair unkept, and then she walks in the door. And at first, you're like, "Oh, what happened?" and then the feeling of disgust [comes]. So I needed that whole context to understand the disgust I need to show. It's not that "Ew, she smells!" [type of] disgust. Do you know what I mean [*chuckling*]? (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017)

ii. Love and/in/or Devotion

Shringararasa is closely associated with, but not necessarily equated to, *bhaktirasa*. Narayanan and Balasaraswati were firm believers that *shringara* could be spiritual as much as erotic, and that, accordingly, there was no need to create a new category of *bhaktirasa*.

> Bharatanatya is frankly [a] devotional art and the best vehicle for approaching God is Sringara. Padams which have full-blown rati bhava [love, passion] need not be vulgar but can be examples of madhura bhakthi [*sic*; amorous devotion] or love devotion which is used by composers of padams because it brings one very near [to] God. The closeness and intimacy of the love relationship is an allegory for the closeness and intimacy of the devotee and God. (Narayanan 1994, 26)

Hence, Hemadri's and Goswamin's perspectives on rasa within the devotee – or actor – undoubtedly apply to, or at least resonate with, this last quote by Narayanan and with classical Indian dance in general, in which we also find a shift "from the passive experience of the audience to the active experience of the actor" (Haberman 1988, 36). In dance, the (female) performer takes on the role of the *nayika* (heroine) who sees, touches, converses and sometimes has intercourse (or

at least, prepares for such event) with a divinity, most often Krishna—four modes of engaging with the divine that were highlighted by Hemadri (*KD*, in Pollock 2016, 289). There is something powerful, says seasoned performer Lata Pada, in having the liberty to "chide the divine," in being able to share an intimate relationship that unfolds passionate moments of devotional love (6 July 2018).

If one were to transpose Vopadeva's as well as Rupa and Jiva Goswamin's theories of *bhaktirasa* and the *rasik* experience of devotees to classical Indian dancers, performers might well be experiencing rasa themselves as they take on the role of devotees—just as the Gaudiya Vaishnava followers experience rasa when taking on the role of the paradigmatic characters of Krishna's world in Braj. In a similar fashion, the rigorous practice required by dance – a practice often named "*riyaz*" in the musical and performing universe of India – is not unlike the rigorous meditative practice (*sadhana*) of the Gaudiya Vaishnava devotees (*bhaktas*). Both ask practitioners to generate foundational emotions (*sthayibhavas*) that can ultimately lead to rasa with the help of a rigorous practice and sustained participation.

Yet, the unending debate between the value of the erotic and the elevation of devotional love is still pertinent in current dance practice. The Indian dance reform of the twentieth century (see Appendix 4) is at the source of this quarrel, with Rukmini Devi Arundale – the founder of Chennai's Kalakshetra and key member of the Theosophical Society – and T. Balasaraswati – a *devadasi* descendant and "one of the only hereditary voices in the dance 'revival'" (Soneji 2012a, xxxii) – as its leading figures. Balasaraswati advocated for a vision of *shringara* that, although erotic in nature, acted as a catalyst between humans and gods: she indeed insisted that "the flesh, which is considered to be an enemy of the spirit, having been made a vehicle of the divine in the discipline of the dance, shringara, which is considered to be the greatest obstacle to spiritual realisation, has itself, we shall realise, become an instrument for uniting the dancer with Divinity" (Balasaraswati 2012, 200).

In contrast, Rukmini Devi saw *shringararasa* as a vulgar depiction of love and rather preferred to talk of *bhaktirasa*. Although she believed that *shringara* was spiritual and devotional in nature, she argued that because "Indian dance [is] spiritual, it is suited only for spiritual expression"—which for her meant prioritizing *bhaktirasa*, devotional love, over carnal love, *shringararasa* (Devi Arundale 2012, 195). As demonstrated by Janet O'Shea, Devi drove a wedge between the erotic and the devotional "by distancing the dance form's devotional expression from the intricacies of *sringara bhakti* to a more straightforward celebration of gods and heroes, representing the dance form's religiosity in a potentially more respectable way" (2007, 47). Yet, traditional portrayals of *shringara* favoured clearly sexually-oriented depictions and metaphors to express love, whether romantic or devotional, as was the case in late nineteethn and early twentieth century performances of *javalis* (dance items similar to *padams*, but erotic in nature) by *devadasis* in private salons (Soneji 2012b, chap. 2).

When I addressed the topic of *shringara* and *abhinaya* training at Kalakshetra with Punthambekar (who is a Kalakshetra alumna), she stood up from the couch she was sitting on in her apartment where we were conducting the interview and gave me an elaborate, almost rehearsed

speech[68] on the history of the *devadasis* and the ways in which Rukmini Devi Arundale transformed this art form, which "had kind of lost its value and its sanctity." Devi made Bharatanatyam a "linear" dance form that reflected temple sculptures, and transformed *shringararasa*, the erotic, into *bhaktirasa*, devotional love. Devi, said Punthambekar, "brought a lot of spirituality" to the dance form. Yet, this fine distinction between the erotic and the spiritual in dance is "*extremely* tricky" she says, "because most of the compositions," like *ashtapadis*, "are all [about] love," which *is* erotic and has explicit depictions of lovemaking. Nevertheless, Devi did not focus her choreographies on these erotic elements but instead on the spiritual bond that was formed between the dancer and God (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original).

Most collaborators who studied outside of Kalakshetra, like Neena Jayarajan and Lata Pada, viewed *bhaktirasa* as part of a "spiritual" or "respectful" context. The rendition of devotional love in *abhinaya* thus revolves around this idea of respect for something that is higher or more powerful than humans. Yet, it also involves an intimate connection with this divine entity, as argued by Pada.

> Spirituality is also about having a deeply personal relationship with the divine. What I mean by that, is having the liberty or the capacity to… chide the divine, saying: "Why [do] you ignore me? What have I done that you need to pile all these miseries on me? What more do you need from me? What more should I be? What more good do I need to do?" You know. […] So that yearning, that *dissatisfaction*—there's always the dissatisfaction, you know, and that dissatisfaction goes away when you are united with the divine, when you die. It'll never go away before that. So spirituality is having that one-on-one conversation with the divine. And making it [personal], personalizing it. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original)

The Gaudiya Vaishnava's understanding of *bhaktirasa,* like Pada's description, is one that is closely linked to a similar intimate relationship with the divine which is fostered through eroticism and erotic desire. Today's more "direct" rendition of *bhaktirasa*, in contrast, generally distances itself from such erotic sentiment (especially in the Kalakshetra-style Bharatanatyam—but not so much in Odissi). This modern debate clearly illustrates William Reddy's remark on the primacy of "love-lust" in Indian thought, which "constitutes a remarkable mode of emotional experience that defies the common sense Western distinction between love and lust and exposes the ethnocentric bias that can easily creep into Western theorizations of desire" (2012, 255). As such, Reddy states that "erotic temple ritual [performed by *devadasis*] in the twelfth century was just the tip of an iceberg, the very public enactment of a broadly shared common sense about sexual practices in relation to spiritual power and emotion" (283). It notably reflected the respect and ideal for *shringararasa* and its transformative potential as a longing for association.

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68. Punthambekar, who specified a few times that she had "OCD," was somewhat nervous about our interview. She had asked for a list of (tentative) questions beforehand to prepare for the interview. This might explain why she has answered this question in such a "rehearsed" way—she probably thought of this question prior to our conversation and prepared an answer accordingly.

Pedagogical Approaches to Rasa and Abhinaya: Guru-Shishya Versus Institutional Setting

The teaching of *abhinaya* (and rasa) can contrast significantly depending on the pedagogical context. If we take the *guru-shishya* (teacher-student) example – like that of *abhinaya* teacher Kalanidhi Narayanan with my collaborators Neena Jayarajan, Nova Bhattacharya and Lata Pada – versus the training offered at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai – as was experienced by collaborators Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar and Rajesh Chenthy – the approach to *abhinaya* is quite distinct. Although both contexts will address the training of *abhinaya* by studying various dance items like *padams*, *javalis* and *ashtapadis* (erotic stories from the *Gitagovinda*), which often focus on the rasa of romantic love, the one-on-one teaching style will put great emphasis on character development, context, and subtlety in the expression of emotions, which are often performed through metaphors[69]. On the other hand, the institutional context, while also looking at character development, context and translation of the sung poem, will pay more attention to theory and history, as it will sometimes adopt more literal interpretations of lyrics and emotions. Institutional settings – in which I include institutions such as Kalakshetra, university dance departments and registered Canadian classical Indian dance schools like Sampradaya (Lata Pada) and Nrtyakala (Menaka Thakkar) – have the additional challenge of adapting "a medium of enculturation to a medium of critical thinking" (Kaktikar 2016, 114) by assessing and evaluating students, all the while teaching to a greater number of students at a time.

i. The Institutional Setting in India and Beyond

Aadya Kaktikar highlights how "[i]n India, inspite of more than five thousand years of civilization, [the] relationship of traditional dance with the past is today, regulated by a few hundred years of colonial rule" (Kaktikar 2016, 127). She is referring to the twentieth century revival of classical Indian dance by a number of reformers, including Kalakshetra's founder Rukmini Devi Arundale, who codified and canonized "classical" arts and standardized performative traditions. Kaktikar insists that Devi taught dance "in a structured manner to get recognized outcomes (establishment of a *gharana* or school of dance), favoring precision, repetition and demonstration of acquired knowledge (recognized by numerous government grants and awards)," hence reinforcing the essence of Indian culture and adapting to Western standards of knowledge recognition (115).

Kaktikar is right in affirming that the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai is a prime example of the revivalists' success in adapting traditional Indian dance to Western scrutiny while elevating the "essence" of Indian artistic culture. Rukmini Devi's previous training in Western ballet prompted her to adapt *dasi attam* to Western standards by deconstructing it into teachable categories that were inspired by the *NS*. While the Kalakshetra teaching methods have expanded over the years – influenced by various artistic directors like Leela Samson who introduced more theoretical teachings and dedicated *abhinaya* classes, or Priyadarsini Govind who was criticized because she was the first director of the institute with no prior training at Kalakshetra – the dance school preserved most of Devi's foundational curriculum and has hence transformed into a proper *gharana*, a "hereditary" dance style of its own. Indeed, collaborator Samyuktha Punthambekar

69. In the traditional training of Indian classical dance – as based on the historicity and embodied knowledge of generations previous to the revival of classical styles during the 20th century in India – emotions, and in particular desire and love, are often portrayed through metaphors rather than literally. For example, rather than directly communicating her desire for her lover to the audience, the *nayika* may imply such passion by showing a bee pollenating a flower.

acknowledges that the Kalakshetra style is known and celebrated for its sharp and energetic *nritta* technique, but not necessarily for its *abhinaya*: "a lot of students, what they do now is they go to *abhinaya* experts to actually learn the concept of *abhinaya*" after they receive their diploma from Kalakshetra, she noted (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017). One the one hand, the teaching of *abhinaya* at Kalakshetra centres around a certain exaggeration of emotional portrayal as instructed in Kathakali—which is also taught at the school. On the other hand, the training of *abhinaya* is done in a way that reflects Devi's approach to love depictions, which are geared towards devotional and romantic portrayals as opposed to more carnal and erotic renditions.

Kalakshetra still strived to replicate (more or less successfully) the *guru-shishya parampara,* the one-on-one teacher to student learning tradition, but in a more structured manner. The holistic teaching provided – dance training alongside music and craft learning, and living on campus at all times surrounded by teachers and fellow students, thus constantly exposing one to the arts – is one way of mirroring such tradition. However, other elements – such as the introduction of theory and readings from the *NS* and the *AD*, the teaching of all movement vocabulary, as well as group compositions, dance dramas and the evaluation of students individually throughout their training – diverge from the master-disciple path.

In many ways, Kalakshetra also works as "a military school" with a strict daily schedule (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017). A typical day starts around 7:00 in the morning with students waking up, taking a quick shower and going to the dinner hall for a controlled, healthy breakfast and morning prayers. This is followed at 8:30 by a communal prayer under the gigantic banyan tree that is featured at the centre of the 99-acre campus. After the prayers, students have two blocks of teaching: one in an elective discipline (theory, music, etc.) and one in their main discipline (dance). They have lunch at 11:30 and go back to class at 1:00 in the afternoon with an elective class, a theory class and an elective dance class (folk dance, Kathakali, etc.). Students have another break from 4:30 to 5:30 for *tiffin* – snacks with coffee and tea – which is followed by a two-hour slot for dance practice. After their dinner, from 7:30 to 8:30, students usually work on their theory or music assignments up until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. Part of that discipline also translates in a strict dress code. Female dance students, for instance, need to make sure they have 30 pleats on their *sari*, a *dupatta* that would go over the shoulder and be tightly fitted around the waist, centre hair partition and combed hair, wear bangles, chains, earrings as well as the customary *bindi* on their forehead. Punthambekar explained that these requirements were in fact relevant, since jewelry, for example, served as markers that allowed teachers "to see the shape" of the students' body from afar and give corrections accordingly (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017).

The Kalakshetra training is arduous—not only in terms of the schoolwork and arts practice, but also in regard to the heat, as Chennai's weather rarely drops under 30 degrees Celsius. In fact, many students drop out during their first year of training because they cannot withstand the heat, explained Chenthy, another Kalakshetra alumnus. "[I]f we are not dedicated, we cannot survive in Kalakshetra," he assured me. Students spend all days – including free time – practicing. Since they are so involved in their training, they are unable to realize all the benefits they are receiving from it—it is only after their hard training that Kalakshetra alumni "get the fruit" of their work: "Now, we are tasting it. […]. That result, now I'm getting it," explained Chenthy (27 Oct. 2018).

One other pedagogical characteristic at Kalakshetra is that the training follows the conventionalized format of a Bharatanatyam recital: from *alarippu* to *jatiswaram*, *shabdam*,

varnam, *padam* and *tillana.* By having students learn examples from these segments in that order, teachers can first focus on training technique (*nritta*) before moving gradually to expressive dance (*abhinaya*). As such, students focus solely on learning steps, hand gestures and other body movements during the first two years of their education at Kalakshetra. It is only during the third year that they start working on small, more technical items like the *alarippu, jatiswaram* and *shabdam. Abhinaya* items like *varnams*, *padams, ashtapadis* and *javalis* are only taught during the fourth and final year of their training (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018). Students also study excerpts of the *NS* that pertain to *abhinaya* as well as the whole *AD* prior to putting this knowledge into action. "So once we understood the theoretical aspects," says Punthambekar, "then we would practice with the *navarasa* and then we would learn [dance items]" (2 Oct. 2017).

While in North America, this austere form of training is not necessarily common in dance schools – as students train for no more than three or four hours a week – there are some curricula and structures in place that reflect Kalakshetra's teaching style. At Lata Pada's Sampradaya dance school in Mississauga for instance, teachers follow the ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) Bharatanatyam dance training, a curriculum that was created in the UK and that enforces a strict, standardized learning program to students. This syllabus includes a yearly evaluation conducted by external examiners. With this system, students learn the foundations and vocabulary that relate to *abhinaya* and dance movements as laid down in the *NS* and the *AD*: "it's all part of their course" says Lata Pada, which includes instruction on the *ashtanayika* and the *nayikabedha* (classifications of heroines), rasas, *bhavas*, *anubhavas* and all four types of *abhinaya* (L. Pada, 6 July 2018). Students also learn rhythm (*tala*), the recitation of *sollukattu* (rhythmic syllables), singing, the names of musical scales (*raga*), and so on. However, *abhinaya* is introduced earlier than at Kalakshetra through small narratives or *shlokas* that teaches students the basics of expressive dance. This overall training, in which dance items are also inserted little by little, leads to the final stage of the *arangetram*, when the student is generally around 16 or 17 years old. At that time, as the training focuses on *abhinaya*, group classes are replaced by one-on-one sessions with a teacher.

The institutional setting has an additional challenge that does not pertain to the *guru-shishya* tradition: the delineation of space. Whether in Chennai like the Kalakshetra institute or in Mississauga as the Sampradaya dance studio, these dance schools oftentimes clash with their surrounding environment. Hence, they recurrently rely on visual symbols – often Hindu in nature, but also related to Indian culture in general – to create a clear demarcation between the "everyday space" and the "dance space." In diasporic dance institutions like Sampradaya, similar rules are observed. When they enter the space, students are exposed to "visual symbols" – a statue of dancing Shiva (*Nataraja*), a miniature painting of the god Krishna and his lover Radha, or a garland of flower that decorates the studio's door frame – that create a clear division between the world on the street and the universe of Indian classical dance. Students must respect the same dress code as they would at Kalakshetra as well. These symbols are not religious per se, but rather "honorary" or "custodians […] of the art form" in that they act as "visual representations of what these children will study about." As a space that emanates a form of "sacredness," the dance studio thus acts a "comfort zone" that helps students connect "to the devotional aspects" of the lyrics from the poems that are danced—which most often come from great saint poets like Tulsidas, Mirabai, Kabir or Tyagaraja. The recitation of the introductory and concluding prayer (*namaskar*) at each dance lesson – during which students ask forgiveness to Mother Earth and thanks for letting them step on her, and honor the gods, their teacher, the (often invisible) musicians and the (often absent)

audience (see Appendix 3) – also works as a space demarcation between the everyday and the performative (L. Pada, 6 July 2018).

The Guru-shishya Setting and Indian Dance Pedagogy

In contrast with the institutional setting, the *guru-shishya*'s pedagogy is very personal and adapted to each student's affective capacity and personality. Students live with their *guru* for a long period of time, both for their dance training and as part of members of the household. By helping around the house, students offer their teacher a remuneration in the form of practical help. Samyuktha Punthambekar keeps fond memories of the first part of her dance training as a child in the *guru-shishya* setting, in which special bonds are created between master and disciple: "In a *guru-shishya* relationship, there is no payment, so when you do something, you do something… because your *guru* tells you or asks you. […] And it's a bond: it's like being with your mother and father, right. They are the first people who ever taught you to walk and do your first dance footsteps" (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017).

This form of pedagogy is certainly demanding and very rigorous, but also rewarding. The teaching pedagogy usually centres around practice and less so theory, as opposed to the institutional setting. It is "less talk, more do" as pointed out by Neena Jayarajan: students are expected to do what their *guru* tells them and never question back. One of the first time she was exposed to this type of dynamic was at the Nrityakala dance school in Toronto where she was learning Bharatanatyam, as a guest teacher in *kalaripuyattu*, a form of martial art from Kerala, came to the studios.

> He would be like: "[*speaking slowly, in a thick Indian accent*] OK, do." And we're like [*looking around, not knowing what to do*] "OK…" You know, we're like [*puzzled look*], "I don't know!" We're not allowed to ask questions, you know! [*chuckling*] And if we ask him "Oh, do you mean…?", he is like: "Tssss [*inhaling/hissing, disapproving look*]…" You know, "Why are you asking me so many questions, you crazy Canadians?!" you know [*laughing*]! […] we are more of a "cerebral" generation, you know. We need more words! [*chuckling*] Even though it's a dance form. (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017)

Yet, Punthambekar explains that this *guru-shishya* relationship is not so much based on power relations as it is on respect. "You respect the person" she says, whatever their age, because that person "is coming from experience." This authority has nothing to do with arrogance or hierarchy, but with experience; and questioning instructions would thus result in doubting the *guru*'s years of experience and knowledge. By following orders without questioning, students are therefore showing respect to their teacher (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017 & 4 Dec. 2017).

Such dynamic between master and pupil can nevertheless lead to very stressful situations for students. Punthambekar remembers how, when she was still a child, she accidentally broke her *guru*'s incense holder: "I remember, my teacher Nirupama looking at me so sternly and after that, I remember my dancing improving." The same thing happened at Kalakshetra with a particularly strict dance *guru* who would constantly shout at Punthambekar because she was not able to master a particularly difficult movement sequence. "She was a tyrant" she recalled, and she would get "*so mad*, so mad" to the point where she would hold her heart and say: "Woah, woah, this girl!" in Tamil. In fact, for the first six months of her training, her teacher would call her Sangeeta instead of Samyuktha—but Punthambekar was too terrified to correct her. However, one day, she found

the courage to confront her teacher before she left campus and asked her to stop shouting at her during classes. "She was so furious!!" said Punthambekar, "I think in her life nobody, *nobody* must have said anything [like that] to her [*laughing*]!" Her teacher was stunned, she went on, but she could "see fire through her eyes." The *guru* asked: "Do you want my corrections?" to which Punthambekar said "Yes, teacher." Then, the teacher put an end to the conversation: "[*Shouting*] Then take my shoutings!" (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original)

Yet, Punthambekar gives credit to this particularly stern *guru* for most of her success at Kalakshetra. This pedagogy gets reflected in Kalakshetra students later, as Rajesh Chenthy confessed during our interview that when he teaches to his own students in Canada, he does not tell them directly that they are doing good work, because otherwise he feels they will stop performing well (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018). But to Neena Jayarajan, who grew up in Canada and has not been exposed to this teaching method, such stern pedagogy ended up making her very nervous, even scared, when she travelled to India to study under her Odissi *guru* Sujata Mohapatra. She recalled one morning in a common class, when she and her fellow Canadian classmate Shanthini were practicing a dance sequence along with other students, including two or three male students. Her *guru* was "walking around, looking around while we were doing it—and then she would take that stick and *whack* the male students on the leg!" The boys started whining, "but they were not upset by it; they were, like, 'come on, stop hitting!'" As Jayarajan and her fellow classmate were terrified, hoping they would not get the same treatment, the teacher spoke in front of the whole class and said:

> Neena and Shanthini, […] all you people who are coming from Canada, coming from France, […] all of you, don't be afraid of my stick. […] You all listen to my words; but these people *only* listen to my stick! […] You people are coming from Canada, staying in that hotel, taking auto-rickshaw, and you are here 15 minutes early; these people, living in my house, came 15 minutes late to the class. Well. Stick for them, only stick! They only listen to the stick! […] Don't worry, I'm not coming at the stick with you! [I] know that, if I tell you not to do that again, you're never gonna do it again! […] I have told them maybe 100 times—still, [they're] doing same thing! (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original)

The *guru-shishya* format also makes for a dance education that goes beyond the dance studio. For instance, character development does not just happen in the formal dancing space: it also gets deepened during informal discussions, as pointed out by two of my collaborators, Supriya Nayak and Julie Beaulieu. Nayak, who currently trains under two *gurus* – a mother who is not performing anymore by only teaches, and her daughter, both based in Delhi – told me how the older of the two would spend a great amount of time inside and outside of dance classes talking about her passed husband—to the point where Nayak would barely dance during classes.

> It was not about the dance at all, you know: it was about partner relationships. She just wanted to tell me the deep story of love. […] And I slowly realized I better keep an hour to talk to her [during each class] because she actually teaches me something [*laughing*]. She just wants to talk! [*Laughing*] And she would be telling me all of these [things], like, just memories of this husband that she had lost 30 years back. […] There is some learning happening there that I can see in *srngara*; but I certainly thought it was connected to what she was teaching. (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017)

In a similar fashion, Julie Beaulieu confessed that when she studies under her *guru* in India, she always learns new, interesting elements about these deep relationships between characters during moments outside of the dance studio: "[My *guru*] rarely speaks during classes, except when it's time for *chai* [tea]. That's when we go get some cookies, we make the *chai*, we sit down, and then we talk a little bit, you know. 'Oh right, Krishna did this, he also did that; but you know, Krishna also did this.'" [70] This information, which contributes to the character development of the poem, is then taken back to the dance studio and applied to her *abhinaya* (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017).

Hence, the *guru-shishya* tradition contrasts significantly with the institutional approach to dance when it comes to theoretical training. Whereas institutions generally address the theory of rasa, dance movements and *abhinaya* directly in their teaching, *gurus* rarely discuss theory directly. Nevertheless, this does not mean that traditional teachers are not familiar with theory. Although "up until now, it's been segregated: on one side, you have theorists, and on the other, practitioners, and each of them looks at the other suspiciously," as pointed out by Jonathan Voyer[71], Beaulieu argues that traditional teachers are well aware of the theoretical foundations of dance, but in different terms.

> Theory and practice live in separate worlds, so [my *guru*] doesn't have the academic background when it comes to Indian aesthetic theory, right, that's for sure. […] [but] I feel that it's still there, because… we work on characters, we work with emotions, we work on states, so we work on all this structure… well, what we call *bhava*, *anubhava*, right, etc., and… […] in the end, I feel that all this theorizing is there, but isn't named as such with [my *guru*][72] (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)

Although she has been introduced to the theoretical aspects of dance in her training, Jayarajan understands the value of focusing on the *making* of emotions over their theory as well, and knows the importance of focusing on the relationships between characters over the abstract concepts of rasa theory: "I think that's the only way that should ever be taught," she confesses, "beyond the theory of it. The theory is just to know the words. But in terms of use, the words are just words to put in a theory work [*laughing*]" (1 Aug. 2017). However, putting theory into action without naming it can lead to a feeling of disconnect between theory and practice for dancers, as was the case for Supriya Nayak during her former training with her initial *guru*: "we would do what is the theory section [of the class]: do the *hastas*, we would do the hands, you know, all of that. […] But I always found that a *bit* abstract… you know? Like, I knew there was a connection, but I did not really [realize it] [*chuckling*]…" As a result, Nayak now feels that a return to theory in her practice – via readings of the *NS* and *AD*, for instance – helps her reconnect theory and

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70. My translation. Original quote: "[Ma *guru*] parle peu pendant les cours, à l'exception de, quand c'est le temps du *chai*: fait que là, on va se chercher des biscuits, on se fait un petit *chai*, on s'assoit, puis là on parle un peu plus, t'sais. 'Ah oui, Krishna, il avait fait ça, il avait fait ça, mais t'sais, Krishna avait ci.'"

71. My translation. Original quote: "jusqu'à maintenant, puis encore… c'est très séparé: d'un côté les théoriciens puis d'un côté les praticiens, puis un regarde l'autre avec une méfiance."

72. My translation. Original quote: "c'est très, c'est des mondes séparés, donc elle a pas le *background* académique en lien avec la théorie esthétique indienne là, ça c'est clair. […] j'me dis c'est quand même là, parce que, euh… on travaille sur des personnages, on travaille sur des émotions, on travaille sur des états, donc on travaille sur toute, sur toute cette construction, euh… bon, qu'on nomme *bhāva*, *anubhava*, là, etc., et… […] dans les faits, j'ai l'impression que toute ce… cette théorisation-là, elle existe, mais elle est pas nommée comme telle avec [ma *guru*] […]."

practice and better understand what she has been dancing for years (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original).

Resistance and Contrasts in the Diaspora

One should note however that teaching theory directly, as is done in the institutional setting, is not sufficient for students to learn how to *move*. In fact, the present realities of classical Indian dance training in the diaspora demands that children be taught not only the theory of dance and the physical representation of emotions, but that such embodiment be informed by context, in the hopes that body movements and gestures will become more genuine. Indeed, when key features of the original context of dance are blurred or lost because of distance – as is the case in the diaspora – one must learn to embody a cultural context in addition to movements.

Teaching how to enact devotion (*bhakti*) in dancing, for instance, represents a major challenge for dance teachers in the diaspora as well. Finding parallels with the children's current situation and focusing on the respectful aspect of devotion is key when addressing devotion in dance, says Jayarajan: "even if they're not particularly religious, they do have a concept of God, not necessarily knowing what that is, and it being kind of up there, somewhere [*chuckling*]! And someone you can't touch or talk to, [*chuckling*], you know?" She also gave the example of the *hastas* required to show grinding sandalwood—a gesture that is certainly absent in a North American context, but that "you don't need to explain in India, obviously" because "they know exactly what we're talking about," whereas children at Nrtyakala do not necessarily understand the reference (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017).

The embodiment of Indian ways of moving and emoting can thus become a challenge for North American Bharatanatyam teachers like Lata Pada. Teachers must acknowledge the situation and work around it to allow students to "embody India." When she teaches *abhinaya* and *nritya* to children, Pada reminds them:

> Remember that what you're interpreting about the composition, the dance interpretation, it's always of another context: it's another time, another place, another kind of society, another kind of rules and protocol for the way men and women behave. I know you can't relate to it, or you don't know what it feels like going to the village well and drawing water. You won't know what it is to […] churn buttermilk to get butter out of it. You won't know what it is to physically put the *rangoli*[73] outside, you know, the decorations outside the homes. […] You won't know what it is to go to the river to bathe, you know. You won't know how to balance pots and pots of water on your head, or pots and pots of buttermilk on the head. There is no Krishna, who is sort of ambushing you at every point. That's not the kind of society we live in. Not even in India today. But this is the way society works. And so you've got to transport yourself back into another era altogether. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

73. *Rangolis*, also called *kolams* in South India, are complex designs applied directly on the ground in front of the house front door using rice flour (white and/or colored). Women are generally in charge of drawing the *kolam* every morning and, sometimes, every evening as well. The drawings are erased at the end of the day and redone the next morning.

Nevertheless, "embodying India" is certainly possible for Bharatanatyam dancers. Jayarajan has noticed a difference between Indian-born and non-resident Indians (NRIs) and other foreign students in enacting both emotions and gestures that are quite instinctive for resident Indians. Yet, as she was observing foreign students do *abhinaya* segments during her Odissi classes in India, Jayarajan told me that

> it wouldn't look like it came from a place of imagination—it came from a place of embodiment. It was always so impressive to me. Because there are people who are just being taught to imagine and you can see right away. That's when the NRIs […] are criticized. "Look, the way they do it, you can tell they don't understand." Whereas there are some who don't, they've been [learning it] from a place where it's a full cultural embodiment understanding. And maybe it's because they came all the way to India to learn it and they *lived* the culture, and kind of had the context. (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original)

This is precisely why, oftentimes, parents will force their children, especially young girls, to learn dance forms like Bharatanatyam: the goal is to embody a culture that may feel foreign to them in a diasporic context.

> [The kids,] they don't even know the clothes that they're wearing are Indian, you know, they're just totally… you know, zero cultural context for them. Some of them probably don't even know they're Indian, you know. [*Chuckling*] […] And many, now the new generation, they're all mixed, they're like all mixed kids. Tons of mixed kids whose Indian mom is hoping to instill something, you know! [*Laughing*] (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017)

To someone that does not originally belong to the Indian culture, or that was trained in other Western dance forms, the training of *abhinaya* can thus feel strange, out of place. Julie Beaulieu, who is both trained in contemporary dance and in Bharatanatyam, had this type of experience when she started training with her *guru* in India.

> At the beginning, it was… I'd say, a discomfort. There was a certain unease […] in *abhinaya* segments […]. Because, it's true, as a dancer trained in contemporary dance, I haven't worked with the face [facial expressions], right—the face is something absent [in contemporary dance]… […] And I felt a little bit like a clown, in a certain way. […] or a little bit like… an impostor, you know? And I found it funny. […] it was a lot of trial and error, until [my *guru*] would say: "OK, yes, that's good. This, not so much." It's a learning process. And gradually, and quite quickly in fact, this sort of… strangeness faded away. [74] (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)

74. My translation. Original quote: "Au début c'était… je vais dire, l'inconfort. Il y avait un certain inconfort quand… mais c'était présent, pour moi, dans les moments d'*abhinaya* : quand j'avais à apprendre des… [personnages]… Parce que, effectivement, moi j'ai pas, comme danseuse contemporaine, travaillé avec le visage, hein; le visage, c'est comme une chose absente… […] Puis je me sentais un peu… un peu clown, d'une certaine manière, t'sais. Puis c'est que… t'sais, je me sentais… clown ou un peu… imposteur, t'sais? Mais, puis ça me faisait rigoler. Puis t'sais, c'était beaucoup d'essais et erreurs, jusqu'à temps que [ma *guru*], elle me dit : "OK, oui, ça c'est juste. Ça, ce l'est moins". C'est un apprentissage. Puis tranquillement, ça s'est quand même estompé assez rapidement cette espèce de… d'étrangeté, là."

The same can be said about the perception of dancers trained in Western technique towards those coming from a conventionalized style like Bharatanatyam. The automatic triggers of the body in classical Indian dance – that everlasting smile, that stylized way of walking, moving and gesturing – are so engrained in the classical artist's body that contemporary and modern dancers often find them ungenuine. Hence, classical dancers, says Bhattacharya, are often accused of not being able to portray "pedestrian" or "naturalistic" ways of moving. But she also explains that it is once the dancer "strives for *rasa*" that she is able to pursue "something that is greater than just doing steps and movement." In fact, she argues, the "embodied performance" of classically-trained performers – their ability to perform movement rather than just portraying them in a "pedestrian" way – predisposes them "to be looking for that greater moment" of rasa (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018).

Classical Indian dance students in North America can become not only resistant to what they may perceive as "unrealistic" movements and expressions, but most significantly to Indian ethics (often from a different time) that does not sit well with their current situation as part of Canadian society. Character development of Indian protagonists, whether humans or deities, is "the most challenging aspect of teaching" in the diaspora, says Pada, because "students are in a bit of a vacuum over here." Teachers have the task of transmitting students "the sociocultural issues" and "the aesthetic, and the kind of ethos that is of being" that underpin seventeenth- or eighteenth-century devotional poems. Women of that time were, in fact, homemakers or lived pastoral lives, "like the *gopikas* surrounding Krishna" whose lives revolve around the "rearing the cows, milking them, and then going to the market to sell the milk and the buttermilk." Teaching young Canadian students about eighteenth-century Indian women in love is another titanic endeavor for teachers.

> While a woman is in love with a person, she's pining for him and so she's decorating herself. […] Why did women pine for men? Let's look at the society that they lived in: there was no direct contact between males and females. […] they had to be very discreet and not noticed by the rest of society. So that discreteness itself causes a particular manner in which you hold yourself, in which you express it. Love relationships always meant that the man was the more gallant, you know, sort of… the one who always took the lead, whereas the woman was the shy one, who sort of was perhaps submissive in some cases. How do we do teach that to diaspora children, who firstly, have no context, and secondly, they question the gender imbalance? […] "I don't have time for that guy: if he's late, he's late! I'm not gonna wait around for him," you know. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

Therefore, it can prove quite difficult for teachers to separate the poems' initial Indian context from the status of women in Canadian society. Nova Bhattacharya went through a similar resistance during a creation lab with dancers trained in Bharatanatyam and others in Euro-American techniques. Participants were taught a *padam* which triggered a "feminist hysteria." Bhattacharya had to justify her approach: "we're not headed towards subjugating women on stage! I'm trying to get us to understand this *technique* in order to play with it in the studio! [*laughing*]" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original).

While students and dancers may resist the seemingly inherent gender biases of Indian narratives, they are also part of a pedagogical system in which ways of learning are very distinct from Indian systems of knowledge sharing. All collaborators who teach in North America have noticed these obstacles: whether students are too impatient and not willing to put enough effort to

learn dance (R. Chenthy); have no discipline and ask too many questions (S. Punthambekar); or don't understand the complexity of Indian languages in poems, which makes the teaching more difficult (S. Nayak). In reality, North American students are indeed encouraged to ask questions, engage with their teachers and learn the theoretical aspects of practice before putting them into action; whereas Indian pedagogical traditions teach students to respect their teacher, who has more knowledge of the subject than they do—which leads them to ingest what is being said and taught without any questions. Supriya Nayak provided an example of this contrast from her teaching practice in Toronto, as she was trying to teach her young student how to portray a bird in hand gestures; but the girl simply did not understand the logic behind the *hasta*. She said: "You know, you're telling me to take my hands separately and then bring them together. Where is the bird?" to which Nayak had no choice but to answer: "That's a really good question!" She then told me: "and you can trust a child growing up in Canada to ask that. [*Laughing*] […] they ask many more questions" than they would in India (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017).

If North American students ask so many questions, Punthambekar claims, it's because they have a very different approach to learning: "in the West, questioning is a culture here. You are expected to question, you have to ask questions, people like questions; whereas in traditional Indian culture, you don't ask questions." And this is also true of dance as a whole, which is only a hobby in North America – where students go to dance classes one or two evenings a week – as opposed to a way of life in India, where students dance everyday: "it's not like the way India views dance. By that, I'm saying… it's a *natural* thing [in India]: it's like going out for dinners here. It's like going out for a vacation here. Going to dance class is part of life there" (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original). Rajesh Chenthy also understood this early on after moving to Canada: "here, the lifestyle is entirely different: they have to work, after work they're all tired. […] [or] they have school and they have many activities to do" (27 Oct. 2018). Because the relationship to dance and to teachers is different, it can come as a shock when students do not treat their practice as seriously as their *guru* would wish, as Punthambekar experienced.

> I remember the first call that I got from one of my students. It was a [voice mail], and it exactly was like this: "Hi Samyuktha, I can't come to class today because I'm going to New York with my family for shopping." And… First of all, in my head, I was like: "How *dare* you call the teacher and say that you can't come to class?!" For me, it stopped there. "Then, you have the *audacity* to tell me that you are going to frickin' New York for shopping?!" Right? [*chuckling*] It just blew my mind! And my mother, every single day on Skype used to always say: "Don't shout at the kids, they'll call 9-1-1!" And I used to be so worked up every single time [*laughing*] to class, and I would be tongue-tied, I didn't know what to say! (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original)

As a result, many of my collaborators had to work around and adapt to this new approach to learning dance in North America. For Punthambekar, this adaptation translated through "explaining more" what dance and its context were about: she started using her grand-father's techniques of giving students actual reasoning, as to why they did what they did. For instance, she had to explain to students who would not wear their *bindi* to class that this mark on their forehead was like a door that locked up all of their "amazing, magical knowledge" and kept it safe from burglars. "And [*snapping her fingers*] that was the day where everybody in that company started wearing a *bindi*, including the teachers, including the parents, even though they had to just pick-up and drop their kids" said Punthambekar proudly (2 Dec. 2017). She further explained that when

she teaches, she brings "a lot of scientific aspects to it," like discussing "yoga and how different *chakras* are actually opened-up when you do certain movements, and how, when you do *mudras*, […] your nerve-endings actually open-up and then, there's more blood circulation. So when you say all these things, the kids actually *get* it." But there are still limits as to how much teachers can explain dance elements to students, as certain things are simply "culturally-bound": "you just have to do it because that's… that's what it is! It is a twelfth-century dance, so we don't [always] have explanations as to why we do certain things the way we do [them]" (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017).

Feeling Rasa: The Physical Experience of Rasa in the Dancer

In the previous section, my collaborators have highlighted the necessity of mastering the technical art of *abhinaya* and to feed their dance with embodied (emotional) knowledge from their daily lives in order to reach an authentic performance in which both dancer and audience can experience rasa. But how precisely does *abhinaya* – the expression of emotions via codified facial expressions and body movements – feed into the artist's experience of rasa? How is it that *not seeing*, but rather *feeling* – both emotionally and kinaesthetically – and *hearing* – perhaps even smelling or tasting – can lead one to experience rasa?

Kathak dancer Pallabi Chakravorty is a leading figure in dance scholarship on the performer's experience of rasa, on which she almost exclusively focuses. She states that the experience of rasa molds her identity as an Indian woman through *riyaz*, the rigorous training of the body through repetition in Kathak[75]. The element of repetitive and rigorous practice is a recurring theme in Chakravorty's life story and performing career. She especially emphasizes the practice of *riyaz* in the embodied nature of devotion. "Through weaving the rhythms, melody and poetic imageries, the kathak dancer is gradually connected to the ritual memories that are deeply inscribed in her body through *riyaz*," she argues (Chakravorty 2009b, 96). In fact, the dancer perceives and feels a ritual dimension to this type of practice leading to habituation (102). *Riyaz* is the essential moment when "the emotional patterns are imprinted on the dancing body" and during which, little by little, the dancer's body is molded into the sensuous world of dancing and singing ultimately leading to the tasting of "the joy of ecstasy," a synonym of rasa for Chakravorty (102).

Chakravorty's idea of *riyaz* as the focal point where rasa gets inscribed in the body was reflected during my conversation with *santoor* player Jonathan Voyer and Bharatanatyam artist Julie Beaulieu. They both believed that their artistic practice unfolded into a ritualized, repeated exercise that they designated as *riyaz* and as a form of *sadhana* (such as meditative and yogic exercises), but that did not carry any particular religious connotation to them. "The artistic practice in itself, for me, is – if we insert it in the hermeneutic, the analytical grid of religious studies – it's literally a ritual practice, you know, that has its own world of sense"[76] explained Voyer. In the

75. The concept of *riyaz* is not exclusive to Kathak: all other dance-drama traditions also base their training on repetitive and rigorous practice through which the physical, codified expression of emotions is learned prior to the reflection that is put in the actual feeling of those emotions in performance. Bharatanatyam dancer T. Balasaraswati (2012) even compared dance to a form of meditation or yoga, a rigorous physical practice that focuses the mind through the control of body movements and emotions.

76. My translation. Original quote: "Mais la pratique artistique est elle-même, pour moi, une – si on la met dans, t'sais, l'herméneutique, la grille d'analyse des sciences des religions, là – c'est carrément une pratique rituelle, t'sais, qui a son univers de sens."

same way that Lata Pada focused on her dance practice as a form of "meditation" after the loss of her husband and daughters (L. Pada, 6 July 2018), it is during the rigorous practice of music and dance that Voyer and Beaulieu feel that, through hardships and strenuous work, they are able to reach a pleasurable state that makes them feel a deep joy. "*Sadhana* is a path, it's about discipline" says Voyer. "*Riyaz*, that's the word that we also use in Hindustani music: it's a Persian synonym to *sadhana*. In fact, it's also – if we translate it literally – it's 'mortification.' It's really a harsh process, like a *tapas* [austere spiritual practice]"[77] (J. Voyer, 1 Aug. 2017).

Bhattacharya too acknowledges the role of rituals in her own practice and the joy that this rituality brings. Due to various circumstances, her father became the designated Hindu officiant in their Toronto community. As such, Hindu rituals have always been part of Bhattacharya's life—including her parents doing their ritual *puja* in her bedroom, where they had set up their family deities' shrine which would act as an "alarm clock" as they rang the bells every morning. Bhattacharya would stubbornly lay in bed, refusing to get up, which allowed her to see her mother's body there as "her soul was going somewhere in that half hour where she was just in her own place." Every time she goes back to India near the Ganges and sees a woman standing still in the water amongst the city chaos, "just standing there" yet "gone to this place," it reminds her of her mother. This morning ritual instilled in her a sense of peace and well-being that she later on found in dance and that she uses to feed her experiences of rasa: "those moments have always been very strong in my work," she explained, "of finding ways to get the audience to either imagine with the performer or to take that moment and breathe" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018).

The rigorous and repetitious practice of dance results not only in pleasure, but in the experience of rasa as well, which Chakravorty understands as a "multisensorial, heightened aesthetic and emotional state of experiencing pleasure" (2004, 6). She claims that the artist's experience of rasa translates as a kinesthetic feeling by sensing the emotions through one's own body movements. She elaborates on this experience in details.

> The emotions in kathak flow from the rainbow of emotional hues that are built into the *raga-tala* [musical scale/key and rhythm] structures and poetic meters of north Indian music. These various transitory emotions (s*anchari bhavas*) all work to create one deep emotion (*sthayi bhava*). The *bhavas* slowly weave the longing and anticipation that propels the dancer to the moment of perfect union, the moment of ecstasy. This experience is also the aesthetic emotion of *rasa* which unites the erotic with the spiritual, the real time with the transcendental, and the *bhakta* [devotee] with the divine. During a kathak performance the experience is marked by a tremendous release of energy as the dancer, musicians and audience erupt into rapturous union. (Chakravorty 2009b, 102–3)

On a personal level, Chakravorty's performance of Kathak dance is intricately linked to the expression of devotion through *shringararasa* or devotional ecstasy. Dance is a "passionate experience of the sacred" lived through this embodied aesthetic desire of *shringara*, she attests, which allows "expressions of the deepest emotions of mystical love, longing, and separation."

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77. My translation. Original quote: "*Sadhana* […] c'est un chemin, c'est une discipline. *Riyaz*, c'est le terme qu'on utilise nous aussi en musique hindoustani : c'est le synonyme de *sadhana*, sauf que c'est un terme perse qui veut dire ça. En fait, qui est aussi, si on le traduit mot pour mot, c'est "mortification". C'est vraiment un processus difficile, comme un *tapas* là."

Hence, she argues that "the expressive body of the kathak dancer is deeply embedded in the semiotics of anticipation and longing that are integral to the devotional landscape of India," and that, as a result, "the 'performing body' is the canvas for shaping the aesthetic emotions of desire and longing[78] that lead to ecstasy" in Kathak (Chakravorty 2009b, 93). She believes that the dancing body lives and experiences the sacred through the embodiment of the male and the female in *abhinaya*, as well as through the mimesis of *riyaz* and the realisation of ecstasy in heightened moments of aesthetic expressions (94). Likewise, Odissi performer Supriya Nayak states that this austere, repetitive practice in the studio can lead to a "pleasurable space" that brings the artist closer to a divine energy: "I do think there is an element of divinity—[but] I absolutely believe that, […] when you are in a dance studio […], working […] for a number of hours, that doing that practice takes you to a state […] that is connected with an energy" (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017).

In addition, Chakravorty mentions that she can experience rasa deep within herself during moments of *abhinaya* by becoming the character of the episode and thus embodying that character's feelings. In these moments, the feeling of rasa creates "deep self-enjoyment" within her, prompting her to engage further in play and improvisation (Chakravorty 2004, 11). The embodiment of the character's inner emotions can easily lead to a feeling of "being a spectator" to one's own performance, thus allowing the dancer to experience rasa as an "observer" of her own dance. Coorlawala argues that by being both involved and detached during the performance, the dancer can generate "blissful *rasa* of value-free witness consciousness" with the help of this "inner seeing-while-doing" (Coorlawala 2010a, 133). Mississauga-based Bharatanatyam teacher Lata Pada translated this idea of rasa in the "performer as spectator" as a form of out-of-body experience that is only possible in seasoned artists.

> When you get to the stage, you're not yourself. It is, many times, an out-of-body experience. Not many times—it is almost always for the seasoned, mature dancer, it is an out-of-body [experience], you know. You don't come out there saying: "Oh, I made this mistake, I made that"—you don't even remember it. […] Whereas the student is going to come out and say: "I'm so sorry, I made a mistake!" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

Bharatanatyam performer Julie Beaulieu also felt that this experience involved a form of disembodiment, because although the dancer needs to be aware of and deal with her relation to the space – a light spot here, a nail in the floor there, an earing that falls down – she also gets lost in the performance and in the character.

> As a dancer, I always have to deal with [the fact that] I'm on a proscenium stage and there are people in front of me. I should always be aware of that, that's for sure. […] But I love it when all the work I've done with [my *guru*] and all the rehearsing allow me to let myself go within the dance item, to dive into that item and… to lose myself in it, you know. Like,

78. This constant tension in *shringararasa* between love in union (*sambhoga*) and love in separation and longing (*vipralambha*) are central themes in Krishnaite devotion. These intense moments of anticipation before seeing the loved one forge what Chakravorty calls "ecstasy" or, in this case, the rasa of love and devotion through the satisfaction of being united with the Lord, but also through the pain of being in his absence. She highlights that the performing arts are an essential platform for devotees to purge these feelings of longing and desire. As art forms soaking in Krishnaite devotion, Kathak and Odissi focus almost entirely on such scenarios, but other styles like Bharatanatyam also share this (devotional) vision.

> I don't recognize myself anymore. It's not Julie that's there anymore, it's the character, it's something that is bigger than my everyday identity, right.[79] (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)

Pada depicts a similar portrait of rasa in the performer, as she believes that "when you get to the stage, you're not yourself"—and spectators can feel that, as they would confess to her after her performances that they did not see "dancer Lata" perform, but they saw her "as that character that [she] had embodied." There is a separation of consciousness involved, a form of disembodiment from the actual physical body of the performer.

> For me, it's that very heightened sense of aesthetic pleasure, you know—or aesthetic taste, if you want to call it [that way]. It's a very semi-conscious state of being, you know, where you—because you're involved in the performance, so it's not *un*-conscious, but it's semi-conscious. […] because it is something that transcends [your] own being. And […] that transformative experience happens to those who've been so *seasoned* in the art form, you know, for years. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original)

Alongside Coorlawala (2010a, 119), Chatterjea specifies that it is crucial for dancers not to get overwhelmed by the emotions they are portraying—fortunately, such ability "to portray strong emotions without getting swept away by them" while maintaining a perfect technique can be acquired through repetition, practice (*riyaz*), and exposure to the work of other masters in the field (Chatterjea 1996, 78). Thus, rasa is an embodied knowledge as well as a skill that comes with practice and that is passed down from one generation to the next through the bodies of students and masters (79).

Pada stipulates that to "transfer" or "communicate" rasa to the audience, "you need to experience it yourself." But while for her, rasa translates as an out-of-body feeling, an experience that the seasoned performer goes through semi-consciously, for Beaulieu it translated in more physical terms—even in *sattikabhavas*, uncontrollable reactions of the body.

> I experience a deep joy in Indian dance, a very transformative [experience]… You know, lots of shivers, shivering moments… Sometimes, I even start to cry because I get caught in a character, you know… […] It's as if, from inside of me, when I'm done dancing an item, it's as if it had… [*laughing*] it had shaken me deep down, and it… it feels really good deep inside, and physically as well.[80] (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017)

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79. My translation. Original quote: "je sais que comme danseuse, j'ai toujours à gérer, que, OK, là j'suis dans une scène à l'italienne puis que ça c'est mon devant là, ça il faut toujours que je le gère là, c'est sûr. Puis que là faut que je fasse attention parce que y'a un spot là que j'peux m'accrocher dedans, puis que là y'a un clou à terre, puis une *tack* en avant, t'sais. Puis que j'ai perdu une boucle d'oreille puis faut que j'fasse attention de pas piler dessus. Ça, ça c'est touj… T'sais, y'a tout le temps ça. Mais moi j'aime… j'aime me laisser… j'aime quand… tout le moment de travail avec [ma *guru*] puis la pratique me permettent de me lancer dans une pièce… de plonger dans la pièce, puis… de me laisser perdre là, t'sais. Que mon… t'sais, j'me reconnais plus, comme. C'est… c'est plus Julie qui est là, c'est… c'est les personnages, c'est quelque chose qui est comme, on dirait… plus grand… que mon identité régulière là."

80. My translation. Original quote: "j'ai beaucoup de… une joie profonde que j'expérimente dans la danse indienne, qui… qui est très transformatrice, de… T'sais, beaucoup de frissons, des moments de frissons… des fois j'peux me mettre à pleurer parce que… j'suis comme, j'me fais pogner par tel personnage, t'sais…[…] C'est comme si, de l'intérieur, quand j'ai fini de faire une pièce, c'est comme, ça… ça m'avait, euh… [*rire*] ça m'avait comme *shaké* de partout, puis ça… ça fait, euh… c't'un bien… ça fait du bien profondément… Et physiquement aussi."

It would be easy, Beaulieu goes on, to explain this pleasurable physical experience using a scientific approach – the release of endorphins and so on – but she feels this would not account for the whole of the experience. This state of deep joy, which is quite distinct from an everyday type of experience, is yet to be defined. "But is that *rasa*? I have no idea, you know!" Beaulieu adds. What she does know, however, is that the feeling of deep joy stays with her for a long period after the performance. Lata Pada expressed a similar feeling: "And it's almost like, you know, [as performers] we're in a particular zone before the performance, and we continue to stay in that zone after. [It's an experience that stays] *beyond* the performance" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original).

For Bharatanatyam dancer Rajesh Chenthy, who claims that rasa is not exclusive to the spectator but also happens in the performer, the dancer's rasa results from the "good vibes" or "vibrations" produced by the audience, which make him feel energized: "we feel, like, 'Wow!' You know? We feel like… like, a full charge [fully charged] [*laughing*]…! […] Fully energized, you know, when we are having that wonderful audience and… we're very, very excited" (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018). This energetic feeling is stronger during the performance but can leave a lingering pleasurable feeling afterwards as well.

As I have experienced myself as a spectator when seeing Kumar's performance in Chennai, rasa can also translate in the performer as delight resulting from a form of surprise, from a disruption in one's "embodied anticipation" (Hahn 2016). Collaborator Jonathan Voyer, who is a Hindustani music scholar-practitioner – and thus very familiar with rasa theory, which he explored in his own Ph.D. project – reflected on his own experience of pleasure in the following terms:

> I think this is what is experienced here, the *camatkara* [intense aesthetic delight, in Abhinavagupta's words], meaning this exclamation of surprise… that is experienced during practice… that happens either because *I* am surprised by what I have just done – I wasn't expecting this, you know, it startles me – or because, ah! it was just so *beautiful*, you know? And it's not, "Wow, I've done this, I'm so great!" you know, it has nothing to do with that: it's simply that, what has just happened, it was beautiful. […] It's in the reaction when faced with a melodic discovery or exploration… a movement, or even a rhythm, because my instrument is both melodic and rhythmical.[81] (J. Voyer, 1 Aug. 2017; emphasis in original)

Voyer's experience of rasa is also restricted to his own perception, as a performer, and is not addressed at an audience—whether during rehearsals or public performances. "When I play," Voyer explains, "my aim is not to generate an emotion [in someone else]… For me, delving into the interpretation of a *raga*, it's about exploring a musical phrasing, exploring movements, paths…

81. My translation. Original quote: "J'pense que c'est ça, qui est vécu là, le *camatkara*, c'est-à-dire l'exclamation de… de surprise… qui est vécue dans la pratique… qui se passe soit parce que c'que je viens de faire *me* surprend – je m'attendais pas à ça, t'sais… ça me surprend – ou soit que, ah, c'était juste vraiment *beau* ça, t'sais. Puis c'est pas "j'suis donc bon d'avoir fait ça!", t'sais, c'est pas ça pantoute : c'est qu'est-ce qui vient de se produire, c'était beau, t'sais.[…] C'est dans la… c'est dans la réaction face à… une découverte mélodique, ou une exploration mélodique… un mouvement ou, même rythmique, parce que mon instrument est à la fois mélodique et rythmique" (emphasis in original).

it's discovering, discovering *myself* through this process."[82] This state gives him the space he requires to experience rasa, because he is not wondering whether the audience is enjoying his performance and going through rasa itself—a perspective that somewhat echoes Pada's thoughts about the fact that dancers do not consciously try to evoke rasa in the audience. Therefore, Voyer's practice consists in finding the melodic combinations that makes him "feel good" and that he likes or enjoys[83]. "But what happens at that moment" – the surprise-delight he goes through – "I think it's part of the process of the experience of rasa" he concludes[84]. It is a steady feeling—one that stays the same every time he experiences it (a *chamatkara*, in other words), whatever *raga* he is performing (Voyer, 1 Aug. 2017; emphasis in original).

Perhaps Voyer's interpretation of his *rasik* experience as a musician echoes *devadasi* dancer Balarasaraswati's understanding of the enjoyment of beauty in her own work. Balasaraswati describes how the dancer's multiple tasks throughout her performance, once harmonized, have the capacity of creating a pleasant experience.

> The feet keeping to time, hands expressing gesture, the eye following the hand with expression, the ear listening to the dance master's music and the dancer's own singing—by harmonising there five elements the mind achieves concentration and attains clarity in the very richness of participation. The inner feeling of the dancer is the sixth sense which harnesses these five mental and mechanical elements to create the experience and enjoyment of beauty. (Balasaraswati 2012, 203)

In a similar way, Julie Beaulieu (1 Aug. 2017) mentioned a few times how she is "débordée," overrun, during a performance. Yet, in parallel with Balasaraswati, the overwhelming task of dancing can in fact put the dancer in a joyful state.

Nova Bhattacharya, artistic director at Nova Dance, calls this *rasik* experience "embodied performance"—that "next moment" when the performer goes beyond technique to delve deep into moments of rasa. She explained this to me as she was relating a constant (friendly) quarrel she has with a friend of hers who always argues with her when the term "embodied performance" comes up. "Well, what other kind of performance can there be?" her friend consistently asks. For Bhattacharya, there is a clear distinction.

> There is a difference between just moving your arms because that's where they're supposed to go, and this idea of the energy circle that your hands are making, or where [they intend to go; referring to the *AD shloka*]… […] there is a difference between just doing the steps, the choreography, the construct, the form, and actually becoming the dance. And I think… in the Bharatanatyam context, I think if a dancer is constantly striving for *rasa*, then they're on a pursuit of something that is greater than just doing steps and movement. So it

82. My translation. Original quote: "je ne joue pas pour aller susciter une émotion particulière chez [le spectateur ou quelqu'un d'autre]… Pour moi… me plonger dans l'interprétation d'un *raga*, c'est… c'est partir à l'exploration d'un phrasé musical, l'exploration de mouvements, de chemins… c'est découvrir, *me* découvrir à travers ce processus-là" (emphasis in original).
83. My translation. Original quote: "à chaque fois, [c'est de] retrouver les combinaisons mélodiques qui me font du bien, qui me plaisent, t'sais."
84. My translation. Original quote: "Mais ce qui se produit à ce moment-là, j'pense que c'est dans le processus de l'expérience de rasa…"

> predisposes us to be looking for that greater moment, but there is also that danger of the split happening if you're not truly able to go there as a performer, if you are just doing it. And we've all seen those Bharatanatyam performances too, where it's just, like, "Why is that person just smiling?" you know! "Is it a toothpaste commercial??" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018)

However, rasa went well beyond the world of the performing arts for several of my collaborators. Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar, for instance, felt that rasa was part of her everyday life, especially during moments of hardship and challenges, whether during her years of study at Kalakshetra or when she moved to Canada and had to face a number of challenges in her personal and professional life. "Everything, all of that: that is *rasa*. That is emotion. That is a *huge*, *huge* baggage of emotions" she confided. All those difficult moments resulted in "many, many *rasas*, and many, many, I guess, challenging and painful emotions in my mind and in my heart" (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017; emphasis in original). Chenthy, who is also a Kalakshetra alumni, feels that the hardship he went through during his training at Kalakshetra resulted in enjoyment – and perhaps rasa – as well, because he is now able to taste the fruit of his efforts. Moreover, he explained that he experienced rasa whenever he sensed joy and delight in his regular day-to-day life: "My understanding is, if you see something and you enjoy [it], that enjoyment is called *rasa*. You['re] producing, the people who are watching, that person is producing *rasa*. […] What your happiness is, it's *rasa*. So, everything is *rasa*." That pleasure or happiness could happen when watching a cricket or a football match, or even listening to a radio show in which the host has a particularly pleasant voice and expresses themselves in a skillful manner, whatever they are saying: "So that is *rasa* because I enjoyed that. That is *rasa*" (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018).

Alternatively, life experiences, especially emotionally charged moments, certainly played a vital role in all of my collaborators' *rasik* life on the stage. The more life experience – and maturity – one has, the better their *abhinaya* will become and, in turn, the more powerful their experience of rasa will become. Jayarajan's revisiting of the Yashoda and young Krishna item was a prime example of this, as it translates an evolution of rasa based on personal, embodied day-to-day knowledge. "It does change," she indicates, "and that's of course what many seasoned dancers will tell you, you know: you do a dance, a certain dance at a certain age, and you do it at a different age and it will change, even though it's the exact same dance," all because the person has more life and dance experience, more emotional baggage. Punthambekar agrees that "age and maturity" changes one's rasa: "Life experiences. It teaches you so much" she explains (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017).

Relying on life experiences to strengthen one's performance of rasa means that rasa becomes very personal, says Nova Bhattacharya. She related her *arangetram*'s *shabdam* story to elaborate on one's intimate relation to rasa: how she resisted playing a mother's role in her teenage years, and how today, as she is now surrounded by friends who have become mothers, she would certainly be able to portray Yashoda in a believable way. As a Bharatanatyam-trained artist, she felt that "*abhinaya* training gives us the ability, also, to abstract the personal in our own creation and choreography"—which she applied in her piece *Unspoken*, where she used her personal experience of her husband's cancer treatment to work around the idea of "the things that you don't want to leave unsaid." The piece "was personal" but without "making it about him or for him": "it allowed me *not* to go to a very, sort of mawkish, *overly* personal place, but to say, 'OK, this is the thought, this is the poem that I want to try and create this dance to, and I'm going to use the

abhinaya technique as well as the structure of an *abhinaya padam* and make this work.'" She concluded by stating that this "mature approach to that work was definitely because of [her] training and experience as a Bharatanatyam performer" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018). Lata Pada used her personal life experiences and hardship in a similar way by choreographing a piece named *Revealed by Fire,* which was inspired by her husband and daughters' passing due to a plane crash.

These examples, as well as Punthambekar's understanding of rasa in her everyday life through challenges and moments of hardship, show that rasa can also act as a catalyst for processing powerful emotions in one's life. As such, rasa in the mundane sphere may not translate as pleasurable every time it happens, as clarified by Punthambekar. For her, rasa goes "beyond pleasure"—it is in fact "spiritual," by which she means "a very meditative" state. She certainly does not enjoy challenges or being faced with serious issues on a regular basis, which is why she cannot equate rasa with pleasure. Yet, she does not perceive "a difference between what *rasa* is" and what her "normal life is." The ambitious attitude she constantly displays throughout her personal journey "becomes meditative" for her, and thus "becomes *rasa* [and] very spiritual" (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017).

This idea put forth by Punthambekar, again, mirrors Bhattacharya's views about rasa being personal, yet transcending the personal. It also reflects Beaulieu and Voyer's understanding of their artistic practice as a *sadhana*, a rigorous yet difficult process that, after much effort, results in rasa, in pleasure or in a sense of fulfilment. This interpretation is close to Balasaraswati's interpretation of dance as well, as she stated that "to experience this rare rapture, a dancer has only to submit herself willingly to discipline. […] if she humbly submits to the greatness of this art, soon enough she will find joy in that discipline; and she will realise that discipline makes her free in the joyful realm of the art" (2012, 203).

Yet, for Jayarajan, even though her personal life experiences fuel her dance, she still confines the experience of rasa to her artistic life. However, she feels that allowing personal experiences to build up her *abhinaya* is "the only way to be authentic"; and the only way to be authentic "is if you let it stir it up inside." This marks a distinction between simply "imagining" and "feeling" the emotion; and, consequently, the difference between mere dance and rasa, as discussed previously by Bhattacharya (doing movements vs. becoming the dance). Accordingly, for Jayarajan, rasa depends not only on the embodiment of characters, but also on "maturity" which comes "naturally with age" and makes each performance "more authentic" (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017).

For Nova Bhattacharya, the idea that rasa also embodies taste and flavor has constantly been following her during her dance journey, as noted before. She adds that

> when you're learning [the *AD shloka*], when you're first learning your *adavus* [movement sequences], you're *already*, even in the context of abstract dance, you're *thinking* about flavor. Right? So for me, *rasa* was never only about *abhinaya*: it was about both [*abhinaya* and flavor]. And so, in terms of expressing emotions or sensations in dance, I think of that… To me *rasa* is [an] umbrella to abstraction and storytelling. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original)

Here again, Bhattacharya finds inspiration in her daily life to feed this rich connection between taste and rasa. She sees a creative link, for instance, between the number "5," which "has really directly *imposed* itself or manifested itself" in her artistic practice, and rasa, based on a famous Bengali five-spice mix that has been with her since her childhood: "in Bengali cuisine, the primary spice mix is *panch phoron*: so, onion seeds, fenugreek, cumin, mustard [and fennel]." The mix reflects the basis of rasa as balanced ingredients that create a wholesome flavor: "fenugreek is bitter, and cumin is sweet, and, you know. So [it reflects] that idea of always having multiple elements to create something and the juxtaposition of different ideas." She further explained that this

> idea of always bringing multiple things to one idea, is definitely something that is – whether it's in my cooking, or the way I dress or the way I create – it's all kind of there. […] often, with dancers, I talk about the "mixing board" and creating balance but also sometimes creating dissonance—creating dissonance so that when you get to the balance, there's an understanding of where it came from. […] Or even […] being a collaborative person: I think that's part of it too, of this understanding that only having one viewpoint is not nearly as interesting as something that's been […] nourished and nurtured by multiple voices and ideas. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018)

Is Rasa Intentional?

Contrary to most preconceived ideas about rasa, Coorlawala states that "it is not the performer's responsibility to evoke rasa" in the audience, but it is her role "to represent the prescribed emotional moods or *bhava* with sustained clear focus" (2010a, 119), leading inevitably to the apprehension of emotions and the experience of rasa by the critically discerning yet sympathetic viewer (*rasika*). Hence, rasa is not something that is consciously sought out by artists during performance, whether in themselves or in the audience. During our interview, as I was asking Lata Pada if she found it difficult to communicate rasa to uninitiated spectators, she shared Coorlawala's vision on this matter.

> [W]hen you ask it that way, it seems like it's a deliberate desire to communicate *rasa*—there isn't that. […] in the performative and in the practical world, we learn attributes of *rasa* and how we need to be trained to be able to evoke it […]. […] when the *rasa* theory was written, you were performing to an audience of connoisseurs who knew every little aspect of the art form. We don't anymore today. So, the expectation of creating *rasa* is not even something we think about. […] I don't think about it [*rasa*] so much. I think about it when I *teach* it; but as a performing artist, it's not foremost on my mind. Because I almost see it as a theoretical principle that's underpinning everything we do, you know. But it's not something we consciously bring up or evoke or try to evoke. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original)

Hence, the dancer's role is to evoke emotions through perfect technique that *may* lead to rasa. One important aspect that was brought forth by my collaborators, especially Pada, is that the history of Bharatanatyam – and by extension of other Indian classical dance forms – can oftentimes contrast with its modern status as a performing art. Several times during our interview, Pada suggested that Bharatanatyam *is* a performative art today. Such status is at times hard to reconcile with the previously religious, devotional or philosophical nature of the art form. Consequently, performers do not necessarily consciously focus on evoking rasa.

> I mean, it's very hard today to say to [students]: "Dance is not a performance art: its primary objective is to evoke *rasa*"—which was the principle of the performing arts many, many centuries ago. Today, it is a performance art—and when you take a form like Bharatanatyam, it's a form that has come loaded with *so* many of these theoretical and aesthetic principles that… why, you know, it is a performance art. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original)

What Pada is expressing here is the fact that Indian classical dance styles have migrated from the temple to the global stage. Previously, dance was associated with several philosophical debates that analyzed every aspects of its rendition. In turn, it was associated with a knowledgeable audience, most often coming from royal courts, who was aware of those aesthetic principles—hence their role as *rasikas* or *sahridayas*. But today, this context has been shattered by politics and migration, transforming the ancient art of Indian dance – and its unbreakable association with rasa – into a modern "restored behavior" (Schechner 1985) with which the whole theoretical concept of rasa does not necessarily resonate. Yet, the role of rasa within performance – especially as part of the relationship that is built between the performer and the spectators – still lingers as an unconscious feeling in the dancer, leading one to believe that, perhaps, Bharatanatyam is not *just* a performance art. The fact that performers are not concerned with the "success" of their performance – which theoretically-speaking depends on the audience's experience of rasa – is a clue that points to the true status of neo-classical Indian dance.

> If one has trained for a long time in the theoretical and the aesthetic principles of dance, [*rasa*] is going to be subconscious: you're not going to think of it as a performance art. […] Many of my peers and I, myself, we've always said [that] we don't care if the audience has only five people, or 1,000 people: we get just the same amount of enjoyment in that performance. If it was a performative art, we'd be more concerned as whether, is the theatre full or not. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018)

Pada, who claims that rasa has not changed but is simply "being interpreted differently," still wonders "why the dancers are so *preoccupied*" with rasa today. "Maybe it's theoretical" she ventured, only because one would not go on the stage with the conscious goal of evoking rasa in the audience (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original). As brought up earlier, Neena Jayarajan shared those feelings regarding the "performativity" of rasa: Bharatanatyam is, first and foremost, a *performance* art that is not as concerned with rasa as it used to be. Odissi dancer Supriya Nayak felt the same, as she shared her insecurities about "rasa" as an abstract concept that is taught to students, but that is not really taken into account or seen as relevant in practice: "that's something we're taught as dancers, that there is *rasa*," she explained, and further wondered: "Am I looking at it as a *rasa* or am I looking at it as likely in all… like, you know, a typical emotion at that point?" (S. Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017). David Mason, too, feels that the word "rasa" has in reality become a jargon "used frequently and loosely in reference to the experience of art, as though it has some useful meaning that we can all perceive, even if we can't articulate it." It is precisely to find a meaning to the word that modern scholars are analyzing it through various perspectives, he argues (Mason 2015, 100).

Yet, as pointed out by Pada, performers – and spectators to a lesser extent – are particularly concerned with rasa today. She rightfully raised the issue of classical Indian dance being trapped between performative emotions and abstract feelings that have been conceptualized centuries ago.

As a result, rasa still lingers on the performer's mind, but not necessarily on a conscious level, as supported by Nova Bhattacharya, for whom the concept of rasa has always been an "essential, conscious and subconscious element" at the source of each of her artistic creations (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018).

Communicating Rasa: The Performer-Spectator Relationship

Indian classical dance is truly about communicating, as pointed out by Samyuktha Punthambekar during our second conversation over Skype.

> It is through expressions that a lot of things like […] rasa [become possible], [that's] the main component of dance. Like, why do we eat? We eat to fill our stomach. Why do we dance? It's to communicate what we are trying to say and for people to understand. And in Bharatanatyam, *abhinaya* and expressions are so, so important. Even in a formal conversation, right. Like, this [talking via Skype, seeing and hearing each other] is so much more effective […] than actually having a phone call. (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017)

But how is one to efficiently communicate rasa via *abhinaya* to an audience that is not necessarily familiar with its content and its syntax? In fact, contemporary challenges related to the uninitiated audience may modify the rigid rules of rasa theory. Among those challenges, the question of transnational communication and intercultural arts are a constant issue in classical Indian dance today, both in India and abroad. Coorlawala judges that these intercultural demands, these hybrid adjustments, are both a force and a weakness of classical dance today.

> In cross-cultural performance, spectacle prevails over historic intertexts, accessibility over complexity. Phenomenological reception effectively narrows the width of presentational options available to artists in layered traditional forms, and very few artists have been able to deconstruct and expose this demand. Thus traditional narrative structures (as sanchari) tend to be marginalized in the service of transnational communication. (Coorlawala 2010b, 78)

As such, the introduction of a new type of audience has modified not only the experience of rasa in the spectator, but the expression of *bhava* (emotional states) and *abhinaya* (expressive movements) in the performer as well, even in India. According to Shanti Pillai,

> dancers in the past relied to varying degrees on carefully selected metaphors to suggest that a heroine was miserable in the agony of love. Today it is not uncommon to see a more literal interpretation, such as a dancer's eyes glittering with tears. This move from connotation to denotation in *abhinaya* is in part a move to accommodate an audience more oriented to film and television and less knowledgeable about dance. It is also a function of the fact that in a large auditorium, a highly refined *abhinaya* can be readily appreciated only by the audience members sitting in the first few rows, where the face can be viewed in detail. (Pillai 2002, 21)

Moreover, the narratives expressed through *abhinaya* have simplified, says Pillai, in part due to the performers' and the spectators' lack of knowledge in the sung language of the songs. The changing tastes and expectations from the audience have modified the content of Bharatanatyam concerts and danced items. "As a result," explains Pillai, "to speak of a single dance scene is not

fully accurate, as there are actually different kinds of programs going on in the city [of Chennai] that appeal to different kinds of audiences" (2002, 22).

The fact that the eclectic composition of the audience can drastically alter a performer's *abhinaya* illustrates a key component of the performance, even to this day: the performer-spectator relationship. Many modern dance accounts convey the significance of this relationship in the performer's experience of rasa. This subject matter speaks to Maratt Mythili Anoop's (2016, 132) understanding of communication between spectator and dancer, in which cooperation translates as "an intense sense of communion"; with Sheherazaad Cooper's (2013) views about the "alchemy of rasa" between spectator and dancer; with Uttara Asha Coorlawala's (2010a, 118) understanding of rasa in dance as "an ongoing dialogue between performer and audience; and also with Kalpana Ram (2011, S165), who maintains that the aesthetic affective experience "goes on not only between performer and audience but also between members of the audience who feed off one another's bodily gestures of appreciation – […] from enjoyment of a technical flourish to a surrender to the emotion in the performance." Pallabi Chakravorty acknowledges such approach as well when stating that "[r]asa as a theory of embodiment is based on connecting to an audience through evoking a collective emotion." She maintains that rasa theory is a system of communication "that shows that human expressivity and subjectivity are shaped and shared in relationships with one another and to the material world" (Chakravorty 2009a, 215).

Therefore, the experience of rasa – whether in the performer, the spectator, or both – is believed to be only possible through the *interaction* between dancer and audience, which allows for the transmission (and re-transmission, in a loop manner) of rasa. Balasaraswati had already acknowledged this reciprocal experience in the early 20th century, as she highlighted the delight that the artist could attain through the discipline of her art form, alongside her audience.

> The yogi achieves serenity through concentration that comes from discipline. The dancer brings together her feet, hands, eyes, ears and singing into a fusion which transforms the serenity of the yogi into a torrent of beauty. The spectator, who is absorbed in intently watching this, has his mind freed of distractions and feels a great sense of clarity. In their shared involvement, the dancer and the spectator are both released from the weight of worldly life, and experience the divine joy of the art with a sense of total freedom. (Balasaraswati 2012, 203)

Arya Madhavan's interpretation of rasa resonates with such "mirroring" of emotions. When relating her own experience as a Kutiyattam actress, she attests that "[b]oth the actor and the spectator experience rasa in a highly interactive and vibrant flux" in which the performer's *sthayibhavas* (representation of dominant emotions) creates rasa in the spectators; the audience's physical reactions to the dancer's *sthayibhavas* then bounce back to the performer, who experiences rasa in return. In short, the performer's experience of rasa is induced by the audience's *rasik* experience, because the latter triggers physical, visible reactions of delight within the spectators. Hence, Madhavan states that the performer's experience of rasa is not possible through the perception of dominant emotions (*sthayibhavas*), as is the case for spectators, but rather "by sensing the subtle reactions from the spectator," by reflecting upon these physical responses from the audience (Madhavan 2010, 76).

This understanding was reflected by Lata Pada, who maintained that, while "*rasa* is commonly understood as [what] is evoked in the audience and what the audience member experiences or relishes," it has the faculty of being "transferred back to the artist" from the audience (6 July 2018). My collaborator Rajesh Chenthy shared a similar understanding of rasa.

> We *feel* also. […] When we perform, we perform in many places with many audience[s]; but some places, we can take *rasa*, you know? That *impact* from the audience, because there is a very good vibes [*sic*]. *That*, I feel that is *rasa*—it comes from the audience. [Sometimes, even if the auditorium is full,] we don't get [that] *impact* from the audience. […] But some places, we feel, like, very good vibration, [a] very good connection from the audience. That, I feel that is one way that we get it [*rasa*], from the audience. (R. Chenthy, 27 Oct. 2018; emphasis in original)

The reciprocity and the interactions happening between the performer and the spectators are paramount to the dancers' capacity to experience rasa alongside their audience, as was expressed by Pada: "I believe very much that there is a sort of reciprocity that one experiences. You can tell when the audience *is* relishing [the performance]. And that sensation actually gets transferred back to you [as a performer], also" (6 July 2018; emphasis in original). Nova Bhattacharya shared similar sensations and defined her experience of rasa as "is a circular relationship with the audience." She related a particular performance in which she was trapped inside a "cocoon" made of saris and could not see the audience: "it's an *amazing* awareness of the audience—when you're onstage for that long and you're not seeing them, but you're sensing them." While it is possible for Bhattacharya to sense the audience when blinded by props or stage lighting, she particularly enjoys performing in intimate spaces where she can see and interact more with the audience: "I'm dancing for people, and I'm *seeing*… Like, […] to be able to [perform] in tiny little spaces with people sitting right next to you, and you see how they're responding to it. It's absolutely a part of [the experience of *rasa*]." Bhattacharya thus claims that when in physical proximity to the spectators, she "can't help but be in a place of responsiveness and porousness," which factors into own experience of rasa (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original).

However, the circular relationship that is formed with the spectators cannot rest on *knowing* who is in that audience—and this lack of expectation about who might be in the audience also forges the experience of rasa within the dancer. Whenever people ask Bhattacharya who will be present at her next show, she always says the following:

> Whoever's sitting in seat 7C. […] You *don't* know. You *don't* know. It *could* be somebody who works on telephone lines. Or it could be a doctor. You have *no* idea who the person is in 7C. You have *no* idea what's going on in their life. Maybe their mom just moved into a home. Maybe their sister just had a baby she'd been trying to have for six years. Like, you *don't* know what's happening, but *that's* the person you have to dance for [*Laughing*]. […] It's the person you *don't* know that you're dancing for. And so even for me, that consciousness, that awareness, that level of thinking about who you're dancing for, is an important piece of the puzzle. (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original)

Like Bhattacharya and Chenthy, Pada attests that the number of spectators in the audience is not commensurate with the artist's experience of rasa, as she will "get just the same amount of enjoyment in that performance" (6 July 2018). Pada also includes the audience and the interaction

the dancer nurtures with the spectators in her understanding of the embodied experience of rasa: "One can sense. One can sense when the audience *has* participated, you know. […] I think it's a both participatory and an interactive experience" (L. Pada, 6 July 2018).

Many times, the issue of imagination was raised by my collaborators. Bhattacharya – as did Beaulieu and Voyer – talked of her dance practice as essentially about "arousing emotion in people, of it taking [them] on a journey of the imagination, of… of just going to a place of wonder" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018). Indeed, in classical Indian performance, the spectator "sees" what is happening in the plot through the performer's eye movements and hand gestures (Madhavan 2012), as was pointed out by collaborator Supriya Nayak who explained to her student who was working on showing a bird that "[i]f you can see that bird, I can see that bird" (4 Oct. 2017). Moreover, Neena Jayarajan perceived a difference between imagining the narrative (as a performer) and feeling or embodying poems and movements, with the latter scenario resulting in increased moments of rasa between the audience and the artist. And that is precisely what the performer is trying to do, states Supriya Nayak: "in a performance, you are doing that, you're trying to invite people to be part of that world with you, […] [into] a different kind of space" (4 Oct. 2017).

If the dancer is successful in bringing the audience on a "journey of the imagination," it is because she is able to "emanate" rasa, claims Lata Pada: "Theoretically, *rasa* is what is evoked or caused within the *rasika*. Right? […] But I think it really emanates or comes from the artist." This "glowing rasa" radiating from the performer reminded Pada of the concept of *takshu* in Balinese culture, which is an "intangible, unquantifiable quality that is seen either in a dancer, in a wood carving, a stone carving, the way a musician plays, an instrument, a temple carving." Yet, this invisible quality is somehow *perceived* by the viewer (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original). In the same way that Bhattacharya argues that "there are certain dancers that we carry with us as we leave the theatre" because of that "extra special thing" they project (11 July 2018), Pada feels that the rasa that emanates from the performer may very well be a form of *takshu*, a quality that stays with the spectators as they leave the auditorium.

> But if you look at a group of dancers on the stage, why does your eye travel to one or two? You know, what is it? One's not looking for just technical perfection, one's not just looking at virtuosity—there's something that draws you. And I think *that* is that, that quality… It may not be the best-looking dancer, it may not be the most physically elegant dancer; but there is a quality that one cannot express. And I think *that* is what that particular artist has been able to evoke. I'm sure that artist is not even conscious of it. (L. Pada, 6 July 2018; emphasis in original).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I sought to offer a view of the *rasik* experience that contrasts significantly with what has been portrayed for centuries in classical Indian aesthetics: rasa is undeniably part of the artist's experience of their own performance. My fieldwork and interviews as well as the most recent scholarship on classical Indian dance all converge in attesting that rasa *is* located in the performer—as it is in spectators. But if spectators build *rasik* literacy through their exposure to the arts, how are performers expected to develop theirs? In trying to decipher the essence of the formation of rasa in spectators and performers, I have offered an overview of the training of *abhinaya* (the source of rasa) in institutional and *guru-shishya* contexts, as well as the ways in

which rasa unravels onstage through inner and outer feelings, in addition to shared experiences with the audience. Rasa in performers often translates through physical and kinesthetic means: feelings of pleasure, deep joy, physical well-being, bursts of energy, out-of-body experiences and so on. Furthermore, examples of *shringararasa*, the erotic mood, were frequently brought up by my collaborators and scholar-practitioners to illustrate the powerful experience of rasa in the performer. *Shringara* has been elevated over and above all other rasas for centuries by theorists, poets, devotees and performers alike—and this status is only intensified in the current practice of classical Indian dance because of the capacity for *shringara* to branch out into dozens of subsidiary, complementary and transient emotions. The more diversified a performance is in terms of emotions, it seems, the better the *rasik* experience becomes.

The previous exploration of the built relationship between dancer and audience has demonstrated that rasa arises from dancers' *abhinaya* and is made stronger by the interaction between them and spectators. The communication of emotions through *abhinaya* may very well be the most essential part of the *rasik* experience in classical Indian dance, as stated previously by my collaborator Samyuktha Punthambekhar. In fact, as pointed out by Neena Jayarajan, it is only through *abhinaya* that a meaningful connection with the audience and a potential *rasik* experience are possible in both performers and spectators: "the music is irrelevant, the lyrics are irrelevant, but *emotions*, *that* we all feel and understand" Jayarajan attests—"And that's the only ticket to the narration that you are bringing them" she adds (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017; emphasis in original). When one is "able to communicate words with gestures and flavor" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018), a strong connection to the audience is forged alongside the shared experience of rasa.

Moreover, neo-classical Indian dance shows that the form (tradition) of each dance style is retained, while the content and choreography is generally more flexible and adaptable (in terms of narratives), making for a variety of *rasik* experiences in performers as well as spectators. *Abhinaya* (expressive dance) changes and adapts to the new hybrid and eclectic nature of spectatorship, while also evolving because of the physical setting of modern entertainment in which dancers perform. This includes bigger spaces and larger stages, better lighting and aesthetic expectations that are for the most part molded by media such as television and cinema, in which full closeups allow for a more subtle yet direct (rather than metaphorical) interpretations of emotion. On some level, the reinterpretation of rasa by modern dancers emerged from an encounter, one that confronted the "modern" West that values the contemporary aesthetics of modern dance, with the "un-changing" traditions of the East—a concept that is almost lost to Western traditions. To situate themselves in this binary, rigid environment, classical Indian dancers of the diaspora needed to redefine their art while preserving their training in traditional forms of dance, making their style both hybrid and modern by using Indian epistemologies rather than Western ones. As a result, many Indian dancers and choreographers are now often seen as cultural activists that challenge Orientalist categories and try to re-define tradition through performance.

As pointed out by Pada (6 July 2018), "*rasa* has so many different forms of expression," both in the audience and in the performer. Not only do spectators draw their *rasik* experience from the dancer's physical rendition of emotions, but the performer too feeds off of the audience's physical reactions to her own *abhinaya* in their personal experience of rasa on the stage. Yet, collaborators have noticed that rasa, although useful as a concept, is not always relevant to the practice of dance. What is rasa, exactly, and what does it mean for the dancer? Pada and Nayak have argued that rasa is a useful theoretical concept that is taught to artists through the training of

abhinaya and the skillful expression of emotions, but that does not necessarily translate in concrete terms in practice. As a result, Pada stated that rasa is not deliberately evoked by the dancer, nor is it consciously experienced by them. Rasa is both ubiquitous and ever absent at the same time in performance: artists are "so *preoccupied*" by rasa, yet they do not necessarily address its formation directly in their work. This aspect will be explored in the fifth chapter through an exploration of embodied theoretical knowledge in dance training.

The flow of mutual appreciation of the performance between dancer and spectators, as explained by Pada and Bhattacharya, depends on the performer's ability to see the audience at times. This is most often possible during intimate performances where the spectators are physically closer to the dancer and therefore contribute to her experience of rasa. But when modern lighting blind dancers or other means keep them from sharing the visual flow of emotions between them and their audience – when performers are not able to *see* their audience's reactions to her own *abhinaya* – how can they still experience rasa? What other sensory cues are available to them to compensate for her lack of sight? Many collaborators talked about an "energy" or their capacity to still sense the audience despite their inability to see the auditorium. The next chapter will examine these sensory means in more detail.

Chapter 4 (*Padam*)—
Rasa from an Ethnographer's Perspective:
New Interpretations of Rasa

Whether the decline of philosophical debates on rasa is due to the spread of Mughal power throughout India or because of a certain "conceptual plenitude" toward the concept (Pollock 2016, 41), it would be misleading to assume that the evolution of rasa came to a full stop following the seventeenth century. Not only has rasa kept on evolving, but the constant external influences resulting from colonization as well as the exportation of Indian classical performing arts has dramatically transformed the nature and application of rasa. In fact, the classical theory of rasa presents many limitations: not only did theorists prior to the 16th century never really have to deal with foreign publics – which made it easier for them to define what rasa is, what its experience feels like, and accordingly suggest who can experience it and in which context – but they also mainly limited the experience of rasa to *rasikas*, meaning cultured people of superior social status. The classical definitions of rasa can contribute to a better understanding of its experience today, but social changes need to be considered as well.

I have been preoccupied by this question of a "changing rasa" throughout my doctoral research. The fact that dancers can experience rasa is a major shift in rasa theory; why was it never truly acknowledged? This transformation unsettles the whole perception people have been cultivating about rasa for centuries. Towards the end of our conversation at Sampradaya's school of dance in Mississauga, I asked Lata Pada why had rasa changed so much in recent times, to which she answered: "I don't think it's changing. I think it's being interpreted differently. […] I think one's relationship to *rasa* is different, as for different people, but it [hasn't] changed" (6 July 2018). This is a subtle, yet crucial distinction. Today's understanding of rasa – the aesthetic delight or pleasure that results from being exposed to the arts – is that it is generally present in both the performer and spectator, and that the experience of rasa is unthinkable without both parties (as food needs a taster, but also an intermediary between the cook and the taster, to relish it) and the relationship they build during the performance.

Hence, while many aspects of classical and medieval rasa theory and the *NS* are still relevant in today's practice, other elements differ to a great degree—especially, but not exclusively, in the diaspora. Not only is rasa located in the performer, but it also is accessible to spectators who did not have access to it previously—an element I have addressed as the de-hierarchization of rasa in Chapter 2. My interviews with professional dancers in Canada have demonstrated that rasa is now more accessible than ever, as many of them understood rasa and emotions as embodied experiences that cross cultural and linguistic boundaries.

As we were sitting at night in her living room during our interview, with the Toronto bright-lightened high-rise buildings as our backdrop through the window and with the lingering smell in the air of our previously eaten Indian dinner, Samyuktha S. Punthambekar provided a rich depiction of the typical *margam* (Bharatanatyam recital items): the *alarippu* was the opening of the body; the *shabdam* was a teaser of expressive dance; and the *varnam*, which artfully combines both technical and expressive dance, was portrayed as "the mother of all." When she came to describe the *padam* of the recital, Punthambekar, being a chocolate lover, compared it to a Ferrero Rocher: a chocolate that she adores because of its layering and the rich flavours contained in each of those layers (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017).

As the *padam* of the dissertation, the present chapter (as well as the next chapter, the *javali*) will attempt to uncover and decipher the several layers exposed during the previous *varnam* – in which collaborators and scholar-practitioners unravelled a rich narrative of performed emotions – and, to a lesser extent, from the *shabdam* as well. In reflecting the musical and lyrical structure of danced poems, in which "a verbal line [*pallavi*] is repeated three to four times and is rendered via varied gestures that include metaphoric renditions of the words" (Katrak 2008, 222) to allow the dancer to improvise on the many meanings of that line, the sections of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 will repeat elements and quotes from Chapter 3 and use them as springboards in discussing their deeper meaning. While a typical *padam* relies exclusively on *abhinaya* depictions, these fourth and fifth chapters – as an analysis of fieldwork and literature data – will strive to foster moments of rasa and inspire new ideas in the reader by using both lyrical and analytical writing styles.

The present *padam* represents my own curation of the data I have collected for this research as an ethnographer. It is my way of putting order in the research's data in answering my primary research question: what is rasa today? I have presented rasa in its raw form from the theorists' (Chapter 1), the spectator's (Chapter 2) and the performer's (Chapter 3) perspectives so far; now, I will expose my perspective, as an ethnographer, on what the experience of rasa entails for spectators and artists. After inserting rasa into its modern context, the *padam* of the thesis will thus address experiences of rasa, meaning the composition of *rasik* literacy, in the audience and in performers.

The first (sensory) exploration concerns *rasik* literacy in spectators and artists. Both expand their *rasik* knowledge through external perception (although processed internally) including vision, imagination, hearing, aesthetic taste and internal processing via the *manas*. The second examination, on the other hand, is exclusive to performers who, in addition to acquiring *rasik* knowledge via external perception, also develop their *rasik* literacy through internal sensations—which will be further explored in the *javali*. Based on data from the previous *varnam*, I therefore argue that artists experience rasa in five different ways: through the embodiment of the character's emotional experience; through their own response to the audience's *rasik* experience; as an internal pleasurable feeling triggered by movement and discipline; through the transposition of lived experiences on the stage; and lastly, as a form of innate quality that emanates from artists and reaches the audience.

"BUT IS THAT *RASA*? I HAVE NO IDEA, YOU KNOW!"[85]: MAKING SENSE OF RASA

In the conclusion to her article, Scheherazaad Cooper points to the danger of universalizing the experience of rasa, even though she had argued for rasa as a shared "energy" accessible to all in the rest of her paper. She highlights that everyone can "access" rasa, but hints toward a possibility for all spectators to experience rasa in diverging terms (Cooper 2013, 346). In parallel, Ram argues that spectators are seldom concerned with or versed in the theoretical foundations to their own aesthetic experience, even in the Indian diaspora; they go to performances for pure enjoyment and are yet still able "to respond with appropriate affect and emotion" (Ram 2011, S164) because the "tasting of the emotions themselves […] is intrinsic to performance, not a derivative of a particular Sanskrit theory" (S162). What these statements reveal is that rasa, as both a subjective experience and a conventionalized notion, exists in an ambiguous space where it is answerable to rigid rules

85. Julie Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).

but can also be interpreted in various ways based on every individual's perspective on their aesthetic experience. Perhaps this explains why rasa can manifest as an isolated form of knowledge reserved to *rasikas* as much as an experience phenomenologically accessible to all. Beaulieu has addressed this ambiguity when she wondered whether the pleasure she feels in Bharatanatyam necessarily means that she is experiencing rasa, all the while acknowledging that the aesthetic concept of rasa could explain what she was feeling.

I want to emphasize this ambiguous characteristic of rasa and how it contributes to its revitalization in current dance practice. It shows that rasa is first and foremost *a theoretical concept* that only late in its history was applied to dance training and practice (rather than the opposite). As of now, rasa is *embodied* by performers, in the sense that rasa as a theoretical concept is manifested through movement. Like any art form or sensory way of navigating the world, the aesthetic experience of rasa is, like *abhinaya*, something that can be learned—described as "*rasik* literacy" earlier. Attending recitals and savouring rasa is based on personal interests as much as cultural dispositions, which means that anyone can learn to reorganize their own sensory attention to align with *rasik* sensibilities. Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds, who talk of "kinesthetic empathy" to address the audience's ability to respond to performance regardless of familiarity with the form, claim that, just like a cultural habitus produces (pre)dispositions in taste, "our general disposition to consume and seek exposure to certain kinds of things—whether or not we choose to watch dance, for example—is not random or even necessarily wholly self-aware but instead deeply ingrained into embodied cultural practices" (2010, 55). Dance is "part of the culture" in India, as Punthambekar insisted, but while it is not always in North America, it has the potential to be.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the now eclectic public of classical Indian dance has drastically changed dancers' performances, as well as the overall interpretation of the concept of rasa. As the borders of Indian performing arts expanded beyond the subcontinent during the twentieth century, new spectators and novel ideas started shaking the aesthetics and renditions of danced drama. To reach a wider audience, classical Indian dancers within the diaspora needed to redefine their art while preserving their training in traditional forms of dance, making their style both hybrid and modern by using Indian epistemologies rather than Western ones. Accordingly, many Indian dancers and choreographers are now often seen as cultural activists that challenge Orientalist categories and try to redefine an ever-evolving tradition through performance. Now more than ever, performers are curious about their own dance style's history, its theory, and its future as the confluence of dance forms rattles its foundations.

In Contemporary Indian Dance, Ketu H. Katrak writes that because performers now wish for the audience to both feel and think – something that was proscribed in ancient writings like the *NS* – "rasa is harnessed in order to catch the audience's attention and raise their social awareness about the many inequities and injustices around us" (Katrak 2011, 17). I have certainly encountered such new interpretation of rasa with my Toronto collaborators, who were for the most part eager to explore new forms of expression using classical Indian dance technique and aesthetics as a baseline for connecting with others (often as part of Nova Bhattacharya's Nova Dance Company projects). Throughout their encounters with artists from various dance styles – whether Indian forms or Western contemporary ones – these collaborators were able to question their own dance aesthetics in relation to others. This gave rise to many hybrid performances that had clear similarities with Katrak's observations about modern uses of rasa.

As it stands, rasa's goal is not solely to provide delight in the spectator anymore—it may even discard the audience's experience altogether. In line with the aesthetics of contemporary dance and the phenomenological experience of spectators, situations of discomfort are triggered within the audience to push individuals to question and think about specific situations. Full recitals made of a single danced narrative interpreted by a group of performers are gaining popularity; yet full-length *margam* programs are also highly celebrated by diasporic communities. While all performances are trying to provide spectators with an ephemeral disconnect from their everyday emotional bonds to the world, dancers are not so concerned about evoking rasa in the audience. The fact that Indian classical dance forms are now within the realm of the performative – they are performed for entertaining purposes outside of temple or court walls – keeps dancers from consciously seeking to evoke rasa in the audience, as argued by Lata Pada.

However, rasa – or some experience/feeling of the like – does happen at times, both/either in the performer and/or the spectators. As pointed out by Pada, artists are still quite preoccupied with the idea of rasa within their own practice, despite the fact that dance is understood as a *performing* art and not a sacred art anymore. This is certainly the case for a number of scholar-practitioners such as Sheherazaad Cooper (2013) and Pallabi Chakravorty (Chakravorty 2009a; 2004; 2008; 2009b). In contrast, some performers like Jonathan Voyer are not very concerned by the audience's *rasik* experience during a performance but are rather preoccupied by their own experience of rasa during practice and public presentations. Here, when the artist is performing in front of an audience, the experience of rasa becomes one of sharing the delight – or *chamatkara* – engendered from one's own performance. In this new envisioning of the experience of rasa, the performer feels rasa and the audience receives this rasa (Katrak 2011, 19–20)—or, to borrow Lata Pada's words, rasa emanates or is produced by the performer, and is then transferred to the spectator (who later transfers it back to the artist). While dancers can produce and experience rasa during rehearsal, public performances often trigger the most vivid and powerful experiences of rasa in the artist, regardless of whether there are five persons or one thousand spectators in the audience. This idea of a communal and shared experience of rasa was undoubtedly reflected during my fieldwork interviews, as it is in current scholarship. In her interpretation of Bharatanatyam dancer and choreographer Chandralekha's work, for instance, Chatterjea perceives rasa "as aspirations for relationality and [……] a concrete sense of the location of individual-in-community" (Chatterjea 2004, 48). Similarly, Cooper (2013) interprets rasa as an energy that comes to life through – and is thus impossible without – the interaction between performer and spectators.

"EMOTIONS, *THAT,* WE ALL FEEL AND UNDERSTAND" [86] : THE SENSORY EXPERIENCE OF RASA IN SPECTATORS AND PERFORMERS

The re-interpretation of rasa in the current dance landscape gives artists more scope in how they want to communicate emotions to the public. The changing nature of the audience too allows (or forces) performers to communicate rasa differently. As a result, there seems to be this consensus among many of my collaborators that rasa – and the arts in general – crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries. Emotions are "the only ticket to the narration" (N. Jayarajan) in Indian classical dance and it is through emotions that dancers can build a rapport, a relationship with their audience. What rasa offers spectators is a distinct way of receiving and experiencing emotions in performance. It

86. Neena Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017.

invites viewers to a synaesthesic[87] experience – a culturally-emplaced, intersensory aesthetic experience – that revolves around shared emotional themes. The first means of accessing rasa, then, is through sensory perception. With this in mind, I propose in this section a glimpse into the experience of rasa – both in the spectator and in the performer, as the two are inseparable – through its cultural specificity and as well as its global outlook.

"If You Can See That Bird, I Can See That Bird" [88]*: Seeing and Imagining Rasa*

A major part of the *rasik* experience is based on imagination and culturally specific visuality. According to the *NS*, the Indian drama is made up of two domains: *lokadharmi*, realistic acting, and *natyadharmi*, aestheticized acting. In the latter, movements are codified, exaggerated and are purely aesthetic. As such, they rely heavily on the spectator's (as well as the actor's) imagination. Manomohan Ghosh even notes that "Hindu theorists on the subject believe that the highest aesthetic enjoyment is not possible without giving the greatest possible scope to imagination, and are therefore in favour of avoiding realism," as the work of the playwright is not to express rasa, but only to suggest and evoke it in the spectator (Nandikeshvara 1957, 7). It is because of the actor's powerful mastery of imagination in art forms like Kutiyattam that spectators are drawn into the performance for hours, argues David Shulman.

> The universe imagined into existence by the trained performer is capacious enough to hold spectators, actors, and drummers inside it, and to demand attention and other entirely pragmatic functions, over dozens of hours, for many nights and days, without lapsing into unreality or disjunction or falling into the black hole of something called "illusion." (Shulman 2012, 17)

Moreover, the absence of decor, which is made up for in color symbolism, costumes, makeup and elaborate descriptions in words and in gestures of environments, contexts and actions, inevitably triggers the performer as well as the spectator's imagination, a faculty that has intrigued theorists for centuries. In his historical study of imagination (*bhavana*) in South Indian thought, David Shulman speculates that imagining, as a causative agent, is an integral part of perceiving and, in fact, reinforces sensory perception. Through imagination, people believe that "what is there exists, in perceptible form, largely because of the way [they] imagine it," which leads Shulman to conclude that in India, the motto should not be "I think therefore I am," but rather "*I imagine, therefore you are*" (Shulman 2012, 269; emphasis in original). Imagination is an integral part of acting and dancing in Indian performing arts, and it is truly on the stage through song, movement, gesture and facial expression that this motto turns invisible thoughts into real, perceivable characters, settings, interactions and emotions.

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87. My use of the term synaesthesia is grounded in the theory of cultural synaesthesia (Howes and Classen 2014) and should not be confused with the notion of (congenital) synaesthesia in the neurosciences. I borrow here Bissera Pentcheva's (2006, 631) distinction between *synesthesia* as the psychological "experience of one sense through the stimulation of another, such as color experienced as sound," and *synesthesis*, the "simultaneity of senses" or simultaneous engagement of multiple sensory modalities. What I will hereafter refer to as "synaesthesis" and "synaesthesic" is therefore a *cultural* synaesthesia and not a neurobiological one. Synesthesis reflects the *constructed* conjunction of the senses, rather than their biological or "wired" equivalent—it refers to culturally-formed and *learned* sensory-emotional associations and intertwinement of the senses and emotions.

88. Supriya Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017.

Arya Madhavan, a Kutiyattam actress, states that it is mainly through the actor's eyes that the audience is able to visualize what is happening during the plot of the play (time periods, environments, events, etc.): in other words, the spectator "perceives" or "sees" through the actor's eyes and gaze, something she calls "eyescapes" (Madhavan 2012, 551). She goes on to explain that the performer, in turn, relies on imagination to adequately enact situations, while spectators need to share that imagined world to experience rasa (Madhavan 2015): "[r]asa is created purely by means of imagination—imagination of the actor and imagination of the spectator" she insists, as rasa "is generated when the actor enacts [characters and their interactions] in a skilfully convincing manner" (Madhavan 2010, 197). Therefore, the sense of vision via imagination is essential to the experience of rasa.

While Uttara Asha Coorlawala (1996) does not call it imagination per se, she examines the power of seeing and its relationship to knowledge in Indian philosophical systems such as yoga and cosmology, and thus underlines the importance of vision in the experience of rasa as well. She notices that Indian theories of aesthetics and perception, as applied to Indian classical dance, point towards the power of sight in the performer-audience relationship. "Mastery of *abhinaya* necessarily involves the ability to direct the audience's sensibilities towards a particular perception through the use of eye movements" says Coorlawala, and the dancer's eyes are thus used as a tool to direct the spectator's attention to a particular body part, idea, place or action, allowing the audience to "see" what they are supposed to see—just as Supriya Nayak demonstrated in the previous chapter when teaching her student to show a bird in gesture.

Again, these examples point to the dancer's ability to use sight and eye movements to evoke rasa via imagination within spectators. But the spectators' sight, too, is mobilized during performance and alters the experience of rasa. As I attended concerts in India during the month of *margazhi*, hopping from one venue to the next, it became clear to me that one should not neglect the contribution of visual cues and stage lighting in the spectator's experience of rasa. Whereas in traditional settings, performances – especially in the context of Kathakali and Kuttiyatam – would happen at night, with people lighting actors with the help of torches (which created a warm, intimate setting), today's technological strategies can go from simple stage lighting, using light projectors, to projected images acting as backdrops. The performances I attended had a wide range of these and went from fully lit small rooms with a low stage, to dark rooms and quality lighting with a higher stage. It became evident that by being on the ground floor, in a dark room and with stage lighting emphasizing the dancer's movements and facial expressions, my emotional experience was heightened; whereas I could not fully concentrate or enjoy the performance when the whole room was lit, or when I was on the balcony level, much farther away, and could notice the stage markups or even see Kathakali actors get in and out of character from behind their flag.

In a traditional *dasi attam* setting, performers and musicians would perform in a very different environment. The band would stand up behind the dancer and follow her around as she moved back and forth through the small space on which she performed, surrounded by spectators and devotees, who would also be on the ground level. Lighting was not as efficient as it is today; yet, the spectators' proximity with the dancer and the musicians allowed them to fully enjoy the *abhinaya* she was performing (see Meduri 2012, 258–59). Classical rasa theory reflected those realities but has never truly been adapted – at least in written form – to the modern proscenium

stage context[89]. Such (visual) proximity with dancers is still possible today – such as I have experienced in India with Sujata Mohapatra's Odissi performance, and in Toronto with Arrthami Siva-Kuruvinth's Bharatanatyam recital – and allows the spectator to share the emotional landscape that is being painted by the performer in a much stronger way than it does when far away from the stage, despite modern stage lighting and technology. This proximity has notably been highlighted by Bhattacharya as a contributing factor to the shared experience of rasa as bodies are "in a place of responsiveness and porousness." But adapting rasa to modern times also means that artists can use visual backdrops and complex colored lighting to emphasize *abhinaya* in ways that were not possible in temples. As such, performers not only suggest what to see through eye movements and gestures, but do so with the help of light and shadows, projected images and costume alterations as well.

Imagination in the audience can also mean to project oneself on the stage, an element that was addressed by Lata Pada during our interview. Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason have dedicated years of research on this topic and came to call it "kinesthetic empathy" (Reynolds 2013; Reason and Reynolds 2010; Reynolds and Reason 2012). Using the same expression, Deidre Sklar emphasizes the role of imagination in the extrapolation of sensation required for one to "move along with" others: one has to imagine what the moving subject is kinesthetically feeling in their body to fully appreciate the knowledge produced through kinesthetic empathy (Sklar 2007, 39)[90]. By sensing along with the performer, audience members are in a better position to experience rasa along with the artist and portrayed characters.

"It's About Rediscovering the Melodic Combinations That Make Me Feel Good"[91]: Hearing Rasa

From my experience, both in India and in Canada, each audience includes two major types of *rasikas*: music *rasikas* and dance *rasikas*. I believe my experience in Toronto sitting behind Menaka and Rasesh Thakkar was the greatest illustration of this: Menaka Thakkar would sit on the edge of her seat, anticipating every move and ready to jump up after a particularly difficult dance technical passage; while Rasesh Thakkar would tilt his head from side to side during the introduction of each *raga* (musical scale), humming the songs, music and poems throughout the performance. Several times, I could hear audience members humming or singing along with the musicians on stage during performances. I was particularly struck by the number of spectators who would sing the Tulsidas poem at that Toronto recital (see Chapter 2). This active participation certainly contributes to the spectators' increased enjoyment of the recital, and even brought me joy as someone who was not as familiar with these poems but that nonetheless was part of this shared singing experience.

A striking characteristic of sound and music in classical Indian dance-drama is that *ragas* (musical scales) are associated with specific rhythmic patterns and "emotional colouring so that only specific kinds of *ragas* will be used in a dance/drama performance" (Ram 2000, 269). Hence, just as certain emotions or characters are associated with specific expressions and visual depictions

89. We had to wait until the mid-twentieth century before Rukmini Devi undertook the task of adapting Indian classical dance performances to the proscenium stage. These changes included the "immobilization" of musicians who were instructed to play sitting down on the side of the stage.
90. Again, see note 7 for more detail on this shared used of the expression "kinesthetic empathy."
91. Jonathan Voyer, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).

– a story between Krishna and Radha would be associated with the erotic mood and romantic scenarios, for instance – particular musical scales are linked to inner moods. Indian music, which amounts to "the sonic embodiment of emotion" (Butler Schofield 2012, 161), privileges the aesthetic savouring of songs in dance (as well as music) recitals by first offering the listeners with a short, improvised introduction to the *raga*—a time that encourages spectators to immerse themselves in the flavour of the melodic segment to come, to explore its ingredients-composition and to embrace the upcoming mood to be represented via dance. Central to the sonic enjoyment of a danced poem is also the tone of the voice and the melody of lyrical poems. Rajesh Chenthy addressed these elements when he explained to me how he enjoyed – and in fact experienced rasa – listening to a particular radio show back in India because of the host's charisma, poised discourse and tone of voice.

Such cultural synaesthesis – in this case, hearing and visualizing a rasa – often occurs in Indian arts. The term "*varnam*," for instance (the main piece of a Bharatanatyam recital) literally means "colour," and so dancing a *varnam* becomes like a painting, but using words, music, sounds, images and movements (Ram 2011, S165). Another good illustration are *ragamala* miniature paintings that feature musical scales – which are themselves associated with a specific rasa – in visual forms, usually as a man or a woman; a synaesthesic idea that Supriya Nayak has been exploring in her Odissi dance practice. In addition to depicting *ragas* in character form, the *ragamalas* are associated with specific natural features, Indian seasons, divinities or even times of the day. For instance, the *raga bhaivari* – one that Nayak is fond of and explored as part of her *ragamala* experiment – has been associated in Indian music theory to the Kailasa mountain where the god Shiva and his family reside (Voyer 2018, 89–90). Multisensory catalysts are thus plentiful for the audience of Indian dance drama and go much beyond visual delectation, triggering the spectator's imagination as discussed in the previous section.

The *NS* (Chapter 27) provides a few clues as to the success of a play (either "human" or "divine"), which are, for the most part, auditory. As such, exclamations ("how wonderful!" or "how pathetic!" for instance, depending on the dominant emotion portrayed) are central to the success of a play—in other words, to the experience of rasa. Smiles and laughter, as well as horripilation, tears, rising from one's seat and applause, are also part of the types of expressions that translate rasa. But the opposite can also be true, as a completely silent auditorium is believed to convey a divine success (*NS* 27.17). This success, which in fact translates enjoyment, goes on not only between performer and audience, but also between spectators through gestures, exclamations and even on-going commentaries, as highlighted previously (Ram 2011, 165; Coorlawala 2010a, 126–27).

"A Flavor That Translates Through Movements" [92]: The Tasteful Experience of Rasa

What does it mean for the spectator to "taste" or "savor" a performance? Spectators manifestly do not literally taste a performance. However, the audience's satisfaction from seeing, hearing and imagining a play alongside the performer's interpretation of a given poem is consistently compared to the pleasure one experiences from eating an exquisite meal. Theorists have used gustatory metaphors repeatedly to expand on the idea of aesthetic pleasure, starting with Bharata.

92. Julie Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).

> Here one might ask: What does "rasa" actually mean? Our answer is that rasa is so called because it is something savored. And how can rasa be said to be "savored"? Just as discerning people relish tastes when eating food prepared with various condiments and in doing so find pleasure, so discerning viewers relish the stable emotions when they are manifested by the acting out of various transitory emotions and reactions and accompanied by the other acting registers (the verbal, physical, and psychophysical), and they find pleasure in doing so. This explains why we call them "dramatic rasas," or tastes. On this matter there are two traditional verses: "Just as connoisseurs eat and savor their fare when prepared with many condiments and substances, so the learned fully savor in their heart the stable emotions when conjoined with the factors, transitory emotions, and reactions. That is why they are called dramatic rasas, or 'tastes.' […] Just as the conjunction of condiments and spices makes food savory, so the emotions and rasas bring each other into being." (*NS* 6.31, in Pollock 2016, 51)

Abhinavagupta expanded on Bharata's analogy in the *ABh* by specifying that the taster of a rasa needs to be present physically, but also mentally to consciously appreciate the played emotion.

> Just as there is something being savored in the food prepared with condiments; an agent of savoring in the agent of the gustatory experience when he is single-minded (since a person who has the experience when his mind is elsewhere will have no sense of savoring anything); an end result of the savoring, namely, pleasure, weight gain, vitality, nourishment, strength, health, and the like, so it is in the case of rasa: there is something being savored when rasa in the form we refer to as the stable emotion is manifested by the various forms of acting; there is an agent of savoring in the audience when they are single-minded, that is, when they identify with the drama; and there is an end result of the savoring, namely, instruction in morality and the other ends of man, expertise in them, and so on, in a way that is predominantly pleasurable. Thus, because of the similarity of act, agent, and outcome, we can refer to the specific kind of apprehension produced by the aesthetic elements as an act of tasting. (*ABh* 1.283, in Pollock 2016, 205)

Hence, Abhinava considered that the aesthetic pleasure resulting from a performance is like the satisfaction resulting from food consumption because they both involve comparable preparation, agents and end results. Furthermore, he considers that savouring rasas "is a mental process far superior to eating, the process of physical tasting." The spectators, in fact, savour emotions with their mind (see the next section on *manas*) and not with their mouth, tongue and digestive system as they do when eating food. The superiority of mental over physical savouring results from the fact that *rasikas* taste emotions in their heart, according to Abhinava, meaning that they relish "a state of consciousness of ultimate joy" that is possible because their heart is free from any hindrances in the aesthetic context, as opposed to food or emotions in everyday life. This experience of a "state of rapture-savoring" is thus only possible in the arts, because it is only there that the thing being savoured "is simply one's own awareness, which is uniformly blissful" (*ABh* 1.284.25, in Pollock 2016, 210).

But the codification of emotions in Indian performing arts has other implications. As a matter of fact, Pollock observes that "for Indian aesthetics, there really is no disputing in matters of taste, not because each reader [and spectator] has his own in accordance with the relativist-

skeptical stance of modernity, but because all readers [and spectators] have, ideally, the same" (Pollock 2016, 34). By this, Pollock means that, because of its codified nature, the experience of rasa should be the same for all *rasikas*. Yet, many of my collaborators have argued that rasa knows no boundaries, whether cultural or linguistic. Because the experience of rasa entails the savoring of emotions, which are arguably discernible whatever the audience's origin, the aesthetic enjoyment of an Indian play would thus be accessible to all. Even to this day, all audiences are addressed "as connoisseurs capable of appreciating the finer taste and savouring the rasa, the juice and essence, of the arts" (Ram 2011, S160). By allowing the audience to occupy the role of fine tasters, artists are allowing them to embark on a *rasik* journey with them, to learn how to savor rasas in all their forms. Through the appreciation of nuances in gestures and facial expressions, the *rasika* is engaging in a savoring that becomes "a tasting of the emotions themselves," which is not a derivative of a particular Sanskrit theory (S162).

In a more literal understanding of rasa as taste, one should consider the contextual factors that contribute to the spectator's appreciation and relishing of a performance. During my stay in Chennai, I was surprised to learn from my guesthouse host that one of the reasons why the month of *marghazi* – roughly around December and January each year – is so effervescent is because people often go watch performances based on the venue's canteen menu. Indeed, every performance venue generally has a small restaurant which is known for the specific dishes they serve. A significant part of a performance's enjoyment thus includes a meal at one of these canteens after the recital, as spectators relish the remainder of the *rasik* experience they had in the auditorium alongside delicious food. It is perhaps through taste and food that the spectator is able to transition back from his otherworldly feeling of pleasantness to the chaotic world that awaits him outside the venue.

"There Is Something That Has Kindled Something Within the Audience Member"[93]: Processing Rasa With the Mind (Manas)

As stated by Abhinavagupta in his commentary on the *NS*, the enjoyment of emotions within the aesthetic context differs from that of ordinary emotions because they are mentally, and not physically, relished. This form of mental processing in relation to the experience of rasa deserves further attention. The many schools (*darshanas*) of Indian philosophy of perception generally agree in saying that perception (*pratyaksha*) or perceptual experience is the primary means of acquiring knowledge (*pramana*) (Chadha 2016; Matilal 1991, 97). Perception can be divided into two forms: external or non-conceptual (sensory) perception, and internal or conceptual (mental) perception. A sensory awareness is thus invaluable in the acquisition of knowledge, as the senses can "grasp" any given object's conceptual, pre-language essence or quality. However, the mind, known as the *manas* – a faculty distinct from the intellect (*buddhi*) or the soul (*atman*) – is the "processor" that ties together sensations coming from the external five senses and transforms those into mental representations. Indeed, the *manas* is responsible for the conversion of external objects (non-conceptual form) grasped by sense organs into conceptual, interpretable data (Dasgupta 1957; Chadha 2016). It is also through this sensory faculty that the subject can isolate relevant sensations and produce knowledge deriving from past experiences (Voyer 2018, 119).

93. Lata Pada, 6 July 2018.

But the *manas* can also grasp objects "from within" in the form of inner feelings and internal processes, such as pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duhkha*), desires and memories (*samskara*). Bimal Krishna Matilal explains that

> the meaning of *pratyakṣa* [perception] is never completely exhausted by our talk of the five types of sensory awareness, for a considerable number of "inner" episodes of awareness must be called *pratyakṣa*, perception, because of their directness, irresistibility, and certainty. Hence an "inner" *akṣa* "faculty" has to be invented, as it were, to account for the arising of all "inner" episodes and "inner" perceptions. (Matilal 1991, 226)

In other words, not only does the *manas* perceive inner feelings – including emotions – but it also bridges the external sense organs to the Self (*atman*) as well as to conceptual knowledge. As such, the Nyaya school of philosophy highlights the fact that both external and internal perception are valid means to knowledge, meaning that even impressions or memories (*samskara* or *vasana*) are considered as real as touching or seeing.

The concept of inner perception and the role of the *manas* is a fundamental element that sets Indian philosophy apart from Western philosophy. "What the senses are for the sensible world," states Matilal, "the so-called mind [*manas*] is for the 'inner' world" (Matilal 1991, 226). Therefore, the Indian aesthetic sensorium would include not five, but six senses[94]—or, in this case, sensory faculties (*aksha*). Furthermore, each sense organ is associated with one of the elements that form the world, as well as with specific qualities that can only be perceived by that same organ (see Table 6 below).

Table 6. Indian Perception in Philosophy[95]

Sense	**Organ/Means of knowing (*indriya*)**	**Element/Substance (*dravya*)**	**Quality (*guna*)**
Eye	Eye	Fire (*tejas/agni*)	Color; Form (*rupa*)
Hearing	Ear	Ether (*akasha*)	Sound (*shabda*)
Smell	Nose	Earth (*kshiti*)	Odor (*gandha*)
Touch	Skin	Air/Wind (*vayu*)	Touch (*sparsha*)
Taste	Tongue	Water (*ap*)	Flavor (*rasa*)
Cognition	Mind (*manas*)	N/A	"Mindables" (*dharma*)

Moreover, it is possible that the *manas* has a significant role in the perception of rasa within the aesthetic context, which demands from spectators to identify with the protagonists of the play in a profoundly emotional yet impersonal manner. For Balasaraswati, for instance, all five external

94. In fact, other philosophical schools such as the Samkhya (metaphysics) and Yoga (epistemology) schools raise this number to a total of eleven senses. They include five conative senses (speech, prehension, locomotion, excretion and reproduction) in addition to the five cognitive senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) and the *manas* (Dasgupta 1957; Voyer 2018, 119–21).

95. According to the philosophical thought and schools of Nyaya (epistemology) and Vaisheshika (metaphysics), in Chadha (2016).

senses are called upon during a performance, but it is the "sixth internal sense," the *manas*, that transform these elements into a harmonic beauty which produces pleasure (2012, 203). Likewise, Coorlawala claims that for spectators to engage their senses via the mind when they are seeing a performance, "sensory information needs to be encoded, rerouted via social constructions, symbolic behaviors, and abstract dance" (2010a, 125), which would be the role of the *manas*.

Abhinavagupta's interpretation of the experience of rasa, just like Bharata's, points toward a "movement of the senses inwards towards reflection and subjective experience," in that the "reception [of a performance] engages the senses but via the mind" (Coorlawala 2010a, 124–25). Furthermore, by consisting of a bridge between the object, the external sense organs and the *atman*, the *manas* brings to light Bhoja's interpretation of the *rasik* experience, for instance, which sums up as the appreciation of the true nature of the Self (*ahamkara*): the *atman*. If the experience of rasa in the spectator is indeed about relishing one's true Self (Abhinavagupta) or one's love towards the true nature of the Self (Bhoja), then the *manas* would represent the organ that makes such delightful consciousness possible.

As Wendy Doniger presents it, the *manas* doubly blurs "the Cartesian distinction between mind and body" – and hence becomes a perfect tool in the aesthetic context – because it combines mental and sentimental interpretations of the world: "like the heart, it is a physical organ in the body, and like the mind, it is where you learn calculus; and like both mind and heart, it is where you fall in love" (Doniger 2014, 107). The *manas*, as mentioned previously, is also responsible for the perception of pleasure—an integral element of the *rasik* experience that is consistently brought up by rasa theorists as well as my collaborators. The Nyaya philosophical school, again, considers that pleasure requires a direct contact between the subject and the object of pleasure, as well as a connection between the mind and the Self. In other words, for pleasure to exist, there needs to be senses, the *manas* and the *atman*.

In parallel, a number of classical aestheticians, including Abhinavagupta, argued that dominant emotions (*sthayins*) – or perhaps, their essence – exist within the spectator in latent form and could be "awakened" by their proper representation onstage or in a poem. The idea that emotions have an "essence" is quite similar to the Nyaya concept of external objects having conceptual essences: a cow, for instance, would be perceived as such because it possesses the essence or universal of "cowness" which can be grasped by the external senses and transformed into conceptual information by the *manas*. We could certainly consider a similar mechanism behind the apprehension of dominant emotions and their transformation into rasas: a given *sthayibhava* is witnessed onstage by the spectator and thus triggers in him a latent, corresponding emotional essence or universal, which in turn transforms, with the help of the *manas*, into a rasa.

"IT IS SOMETHING THAT TRANSCENDS [YOUR] OWN BEING" [96]: WHAT TRIGGERS RASA IN ARTISTS?

Collaborators and scholar-practitioners have made it clear that, in most cases, rasa emanates from the dancer before it is grasped, in a sense, by members of the audience. At that point, rasa has the potential of "bouncing back" to performers as they see or sense the experience of rapture within the audience. For the most part, dancers associate rasa with a feeling of pleasure, well-being or

96. Lata Pada, 6 July 2018.

enjoyment that sometimes results from a disconnect from the body, especially in seasoned performers. Moreover, this feeling usually lingers for a certain amount of time following the performance. For some, rasa is an individual feeling; for others, it is indissociable from the emotional experience of spectators. Several collaborators have even attested that the experience of rasa is possible outside of the aesthetic context of the arts.

Therefore, according to scholar-practitioners and my collaborators, I argue that the translation of a character's emotions via facial expressions and body movements can trigger rasa within the dancer in a number of ways: by personally experiencing the character's emotions which can lead to a disconnect from one's own identity and body; by triggering rasa and physical reactions in the audience that are then perceived and re-transformed into rasa by the dancer; by engendering specific emotions in the body of the dancer leading to rasa through the association of such movements with their corresponding emotions; as the actualization through dance of deep emotional experiences that derive from daily life; and, lastly, as a cultivated quality in the artist.

"When You Get to the Stage, You're Not Yourself" [97]*: Rasa as the Embodiment of the Character's Emotions*

The attention devoted to character development in the training of *abhinaya* (expressive dance) prepares dancers not only to interpret any sung poem convincingly, but most importantly to delve into "deep stories of love" (Supriya Nayak) and the like. In addition, the emphasis on relationships over narratives reinforces a personal connection with characters that in turn predisposes the embodiment of emotions in the performer. The extent one-on-one training with the *guru* alludes to these deep emotional connections with the poem's characters—and not always in the dance studio, as hinted by Beaulieu and Nayak. Indeed, the informal context outside of dance lessons oftentimes leads to more detailed discussions about those relationships, allowing the dancer to deepen her connection to characters and express emotions in a more "authentic" way on the stage.

As such, what allows the performer to experience rasa, according to Chakravorty, is the expression of the character's emotions (*bhavas*)—the experience of rasa becomes the embodiment of a character. Thus, the representation of the emotion is independent from the dancer's feelings, says Chakravorty (2004, 12). The embodiment of poems and narratives through danced dialogues gives performers access to a plethora of emotional moments that are crucial in the formation of rasa within the artist and the audience. A key component in forming authentic emotional relationships with and between characters for Jayarajan was to create imaginary dialogues that would trigger "natural" emotions in the performer. Those dialogues form a deep connection with characters over time and slowly build a body memory associated with those relational exchanges. Beaulieu even stated that dance – more than visits to temples – was the most effective way to come into intimate contact with Hindu divinities, because it allowed you to embody their stories and built personal relationships that you could later refer to when enacting emotions on the stage (J. Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017).

When performers reach a state in which their own identity dissolves into the character's identity, they experience – and arguably produce – rasa. Pada was convinced that seasoned performers would almost always experience an out-of-body experience during recitals, which may

97. Lata Pada, 6 July 2018.

well result from this dissolving of personal identity. Performers are not themselves once they step onto the stage (L. Pada), they do not recognize themselves anymore (J. Beaulieu): it is not "Lata" or "Julie" that are dancing anymore, but the characters that are embodied, an identity that goes beyond the dancer's.

Chakravorty mentions that by imagining herself as the character of the episode, she is able to embody that character's feelings and thus feel rasa deep within herself, which leads her to claim that "the line between practice, performance and creativity (choreography) is blurred in *riaz* [practice]. […] The feeling of rasa creates deep self-enjoyment within the performer, which prompts her to engage in play and improvisation" (Chakravorty 2004, 11). According to Chakravorty, by expressing the character's emotions (*bhava*s), the dancer can experience rasa as an embodiment of that character (12). The representation of the *bhava* becomes independent from the dancer's feelings.

It appears that such disconnect from one's own body in performance may allow the artist to experience rasa as a "witness" to her own embodiment of the character. Chakravorty's understanding of rasa in the dancer – which lays in the embodiment of a character and their emotions and is thus detached from the dancer's feelings – as well as Coorlawala's interpretation of rasa within the performer as an "inner seeing-while-doing" (2010a, 133), would correspond, I argue, to the "emotional distance" that is considered essential in Abhinavagupta's theory of rasa. In contemporary practice of classical Indian dance-drama forms, this distance is achieved by "transcending" played emotions, by removing them from the performer's own emotions during "out-of-body" moments. According to Chakravorty, this is what enables the dancer to become a spectator of her own dance through practice and movement (*riyaz*).

"It's an Amazing Awareness of the Audience" [98]: Rasa as the Dancer's Response to the Audience's Emotional Experience

As a "participatory and an interactive experience" (L. Pada) and a "circular relationship with the audience", classical Indian dance performances undoubtedly make artists "responsive and porous" (N. Bhattacharya) to the emotional experience of others surrounding them. Hence, the performer's experience of rasa is closely linked to their audience and can result from their own response to the spectators' reactions, as suggested by Arya Madhavan. Similarly to the formation of rasa in the spectator, Madhavan argues that the performer's experience of rasa is caused by the audience's reaction to their own acting—the performer's depiction of dominant emotions (*sthayibhavas*) triggers rasa in the audience, which is then transferred back to the stage as the actor sees, hears or senses the spectators' *rasik* experience (Madhavan 2010). The idea of sensing or feeling the audience was indeed discussed by Pada, Bhattacharya and Chenthy. This sensing, which does not always rely on the sense of vision, contributes to each artist's *rasik* experience, as rasa – or at least the sensation of rasa in the audience – is being transferred back to the artist through a form of reciprocity (L. Pada), energizing the performer (R. Chenthy) and allowing them to "become the dance" (N. Bhattacharya).

If we think of rasa as the dancer's response to the audience's emotional experience, rasa in the performer could be compared to the spectators' experience of rasa when seeing and hearing a

98. Nova Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018.

performance, in that both react to dominant emotions (*sthayibhavas*) presented to them: the spectators react to the embodied character's emotional experience, while the dancer feeds off the audience's own reactions to her performed emotions onstage. This circulation of affect is constant throughout the performance and feeds the artist's own rendition of emotions; it acts, in a sense, as an "emotional dimmer" in the same way Beaulieu's *guru* would do during her *abhinaya* training. This "bouncing back" or "reciprocity" of the *rasik* experience from audience to performer certainly energizes the performance, but also triggers an equivalent sensation of pleasure in the artist as "that sensation actually gets transferred back" to them (L. Pada).

The audience's participation is thus essential to the interactive experience of rasa in the artist, and speaks to the *rasik* specificity of Indian performing arts. Furthermore, the experience of rasa in performers through their awareness of the audience's own experience accounts for what Pada addressed earlier as Bharatanatyam being both a performing art and not a performing art. Beyond all appearances, Bharatanātyam is still defined through *rasik* motivations: the dance form today is undeniably a performance art, yet the experience of performers and spectators suggests that its ultimate goal is still rasa, thus equating Bharatanatyam with a *rasik* event rather than an entertaining art. The fact that performers can "receive" the audience's *rasik* enjoyment no matter how many people are present in the auditorium proves that, indeed, Indian performing arts are fueled by the distinct aesthetic concept of rasa.

"I Experience a Deep Joy in Indian Dance" [99]: Rasa as the Dancer's Emotional Response to Kinaesthesia

Because the physical training of emotions is uncommon to Western actor training – in which, in a Stanislavsky-based approach to acting, practitioners do not argue that movements trigger emotions, but rather that the evocation of inner feelings trigger adequate movements that translate the emotion (as seen in Method Acting) – the Indian approach to the training of emotions has caught the attention of a number of Western-based scholars of performance studies, including Eugenio Barba (2015), Phillip Zarrilli (2000) and Richard Schechner (2001). What they have retained from this newly found artistic culture – as was highlighted by Nayak – is that emotions can be learned and that the mind-body dualism in Western theatre pedagogy can be challenged through such approach to performing emotions.

In parallel, and based on modern cognitive neuroscience research, a growing number of Indian classical dance performers and scholar-practitioners argue that the physical representation of emotions triggers that same emotion within the performer's body. Ursula Neuerburg-Denzer's Ph.D. thesis explores this exact question, asserting that performed emotions have "more to do with the bodily processes of emotions than the mind processes of feelings" (2011, 42). She makes a clear distinction between affect, emotion and feeling in trying to define which of these the actor needs to focus on during training. Affect, Neuerburg-Denzer stresses, is the more immediate response to a trigger; emotion is "the response to a trigger that involves both bodily changes and cognition," and its expression is "culturally and situationally determined" (50); while feeling "is the knowledge or awareness of the performer that an emotionally triggered bodily change has taken place, but feelings are not outwardly readable signs" (51). She concludes that rasas correspond in most part to basic emotions as theorized by psychologist Paul Ekman, thus working as umbrellas

99. Julie Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).

that include many other states or secondary, more complex emotions (e.g., jealousy, shame, guilt). More importantly, she suggests that gestures can indeed trigger emotions—a much better approach to performed emotions than relying on affective memories that trigger corresponding emotionally-charged movements.

Beaulieu suggested during our discussion that emotions can in fact be triggered by both paths—either from action to emotion, or from emotion to action. In her case, because she had no prior bodily memory (Sklar 2008) associated with Indian ways of expressing emotions, she had to build those associations – a process she called "absorption," which brought her to engage with poems and their characters – in order for specific movements to trigger the corresponding (codified) emotion within her. Now that her body has absorbed those (culturally-charged) emotions and has associated specific gestures with corresponding affect and relationships with key characters – now that those interactions "live within her" as she expressed it – she is able to trigger sentiments from movements instead of hoping that forced sentiments would lead to adequate outward emotional expressions. To borrow Susan Leigh Foster's words, Beaulieu has acquired, through situated kinaesthesia, a form of habitus in which certain patterns emerge as "way[s] of knowing in a given cultural context, a form of embodied knowledge" (Foster 2011, 8).

Kathak dancer Pallabi Chakravorty tells of the intense mental and physical pleasure produced by rigorous and repetitive practice, or *riyaz*. Such practice produces rasa, she says. She links rasa to its religious (*bhakti*) roots in medieval devotional movements in which devotion "was imagined as an intense emotional outburst of personal devotion to God": we can think of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas as an outstanding example of this. In these movements, the "aesthetic emotion of rasa was experienced through *bhakti* by the devotee (*bhakta*) in the form of divine bliss" (Chakravorty 2004, 8). Chakravorty claims that this transition from a detached impersonal state of emotions in the *NS* to a more subjective and embodied experience of rasa in medieval *bhakti* is at the root of rasa today in Kathak. Hence, for Chakravorty, the experience of rasa in the artist lies in the way one senses emotions through body movements, or what she calls the "embodied aesthetics of the feeling states of *bhava* and *rasa*" (2009a, 213). Therefore, one could argue that because dancers not only relish rasa with their mind, but dance it as well – *move* through it, *feel* it in their body – their experience could indeed transform into a "very *heightened sense* of aesthetic pleasure […]—or aesthetic taste" as Lata Pada has explained to me (6 July 2018; emphasis added).

A recurrent theme that came up during my interviews was that dance, and classical Indian dance in particular, triggered joy and well-being[100] in performers. It is arguable that this joy represents the manifestation of rasa in dancers—just as rasa triggers *chamatkara* (pleasure, surprise) within spectators, as well as performers at times. Not only has Beaulieu drawn attention to the joy she felt in Indian dance that is not present in her contemporary dance practice, but Bhattacharya – who does rely on a Bharatanatyam-based dance vocabulary but is mostly involved in contemporary works – has also expressed how much she found joy in coming back to her Bharatanatyam roots and movements. Nayak, too, found enjoyment in her Odissi practice by coming back to its roots and foundations following an injury; as did Voyer, who felt a sense of joy

100. "Faire du bien/faire un bien énorme" in French.

within his music practice triggered by surprising and exciting moments of self-discovery (see Wang 2019) that led to *chamatkara*.

Beaulieu has pointed that one may explain this joyful state through neuroscientific reasoning – just as scholars in mirror neurons do – but this would not account for the artist's engagement with the material and the intimate relationship they forge with key characters like Krishna. For her, the difference between Bharatanatyam and contemporary dance lies in the fact that the profound joy she feels lasts well after performances in the former case. Enjoyment, argues Sen-Podstawska, could also surface in Odissi dance because of its distinct (Oriya) sensibilities – the "emotional responsiveness (sensitivity) towards different notions or qualities such as movement, rhythm, sound, time, shape, colour, texture and taste" – in which sensuality, circularity, sculpturesque-like postures, fluidity and grace of movement evoke emotional and aesthetic pleasure (2018, 299). In other words, the reception of certain aesthetics is associated with pleasure and well-being because it derives from an acquired cultural sensitivity—or, in this case, *rasik* literacy.

Kalanidhi Narayanan (1994, 71) states that an *abhinaya* performance without *sattvikabhinaya* (psychophysical acting) is like a meal without salt: it is devoid of flavor, devoid of rasa. Involuntary physical reactions triggered by powerful emotions enacted onstage often result when dancers "understand" and "internalize" the emotions produced through the characters' relationships, and thus "feel the *abhinaya*," as pointed out by Pada. Those reactions are indicators that the dancer is perhaps experiencing rasa, that rasa has been evoked in them. That is in fact what Beaulieu has noted in her Bharatanatyam practice, in which she experiences "moments of shivers" and incontrollable weeping. Here, there is a connection between the performed emotion and the feeling (Neuerburg-Denzer 2011).

The joy and well-being radiating from rasa can in fact result from any emotional situations, as it actually does in performance—rasa is a pleasurable feeling that is triggered both from negative emotions like sadness and positives ones like love. Punthambekar has explained her own personal experience of rasa in these terms, in that she felt a form of well-being or satisfaction resulting from hardships and challenging situations in her everyday life that would trigger unpleasant feelings in her. In this case, physical and mental distress or exhaustion can lead to rasa. Chenthy, who like Punthambekar studied at Kalakshetra, shared similar feelings regarding the hardships he had to face during his dance training in Chennai and the fact that, through this suffering, he had become a successful performer with solid technique, therefore better at communicating emotions and evoking rasa in audiences.

As we were discussing their religious identity as Quebecois artists who adopted an Indian artistic practice, Voyer and Beaulieu raised this issue of pleasure resulting from pain in different terms. Voyer challenged the idea of his religious identity influencing his artistic practice in saying that it would in fact go the other way around: it is the artistic practice that leads to a ritualized practice. Beaulieu and Voyer both agreed that they felt "at home" in India where artistic practices were valued and celebrated as a *sadhana*, a ritualized, rigorous exercise that implies a form of restraint or sacrifice. While artists usually refer to the word *riyaz* to express this form of "mortification," as Voyer indicated, both *sadhana* and *riyaz* embody this idea of dedicating one's life fully to a way of life and putting the mind and body through sustained hardships that result in an uplifting artistic excellence—and experiences of pleasure through rasa, perhaps. Beaulieu's

definition of her experience onstage – where she is "débordée," overwhelmed by physical tasks that demand a sustained concentration – also speaks to her conceptualization of her dance practice as a *sadhana*. It is precisely the fact that she is juggling with the complexity of Bharatanatyam's dance techniques onstage that allows her to disconnect from her personal identity through rhythmic flow (see Vuoskoski and Reynolds 2019).

Chakravorty also claims that "learning from repetition and habituation has a ritual dimension." *Riyaz*, she argues, is the essential moment when "the emotional patterns are imprinted on the dancing body" and during which, little by little, the dancer's body is molded into the sensuous world of dancing and singing, ultimately leading to the tasting of "the joy of ecstasy" because of repetition and discipline (Chakravorty 2009b, 102). Punthambekar too viewed her personal connection and experiences of rasa in her day-to-day life as a form of meditation or spirituality that certainly resonates with Chakravorty's, Voyer's and Beaulieu's conception of *riyaz* and *sadhana*.

Interestingly, it is only when the artist is able to disconnect from her (conscious) body and "let go" of the physicality of dancing – of the burning muscles, the heat, the exhaustion, the pain – that she can feel rasa. For Pada, that means going through an out-of-body state during performance, a moment during which everything else disappears and the dancer is not herself anymore. She interprets such *rasik* state as semi-conscious or transcendent because she is not truly aware of what she is doing onstage—all she is able to experience is a "heightened sense of aesthetic pleasure." It is only during such moments of disconnect – when one is able to "let go of those things [steps, etc.]" – that "the dancer becomes magical," argues Bhattacharya: rasa can only happen, she believes, once the dancer lets go of technique, once technique has become ingrained in their body through repetition (*riyaz*) and discipline (*sadhana*).

This interpretation of the experience of rasa in the performer is similar to Zuhangzian *wuwei* which, like Indian rasa and Balinese *takshu*, emphasizes "the state of deep involvement in an intrinsically enjoyable and highly skilled activity," leading artists to *wangwo* – effortlessly losing self – which "allows a sense of great control without self-awareness" (Wang 2019, 135). In the same way, Balinese dancers, actors and musicians "must lose themselves in their performances and give themselves up to *taksu* in order to enjoy their performing experiences" (140). Rasa, *takshu* and *wuwei* all call for a strict physical and mental discipline that ultimately allows the performer to disengage from the body and from kinesthetic awareness to delve into an out-of-body or trance-like experience in which mental faculties and emotional expression are enhanced.

The disengagement from the body is in fact possible because of a mastery of technique, as body memory moves the limbs, allowing the performer to step away from her incarnate self to delve into the passionate flavors of an emotional, imagined dialogue. The dancing body, argues Sreenath Nair (2015b), is not a social body, but a performative body that answers to a performative habitus—what Barba (2006) would call extra-daily techniques that become one's alternate "natural" way of moving in the performing context. Once the artist can let go of technique, she reaches a sense of flow that facilitates states of "losing oneself" (Wang 2019). Wang's concept of Zhuangzian "effortlessly losing self" (*wuwei*) is not unlike the concept of "flow" and effortlessness possible through "good rhythm" or "being in the groove" discussed by Vuoskoski, who argues that flow produces "feelings of pleasure" through "rhythmic complexity and sensorimotor synchronization" (Vuoskoski and Reynolds 2019, 6).

While I have not danced long enough to reach such state, I do remember from my few Bharatanatyam classes how I needed to simply forget about my body, about the pain in my legs and the sweat pouring down my back, to be able to carry on with the lesson. I certainly felt like I disengaged from my body at times, in the same way one loses touch with one's body after a few minutes jogging or doing rigorous physical exercise. I could certainly identify to what Pada, Bhattacharya or Beaulieu were explaining through my own experience playing the piano: the ecstatic joy, satisfaction, well-being that blooms once I can let my fingers move on their own and lose myself in the lyrical and emotional interpretation of a piece. These moments give me the same satisfaction I get from eating a gourmet meal—as if I am nibbling or sipping on the melody, savoring and relishing it, wanting more yet prolonging the pleasure of the moment.

"But Now, Every Time I Do It, I Get Really *Emotional"* [101]*: Rasa as the Transformation of Lived Experiences*

Throughout this research, dancers have made it clear that one's ability to experience rasa as a performer depends on what they termed "authenticity" (N. Jayarajan) or "maturity" (L. Pada)—a quality that develops through years of practice and, most importantly, through the accumulation of bodily or emotional knowledge deriving from lived experiences in everyday life. As one embarks on new emotional life events, these experiences can be transposed on the stage to fuel the performance of emotions, as "a more mature performer with a greater realm of emotional experiences will be able to achieve greater depth in expression," suggesting that performers supplement performed emotions with their "increasing personal experience of emotional states" (Neuerburg-Denzer 2014, 88). Jayarajan's Yashoda example is the most striking in this regard, as she was able to portray her relationship to Krishna as Mother Yashoda in more relatable terms after going through motherhood herself. Not only has the audience experienced rasa then and "got it," but she, too, went through a transcending experience through her performance. She understood the experience of motherhood in embodied terms and was able to transfer this highly emotional experience – transforming it into rasa – to the audience.

Hence, rasa could be interpreted as the transformation of lived experiences, whether on a stage or in daily practice. Just as performers need to create bodily memories and embodied references of emotional expression in relation to Indian narratives – whether by growing up in a context that exposes them to those narratives, like Nayak, Pada and others experienced, or by consciously developing a relationship with key characters through dance like Beaulieu did – dancers can also use bodily memory from their daily life to contribute to their authenticity on the stage, leading to a more communicative *abhinaya* and increasing a communal experience of rasa with spectators. This ability translated as authenticity for Jayarajan, as the capacity to let emotions from lived experiences "stir up inside," and as the difference between imagining emotions and feeling them, based on passed sensory and affective experiences.

Perhaps rasa is not an embodied form of knowledge per se but derives from and is informed by embodied knowledge. As an "outward expression of the innerself" (Narayanan 1994, 32), rasa is only possible through authenticity, as argues Jayarajan; meaning with embodied knowledge deriving from personal lived experiences. In fact, as Katrak notes, the intertwining of the individual, the subjective and the impersonal onstage has become the norm, "whereas in traditional

101. Neena Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017.

classical dance, the dancer's individual body is only a vehicle for the expression of the stories of gods and goddesses" (2008, 233). Personal stories embedded in the body of dancers through lived experiences thus inform the representation of emotions and the evocation of rasa.

Bhattacharya feels that rasa for her is personal because it is embodied—by which she means that dancers relate, through their own lived experience, to the experiences of characters and transpose their own embodied knowledge in their interpretation of emotions onstage. It is because rasa is personal that she believes that she was so resistant to the idea of playing mother Yashoda when she was a teenager, as opposed to dancing love stories which appealed to her more. As such, Bhattacharya argues, the personal feeds into one's experience of rasa, but without making it too personal since emotions are being abstracted and interpreted based on a catalogue of codified gestures.

"There Is a Quality That One Cannot Express" [102]*: Rasa as an Innate Quality of the Artist*

As opposed to Madhavan (2010), a number of my collaborators hinted that rasa does not emerge first in the audience, but in fact originates from the artist herself. This idea is different from former rasa theories that viewed the character as the locus of rasa. In fact, my collaborators made it clear that this ability to create rasa depends on the dancer's personality, spirit (Samyuktha Punthambekar) or qualities (Lata Pada) which draw the audience in. As they delve deep into the emotional life of the characters, interpreters indeed produce or emanate rasa – often from previous bodily knowledge based on lived experiences – and transfers it to the spectators, who then transfer it back to them. But the starting point is the artist who produces rasa.

Rasa, then, may reside in the artist herself as an innate quality that is "emanated" during performance. Pada has referred to the Indonesian concept of *takshu* to translate this idea of a person's or an object's inner quality or power that is perceivable and somewhat inexplicably appealing to spectators. *Takshu*, a Balinese aesthetic concept that usually pertains to the performing arts, refers to "the spiritual inspiration and energy within a mask, puppet, character, or ceremonial weapon" as much as it designates "the charismatic power of a great performer to please the audience and to become the character or role he or she plays." Furthermore, *takshu* stands for a condition that performers aspire to achieve (Davies 2007, 21). But *takshu* resonates with Indian rasa in other terms, in that it also refers to "what makes a particular performance come to life, what makes an audience forget they are watching theatre and become absorbed, what imbues an actor with something special" (Hobart 2007, 124n34). Objects, puppets and humans alike need to be infused with life or *takshu* during performance. It is in fact movement that gives life to puppets through the flickering light and resulting moving shadows produced by oil lamps, and the same is true of Balinese dancers and actors who are expected to be in constant movement (Davies 2007, 22).

When she discussed *takshu* as "a type of rasa," Pada focused on its relation to the seasoned performing artist's charisma and stage presence. She explained how Balinese people would express their awe when faced with an object or a person that emanates or is imbued with this intrinsic quality of *takshu*, and felt that this same quality which draws spectators' attention may very well be present in Indian dance performers too. Just as Balinese viewers see this intangible

102. Lata Pada, 6 July 2018.

takshu in performers or objects, spectators of Indian performing arts see rasa as a quality emanating from the artist—or rather, members of the audience witness the manifestation of rasa through the artist's movements, gestures and expressions.

Perhaps rasa is indeed an indescribable quality, like *takshu*, that lies deep within the performer. Although one can learn to express emotions through codified gestures, there needs to be this "extra special thing" that transforms the dancer into something "magical," as pointed out by Bhattacharya—an element that Tomie Hahn addresses as "presence" and the ability to project *ki* energy out to the audience through effortless flow (2007, 162–65). This presence may well be what Punthambekar has associated to her family, where the arts flow in their blood. This passionate and emotional bloodline of hers is what gave her the "spirit" that Piryadarsini Govind associated with her ability to portray emotions and evoke rasa in audiences. Being a "highly emotional person" with a high "Emotional Rasa Quotient" is also what allows Punthambekar to experience hardships as *rasik* events that elevate her.

It is worth noting that with maturity comes the ability to improvise. As with Benamou's (2010) study of rasa in Javanese music, in which rasa is closely associated with moments of improvisation, rasa in classical Indian dance normally reaches its peak during improvised segments, either during training or onstage. For instance, *abhinaya* guru Kalanidhi Narayanan's expertise at improvisation when she was teaching expressive dance to Neena Jayarajan necessarily results from her years of practice and the maturity she has acquired over time. Here, a performer may excel at creating rasa or may be said to have rasa because of her maturity and experience. In any case, with maturity and experience comes a form of "aura" that emanates from the performer, as if she is imbued with rasa after being immerged in it for so long.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I curated a portrait of the modern experience of rasa in spectators and performers. Both parties, I argued, have access to the experience of rasa and further develop their *rasik* knowledge through visual, imaginative and aural sensory means and aesthetic taste, which are in fact interpreted, melded together and processed by the *manas*, the Indian internal sensory faculty that is responsible for transforming raw perception into conceptual knowledge. In addition, dancers expand their *rasik* literacy through internal forms of perception that are not accessible to spectators—or at least not in the same form. As such, performers experience rasa in kinesthetic ways by embodying characters' emotions and enhancing those via their own personal embodied knowledge on emotions, as well as by engaging in a rich *rasik* dialogue with the audience. Often, rasa translates as a pleasant physical sensation that – as is the case for spectators – makes them forget about their own identity and sometimes even gives them the impression of an out-of-body experience in which they become viewers of their dance. Rasa is believed to originate from artists, and some collaborators even envisioned the concept as a distinct quality that emanates from the dancer to the audience.

The rich and complex experience of rasa in spectators and artists represents, I argued, a synaesthesic experience (in the cultural sense)—an intersensory feast in which (learned) sensations and emotions combine and complement each other. From the very beginning, rasa theorists, including Bharata, have acknowledged the multisensory nature of the *rasik* experience. Drama was understood as a poem to be seen, which made it superior to literature (*kavya*) because, according to Bhatta Tota and as highlighted by Abhinavagupta in his *NS* commentary, "rasa comes into being

only when a state of awareness simulating visual perception comes into being" (*ABh* 1.284.15, in Pollock 2016, 209). Yet, the spectator's sensory experience of rasa is more than audiovisual and goes beyond ready-made and distinct categories of perception: it is intersensorial, even synaesthesic at times. The knowledgeable spectator, for instance, associates sounds to a specific mood-flavor—like *shringara*, the erotic, is evoked when hearing the *raga bhairavi*, or devotion is triggered when singing a Tulsidas poem. As such, the movements and music of Indian classical performing arts act as nostalgic reminders of the past to spectators of the Indian diaspora—these "patterned and coherent modes of being" are in fact "imbued with an emotional texture and colour, being the product of a synaesthesia of the senses" (Ram 2000, 269–70).

In a way, Indian classical dance represents a living, moving and intersensory representation of *ragamalas*, those miniature paintings that depict *ragas* as characters in visual form. In fact, the *rasik* experience is characterized by an intertwining of the senses and their association with specific emotions for both spectators and artists. For instance, both Chakravorty and Coorlawala highlight the synaesthesic quality of sight in performance. They compare the spectator's gaze to a form of *darshan* in which "gazing, knowing and touching [are possible] all at the same time" (Chakravorty 2004, 9), in that sight, knowledge and touch come together to form a multisensorial and holistic feeling of rasa (Coorlawala 1996, 19). Furthermore, visual beauty does not only concern the performer onstage, but the imagined environment that is created as well. Even the odors coming from the burned incense at the beginning of the recital, or the fresh smell of jasmine flowers in the dancer's hair as I have experienced at the Toronto recital of Arrthami Siva-Kuruvinth, contribute to the wholesome experience of rasa and signals that one has entered a space dedicated to Indian aesthetics. Each mood, narrative, costume, fragrance, poem, imagined landscape and melody are in turn associated to distinct memories and feelings, which is synthesized by the *manas*, awakening dormant stable emotions (*sthayibhavas*) within spectators and performers.

The modern interpretation of rasa aligns with Goswamin's perception of the actor (and spectator) as an active participant in the performance of emotions. All my collaborators, without any exception, affirmed that they experience rasa on the stage and sometimes even beyond. While for some, rasa was closely associated with the pain and suffering of daily challenges and obstacles, for others it became one with eating, cooking and mixing ingredients to create surprising and tasteful results, both in the kitchen and onstage. Through their training, my collaborators have acquired what Shanti Pillai identifies as "kinesthetic intelligence" (in Banerji et al. 2017, 228)—a derivative of *rasik* literacy and a form of knowing deeply ingrained in their bodies that resurfaces whenever they dance. The following *javali* and final chapter of the dissertation will address this notion of kinesthetic intelligence in more detail.

Chapter 5 (*Javali*)–
Rasa from a Sensory Anthropologist's Perspective:
Rasa, Embodied Thought and Anthropology

As hinted in the *padam*, the experience of rasa in dancers is distinct from that of spectators without kinesthetic knowledge of the *rasik* experience. Dancers have a fair advantage over spectators since they possess not only sensory knowledge of rasa, but also some theoretical knowledge in addition to a deep kinaesthetic understanding of the concept. This singular position makes them, I have argued earlier in the *shabdam* (Chapter 2), the modern *rasikas* of neo-classical Indian dance-drama. With *rasik* knowledge deep in their muscles and their *manas*, classical dancers are undoubtedly the new experts on rasa.

But what does it mean for artists to expand their *rasik* knowledge through internal and kinesthetic perception? In this *javali* – a poetic form characterized for its strong sensuousness and dominating *shringararasa* – I will answer the previous question by examining the deep meaning of learning emotions in and through the body. I will thus explore questions of theory versus practice in dance pedagogy and what Tomie Hahn calls "sensational knowledge" acquired through training (Hahn 2007), hence expanding on the idea of "sensory literacy" presented in the *shabdam* (Chapter 2) of the thesis. Based on data provided in the *varnam,* I will demonstrate that theory in inscribed deep within, yet also voiced through movements, gestures and expression in dance training by "talking less" and "doing more." Four important intersensory means come forward in embodied theory: hearing, seeing, imagining and moving (kinaesthetically, proprioceptively, rhythmically) through rasa. At the outcome of the first part of the *javali*, it will become clear that *dancers know in their body*.

Indeed, a common thread in my collaborators' accounts is the role of the senses in their interpretation and experience of rasa both onstage and during practice, with special emphasis on sound, aesthetic taste, imagination (or imagined sensory experiences) and kinaesthesia (rhythm in particular). While a visual contact with the audience seems to contribute to the experience of rasa during performances, it does not hinder the possibility of experiencing rasa nonetheless, since the dancer is most likely able to feel the spectators' presence and reactions, as pointed out by Bhattacharya and Pada. In fact, rasa may very well be "felt – bodily, mentally and emotionally – but it is not visual" (Sklar quoted in Katrak 2011, 19), especially in the case of artists. Some of Nova Bhattacharya's most powerful *rasik* experiences onstage, for example, happened when she was wrapped up in a "sari cocoon" that kept her from seeing the audience but allowed her to *feel* the spectators' presence. Likewise, Supriya Nayak expressed how singing poems herself, both during live performances and rehearsals, contributes favourably to her own *rasik* experience. The pleasure resulting from engaging in the singing of music is amplified by the dancer's mastery of rhythm, which is not uniquely auditory but rather multi- and intersensory and kinesthetic as their feet dance to the complex beat of the sung poem and the chanted syllables (*sollukattu*). The ability of dancers to reach a state of "flow," as discussed by Vuoskoski (Vuoskoski and Reynolds 2019), further increases their enjoyment as they then dissociate from their "overrun" body (J. Beaulieu) and surrender to the emotional density of the performed narrative. All these elements will be addressed in the first part of the analysis, which uncovers the sensational knowledge at play in the training of Bharatanatyam and Odissi.

The analysis that follows this first section is strongly influenced by the methodological foundations of sensory anthropology as developed by scholars such as David Howes and Constance Classen in the past three decades (Howes 1991; Classen 1997; Howes and Classen 2014). In reflecting the *javali*'s insistence on the sensual, I will turn to sensuous scholarship (Stoller 1997) in an exploration of rasa as taste (and specifically gustatory aesthetics). Hence, this second and final section of the *javali* will be dedicated to situating the study of rasa within the field of anthropology, with a special focus on sensory anthropology and the anthropology of emotion (or better yet, sensory-emotional associations in culture). I will uncover rasa as an "embodied thought" (M. Z. Rosaldo 1985) and a "bodily way of knowing" (Geurts 2002a) that, in reality, challenges typical anthropological categories (such as "senses," "emotions" and "body") and reveals the inadequacy of the mind-body binary in the study of emotional and sensory patterns across cultures. The significance of Punthambekar's description of the *padam* as a pleasure of the senses and an explosion of flavors highlighted in the pervious chapter will surely become tangible in this final, analytical chapter.

"LESS TALK, MORE DO"[103]: RASA AND QUESTIONS OF EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE IN PEDAGOGY

Practice and theory, as well as praxis – "knowledge emanating from practice" (Purkayastha 2018, 191) – have a paradoxical status in Indian dance and rasa studies: up until the end of the twentieth century, they co-existed, but never quite connected. The theory of rasa and its practice were part of two separate worlds that rarely came into contact, and theory (through Sanskrit studies) have dominated the field of research on rasa over practice (through performance studies and the anthropology of dance). Prarthana Purkayastha outlines the implications of this ambiguous status and the gap it created between theory and practice.

> In its appraisal and glorification of the past, the new nation that was India produced a rift between practice and theory in dance: "practice" in Indian traditional pedagogical systems of dance training became an unquestioning learning of repertoire and technique, while "theory" meant the study of ancient dramaturgical texts, such as the *Natyashastra* or *Abhinaya Darpana*. Praxis – the act of *doing* ideas – had a very different agenda under these systems of dance training and study, where collective cultural identity was given far more importance than an individual body's interrogative relationship vis-à-vis the dance form. (Purkayastha 2018, 192; emphasis in original)

The fact that modern dance-dramas are now predominantly performed by women has challenged the classical understanding of rasa and transformed its experience by confronting theory to praxis. Using feminist theory, most contemporary performers reject the rigidity of classical theory and instead suggest that not only can theory inform practice, but practice too can inform theory. Yet, the pervasiveness of theory's hegemonic status still prevails in dance.

> Whereas scholars agree that praxis (here, organized notions of training, vocabulary, syntax, form, etc.) preceded the writing of these historic manuals, today performers often assume the reverse, that is, that practice followed the writings. This assumption more accurately reflects our present relationships with these movement texts as well as recent processes of

103. Neena Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017.

> recovering and reconstructing Indian dances as classical forms. In this time of global diasporic movement, it is hard to hold on to the slippery meta-narrative spanning two millennia of geo-culturally specific performance practice. Accumulating traces from previous models of rasa in performance, philosophic inquiry and imaginative play continuously layer and transform meanings with each act of interpretation and each performance. (Coorlawala 2010a, 121)

This new emphasis on the precedence of practice over theory is certainly evident in the Indian teacher-disciple mentorship tradition (*guru-shishya parampara*). In this system, students are expected to live with their *guru* and help with daily chores alongside receiving dance training. The *guru-shishya* approach thus allows for teaching moments that go beyond the classroom—like discussing "apocryphal" details of mythological tales or hearing about "deep stories of love" that will affect the student's rendition of emotions in dance, as showed previously by Beaulieu and Nayak. In fact, Punthambekar even compared her *gurus* to mother figures because of the special affective bond – based on a "tough-love approach" (Banerji et al. 2017, 227) – that builds between teacher and student in such intimate approaches to dance training.

The making of emotions, their translation through gestures and facial expressions, is another element that sets Indian classical dance apart from many other traditional and modern dance forms. Yet, recent developments in Indian history encouraged reformers to introduce Western pedagogical elements – most notably textual and theoretical approaches to knowledge – to traditional Indian teaching methods. Dance is not only taught in *gurus*' houses anymore (now for shorter periods of time, usually a few weeks and in exchange for money), but in university departments and in dance schools like Kalakshetra as well – where students are exposed to a mix of *guru-shishya parampara* and institutional training – which both involve receiving dance training from several teachers. Henceforth the focus is on the product rather than the process of embodying rasa, as is the passing down of dance forms over the way it was taught traditionally (Chatterjea 1996, 84). University teaching, argues Chatterjea, is unable to instill "a different cognitive mode and a whole way of life, an aesthetic, a demeanor, a religiosity" that is only possible in an intimate approach to dance training (85). As for dance institutions, she considers that they cannot be considered professional schools, in that they simply fill the growing demand of the middle class (87). In contrast, Aadya Kaktikar, while acknowledging the difficulty of introducing an "un-academic" pedagogy within a university setting, suggests that the academic teaching of classical Indian dance forms enables teachers to break the *guru-shishya* power dynamic by giving agency to students (Kaktikar 2016).

The collision of these two worlds – traditional home teaching and modern institutional instruction – can create numerous challenges for teachers, as showcased several times in my interviews. For Punthambekar and Chenthy, this struggle translated through their frustration at teaching only once or twice a week to students who viewed dance as a mere hobby, as opposed to a way of living. For Jayarajan, the challenges resided in the contrasting approaches to learning: studying and translating poems, asking questions and learning about the history of characters before putting this knowledge into practice, as opposed to "doing and fixing later." Embodied forms of knowledge as they are valued in India imply that theory is slowly and relentlessly incorporated in the student's body. This approach allows students to embrace mistakes, contrary to Western teaching methods. To Punthambekar, this wisdom was summarized by a Tamil

expression which meant "shut your mouth and do your work": "It's just so profound," she said, "You just have to really… shut your mouth and do the work!" (2 Oct. 2017).

Hands-on, experiential approach to learning in India is also closely tied to what Punthambekar calls a "culture" that differs from outside the subcontinent, one in which dance is not a hobby, but a way of life—just as "Hinduism" is also a way of life, not a "religion." Punthambekar's remark makes even more sense considering Caroline A. Jones' (2018) idea of the "bureaucratization" and compartmentalization of the senses in Western culture. Jones argues that in the past two centuries, Western culture has successfully individualized the senses, thanks to technological advances and new media, slowly educating people to only "look" at art in white-wall galleries, only "listen" to music in music halls, and so on. The same is true of academia, which compartmentalizes the sensory order of study areas and the acquisition of knowledge, so that sensory-based disciplines (music, visual arts, dance) are located on the margins of those who focus their knowledge acquisition on intellectual research and theory, hence emphasizing the philosophical mind-body split (Hahn 2018, 33–34)**.** However, the original context of classical Indian performance invites students to live dance through a variety and overlap of sensory means. In this instance, dance is inseparable from *chai* and snack breaks (*tiffin*), from live music, rhythmic *sollukattu* and singing poems while dancing, from being surrounded by a living soundscape filled with various Indian languages, from family chores, from heat and exhaustion, from a continuous embodied learning in all aspects of daily life. But in Canada and in institutional settings, dance – although located in a distinct space marked by "honorary" and "custodian" visual symbols (as pointed out by Lata Pada) – does not exist along *tiffin*, along a persistent soundscape that fills the student's ears with Indian languages, myths and popular music. Here, people go to restaurants to eat, or to a concert hall to listen to music; once they step outside of the dance studio, they are leaving behind the "culture" of dance.

Indian teaching methods are often founded on harsh (and mostly gendered) training based on negative rather than positive reinforcements. Jayarajan's example of her Odissi *guru* hitting her male (and not female) students with her *talam* stick or Punthambekar's experience at Kalakshetra with her teacher who told her to "take her shoutings" are prime illustrations of this approach. Chenthy also confessed to me that, as a Bharatanatyam teacher, he did not want to tell his students that they were making good progress and were dancing well because otherwise they would stop working hard to get better: "I don't tell in front of them, but behind them, I will tell they're very good" he stated (27 Oct. 2018). Both Chenthy and Punthambekar claimed that the physical and mental harshness of this pedagogical approach made them better dancers, both in *nritta* and *abhinaya*. This approach stands for a high standard of dance teaching to them, one in which movements and emotions are learned "the proper way."

Whatever the pedagogical approach to learning, the teaching of Indian classical dance involves a complex intertwining of embodied theory and theorized embodiment. The body and the ways in which it expresses feelings and emotions via movements and gestures has always been a part of the *NS*'s instructions. From the outset, Bharata was able to pinpoint the extent at which the "sense organs and sense perceptions are potent vehicles of feeling and sensibility," thus demonstrating that "[i]ntellection is important, but senses, feeling and sensibility are fundamental" in dance and beyond (Vatsyayan 1996, 54). Kapila Vatsyayan, one of the most celebrated scholars of Indian arts, is right in affirming that "Bharata shows a deep understanding of the senses, body and mind relationship" in the *NS*. The treatise's theory of rasa, as a "psychosomatic system" that

establishes "correspondence between the motor and sensory systems" (19), shows great attention to detail when it comes to the representation of emotions and sensations on the stage. Bharata is not only careful in listing an impressive list of emotions, sentiments, states and their corresponding physical manifestations, but he also discusses the senses in and of themselves, the ways in which they should be portrayed during performance, and how their use and classification are closely related to personalities and tempers, as understood in Ayurvedic system.

Nevertheless, this theoretical complexity is rarely addressed directly in the *guru-shishya* approach, as opposed to the institutional teaching of dance. It is generally understood that students are exposed to major texts like the *NS* and the *AD* but dominantly in oral form through the *guru*'s descriptions, recitation or physical demonstrations. Emphasis is placed on "keeping the knowledge within the head," as would Odissi *guru* Sanjukta Panigrahi say to her pupil Anyaya Chatterjea; not on scripture, reading or taking notes (Chatterjea 1996, 82). The lack of attention given to the theoretical roots of dance left Nayak feeling disconnected from her practice, and compelled teachers like Pada to study the vocabulary and theory of Bharatanātyam and adhere to the ISTD dance curriculum in order to teach it to diaspora children in a more structured manner. However, as pointed out by Beaulieu, although this knowledge of theory is not named as such in the one-on-one teaching of dance, it is still there in movements, in expressions, in gestures, in character development, in the study and translation of poems. In other words, theory is embodied within the traditional Indian pedagogical approach to teaching dance: *gurus* have the theoretical knowledge that has been exported to treatises like the *NS* and the *AD*, but express it in bodily form.

One of the best ways of looking at embodied forms of knowledge and embodied theory in dance, as exemplified by Tomie Hahn's (2007) in-depth study of sensational knowledge in *nihon buyo*, is to examine the sensory strategies at work in its teaching. My collaborators have provided me with a plethora of information in this regard that provide valuable knowledge on the practice of rasa and the embodiment of emotions in classical Indian dance. The interviews as well as my fieldwork at Kalakshetra and my own short exposure to dance when I studied Bharatanatyam in Montreal with Rajesh Chenthy have opened my eyes to the modes of transmission of knowledge in dance, which, similarly to Hahn's study, involve vision, hearing and touching, but also other senses such as imagination, rhythm, kinaesthesia and proprioception, in part due to the absence of mirrors.

In illustrating the complex links that exist between theory and practice in the performance of emotions in classical Indian dance, the following sub-sections will be dedicated to the three aforementioned key aspects of embodied theory and theorized embodiment: the senses and the embodiment of emotions in the *NS* (as theorized embodiment), the sensational knowledge ingrained deep within the teaching and learning of Bharatanatyam and Odissi in India and Canada (embodying theory in training), and lastly, the place of theory within practice in neo-classical Indian dance (as embodied theory). In studying the impact of such structures of knowledge transmission, this section will additionally reveal "how teaching methods instill cultural concepts of the body and embodiment, while also identifying which elements a culture deems to be vital to transmit" (Hahn 2018, 32), in that pedagogy acts as a culturally-emplaced way of learning (see Nuttall 2018).

"I Want to See It in Your Eyes"[104]*: Rasik Senses in the Character*

Although the *NS* does not locate rasa in actors, it does provide a plethora of tools and mechanisms to help them live through and translate the rasa of characters they are embodying. In fact, in forging a theory of rasa, Bharata created a *rasik* sensory chart to help actors in the representation of emotions on the stage. Hence, the *NS* acts as a manual of theorized embodiment of senses and emotions. Indeed, in the twenty-fourth chapter of the *NS*, Vatsyayan notices that

> Bharata pays attention to all the five senses, presents his classification and categories of "personality types" and different types of human temperament. Tacitly, he is following in the latter, the classification of personality types of the Ayurvedic system where individuals have different types of temperament, calm, cool [*sattva*], hot, excitable, energetic [*rajas*] or dull [*tamas*], depending upon their metabolism caused by the relative balance or imbalance of the primary elements of *vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*, etc. Looked at thus, the chapter reveals Bharata's keen observant eye and mental comprehension of the senses—body, mind, feeling, emotion, relationship. (Vatsyayan 1996, 83–84)

Furthermore, this study of human temperament includes an examination of the representation of perception onstage. Bharata, who located rasa within the character, says that perception should be represented on the stage based on each of the sense organs—in this case, the five senses that are most familiar and their corresponding sense organs, namely the skin (touch), the eyes (sight), the nose (smell), the tongue (taste) and the ears (hearing; as illustrated in Table 6). Two distinct elements are of interest here. First, sight is not merely designated by the simple use of the eyes but is addressed in terms of "colors" and ways of representing visible forms (*rupa*). Second, taste and smell are combined (see Table 7). It is through the interaction with one's environment that the performer can represent perception and sensations. In fact, when the spectator witnesses the performer's representation of perception onstage, it is because the performer's *manas* (mind) has rightfully – meaning genuinely or authentically – apprehended an object from that environment, which can be positive, negative or neutral (NS 24.80-87, in Bharatamuni 1951, 1:452–53).

104. Supriya Nayak, 4 oct. 2017.

Table 7. The Representation of Perception in Indian Performance[105]

Perception/Sense organ	Onstage representation
Hearing	By making a sidelong glance, bending the head sideways and putting a hand near the ear, one should represent the sound (*shabda*).
Touch	By slightly narrowing down the eyes, raising the eyebrows in the like manner as well as touching the shoulder and the cheek, the wise one should represent touch (*sparsha*).
Sight/Colors [Form]	By holding on the head the *Pataka* hand [fingers together, hand straight] with its fingers slightly moving, and looking intently [at something] with eyes, the wise one is to represent form (*rupa*).
Taste and Smell	By slightly narrowing down the eyes and expanding the nostrils in the like manner as well as by intently gazing [at something] the wise one is to represent the taste (*rasa*) and the smell (*gandha*).

These representations of perception apply to any rasa (or rather, *sthayibhava*), although the rasa of the odious (*bibhatsa*) is of particular interest here. In the *NS*, Bharata notes that disgust (*jugupsa*), which leads to the rasa of *bibhatsa*, arises from factors (*vibhavas*) such as "discussing, hearing, or seeing what is ugly, unpleasant, unclean (*acoṣya*) and undesired"; or, in other words, "unpleasant smells, tastes, physical contacts, words" (*NS* 6.72-73, in Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 1:55). Yet, disgust can also arise in the erotic sentiment, during moments when, for instance, the *nayika* sees another woman's lipstick on her lover's neck or nail scratches down his back (N. Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017). In any case, unpleasant sights (or smells, or touch, or flavors, or sounds/utterances) should trigger *bibhatsa*, while pleasant sights might otherwise result in *shringara* (love) or *adbhuta* (awe), for instance.

McHugh's (2012) remark about the role of fragrances in Hindu thought is relevant to Indian performing arts as well. Performances of *vipralambha shringara* (love in separation and longing) within Indian dance-drama, for instance, rely heavily on reminiscing about the loved one and bringing him closer to the heroine via odorous and other sensory cues. Such narratives make considerable use of the representation of perception on the stage: smelling a piece of cloth that was left behind by the lover, imagining his embrace and touch, hearing the melodious sound of his voice, and visually describing the various parts of his body through metaphors, are an essential part of *vipralambha* renditions. Together, these sensory representations will produce taste, rasa.

Furthermore, one quickly notices that performed perception, as a rendition of *lokadharmi* – life on earth – reflects gendered ways of sensing within Indian society, which are for the most part based on social status. As such, Bharata is not simply giving instructions as to how to represent perception, but "he is, in fact, drawing attention to a deeper aspect of the senses, body, mind, feeling, relationship" (Vatsyayan 1996, 84). When learning how to represent *shringararasa*, for instance, dancers will use their gaze in very different ways depending on the gender of the character or the type of woman (*ashtanayika*) in that love scenario. The female *shringara* is to be

105. Based on the translation of the *NS* 24.80-85 by Manomohan Ghosh (Bharatamuni 1951, 1:452–53).

acted out shyly, with sidelong glances going from the upper corner of the eyes to the opposite lower corner, and, while looking downward, with a hand concealing the mouth as to hide one's laughter (see *NS* 24.166-167). The male *shringara*, on the other hand, is more suggestive: sidelong glances go from lower corner of the eyes to the opposite lower corner, so as to invite the woman to join him by his side, as well as suggestive and repetitive up-and-down movements of the eyebrows. Likewise, social status differs from one character to the next, whether in the gait or just in the way the person smiles (showing teeth while laughing if one is of lower class or simply smirking if one is from upper class).

Colors have their role in the experience and representation of rasa as well. In fact, each rasa has a corresponding color, which often reflects its affiliated divinity: the rasa of the odious (*bibhatsa*), for example, is associated to the color blue and to the god Shiva, who, in his ascetic form, has blue-gray skin because of the ashes from the burning grounds that cover his body, which in turn triggers disgust (*jugupsa*) in people who see him (see Table 1). In a similar fashion, certain colors, odors, sights and sounds are thought to engender particular mood in the audience (and surrounding characters): *shringara*, for instance, is to be portrayed using colorful or white attire, bright jewels, pleasant perfumes and garlands of flowers spreading a sweet smell around the character (*NS* 6.44-45; *NS* 13.41-44). Likewise, love is believed to grow from seeing a loved one, hearing from him or hearing his voice (*NS* 24.157). The effects of love, too, trigger several psychophysical reactions: horripilation, voice modulation and sweating (*NS* 24.162).

This overview of Bharata's treatment of *rasik* senses in the character clearly highlights the dominant role of sight, hearing, and to a lower extent, of smell, in the appreciation and representation of emotions and sentiments on the stage. The sense of touch does not seem to be as relevant to the character's rendition of emotions, whereas the sense of taste is both absent and omnipresent—lacking in representation, but ubiquitous in appreciation of the representation. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Bharata only addressed the relishing of emotions in the character, not in the spectator—this perspective only became prevalent many centuries later. In reflecting recent scholarship on the value of praxis in dance studies, it comes as no surprise that the *NS*, as a written theory of emotional embodiment, is still valued and influential in the training of classical Indian dance forms.

"It's More Than Mimesis […], It's an Imprint of Both Bodies" [106]: Sensational Knowledge[107] in the Training of Bharatanatyam and Odissi

The transmission of embodied knowledge from teacher to student in classical Indian dance styles like Bharatanatyam and Odissi is a process that goes on for a lifetime. Just as one learns to move, talk and emote through child rearing, dance has the ability to tune sensibilities and "encourage priorities of sensation that subtly affect the nature of perception itself" (Bull 1997, 285), which is a strenuous process that takes time. It is through the intensive training of Indian classical dance that performers learn to embody technique and expressivity and to tune their senses to a way of being and communicating that, although reminiscent of everyday gestures and Indian habitus, is codified in a manner that makes moving and emoting feel artificial at times. This is precisely what

106. Julie Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).
107. Hahn 2007.

Tomie Hahn (2007) calls "sensational knowledge," meaning this particular transmission of embodied knowing in dance through various sensory means.

In the *AD*, Nandikeshvara advises dancers to use all embodied tools at hand to interpret poems. In this sense, the dancer should sing poems "with her mouth," express their meaning through hand gestures, translate emotional states via the eyes and glances, all the while beating time with her feet (*AD* 35-36, in Nandikeshvara 1957, 46)[108]. The author highlights fundamental sensory processes that all contribute to the formation of rasa: sound and vibration through music, singing and syllable chanting (*sollukattu*) synchronized with footwork; movements that translate meaning; sight and imagination; as well as rhythm, which is closely tied to kinesthesia and proprioception. While Hahn concentrates her sensory analysis of dance on the ways in which *nihon buyo*'s tacit Japanese habitus is transmitted through the visual, the oral/aural and the tactile/kinesthetic, I wish to add to this analysis a number of sensory inputs distinctive of Indian dance which include imagination and rhythm, with a special emphasis on (the pain felt through) kinaesthesia – understood as "the ability to feel the movement of the limbs and body" (Brandstetter 2014, 224) – and proprioception – the "body's awareness of itself in space" (Sen-Podstawska 2018, 295) – as synaesthesic[109] events that interweave "the sensual and the aesthetic aspects of experience" (Brandstetter 2014, 221).

"I Like to Sing It All to Myself Now"[110]: Hearing Rasa in Indian Dance Training

Hearing rasa can mean many things. One hears the *guru*'s instructions and embodies them to render sophisticated *abhinaya* segments, for instance. But the dancer also learns to hear rasa through live music and singing. When learning a new piece, dancers first sits down with their teacher to listen to the poem, transcribe and translate it, and then analyzes the complexity of each word through character development. Furthermore, students will oftentimes sing the poem themselves as they are practicing it, either by themselves or with their *guru*. By simultaneously singing and dancing – a tradition that was the norm in performances by *devadasis* – the dancer triggers deep emotions in kinetic as well as in sonic form through her body. It comes as no surprise, then, that Nayak felt that singing poems by herself during rehearsals rather than relying on pre-recorded music allowed her to work more efficiently on her *abhinaya* and to reach states of rasa, especially in the absence of her *gurus*. This alternative to taped music allows her to stay connected with emotions despite the repetition of movements and lyrics. The vibrations created by one's singing – in relation to a "sound vibration which all mantras attempt to yoke to or sympathetically join" (Coward and Goa 2004, 24) – may contribute to the construction of emotions deep within dancers as well, just as the Hindu primordial sound – OM (A-U-M) – represents at the source of all things and all creation (2).

Nayak and Voyer drew attention to the emotional force lying in each musical scale (*raga*). As a given rasa is associated with specific facial expressions – in *raudra* (rage), for example, the dancer will have wide-open eyes with flickering lower eyelids, and so on – the same is true of *ragas*. As an example, the *raga bhairavi* is mostly used in *shringararasa* (erotic love) and

108. This *AD* stanza is learned as a *shloka* (along with gestures) in dance training alongside the "*yatho hasta, statho drishti*" *shloka* (see Appendix 3). It is known as the *natya krama shloka*.
109. Again, not biological synaesthesia but cultural synesthesis. See note 87.
110. Supriya Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017.

bhaktirasa (devotional love) poems. Nayak – who, as an Odissi dancer, mostly works with *shringara* pieces involving the god Krishna – has expressed her fondness of the *bhairavi raga*. She has come to associate its melodies with "deep stories of love" and hence feels that this musical scale naturally elicits devotional and erotic sentiments in her *abhinaya*.

While institutional settings, especially outside of India, will almost exclusively work with recorded music (with the exception of Kalakshetra, who has singers and musicians that help students practice pieces at the advanced stage of their rehearsals), dancers have more access to live music as part of the *guru-shishya* approach in India. Undergoing dance training with a live band allows students to "feel differently" by connecting with the live interpretation of music, while also providing them with the option of improvising dialogues and nuancing each line of a poem. With a *guru* like Kalanidhi Narayanan, for instance, Jayarajan was able to witness the virtuosity of a seasoned dancer and her relationship to live music, as Narayanan, during her *abhinaya* training sessions, would present a series of improvised expressions on the same line of a poem to show students how a single sentence can carry a plethora of emotional tones.

The emphasis on experiential learning in traditional Indian dance training often results in a lack of verbal transmission of knowledge and a focus on visuality – or rather, kinaesthetic memory – through imitation (Prickett 2007, 29). Yet, aural learning is still part of the "making" of emotions through the recitation of poems, prayers and *shlokas* in Sanskrit, Tamil or other Indian languages (see Appendix 3)—a mnemonic approach to learning that is favored in Indian pedagogy (*shruti*, oral transmission and memorization of knowledge). Evidently, *shlokas* are always accompanied by movement, thus allowing students to retain information with the help of multisensory cues including hearing, seeing, rhythm and kinaesthesia.

"I Can't Be Watching Myself in the Mirror and Seeing My Eyes"[111]: Seeing Rasa in Indian Dance Training

When I attended *abhinaya* classes as a spectator in the mud-wall cottages of Kalakshetra in Chennai, and when I trained in Bharatanatyam at Montreal's ISKCON temple in the upstairs dining-performance space, I was struck by one detail: none of these training spaces had mirrors decorating the walls, which contrasted with typical Western-style dance studios. In fact, in a *guru-shishya* training, as is sometimes the case in institutional settings, students are required to move through space with no visual feedback. How are students coping with this visual handicap?

In fact, the absence of mirrors is compensated by the *guru*'s presence. It is through the teacher's eyes, verbal instructions, movements and tactile adjustments that students are able to "see" their posture and facial expressions in class. In Beaulieu's training experience, for instance, as for Chenthy and Punthambekar at Kalakshetra, students would sit down facing their *guru* and learn *abhinaya* by reproducing their teacher's facial expressions, movements, gestures and verbal descriptions. In this instance, as observed by Beaulieu, the student has to feel the teacher's interpretation of emotions and mimic this representation—a method that allows teachers to inscribe the structure of their stylistic school (*gharana* or *bani*) into their student's body (Prickett 2007). It becomes crucial to see through the *guru*'s eyes to deliver an adequate interpretation. Through repetition and adjustments, the student slowly learns to see their body in space through

111. Supriya Nayak, 4 Oct. 2017.

their teacher's gaze as well, "to transpose on to his or her own bodily orientation the mirrored movements of the teacher" (Ram 2011, S167).

It comes as no surprise, then, that both Nayak and Punthambekar felt discouraged and unmotivated once they lived away from their *guru* and had to rely on mirrors to train. While mirrors can prove useful in the technical training of dance, they become a hindrance when working on *abhinaya*, in which all emotions go through the eyes. Nayak, indeed, has addressed how she could not look at her own eyes in the mirror when working on her *abhinaya*. Nevertheless, the essential role of the eyes in the transmission of emotions and rasa is taught to dance students from the very beginning of their training, as Indian eyes are the mirror of emotions, not of the soul (Madhavan 2012). Moreover, in her elaboration of a sensory paradigm for Odissi dance, Sen-Podstawska notes the importance of *drishti* or sight in the performance of emotions, in that "[a] dancer uses her sight to orient herself in space, but she also establishes eye contact with another dancer or an imagined character and also directs the audience's attention or thought to a place or idea to create a vantage point of view, with her eye movements" (Sen-Podstawska 2018, 296). To train one's own art of "eyescape" (Madhavan 2012) without the presence of the *guru* who adjusts the gaze is thus a serious challenge.

But the role of vision in the training of Indian dance does not stop there, both for students and teachers. With the help of visual cues such as necklaces, bangles and bracelets, as well as brightly colored clothing, the *guru* is able to adapt the student's body posture during rehearsal, in the same way that spectators witness the dancer's skills and expression through these same visual markers, which are enhanced by makeup. Students also rely more and more on dance notations as well as poem transcription and translation to remember and work on dance units (*adavus*), *abhinaya* and pieces covered in class. In addition to those media, students are encouraged to see as many dance representations as they can, even on the Internet, as Pada asks of her students. By being exposed from a young age to Indian performing arts, as it was the case for Nayak in Delhi, students are able to develop an awareness of the kinetic and emotional conventionalized codes of dance, as well as tune their senses and sensibility to the performing arts.

From a "Place of Imagination" to a "Place of Embodiment"[112]: Imagining Rasa in Indian Dance Training

To embody movement during lessons, Hahn writes, dancers "learn to exercise a particular way of seeing dance that is culturally constituted" (Hahn 2007, 96). In classical Indian dance training, this appropriation of sight not only means to mirror the *guru*'s movements and verbal instructions, but also to imagine what the teacher is picturing and to move in space accordingly. "Seeing dance" in this case means that students must embody a shared, collective imaginary that mobilizes characters from Hindu myths and Indian epic stories. Seeing by imagining also entails envisioning the space occupied by imaginary characters and sceneries and adjusting their movements to this environment. For instance, Gitanjali Kolanad explains that in the Kerala martial art of *kalaripayattu* as in Bharatanatyam, the practitioner's movements will differ whether one executes the codified movement of sword fighting, as opposed to imagining that the sword is real, with its shapes and weight, which will alter the gesture drastically and will render it more realistic—muscle tension will change, as will expressions. It is only then that the invisible turn into visible, both for

112. Neena Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017.

the performer and the audience. In other words, meaning and embodiment gives emotion to movement (Kolanad 2015).

When it comes to *abhinaya*, a key component of a dancer's authenticity is to imagine accurate dialogues between the interpreter and her invisible interlocutors, says Jayarajan. Just as imagining the environment will allow one to move in a believable fashion, dancers will strengthen their *abhinaya* by creating those imaginary dialogues in their head and applying them to their performance. With an imagined dialogue, dancers will transition from a codified movement to an expressive codified gesture, as illustrated in Jayarajan's teaching of the "Oh mother, I have not eaten the butter" episode to children. As children age and gain life experience and maturity, they will eventually be able to move from an expressive codified gesture to embodied performance—what Bhattacharya defines as moving from "just doing the steps, the choreography, the construct, the form" to "becoming the dance."

During their training, students relentlessly hear the *AD*'s adage of "hand to eye to mind to emotion to rasa"—a verse that reflects their training, as they start with codified movements and move on to interiorized emotions that are conveyed outward and shared with an audience. Progressing from learned technique to imagined dialogues to embodied performance, students will eventually be able to master the art of expressing emotions and conveying rasa to the audience and to themselves. This ideal state of authenticity, where one is able to "let it stir up inside" so that narratives become embodied (Neena Jayarajan), allows performers to invite the audience into this imagined world and share the experience of rasa within a same collective imagination. This shared imaginary is precisely based on Nayak's remark about her dance student: if the dancer is able to see imagined characters and sceneries, so too will the audience. Seeing rasa rests in the sharing of a tangible atmosphere and engagement in deep relationships between characters.

Nevertheless, to embody emotion and share an imagined dialogue with an audience, dancers need to have a prior direct lived experience of Indian (medieval) culture. Living the culture, says Jayarajan, is the nudge that makes one move from "a place of imagination" to "a place of embodiment," as gestures and movements that are deeply characteristic of Indian ways of moving – or Indian techniques of the body (Mauss 1936) – become part of the practitioner's natural way of dancing. Just as sensory ethnographers have to "feel along with" the people they study, so too do Indian dance student need to "move along with" the people embodying the culture of classical dance forms—something Deidre Sklar would call "kinesthetic empathy" (Sklar 1994)[113].

"The Repertoire of Movement That Is in My Body"[114]: Moving Through Rasa in Indian Dance Training

In addition to singing poems, students are expected to learn the vocalizing of syllables (*sollukattu*), which is mostly mobilized in *nritta* segments and technical pieces as seen in *alarippus*, *jatiswarams* and *tillanas*. Ram emphasizes how *sollukattus* act as extremely important mnemonic devices, since they

> are themselves vocalised in a specific temporal rhythm involving significant pauses as well

113. Again, kinesthetic empathy is a term used by both Sklar and Reynolds, but in different ways; see note 7.
114. Nova Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018.

> as vocal stresses that are experienced by the dancer as a form of vocal mimesis of the rhythm she or he is required to perform with the feet, which strike the ground with precisely the same stresses and temporal pauses. (Ram 2000, 268)

In other words, *sollukatus* are rhythm and mood embodied through sound and complex footwork. The embodiment of rhythm through the combination of recitation, the clapping of hands on thighs and, ultimately, the accompanying footwork, is thus an essential aspect of dance training (S. Ghosh 2018, 70)—one that becomes embedded within *rasik* representations, "as the face and upper body convey the story and feelings, [while] the feet stamp a rhythmic pattern and the body and mind work together to attain *rasa*" (Katrak 2008, 226).

The construction of emotions in *abhinaya* through singing and the pleasure resulting from both technical (*nritta*) and expressive (*abhinaya*) dance therefore involve an essential aspect of *rasik* knowledge: rhythm. Indeed, in learning to sing danced poems, performers not only appropriate and internalize sonic moods, but they also incarnate kinetic and complex rhythm deep within each of their limbs. In fact, Chakravorty claims that in Kathak, the ecstatic climax of rasa is only possible through a fast tempo that "echoes the pleasure of union imagined as Rādhā's union with Krishna" and "[t]hrough weaving the rhythms, melody and poetic imageries" which are "deeply inscribed in [the dancer's] body through *riyaz*" (Chakravorty 2009b, 96). Sabina Sweta Sen-Podstawska also claims that, as an Odissi-trained artist, rhythm (*tala*) in dance involves meaningful multisensory sensations that merge vibrations of the feet and other body parts with "hearing, touching, kinaesthesia, proprioception and sense of time" (2018, 298).

On that topic, Jonna K. Vuoskoski (Vuoskoski and Reynolds 2019) suggests that in activities such as music playing and competitive boat rowing, participants experience pleasure and satisfaction through the flow created by rhythmic patterns and the synchronization of movements. An important aspect of this process is also situated in the anticipation of movement, as rhythm and beat "enable prediction and thus synchronization of joint action" (2) thanks to "multisensory cues of others' actions" such as auditory, visual, vestibular and somatosensory cues (3). In *sollukattu* (chanted syllables) and complex *adavus* (dance units) characteristic of *nritta* (pure dance) segments, dancers would thus engage in what Vuoskoski calls "embodied cognition of rhythm" which triggers pleasure in the artist. Here too anticipation plays an essential role in the pleasurable experience of danced music as slight dissonances or gaps between predicted metric hierarchies lead to greater enjoyment (Vuoskoski and Reynolds 2019, 5). Furthermore, as the dancer reaches a state of rhythmic flow and effortlessness during which she is able to disconnect from physical (and painful) technique, she will in turn experience more "positive affect, concentration, creativity, motivation, and satisfaction" (6). The notion of rhythmic flow, says Reynolds, showcases how "embodied cognition as well as pleasure is key to the aesthetics of rhythm," in that pleasure is linked "with learning and sensory cognition that is enacted in the body" (8).

The element of the anticipation of movement was highlighted elsewhere by Hahn and Jordan with their concept of "embodied anticipation" in Japanese traditional dance, understood as "the development of implicit, embodied expectations about the relationships between movements and the sensory effects they reliably produce" (Hahn and Jordan 2017, 269; see also 2014). Hahn derives part of this concept from her earlier practice-research on *nihon buyo* in which – borrowing on Sklar's (2001) research, but also on Mary M. Smyth's (1984) idea of kinesthetic communication as well as Michael Bakan's work on Balinese gamelan music – she talks about the role of

kinesthetic empathy and body memory in the dancer's apprenticeship and embodiment of knowledge.

> The practice of learning through visual imitation, repetition, and close proximity to the teacher reinforces imprinting—a transference and fixing of dance information in a student's physical memory. Then there is kinesthetic empathy[115], an empathy rooted in the body that draws on kinesthesia—the sense that comprehends the body's weight, spatial orientation, and movement of muscles, tendons, and joints. […] It plays an important role in movement transference, in which a dancer, experiencing and physically identifying closely with the movements of a teacher, sympathetically coordinates her muscles to resemble the teacher's dance. The alignment between bodies via kinesthesia imprints movement and reinforces kinesthetic empathy for future lessons. (Hahn 2007, 83–84)

Hahn's reflection, as well as Vuoskoski and Reynolds' ideas around flow, rhythm, embodied cognition and the pleasure deriving from movement, undoubtedly apply to the training of classical Indian dance. In the training of Bharatanatyam and Odissi, movements, gestures and expressions – and by extension, rasa – are directly felt and internalized in the body of dancers. The absence of mirrors in training accentuates this characteristic of embodied emotions, as one cannot rely on visual reflections of the body to adjust movements and gestures, but only on kinaesthesia, equilibroception (sense of balance) and proprioception. In reality, the rendition of emotions and their abstraction through rasa is only possible through movement, which "is a *doing*, involving not only the shaping of body positions and locomotion through space but also the organization of kinetic dynamics, received by performers through their own bodies, as proprioception" (Sklar 2008, 88; emphasis in original).

I soon realized this during my short Bharatanatyam training. As an uncoordinated person, I found it quite difficult and painful to learn complex combinations of foot, hand and body movements – all the while keeping a smiling face – without the help of a mirror reflection. Because I feel that my actual body image and my idea of facial expressions are not representative of their actual rendition, I found it particularly arduous to adjust my posture and movements based solely on my *guru*'s comments and from watching fellow students who were more agile than I. Moreover, I had to rely on my body – I had to develop a "sensory awareness" (Sen-Podstawska 2018, 294) within me in a deeply kinaesthetic and proprioceptive manner – as an indicator of adequate postures. As Samudra (2008, 671) shows in her own practice of the movement system and martial art of *silat*, I would not know when I was executing an *adavu* correctly based on the shape of the form, but rather by subtle sensations. Instead of approaching my experiential learning through vision, through a reflection in the mirror that would allow me to see what my body looks like in space – "For this *adavu*, I *see* that I need to put my leg *here*, my arms like this, and do this movement *in this direction*" – I had no choice but to trust in the position of my limbs and the pain in my body to adapt my posture – "For this *adavu*, I need to *balance* my feet like this, *move* into this squat, focus on the *curve* in my lower back, raise my arms until my shoulders *hurt* like this." It is a completely different approach from what I am used to in the memorization of new knowledge. Unlike the piano, in which I can always see my hands, Bharatanatyam dancing prevented me from seeing my body and forced me to rely on kinaesthetic and proprioceptive

115. Here, Hahn borrows Sklar's definition of kinaesthetic empathy rather than Reynolds'.

feelings instead to determine if my posture was good or not. When my *guru* confirmed that my posture was correct, I desperately tried to memorize the kinetic feelings in my body and to associate those internal sensations and discomfort with the proper execution of movements.

The same is true of facial expressions. Beaulieu mentioned that her *guru* does not tell her how to express emotions, but simply enacts them herself and expects her student to reproduce those expressions. Through mimesis and repetition, the student is eventually able to capture, internalize and embody those emotions. Likewise, as movements are a dancer's only recourse in communicating meaning and producing rasa, the student will embody kinesthetic and aesthetic patterns through kinaesthetic recitation, mimesis and repetition (*riyaz*). While emotions are transmitted through the gaze, narrative meaning is mainly conveyed through hand gestures (*hastas*), which are memorized through recitation and simultaneous hand gestures (see Appendix 3). For instance, one would chant "*pataka*" while raising a hand (or both), palm facing forward and fingers together, and would proceed with "*tripataka*" by simply lowering the ring finger, and so on. Just as one learns to recite prayers and other *shlokas* in training by repeating them over and over without any visual support (text), students learn these hand gestures and their application using a variation of *shlokas* as they do the *hastas*.

There is great value in the pedagogy of learning through doing—or experiential learning. It encourages mistakes and incremental adjustments of the body that, once mastered, are easy to rely on. Experiential learning also encourages alternative mnemonic techniques that do not rely solely on sight (see Bull 1997). One of the reasons why I found it so difficult to train in Bharatanatyam is, I believe, my resistance to making mistakes. The same is true of Jayarajan, who had to give in to her *kalaripayattu* teacher by "just doing and fixing it later if it's wrong." In her visual approach to learning, she was used to first preparing movement by studying technique through text and theory—so when she studied Odissi in India, she was completely shocked at the way her *guru* would hit her students with her *talam* wooden stick to adjust their posture and movements, rather than simply telling them. These students, said her *guru*, would "only listen to the stick," in that they embodied instructions through movement and not necessarily using aural means.

"All This Theorizing Is There, but Is Not Named as Such"[116]: The Place of Theory Within Practice

The *NS* represents the state of oral and performative history at one precise point in time. Like any writing, it presents a topic – theatre, dance, rasa – that, by being immortalized in written form, gives one the impression that it acts as the definitive view on the subject—or, at the very least, acts as a starting point for further discussion. Theorists have outlined their diverging perspectives on this topic for centuries. All the while performers have embodied it in practice, where it also developed. The ephemeral status of rasa gives scholars the feeling that its relationship to theory and practice is uneven, disjointed. The fact that "the tendency of revivalism can be summed up as a tendency to bypass the *parampara* [tradition] in favour of *śāstra* [scripture]" only exacerbates the apparent gap between rasa in theory and rasa in practice (Ram 2011, S166).

Throughout my doctoral research, I have been ruminating over the complex relationship that exists between theory and practice in Indian classical dance, and the place and role of rasa

116. Julie Beaulieu, 1 Aug. 2017 (my translation).

within this relationship. Little did I know, I was not the first nor the only one to ask those questions, as I discovered during my interview with Julie Beaulieu and Jonathan Voyer. As we were sipping on *chai* in a Montreal tea house that day, I realized through our conversation that, as scholar-practitioners, Beaulieu and Voyer had a first-hand experience of the role of theory within practice and the contribution of practice to theory. They had, like me, noticed that the aesthetic experience of practitioners was seldom addressed in performance studies and literature—a gap they were hoping to fill with their respective M.A. (Beaulieu 2015) and Ph.D. (Voyer 2018) research. They raised the issue of theory and practice living in two separate worlds in Indian performing arts, where each looked at the other with reluctance. Since then, I have been asking myself and my collaborators the same question: What access to and knowledge of theory do dancers have during their training? How does theory inform practice during this training? As I got to learn more about the world of classical Indian dance in interviews and fieldwork, these questions slowly transformed into what seemed like a more relevant issue: How does practice inform and express theory within classical Indian dance? Does the enactment of emotions via *abhinaya* reflect the classical theory of rasa? Is rasa theory even relevant to its application in dance?

The current standing is that, in theory, rasa is only located in the spectator—that being said, because dance has migrated from an aesthetic context (dance in temples and royal courts, for upper-class publics made of connoisseurs) to an entertaining one (secular art accessible to all), the reality is that the public has changed and does not include *rasikas* as it used to, which translates into the dancer's performance. Is there even rasa today? For artists, the goal of a performance is not limited to the transmission of rasa to the audience anymore, as pointed out by Lata Pada. As a result, rasa does not have the revered status it used to have in medieval India. Performers I have interviewed unequivocally attested, however, that they could feel something along the lines of rasa in performance, a statement that contests classical rasa theory. Yet they were sometimes resisting the use of the word "rasa" in describing this experience—in the same way many of them would not speak of "religiosity" but "spirituality" to describe the otherness or supranatural characteristics of their dance practice. On the other hand, they were still preoccupied with the concept, although they were trying, perhaps, to adapt it to modern times or reinvent it to best suit their relation to their personal dance practice.

One must conclude that rasa is, more than anything, a concept created by theorists to analyze the aesthetic experience and the mechanisms and factors behind the formation of aesthetic delight at a specific time in history. Both Pada and Nayak, as well as Jayarajan to some extent, understand that rasa is a concept that applies to a very precise context – namely dance in temples and royal courts – and that was forged by theorists. Now that dance has moved away from temples and migrated to the world of stage performance, there is a constant awareness in dancers that their art is first and foremost a performing art. Performers are conscious of rasa and what it entails, but do not necessarily find it relevant to their current (Canadian) context. Yet, they do find that a notion such as rasa proves to be useful in reflecting on their personal practice.

For months, I have been going back and forth to these notions—theory and/in practice, and practice leading to theory. What rasa offers, I believe, is a fertile ground where we can reflect on the ways in which emotions translate in dance. By looking into the application of rasa in the performing arts – the ways in which it shines, creates flavors, plays with hues of emotions – complex and fascinating realities of embodied cultural emotions and tacit knowledge come to life.

In this, even if rasa only exists as a theoretical concept, it still has significance in helping both scholars and practitioners understand their practice.

Dancers know in their body. They actualize theory through body movements, as argued by Beaulieu, who explained that her *guru* does not discuss dance theory with her but teaches her theory by enacting it: "She doesn't say anything: she does it. We do it, we do it, we do it." (1 Aug. 2017). Likewise, Punthambekar claimed that she did not require books to teach dance, because it was already in her mind, in her system and in her blood (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017). In the teacher-disciple model in particular, students are encouraged to approach dance through "a modality of learning that relies heavily upon muscle-memory through exact imitation and incessant repetition" (Banerji et al. 2017, 223), something that Jayarajan noticed in her training with visiting Indian teachers who would encourage students to *do* instead of writing down notes or asking questions on theory. Like the "crazy Canadians" that they were, Jayarajan and her fellow classmates kept on asking questions that may not only have been "perceived as a challenge to the *guru*'s authority or knowledge" (Prickett 2007, 28), but that had no answers to the eyes of their guest teacher, simply because the they were embodied and kinetic, as opposed to vocalized and written[117]. Her *kalaripayattu* teacher wanted her to understand that she just had to *do* and that they would *fix it later* if needed—not to anticipate and wonder what could go wrong. Just as Tomie Hahn's *nihon buyo* teacher instructed her to know with her body (Hahn 2007, 1), Jayarajan's *gurus* wanted her to understand that all the theory and all the answers to her questions were in her movements, in her understanding of facial expressions, in muscle tension, in the pain she felt through her body as she was perfecting certain footsteps, *hastas* and uncomfortable postures. Likewise, the focus of *abhinaya* training is not so much on explaining what is happening in a given scene – although character development is an important aspect of *abhinaya* and happens both during classes and outside of them – but on *doing* emotions, on representing emotions physically. The acquisition of theoretical concepts through bodily movements hence leads to an embodied understanding in dance practitioners.

As highlighted by Beaulieu, Voyer, Chenthy and Punthambekar, the mastery of technical and expressive dance is only achievable through discipline and rigor, through the *sadhana* of dance practice (*riyaz*). This idea is imprinted into the bodies of students by their teacher from the early stages of their training. Theory is slowly, painfully injected into their limbs as they progress through their dance journey. This embodied knowledge, in turn, is hard to put in words later. Dancers know in their body—and they sometimes also know that this tacit knowledge has been immortalized in written form like the *NS* and the *AD*, but they do not necessarily associate these two separate worlds. They do as they are being told by their *guru* and strive to absorb the incarnated knowledge that is being transferred to them. They become, as Beaulieu said, an "imprint" of their teacher, they are moulded by their *guru*'s dance lineage (*bani* or *gharana*). They learn from a pedagogical style in which actions speak louder than words, in which the blow of a *talam* or the

117. Such pedagogy, which is founded on kinesthetic rather than intellectual engagement, is recurrent in Asian training. Samudra, for instance, notices the same dynamic in the pedagogy of *silat*, a Chinese-Indonesian martial art and movement system, where silence – or the absence of questions – is a deliberate part of the training. Like the examples I provide here, *silat* instructors would instruct "voluble" students to just *do*: "Don't think, do" they would order (Samudra 2008, 668).

constant shouting of a 70-year-old *guru* stand for a Western teacher's "C-" or a patient verbalized explanation on what went wrong and how to improve the performance.

At a later stage, these students become teachers that sometimes have no idea how to go about their teaching career. In a North American context, it becomes necessary for teachers to reflect on what is done in a dance practice in pragmatic terms – to theorize their practice – before they can share that knowledge with others. Such was the case with collaborator Supriya Nayak, who learned Odissi in a traditional *guru-shishya* setting – one in which questions were never asked and students only did what they were told to do – but felt the urge to turn to theory after having acquired such knowledge in her body. Lata Pada also expressed that, as a teacher, she had to reflect on and deepen her knowledge of dance and rasa theory, but that, as a performer, it was not foremost on her mind. Teaching emotions involves a deconstruction of embodied practices; while dancing emotions means to express and share knowledge through gestures without necessarily relying on this intermediary process.

One main theoretical issue was raised during my fieldwork: How does one teach a theoretical framework that was abstracted from historical practice to modern-day dance students? Due to the changes in dance training and the practice environment over the years, how can one inculcate the theoretical understanding of a concept which made sense as part of a devotional and courtly context, but that now only applies to a performative context? In other words, rasa is, and has always been, a purely theoretical notion that is abstracted from dance within a very specific sociocultural, geographical and historical context. As pointed out by many of my collaborators, rasa is an essence or an energy that is addressed indirectly during dance training. It has been theorized, but this theory is not necessarily relevant to the present performative context. Moreover, the traditional training model does not address rasa theory directly – as opposed to the new institutional model – yet teaches it tacitly.

Theory, and more specifically rasa theory, acts as an abstraction of embodied knowledge in classical Indian arts. Creating a theory around rasa is only a means of providing meaning and words to embodied forms of knowledge. Rasa as a concept is both useful and obsolete today. What I have been noticing, perhaps, is that the modern-day globalized understanding of audience reception – one in which all spectators have, phenomenologically-speaking, access to powerful affective experiences, whatever their background and knowledge of the art form – and of actor training – which, in the school of realism, still favors an "eruption" of emotions in the actor that comes from previous life experiences and sensory memories – lends itself admirably to the classical theory of rasa. What I mean by this is that rasa creates meaning within a globalized performative context that has rarely explored in detail the emotional potency of the interaction between the audience and the performer, and more importantly, how that relationship energizes the artist's own emotional experience. In a theory based on embodied knowledge of the affective flow that feeds the performer-spectator relationship, it is not surprising that artists claim today that they draw from their personal life experiences to render powerful, authentic performances that captivate the audience.

"IT'S A FULL CULTURAL EMBODIMENT UNDERSTANDING"[118]: RASA, SENSES AND EMOTIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

What are we to make of a concept such as rasa? What does rasa mean as part of the field of anthropology? As a flavorful concept that has no equal in Western culture, including Western aesthetic taste, rasa has shown us that Indian aesthetics invites all participants in the performing arts and literature – poets, playwrights, actors, characters, spectators, teachers and musicians – to unite and share the delightful flavors that it unfolds. Taste in Western arts, I would argue, only targets the critic (rather the critic's visual discrimination; see Jones 2018) – the equivalent of the Indian *rasika* – while taste in Indian arts believe that all those involved in the art form are active participants in the enjoyment of the flavors evoked by rasa.

The contribution of rasa towards the field of anthropology rests in its ability to challenge Western aesthetics and its sensory biases, while also unfolding the complex relationship that Indian culture has towards knowledge acquisition, emotional diversity and politics. Above all, this study of rasa acts as an exploration of embodied cognition, or what Michelle Z. Rosaldo (1985) called "embodied thought" – in this case, embodied taste, savory emotions in the body and the ways in which they are communicated to and shared with others – within Indian culture, thus contributing to the more general paradigm of embodiment within the anthropology of emotion, the senses and the body.

In their edited volume *Exploring the Senses*, Axel Michaels and Chris Wulf underline the hegemony in academia, especially in psychology, physiology and biology, of "a logocentric, ocularcentric or scopophilic approach to culture that neglects the specific aspects that come through feelings and sensations" (2014, 2)—a bias that sensory anthropology has been trying to overcome for decades. The field of anthropology has always showed interest in the diversified formations of sensations and emotions across cultures. Attention to actions, language and words often hard to translate is essential in this type of research, as different cultures have various concepts to either designate what could be understood as a combination of feelings, or as new emotions altogether. Kathryn Linn Geurts' study of *seselelame* in Ghana and Michelle and Renato Rosaldo's research on emotions, including *liget*, in the society of the Ilongots of the Philippines, are prime examples of such deviations from the Western neurotypical emotional and sensory schemes.

Through her study of the Anlo-Ewe people of southeastern Ghana and their conception of *seselelame* – "feel-feel-at-flesh-inside" or "feeling in the body" – Geurts has proved the inadequacy of anthropological categories like "emotions" and "senses" outside of Western culture. As she was trying to coin words that would best describe "the senses" in Ghanaian society, Geurts soon realized that this category did not encompass the complexity of Anlo-Ewe emotion-sensation. The word *seselelame* was, in fact, the closest they had to our conception of the senses, as it referred to "the cognitive function of perception, as well as the somatic phenomenon of sensation (inside the flesh)" (Geurts 2002a, chap. 3). Yet, this expression could also be used in a plethora of situations, as it designated "painful and pleasurable sensations, emotional inspiration, [as much as] physiological indications of illness" (Geurts 2002b, 185). As a result, Geurts defines *seselelame* as a "synesthetic [mode] of knowing" (190) that is not only associated with sensation and

118. Neena Jayarajan, 1 Oct. 2017.

cognition, but with emotion, instinct, kinaesthesia, proprioception, balance, vocation and disposition as well. For Anlo-Ewe people, then, it is quite difficult to isolate each of these elements. The term *lugulugu*, for instance, refers to the unsteady walk of a drunkard but also evokes traits like irresponsibility, aimlessness and sloppiness. If a child were to start walking in a *lugulugu* way, they could develop a *lugulugu* character, and vice-versa (Geurts 2002a, chap. 4; 2002b, 188–90). Through this example, Geurts thus demonstrates that notions of balance, kinaesthesia, movement, gait, ethics, morality and dispositions intertwine in Anlo-Ewe culture.

Geurts' study unveils a powerful emotional state distinctive of Anlo-Ewe society while making the case for more embodied ways of doing fieldwork. Using her own troubling experience of accidentally driving over a *legba* – a sacred spiritual guardian of thresholds, often in the form of a rock, that populate Ghanaian land – and the resulting "jolt of lightning" she felt through her body, Geurts got to experience and share what she was later told represented *seselelame*, but which she had pushed aside for years before realizing its importance. She later on followed the Anlo-Ewe custom of "attending to and processing such 'messages'—which include sensations, perceptions, intuitions, emotions, and even imaginations," in analyzing and understanding what this jolt of lightening truly represented. She realized that she ignored the "flood of sensations, emotions, and intuitions" that went through her body when she first ran over the *legba* because her "'cognitive system' concluded that it was simply a rock," and because academic conventions usually dismiss such embodied experiences in the field. Yet, as the notion of *seselelame* taught her, she should have seen these "red flags" – the jolt of lightening, the intuition of having done something taboo, the cognitive conclusion that it was "only a rock" – as indicators that something much more significant had in fact happened; it would be the same as a mother who, after seeing her child walking in a *lugulugu* manner, would simply conclude that it was "just a walk" that could not affect their moral character. Geurts' *legba* incident thus helped her better grasp the integrated concept of *seselelame* as "a cultural meaning system in which bodily feeling is attended to as a source of vital information" (2002b, 196), and led her to conclude that,

> in seselelame we are confronted with not only the nonuniversality of the five-senses model but with an Anlo theory of the nature of being and an Anlo theory of knowing that thoroughly and completely links knowledge and reason, along with the development of morality and identity, to the body and to *feelings in the flesh*. (Geurts 2002b, 197; emphasis in original; on this incident, see also 2002a, chap. 8)

Similarly to Geurts, Michelle and Renato Rosaldo encountered serious anthropological challenges when faced with Filipino Ilongot emotional schemes, especially in the case of notions of shame, guilt, grief and "*liget*," an emotion that would apparently hit people quite abruptly and would prompt them to go headhunting as much as chop wood or start crying. Indeed, headhunting constituted a remedy to this strong ***liget*** feeling because

> In severing and tossing human heads, Ilongot men recount, they could relieve hearts burdened with the "weight" of insult, envy, pain, and grief; and in discarding "heavy" thoughts, they could achieve an "anger" that yields "energy,"' makes shy and burdened youths "the same" or equal to their peers, and "lightens" both their footsteps and the feelings in their hearts. (M. Z. Rosaldo 2007, 206)

Liget, it seemed, was a mixture of energy, productivity, liveliness, passion, but also of grief and anger, as Ilongot people once told the couple to stop playing a recording in which a passed elder

spoke, because it made their hearts "feel *liget*" and urged them "to take a head." Yet, the interpretation of *liget* as mere rage deriving from grief did not explain the burst of energy it triggered in Ilongot men through a variety of causes such as sadness, envy, insult or pain; inasmuch as it could not pertain to feelings of guilt or shame—cultural terms that could not apply to this society (M. Z. Rosaldo 2007).

The true meaning of *liget* hit Renato Rosaldo some fourteen years later, as his wife Michelle – with whom he had conducted fieldwork among the Ilongots in the late 1960's and mid-1970's – died in 1981 during fieldwork among the Ifugaos of northern Luzon, Philippines, after falling off a cliff. As he went through the painful mourning of his beloved, Renato Rosaldo felt the urge, after weeks of internalizing his grief, to scream out his feelings—a process-feeling-emotion he associated to *liget*. In similar terms to Geurts' *seselelame* experience during the *legba* incident, Rosaldo translated his personal experience of *liget* as "high voltage" through his body—an electric shock that transformed into a burst of energy that needed to come out and, in doing so, procured him with a feeling of release and relief (R. Rosaldo in Rosin and Spiegel 2017). It is only then, and because of his fieldwork among the Ilongots, that Rosaldo was able to identify his painful anger as the legitimate emotional processing of his grief. He did not imply that his experience of anger was identical to that of the Ilongots, but he recognized that theirs and his overlapped—and it is only through reflexive anthropological inquiry that he was able to realize the Ilongots' powerful experience of *liget* (R. Rosaldo 2007).

It is because Ilongots do not make a distinction between thought and feeling that Michelle Rosaldo talked of "embodied thought" rather than a dichotomy of emotion and intellect when it comes to anthropological inquiry. "Emotions are thoughts somehow 'felt' in flushes, pulses, 'movements' of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin" asserted Rosaldo: they are embodied because they are felt on a deeply subjective level (1985, 143). She recognized that just as "thought is always culturally patterned and infused with feelings, which themselves reflect a culturally ordered past, […] affect is culturally ordered and does not exist apart from thought" (137). Rosaldo's concept of embodied thought is certainly reflected in Geurts' research on *seselelame*, in R. Rosaldo's interpretation of *liget*, as well as in Sklar's understanding of kinesthesia and movement across cultures, as she notices that differences in gestural style embody "differences in *ways* of thinking" (Sklar 2007, 41; emphasis in original).

Could rasa be a new emotion, a sort of Indian *liget*, or a type of emotion-feeling-sensation-mood-morality as is the case with Ghanaian perception? While rasa does not necessarily trigger "a jolt of lightning" or "high voltage" in one's body, it does provide both artists and spectators with a profound satisfaction, well-being and pleasure—a sensation that, like the reverberations of a lightning bolt, often lasts beyond the performance. Rasa as a concept or a suggested and evoked aesthetics could probably not be called a "sixth sense" per se. However, the aesthetic context surrounding rasa does call for a synaesthesic experience[119] that allows artists and spectators alike to make sense of danced emotions.

As a concept that charts dominant emotions in Indian culture, rasa challenges the idea of primary, basic or universal emotions, as first addressed by Charles Darwin (1979) and later by

119. Again, in the cultural sense; see note 87.

neuropsychologists such as Paul Ekman (1992) and Silvan Tomkins (1962)[120]. These works all try to assess the universality of specific emotions such as joy and sadness, whether in humans or both in people and animals. But what Darwin and others (dis)missed is the cultural specificity of emotions and emotional patterns. A dog that wags his tail, for instance, is very happy, while a cat doing the same thing is usually quite irritated; similarly, a person smiling in North American culture is probably genuinely happy, but a person from Khmer culture doing the same thing is possibly embarrassed or trying to save face. It is for such reasons that social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (2012), who like previous anthropologists supports the idea that thoughts and emotions cannot dissociate from the body that produces them, proposes the term "emotional patterns" rather than "basic emotions" to address recurring emotional themes or paths – but with variable manifestations – across cultures.

Some research has already been done on the psychological value of rasas as universal emotions (e.g. Aruna 1995) or on the place of rasas in this scheme. Neuerburg-Denzer, for instance, tries to situate the *navarasa* (nine basic rasas) as part of the neuropsychological scheme suggested by authors like Ekman and Tomkins. She comes to the conclusion that with the exception of love (*shringara*) and heroism (*vira*), the eight rasas listed in the *NS*, or in her case the emotions used in the Rasabox exercise, correspond to Ekman's six-emotion model (Neuerburg-Denzer 2011, 49; see also 2014). Kapila Vatsyayan adopts a similar point of view on the universality of emotions in Indian performing arts, stating that

> the abstraction of "life" into primary moods, sentiments, primary emotive states, is basic and universal to the human. It is not culture specific or individual or particular. Yes, the culture specific, the individual or society are embodiments of the universal human psychical states. The primary human emotions are expressed in a variety of ways; indeed, an infinite variety in time, space and locale through distinctive modes of speech, body language and gesticulation, dress and costume, but love and laughter, jealousy, fear and wonder are universal. It is these "universals" which are common that constitute the core "theme." (Vatsyayan 1996, 64–65)

I would refute the universality of emotions – just as Michelle Rosaldo (1985, 149) did – by arguing, in parallel to Neuerburg-Denzer, that certain rasas such as *karuna* (in the sense of compassion when faced with sorrow) and *vira* (heroism, valour), and emotional states such as that of *smriti* (recollection), are much more familiar to Indian, Hindu, Buddhist and other Asian cultures than they are in the West. However, I do concur that emotions in their most general sense (affects, in other words) are experienced by all cultures—but in very different ways and patterns. It is this notion that Vatsyayan is pointing to in the previous quote, one that acts as the "ticket to narration" to all performing arts, and which we even find in other areas of society such as museum exhibits (see Dudley 2010) and political strategies (see Reddy 2001). It is these "affective patterns"

120. In short, the number of basic emotions vary between authors. Ekman, for example, listed six basic emotions – anger, fear, sadness, enjoyment, disgust and surprise – with "the possibility that contempt, shame, guilt, embarrassment, and awe may also be found to share" the same characteristics as the former six emotions (Ekman 1992, 170). On the other hand, Tomkins, a predecessor of Ekman, believed there were eight primary emotions – what he called affects – namely interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, distress-anguish, shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust, anger-rage and fear-terror, in which the paired elements go from milder to greater in manifestation and their intensity (Sedgwick and Frank 1995; Wetherell 2012, 37).

(Wetherell 2012), perhaps, that Voyer, Beaulieu, Jayarajan and Pada referred to when they suggested that the arts – including the complex aesthetics of rasa – know no cultural boundaries.

In reality, the purpose of rasa theory was not to propose a classification of affects, but rather to transform them "into opportunities to savour them in the context of expressive performances" (Ram 2011, S163). As argued by David Mason (2015, 100), rasa is not emotion nor feeling, simply because rasa theory is not concerned with the distinction between affect, emotion and feeling – as is the case with modern psychological theories – but is rather interested in the chain of cause-to-effect that leads to the inexplicable, pleasurable experience that is rasa. That is why rasa theory involves a cornucopia of states that go much beyond emotions—character traits, affective states, moods, feelings, physical reactions, and so on. Accordingly, we cannot superimpose Western psychological models of emotion-feeling-affect to rasa theory.

Furthermore, the sociocultural context and environment in which emotions emerge count for much of their variation from one culture to the next. Rasa, for instance, is a concept that has migrated outside of India to other Southeast Asian countries, and most notably Indonesia. There, the concept of rasa is still very present in the world of the performing arts, albeit with slightly different interpretations from the Indian continent. In his study of *råså* in Javanese music, Marc Benamou notes a variety of meanings to this word, including "affect," "mood" or "feeling" when pertaining to the world of music. Yet, Javanese culture also associates *råså* with sensory perception such as taste and hearing, as with the "faculty of intuition," an extrasensory faculty of perception or sixth sense "through which the properly trained heart can 'feel' essences directly" (Benamou 2010, 50). In this, *råså* resonates with the Indian *manas* which apprehends inner realities. Benamou does not list eight or nine, but six recurrent *råsås* in Javanese music discourse: *regu* (stately, regal), *sereng* (tense, heated), *sedhih* (sad), *prenès* (flirtatious, coquettish), *bérag* (exuberant) and *gecul* (jocolar) (70). Similarly to Indian rasa, *råså* is "likened to the perception of flavor or texture on the tongue," leading to a plethora of food metaphors in Javanese music talk (46). *Råså*, too, is often uplifted during improvised segments, just as it acts as a criterion for judging excellence in performance. Likewise, Javanese *råså* is said to reside at once in the music piece, the performance of the piece and the sensitive spectator. Benamou stresses that "[b]ecause the content [of performance] is primarily an emotion, expressing a *rasa* involves both understanding and feeling, as does rasa itself" (159).

Although Javanese *råså* (as well as Balinese *takshu*, referred to previously by Lata Pada) shares similarities with its Indian sister, rasa as an aesthetic delight in the Indian performing arts is a complex concept that is distinct from Indonesian aesthetics. Rasa encompasses a cultural habitus and an Indian sensorium, as well as a social, philosophical, political and religious history and aesthetics that are unique to the Indian subcontinent. The aesthetic notions that surround rasa in performance – *bhavas* and *abhinaya* – are founded on an Indian habitus and techniques of the body that were eventually conventionalized on the stage and in writing. In its original context, the experience of rasa is also shaped through a sixth sense, the *manas*, a cognitive faculty that synthesizes the non-conceptual perceptions of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch into a comprehensive experience in the mind, while also perceiving and deciphering inner sensations such as pleasure, pain, memories, sentiments and emotions.

During our interview, Punthambekar has not only attributed her *abhinaya* virtuosity to her bloodline, but also to the fact that she grew up in India, an "emotional country" where people are

"extremely animated" and rely on body language to express much of what they want to say (S. Punthambekar, 4 Dec. 2017). The fact that emotional portrayals are quite distinct between Canada and India was illustrated in Beaulieu's Bharatanatyam training experience, where she "felt like a clown" in the beginning of her *abhinaya* training and was somewhat treated as one when she came back to Canada and trained with fellow contemporary dancers. There are differences in the performing styles, in that emotions are "exaggerated" to borrow Jayarajan's words, but also in techniques of the body, in gestures that are specific to the Indian habitus.

The emphasis on movements that, after much discipline and practice, become embodied and trigger corresponding emotions also separates Indian emotions from Western ones—at least in the world of performance. The Indian pedagogy based on experiential learning, on embodying theory and knowledge by beginning with movements, and the focus on harsh physical work and discipline, certainly make for a different approach to emotions. Coorlawala notably stresses that rasa functions within an Indian perspective in which "thought is action, with all the karmic consequences of actions" (2010a, 133). Indian aesthetics challenge the Western understanding of knowledge acquisition by going beyond mimesis to become "an imprint of both bodies," *guru* and student (J. Beaulieu), and in doing so, by engaging in an "enculturation of aesthetics via the body" in which one fully embodies "a wide variety of ideals and philosophical concerns" (Hahn 2007, 67). Furthermore, Indian aesthetics questions the Western "logocentricity of theatre" (Madhavan 2012, 562) as well as reception theory by sharing emotions not through speech alone, but through music (*ragas*), movements (*hasta*) and gestures (*rasa*), and recognizing and valuing these modes of expression. In Indian dance-drama, good and bad emotions are not experienced as one-sided, emotion-purging catharsis, but as a two-sided consistently pleasurable experiences that merge a blend of tasting and being tasted (Neuerburg-Denzer 2011, 64), that celebrate, relish and extend emotions (Mee 2017, 32) and that transcend one's own being (Lata Pada). While the goal of Greek *katharsis* is effect (possible through linear narrative), the objective of rasa is affect (embraced via non-linear storytelling) (Mee 2017, 32).

"Being Able to Taste Physical Expression" [121]*: The Significance of Gustatory Analogies in the Analysis of Rasa*

The profusion of gustatory metaphors in rasa theory, starting with the *NS*, can lead one to believe that there are actual correspondences between the physical act of (touch-)tasting and the aesthetic experience of savoring emotions. As pointed out by Voyer (1 Aug. 2017), the process of rasa starts with a dominant emotion (ingredients) that is transformed into an experience of taste in the spectator (eating), and it is only through this process that savor becomes rasa and *chamatkara* (relishing, savoring, appreciating flavors).

The word "rasa," which literally means "taste," was certainly chosen (in theory and practice) with their homology in mind. In the sixth chapter of his treatise, Bharata describes rasa as follows:

> Rasa arises from the conjunction of factors, reactions, and transitory emotions. What would be an analogy? Just as taste arises from the conjunction of various condiments, spices, and substances, so rasa arises from the presentation of various factors and emotions. That is to

121. Nova Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018.

> say, just as physical tastes, that of lassi, for instance, or other such drink, are produced by substances such as brown sugar, plus condiments and spices, so the stable emotion, in the presence of the various factors and emotions, turns into rasa. (*NS* 6.31, in Pollock 2016, 50–51)

Likewise, Bharata explains that rasa can only be produced by emotional states (*bhavas*) and not the other way around—just as new flavors result from the cooking of ingredients. He refers to several verses to support this statement.

> Just as various substances bring a new flavor into existence, so the emotions with the aid of the registers of acting bring the rasas into being. There is no rasa without the emotions and other aesthetic elements, and no emotions without rasa. Their production is mutually effected in the course of acting. Just as the conjunction of condiments and spices makes food savory, so the emotions and rasa bring each other into being. (*NS* 6.34-38, in Pollock 2016, 51)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Abhinavagupta addressed the significance of Bharata's likeness between tasting and rasa by claiming that aesthetic savoring is superior to eating because emotions are mentally relished through the mind, as opposed to physically tasted through the mouth. Consequently, the experience of rasa results in "a state of rapture-savoring" only possible because of "the absence of the self-other distinction" (*ABh* 1.283, in Pollock 2016, 205–6). Despite Abhinavagupta's stance regarding the mental savoring of rasas, the enjoyment of played emotions certainly trigger physical well-being too. Chakravorty, for instance, claims that "[s]ince rasa literally means the physical experience of tasting food and is associated with the mouth, the feeling of *rasa* is visceral, in the gut, where the spectator and the performer, observer and the observed mesh together in a burst of sensory pleasures" (Chakravorty 2004, 7).

Many scholars are resistant to the idea that rasa translates in physiological terms as taste and flavor, notably because such interpretation may disregard the culture-specificity of the concept (e.g. Coorlawala 2010a; Mason 2006). Yet, others like Schechner dive headfirst in the literal reading of gustatory metaphors in rasa theory, stating, for example, that rasa is "the sensation one gets when food is perceived, brought within reach, touched, taken into the mouth, chewed, mixed, savored, and swallowed," which later gets digested through the gut's "second brain" (Schechner 2001, 29). In stark opposition to Schechner, David Mason argues that

> the terminology of eating and tasting and so forth [used in the *NS*] are here employed to facilitate a discussion about a phenomenon which does not have terminology of its own. The analogy, then, does not supply us with an understanding of *rasa* based on our common experience (we all know what eating is like), but gives us a conception of *rasa* (and only potential, at that) based on our capacity for abstract reasoning. (Mason 2006, 75)

Bhattacharya was certainly not opposed like Mason to the literal interpretation of rasa as taste, and found immense inspiration in this correspondence. From the beginning, she felt that her Bengali roots predisposed her to balance emotions-ingredients on the stage, or rather made her more receptive to cooking-dancing techniques leading to flavors-rasas. She always heard these analogies in the back of her head as she was learning Bharatanatyam and was consistently fascinated with the idea of working toward flavor and taste in her dance practice. To this day,

Bhattacharya still feels very attached to the idea of dancing flavors and "being able to taste physical expression," a concept she uses recurrently in her collaborative work. It is through these analogies that she strives to go beyond "knowing the steps" and tries to find balance between emotions-ingredients on the stage to suit everyone's personal tastes. She equally loves creating surprising combinations or dissonances in flavors that will surprise her audience – and even herself – in the same way that a sophisticated meal would create a delightful surprise through the dissonance-balance of savors. For Bhattacharya, dancing flavors is about sharing the experience of savoring with audience members, but also with fellow dance practitioners from various horizons who often are delighted to have a "*lived* experience of being able to communicate words with gestures and flavor" (N. Bhattacharya, 11 July 2018; emphasis in original).

Furthermore, flavors-rasas go beyond the realm of dance for Bhattacharya: for her, rasa means flavor in dance as much as in her everyday life through cooking, eating or sharing food with others. She simply lit up when we started discussing analogies between rasa, flavor and food, and enthusiastically explained how the pleasure of eating and cooking is as satisfying to her as the pleasure of feeling and mixing emotions on the stage. She even uses the idea of the Bangali *panch phoron* spice mix to play with the number five in her dance practice, using this five-spice mix as an inspiration for creating flavors onstage and in the audience. Playing with combinations and finding a balance between the six flavours of Indian cuisine – sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, astringent – is certainly a recurrent theme in her work. Engaging with Indian flavors is as much a choice as something embodied in Bhattacharya's dance practice because of her Bharatanatyam training. Although she mostly does collaborative work with dancers and artists from all horizons, she chooses not to work with the simplistic four tastes known to Western cultures (sweet, sour, salty and bitter) or the five flavours of Japanese cuisine (in which we add umami, known as savouriness, or simply "delicious"), but rather prefers exploring the complexity of Indian emotions-spices through the juxtaposition of different viewpoints and ideas in her collaborations. In fact, very much like the *nihon buyo* student, Bhattacharya gradually embodied knowledge and metaphors through practice: "The metaphors connecting the practice with the physical and spiritual not only surround the dancer as she learns to move—she appropriates these metaphors until they become embodied" (Hahn 2007, 68).

Just as there are more flavors to Indian cuisine, there are also many more aesthetic flavors and emotions to the Indian emotional range that are unfamiliar to other cultures. One obvious example is the *bhava* of *smriti*, the act of remembering something from past memories, often elements that were learned in previous lives—a concept tightly linked to the Hindu (and Buddhist) concept of *samsara*, the cycle of reincarnations, and its touchstone *karma*. But taste in India is also closely linked to touch, social status and hierarchy, purity and pollution within food transactions (Appadurai 1981), leading some to suggest that Indian culture is not dominated by vision, as hinted by Eck (1998), but rather by taste (Pinard 1991). We could talk, too, of an embodiment of gustatory metaphors in everyday life through social taboos and holistic cuisine.

There is a close association between eating, taste and enjoyment in Indian thought, as reminded previously by Bhattacharya, but also by Wendy Doniger.

> One of the most common Sanskrit words for "eat" is the verb *bhuj*, which means a whole group of delicious things: the enjoyment or consumption of food, sex, experience, karma, fuel (by fire); it means to enjoy, eat, consume [as fuel], enjoy [as one enjoys sex or music],

and burn up [fuel or karma]. (Doniger 2014, 73–74)

Such use of the word *bhuj*, to eat, resonates with the intrinsic meaning of rasa and taste within Indian thought and performing arts. In fact, rasa theory "urges us to think of art as 'slow-cooked' gourmet food," as Ram reminds us (2011, S167). In parallel with Narayanan, who claims that the formation of rasa "cannot be produced in a second or a minute" but is in fact a long process that needs to build up gradually (1994, 35), Ram claims that

> *rasa* theory makes it very explicit that this is a world in which time is slowed down to the time *it takes* for good flavours to be released. Taste, in this world of performance, is no different from good cuisine. The temporality is at once slow and yet requiring decisive judgement and action. It entails taking time over the cuisine, preparing the ingredients, but also intervening at the right time to adjust the heat, simmer the appropriate spices before adding meat and vegetables, allowing a further simmering that releases the flavours and mingles them. Such food is not only prepared by gourmets. It is meant for consumption by epicures. (Ram 2011, S161; emphasis in original)

Indeed, analogies between food, taste and rasa in dance theory and practice carry substantial meaning and significance. In fact, Alain Montandon points out that the vast images and flavourful metaphors that surround the general discourse on taste reflect the impossibility of translating the inexpressible, as well as the fact that taste represents "a synthesis and sublimation of the five senses, controlled by imagination and a multitude of representations (personal, cultural and social)" (Montandon 2014, 185). Beyond making sense of aesthetic taste, these gustatory analogies urge us to taste performed emotions instead of simply seeing or hearing them. Rasa, argues Ram, is a richly synaesthesic term that, analogous to the cooking process, suggests the combination of "raw materials (vegetables and meats) to a distinct flavour through the application of techniques (cooking with spices and sauces)." Furthermore, the performing arts, by seeking to extract the *ras* or juice-essence of a danced recital, entail "an intertwining or crossing over of the senses—rasa as the sense of taste infuses rasa as the essence of emotions" (Ram 2000, 266).

Like eating food, the relishing of danced emotions triggers pleasure in the one experiencing it, sometimes alongside awe and surprise (*chamatkara*) as one is faced with a remarkable and unexpected combination of flavors. Like physical taste, rasa is acquired and "improved with training" (Pollock 2016, 42): it becomes more and more delightful as one explores its complex balances, learns its vocabulary and uses this new knowledge to better appreciate both its various parts and whole presentation. As a result, "rasa precisely resembles the 'taste' it metaphorically references, which may be regarded as existing at once in the food, the taster, and the act of tasting" (26).

Yet, poets and theorists never paid much attention to *rasik* gustatory analogies in their works. "Perhaps it was too obvious to them" says Pollock, as they already valued the significance of embodied knowledge and did not perceive emotions as subordinate to reason, as opposed to Western thinkers who still associate knowing with reason and intellect (Pollock 2016, 42). While taste has become part of Western aesthetics in the mid-eighteenth century and applied to the capacity of the social subject, it never held the embodied status it has in Indian aesthetics, where taste not only establishes standards of appreciation, but is also typically tied to an aesthetic object (44). In his Ph.D. thesis, my collaborator Jonathan Voyer also insists that Indian aesthetic taste or

rasa should not be confused with the idea of taste in Western aesthetics, as the former is an experience – the experience of savoring an emotion – and not a faculty as is the case in the latter (2018, 84–85).

Furthermore, Indian aesthetics acknowledge the intimate relation one has toward flavors, as clearly illustrated by Bhattacharya when she conveyed that "we all taste things differently" because what someone finds "wonderfully sweet and delicious" will appear "too plain" to somebody else. Just as we have food preferences, spectators may have favorite rasas[122] and performers too may become attached to certain aesthetic moods, like Nayak who was particularly fond of the *bhairavi raga* and the *shringara* sentiment. In this sense, rasa as an Indian aesthetic delight takes into account personal resonances as well as objective appreciation, in that specific narratives and elements will trigger shared emotions in the audience and enable a relationship with the performer, as would a love story between Radha and Krishna signal *bhakti* and *shringara*, for instance.

Indian gustatory aesthetics and Western aesthetic taste also diverge in terms of cultural variations. In Indian thought, emotions do not hold the same negative connotation they have in Western culture. Largely due to its Christian heritage, emotions in the West have become unpredictable parasites that need to be "controlled" and "disciplined" by logic and reason. They have historically been located in the body and associated with women, "primitive people" and nature, as opposed to reason and cognition which became the hallmark of men, intellect, rationality and control (Wetherell 2012, 95; see also Classen 1998, chaps. 3 and 4). But in India, these associations have no meaning, as emotional states and sensations directly impact knowledge and intellect. In fact, rasa theory is based on the assumption that emotions – just as perception, which is understood as a direct way of accessing knowledge – are key ingredients in the way we grasp the world's significance (Ram 2011, S162). Coorlawala contends that the reception of traditional Indian performance is informed by a specifically Indian perception of emotions, one that understands emotions as "appraisals, as judgements of situations based on learned beliefs and values"—which may not be the case in Western audiences where emotions are often equated with passivity and irrationality, and understood as "natural, universal, and female" (2010a, 128). Likewise, Chakravorty concurs that because "cultural knowledge, skill, and social memory are intricately linked" to the experience of rasa, uninitiated spectators may not reach this ideal state (2004, 9).

Hence, the significance of gustatory analogies in rasa theory lies in its ability to acknowledge the deeply embodied experience of appreciating staged emotions. Both eating and seeing a play creates pleasure in artists and spectators. But as any food lover will attest, eating is not just about ingesting food: it involves a colorfully-balanced visual presentation, sounds created by the crunchiness of ingredients or by the sizzling of a dish, aromas that make us salivate, textures that melt in our mouth or crisp under our teeth, the slight touch of sipping tea to the sloppy work involved in eating a spicy curry with Indian bread, the accentuation of flavors due to temperature,

122. Indeed, from the very beginning, the *NS* (chap. 1) argues that each rasa will appeal more to distinctive groups of society: young people will prefer *shringara*, while warriors will be more attracted to *vira,* women and lower status people will enjoy *hasya* more, and so on.

as well as the physical proximity and pleasurable company of others[123] (Montandon 2014). Rasa as taste invites us to savor performances and movement through various sensory means, rather than adhering to the "bureaucratization of sensation" (Jones 2018) which dictates that we should isolate the senses rather than combining them, or only see – and to some extent, listen to – dance. Enjoying a performance, just as eating a meal with others, involves the multisensory, intersensory and synaesthesic experience of sharing flavours, savouring them together and expressing our enjoyment of those flavors through ongoing commentaries. Dance and emotions feed the soul, make us hungry for more while quenching our thirst. Rasa, it seems, demands that we perceive the performing arts with a new eye—or, perhaps, new taste buds.

CONCLUSION

This *javali* acted as the continuation of my previous *padam* analysis as an ethnographer by providing an anthropological account of rasa. The notion of rasa, although primarily conceptual in nature, opened a dialogue on the place of theory in the practice of classical Indian dance and about the meaning of aesthetics, sensory and emotional patterns across cultures. For centuries, rasa in practice and in theory has highlighted the inadequacy of the mind-body Cartesian model in understanding affect and perception in culture.

As an embodied cognition or "embodied thought" (M. Z. Rosaldo 1985), rasa is a prime example of the embodiment of theory in dance through oral and performative tradition. I have highlighted that dancers, in addition to developing their *rasik* literacy through external perception, surpass the distanced spectators by having access to rasa through internal means as well. Throughout their training, performers learn to internalize *and* externalize rasa with the help of inner sensations like kinaesthesia, proprioception, equilibroception and rhythmic flow. Dancers learn rasa *through* their body and know rasa *in* their body. As such, even if artists and *gurus* do not have prior knowledge of rasa theory, they are still able to enact rasa theory in movement, gesture and expression.

Rasa as "an embodied and animated aesthetic experience" (Sen-Podstawska 2018, 301) and an Indian concept of embodied emotion-flavor provides significant insight to the field of anthropology. Through a comparative examination of rasa as aesthetic emotion-sensation, I have demonstrated that this concept challenges Western ideas about aesthetic taste, sensation, emotion and the mind-body binary understanding of knowledge. Rasa invites us not only to look and listen to performance, but to grasp, taste and savor it as well. Additionally, the *rasik* system shows that, while all cultures can be moved by affect, emotions and states are nevertheless distinct across cultures. There is no true Western equivalent, for instance, for *smriti* – reminiscence of memories from past lives – and the emphasis that Indian culture puts on compassion (*karuna*), duty (*dharma*) or heroism (*vira*) does not resonate with the historically-Christian thought process of the West. Manifestations of emotions and the meaning that is attributed to them reflect the singularity of emotional patterns across cultures.

As indicated by Prickett, "[a]cquisition of part of the culture is crucial to both create and grasp the implicit and explicit meanings of dramatic movements" (2007, 34), a statement that

123. Even the latest Canadian food guide acknowledges that eating does not only involve nutrition but the company of others—something that rasa theory has understood for centuries!

applies to Indian aesthetic taste and sensibilities as well. Taste cannot be relegated to a mere physiological operation, as it also "involves a large range of psychological and sociological representations, the produce of history and experience" (Montandon 2014, 180), which need to be taken into account, both in regards to taste as a sensation and taste as an aesthetic delight. As a synaesthesic sense that involves sight, hearing, smell and imagination in the appreciation of an object (177), the physiological as well as the symbolic representation of taste tells us so much about Indian aesthetics. Just as one can acquire a sense of gustatory discrimination through food connoisseurship, so too can dance students and spectators learn to discriminate good from bad rasas through the acquisition of *rasik* literacy.

Conclusion (*Tillana*)

The focal point of this dissertation was "rasa"—a Sanskrit word that holds a plethora of meanings, including (emotional) essence, juice, taste and flavor, as well as aesthetic delight and pleasure. To narrow this vast topic, I have chosen to restrict my research to the latter aesthetic definition of rasa within Indian performing arts, and more precisely the classical dance forms of Bharatanatyam and Odissi in Eastern Canada. The actualization of rasa in the Indian diaspora urged me to retrace its origins in India to better understand its current state as part of a new socio-cultural environment—and these origins, as they stand, are located in classical and medieval aesthetic theory, with later historical development in pre- and post-colonial twentieth-century India. The migration of rasa in Canada also entailed an investigation of mixed practices and Western influences in the performing arts, as classical Indian dance is no longer a mainstream form in locations such as Montreal and Toronto. These latter elements were explored in relation to my interest in sensory anthropology, a methodology that imposed itself onto my research and perfectly complemented the many affective and sensory facets of the notion of rasa in the performing arts and beyond. With the help of the ethnographic method of participant sensation, I was able to conduct interviews with Montreal- and Toronto-based professional dancers, as well as fieldwork – as a spectator – in Chennai, Toronto and Montreal.

Following these methodological and theoretical decisions, my research soon unfolded on its own. The primary aim of this research was to provide a better understanding of what the Indian aesthetic notion of rasa means within Indian performing arts and culture, with a special focus on the Indian diaspora in Eastern Canada. The secondary goal was to illustrate how an anthropological analysis of rasa from a sensory and affective perspective could contribute to a complexified understanding of the senses and emotions in Indian society and beyond. In doing so, I have attempted to provide answers to debates around the interpretation of rasa in contemporary Indian performing arts, its location, the place of classical theory within current practices of rasa, the sensory and emotional nature of the experience of rasa in training and onstage, as well as the gustatory significance of this concept (as interpreted from a sensory anthropology stance)—all the while contrasting these elements with the mainstream, theoretical understanding of rasa as an aesthetic experience exclusive to the spectator, as argued in early eleventh century by Abhinavagupta.

In providing these answers, I have addressed rasa from a number of perspectives: that of classical and medieval theorists, Indian and uninitiated spectators, contemporary performers (mainly in the diaspora) and myself (as an ethnographer and anthropologist). These perspectives were choreographed in a structure that reflected a typical Bharatanatyam recital (*margam*) in which the dancer moves gradually from pure technique (*nritta*/theory) to expressive dance (*abhinaya*/narrative form/interviews) and back to non-expressive dance, namely *alarippu* (Introduction)*, jatiswaram* (Chapter 1: Rasa from a Theoretical Perspective)*, shabdam* (Chapter 2: Rasa from the Spectator's Perspective)*, varnam* (Chapter 3: Rasa from the Performer's Perspective)*, padam* (Chapter 4: Rasa from an Ethnographer's Perspective)*, javali* (Chapter 5: Rasa from a Sensory Anthropologist's Perspective) and *tillana* (Conclusion).

From a theoretical perspective, rasa has been many things and located in various players: from an decorative element of the text and an emotional state in the character, it has transformed into an aesthetic quality implied or suggested (*dhvani*) through poetry after theorists turned their

attention from (audio-visual) Sanskrit drama to (aural) literature (*kavya*), and finally to an aesthetic experience (as opposed to a worldly or "pedestrian" emotional experience) located in the educated spectator, the *rasika*. As the concept of rasa migrated from literature to devotional poetry and practices in medieval India, however, it became accessible to spectators – or devotees – who became active participants – or actors – in their affective relationship with divinities such as Lord Krishna. In this scenario, rasa remained an experience of aesthetic delight, but one fueled by passionate devotion towards Krishna as devotees embodied – imaginatively-speaking – the many characters of his world-play (*lila*).

The experience of rasa in spectators today may very well exceed the Abhinavagupta-esque classical understanding of the concept, as uninitiated spectators seem to have access to this experience as well, despite not being aware or familiar with its cultural and theoretical underpinnings. In reality, the audience is not the only one experiencing rasa, as performers too unequivocally claim that they have access to this experience on the stage and even during rehearsal or beyond the performative context. The performer's experience of rasa, I have argued, is a learning process – as is the case for the spectator – that can be summarized as the acquisition of *rasik* knowledge or *rasik* literacy through sensory means. Throughout their training, dancers learn to understand, interpret, but most importantly to *embody* and express rasa through various sensory channels, including kinaesthesia, proprioception, equilibroception, rhythm, sound, imagination and sight—embodied expressions that generate the formation of *samskara* (memories) or "memory-habits" in the artist (Voyer 2018, 207). As such, rasa is both always and never present in practice; it is rarely addressed directly in training, but only internalized through repetition and discipline (*riyaz*). Each performer develops their own interpretation of this concept as they acquire more experience and maturity.

In the last part of the thesis (*javali*), I have attempted to expand on the various shades and flavors of the concept of rasa from a sensory anthropology perspective. The significance of rasa as an emotionally and sensory charged Indian aesthetic concept unfolded as I situated rasa within the larger field of the anthropology of the senses and emotions. The variety of gustatory and culinary analogies that are part of the discourse around rasa hold strong significance as the experience of rasa was, and still is, very similar to that of eating, but especially of *enjoying* food and the complex mix of a number of flavors. Rasa, in fact, invites both spectators and artists not only to see and hear performances, but most importantly to *feel, taste* and *savour* them. Hence, rasa represents an active, shared delight as much as a synaesthesic experience. But more importantly, rasa stands as an affective experience that lies in *relationships*—relationships between characters, relationships between performer and the audience, relationships between the senses.

GENERAL CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study, I have not only showed how rasa relates to theories of embodiment, but also the ways in which rasa sheds light onto the (Western) concept of emotions and sensations in Indian culture, especially in its Canadian diaspora. This anthropological study of rasa has made it possible to think of the performing arts as more than something to be seen by exploring the various iterations of savoury combinations in Indian classical dance. Rasa is a concept that resonates with taste as we know it in everyday life, because it invites us, as active participants, to share the experience of savouring perfectly combined flavours on the stage and even beyond. I have presented rasa as an acquired taste, as an expertise that is learned through one's exposure to its multiple expressions—

a process I have coined as "*rasik* literacy." I have also demonstrated that, as an acquired taste, the expression of rasa grows from embodied, lived experiences in everyday life; mnemonic traces (*vasanas* and *samskaras*) that leave impressions in our mind that further informs our future perception of rasa. Indeed, when discussing the experience of rasa in the audience, Ramachandran highlights that "an emotion can be understood only by one who has himself had experience of it" (Ramachandran 1980, 2:85). As argued in this dissertation, so is the case for performers, who, as highlighted by Neena Jayarajan, will be better equipped to transmit rasa if they have experienced emotions themselves in their day-to-day, *laukika* (worldly) life—in other words, *alaukika bhava* (aesthetic emotional state) is quite impossible without the prior experience of *laukika bhava* (mundane emotional state).

Mason suggests that the concept of rasa discussed in the *NS* may very well be "rooted in a specific temporal, cultural, and artistic circumstance that is now lost for good," rendering our attempts at understanding rasa today quite futile (Mason 2015, 101). Indian theorists of rasa have nonetheless engaged in debates about the experience of rasa for almost fifteen centuries; debates that, I suggest, have modulated according to specific times, local religious beliefs and philosophical standings, contexts and uses. In its primary form (*NS*), rasa was located in the character and addressed at the actor (Pollock 2016), the one person concerned with the "making of emotions" (Neuerburg-Denzer 2011; 2014). Theorists have afterwards analyzed rasa as a product of decorative features of the text (*alankara*) and, later on, of poetic suggestion (*dhvani*). A major shift occurred at the turn of the tenth century, when Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta suggested that rasa was in fact an aesthetic *experience* distinct from worldly emotional episodes and rather analogous to illumination (*ananda*), while being exclusive to the knowledgeable spectator (*Rasika*). While many hypotheses emerged and are still dominant in scholarship – including the location of rasa in the audience but not in the performer, as well as the distinction between ordinary (*laukika*) and aesthetic (*alaukika*) emotion and sensation in the arts, the latter corresponding to rasa – no significant attention was given to the possibility for performers to experience rasa before the works of Rupa and Jiva Goswamin and the rise of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Indeed, it is only during medieval times, as the popularity of devotional practices (*bhakti*) and poetry grew dramatically, that rasa migrated from the spectator to the actor, understood by the Goswamins as an active participant in the *rasik* entourage of Lord Krishna.

Although the theory of Abhinavagupta still prevails in rasa theory and in the institutional training of dance forms like Bharatanatyam, interpretations of rasa based on the Goswamins' account – in which the boundaries between the viewer's and the character's experience of rasa were blurred – do resonate with the current practice of classical Indian dance forms. Indeed, the current dance scene still puts significant emphasis on *shringararasa* as the supreme rasa and highlights the role of spectators and performers as active participants in the shared experience of rasa. Yet, the experience of rasa outside of India or in non-Indian audiences was never an issue for theorists—simply because they were not confronted to such context. The fact that philosophical debates on rasa slowly decreased around the sixteenth and seventeenth century – a little before the British colonization of India and the consequent introduction of a new uninitiated public to traditional performing arts – may account for this lacuna.

In this dissertation, I attempted to fill this breach by complicating the experience of rasa in the audience outside of India—an experience that is often reduced to mere feelings or affects accessible to all. The situatedness of rasa as an Indian processing of emotions, and the generalized

Western understanding of the reception of emotions as phenomenologically accessible to all audiences, are difficult to reconcile. Rasa is a complex concept that encompasses a cultural habitus and an Indian sensorium, as well as a social, philosophical, political and religious history and aesthetics that are unique to the Indian subcontinent. The aesthetic notions that surround rasa in performance – *bhava* and *abhinaya* – are founded on an Indian habitus and techniques of the body that were eventually conventionalized on the stage and in writing. In its original context, the experience of rasa is also shaped through a "sixth sense," the *manas*, a cognitive faculty that synthesizes the non-conceptual perceptions of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch into a comprehensive experience in the mind—but one that also perceives and deciphers inner sensations such as pleasure, pain, memories, sentiments and emotions. The cultural and sensory specificity of rasa therefore makes it difficult for a non-Indian spectator to experience rasa in a conventional sense.

To further complicate matters, the classical theory of rasa (especially Abhinavagupta's widely accepted thesis), in which the experience of rasa is exclusively located in the spectator, is at odds with current practices of classical Indian dance forms such as Bharatanatyam in which dancers often maintain that they can experience rasa. The classical theory of rasa, as suggested by Abhinavagupta, is formal: only the expert (*rasika*) and sympathetic (*sahridaya*) spectator can rightfully experience rasa. Nevertheless, contemporary accounts of scholars-practitioners and professional performers of Indian traditional dance forms challenge this assumption by stating that dancers, as well as non-Indian audiences, can experience rasa too—an element that was addressed directly by Lata Pada, who was well aware of the classical, aesthetic definition of the *rasik* experience in the spectator, but could not ignore the (*rasik*) delight that uninitiated spectators experienced nonetheless as well as the out-of-body state that the artist experienced onstage during performance. I have attempted to explain these divergent takes on rasa through the influence of Western reception theory, which argues for the performing arts as phenomenologically accessible, on an affective level, to everyone; but also using the concept of kinesthetic empathy, as proposed by Deidre Sklar (1994) and Dee Reynolds (Reason and Reynolds 2010; Reynolds and Reason 2012), and by further analyzing the sensory depth of the spectator's experience using my own embodied fieldwork experience.

It seems that the experience of rasa is rapidly evolving and adapting to the new challenges imposed by modernity and globalization. While efforts are being deployed in keeping the "traditional" and the "classical" in Indian dance forms today – and at the same time redefining the traditional and classical roots of dance on the global, contemporary scene (see O'Shea 2007) – can we say the same about the audience? Is the reception of rasa still "classical"? Are the experts of rasa the only ones who can fully appreciate Indian classical performing arts? Or can the non-expert spectator truly savour dance-drama today? There is no doubt that rasa is a concept deeply embedded in Indian culture; but the current scholarship hints towards a new, more flexible definition of rasa where the experience of rasa rests in the relationship established between performer and audience, be them experts or not. For spectators, rasa is not about a cathartic experience, but a state that consists in apprehending "the emotions within a performative context" (Coorlawala 2010a, 119). It is through the relationship between dancer and audience that all types of spectators now have access to rasa, suggests Coorlawala (133). In parallel to Ram's (2011, S164) claim about the audience's capacity to experience "appropriate" (meaning: historically and culturally emplaced) affect and emotion without a thorough knowledge of classical rasa theory – which has also been highlighted by Beaulieu and Voyer – I argue that there is a need to legitimize

the non-expert's experience of Indian dance-drama, an experience that is defined through a form of aesthetic pleasure which may or may not correspond to rasa, but that is still valuable.

The internationalization of classical Indian dance forms has accentuated the paradoxical relationship between rasa theory and the performance of emotions in current practice. Such incongruity is due to the vast proliferation of performances and the establishment of teachers worldwide during the twentieth century, which in turn led to the introduction of a new international, non-expert audience in Indian performing arts. Dance and rasa as art forms dominated by women are now a platform for artists to address various challenges to the Indian identity: gender roles, classical vs. modern, the politics of dance, representation, history, etc. Rasa and *abhinaya*, indeed, reflect gender stereotypes, complex histories and politics, and embodied traditions. As such, rasa is acquiring a whole new meaning in the diaspora, one that results in "resistant aesthetics" (Chatterjea 2004, 327). This new definition emerges from the introduction of classical dance styles into a "modern" West that values the contemporary aesthetics of modern dance founded on a Cartesian mind-body dualism, as well as the pristine status of the un-changing traditions of the East, a concept that is almost lost in Western traditions. To situate themselves in this binary, rigid environment, classical Indian dancers of the diaspora have had to redefine their dancing style while preserving their training in traditional forms of dance, making their form both hybrid and modern by using Indian epistemologies rather than Western ones. Indian dancers and choreographers are now often seen as cultural activists that challenge these Orientalist categories and try to re-define tradition through performance.

The notion of rasa has changed from its philosophical and medieval roots, forcing us to take a new look at the experience of rasa today. Rasa has not necessarily changed, but the reception of rasa, its interpretation, has mutated. Given this new reality, I believe, the classical theory of rasa – especially Abhinavagupta's widely accepted thesis – does not and cannot apply to the contemporary Indian global scene. In fact, the Goswamins' interpretation of rasa as an active experience of the actor-participant is more relevant to the current performing arts context. A major indicator of this hypothesis lies in the fact that all my collaborators – as well as scholar-practitioners in dance scholarship – have confirmed that they are able, as dancers, to experience rasa during performance. In addition, they have all, with one exception, attested to the audience's role in their own experience of rasa on the stage, in that rasa takes form within the "circular relationship with the audience" (Nova Bhattacharya). In this scenario, both performer and spectators are active participants in the affective narrative taking stage through deep imagined relationships between characters.

But the most significant contribution of this study to the field of anthropology is undoubtedly the alternative sensory approach that rasa in performance proposes. Indian drama is much more than "a poem to be seen," as Neuerburg-Denzer writes: "[i]n its evocation of food and flavor, rasa aesthetic does not only privilege the visual and aural aspects of performance, but suggests an alternative that includes other senses of perception" (Neuerburg-Denzer 2011, 63). Drawing inspiration from Tomie Hahn's (2007) concept of "sensational knowledge" and sensory modes of knowledge transmission in the training of Japanese *nihon buyo*, I have demonstrated that one learns to evoke rasa in deeply tacit ways through sensory means such as sight and imagination, affective hearing, kinaesthesia, movement, equilibrioception, rhythm (including rhythmic flow) an proprioception. I have also given attention to the haptic qualities of Hindu-Indian senses in

performance (and in culture) as well as the role of the mind, *manas*, in the evaluation and relish of staged emotions.

This analysis has drawn me to conclude that performers experience rasa via sensory routes that are not accessible to audience members, or at least not under the same modalities: these alternative "processing" of rasa include the embodiment of a character's emotions, the dancer's response to the audience's own experience of rasa, the identification with characters' emotional experiences through shared lived and embodied life experience, as well as the understanding of rasa as a innate quality in the dancer that can be attributed to the lifelong acquisition of maturity and embodied experience. In all those instances, rasa is processed through the awareness of one's kinesthetic experience, as emotions translate through somatic sensations in the body, and less so through exteroceptors. As such, dancers do not *see* the physical expression of emotions which then transforms into rasa, as is the case for the audience, but *kinesthetically perceive* emotions – which have been associated with specific moods through discipline and repetition of movements (*riyaz*) – which become rasa.

A Note on Dance, Rasa and Religion

A number of scholar-practitioners like Kathak dancer Pallabi Chakravorty raise the significance and role of religion and personal devotion in their work, stating that rasa is the moment of perfect union or ecstasy that is produced by dominant emotions. In the case of Kathak in particular, rasa is possible when the erotic (*shringara*) merges with the spiritual, the real time with the transcendental, and the devotee (*bhakta*) with the divine (Chakravorty 2009b, 102–3). However, in this research, I have not directly addressed the spiritual and religious relationship that artists may have towards dance and rasa. This was a conscious choice, as the current state of classical Indian dance, most notably in the diaspora, shows that aspects of devotion and *bhakti* are less and less relevant and are consequently rarely involved in choreographic choices (Katrak 2008).

Although I have discussed the topic of religion and devotion with my collaborators, I too concluded that this element is not relevant to their practice or experience of rasa today. There are, however, a few elements that came up during the interviews that are worth noting. The first is that dancers draw a clear line between the "religious" and the "spiritual," the former being associated with rituals and shared practices of religion (in this case, Hinduism), while the latter refers to the day-to-day relation one has with a "supreme energy." "Spirituality" says Punthambekar, "is also like a feeling: it's like smell. You can't necessarily say that 'I love Krishna and I'm spiritual.' Spirituality is also about energy." She opposed spirituality to religiousness, which "the actual *pujas*, it's the actual specific deities, things like that" (S. Punthambekar, 2 Oct. 2017). What some, like Bhattacharya, have called a "spiritual connection" to dance rests on the communal experience of rasa in which the dancer invites spectators to join her on a "journey of the imagination" or in "going to a place of wonder"; while for others like Punthambekar, Beaulieu, Voyer and Nayak, the "spiritual" refers to the relationship they forge with their dance practice through discipline (*riyaz*). As noted previously, the rigorous repetition of dance movements and *abhinaya* sometimes lead to altered states that may feel "spiritual" or "meditative." But spirituality, says Lata Pada, also lies in one's ability to have a "deeply personal relationship with the divine" in dance, where one has "the liberty or the capacity to chide the divine" and longs for a vanishing of dissatisfaction through the union with the divine at the time of death (L. Pada, 6 July 2018).

Secondly, interviewees generally didn't believe that being a practicing Hindu would influence their dance training, with the exception of Indian cultural elements associated with Hinduism that had to be rendered through movements, like Jayarajan's example of sandalwood grinding—but like *abhinaya*, those gestures can be learned. Similarly, dance students can learn how to enact devotion (*bhakti*) on the stage, a concept that was understood as "respect" or "reverence" by Jayarajan and Pada. Pada did define Bharatanatyam as a "devotional art," but mainly because of its temple origins, as she now views it as a "performative art." She compares it to learning a Shakespearian play, in which actors learn to portray emotions and enact century-old narratives that have a very different aesthetic from the modern world. In summary, the Indian-encoded movements that make classical Indian dance styles like Bharatanatyam and Odissi, including religious gestures, can be learned, but will have more "authenticity" if they "come from a place of embodiment" deriving from the dancer's lived experiences of Indian and Hindu cultures. Anyone can learn to "embody India/Hinduism," in other words.

Thirdly, as mentioned earlier (in the Introduction), my collaborators did not associate religious myths and "Hindu-oriented" narratives of dance to religion but rather to Indian culture, to some extent. Nayak, for instance, insisted that seeing Hindu myths in dance as religious is a purely Western concept. Those myths and epics are "just stories," as pointed out by Jayarajan, and simply serve as material for dance. The key elements, explained Nayak, were the *relationships* that were present in those stories. I believe this aspect of relationality surpasses questions of religion, spirituality and devotion, and thus deserves further attention.

Rasa: A Relational Experience of Emotions and Sensations

When defining the theory of rasa (*rasavada*), Ramachandran explains that,

> although the focus of a theory of *rasa* is *rasa*, the theory has necessarily to consider the process of appreciation in all its aspects because *rasa* is the culmination of the whole process. Hence actually *a theory of rasa is a comprehensive theory of the process of appreciation leading to rasa.* In other words, it seeks to explain the nature and interconnection of the content of the work, its method, the equipment of the appreciator, and the *rasa* in which all these culminate. (Ramachandran 1980, 2:84; emphasis added)

The present dissertation has attempted to put forth such manifestations of the experience of rasa in the current Indian diaspora of Canada—its intricacies, the many relationships it weaves, the secrets that lie behind such manifestations. Indian aesthetics surely reveal how rasas can adapt to specific goals and uses, based on one's objectives, whether these are religious, for entertaining purposes or for critical inquiries. For instance, Rupa Goswamin's contribution to Indian aesthetics shows that rasa theory is first and foremost a theory of affective relationships, a relational theory of emotions. His new ramification of *shringararasa* into various *bhaktirasas* and culminating into an ultimate *premarasa* (non-sexual love) demonstrates that rasas and *sthayibhavas* (dominant emotions) are certainly not fixed. On the contrary, they are defined and determined by their surrounding elements and accompanying emotions—in other words, by their *anubhavas*, *vibhavas* and *vyabhicharibhavas*. For instance, *vatsalya* (parental love) cannot be *shringararasa* (erotic love) since its main determinant (*vibhava*) is the young Krishna, whether as a child or as someone much younger than the devotee. This relationship is what defines the type of *bhava* and therefore the rasa that will arise from it. Goswamin was quite agile in highlighting these contextual factors (age, gender, complexion, dominant clothing color, social status, etc.) and the ways in which they

determine the type of relationship – and thus, the type of *bhakti* towards Krishna – that was the most adequate for each devotee.

Supriya Nayak insisted during our conversations on the fact that rasa lies in the *relationship* between characters—how those relationships are constructed, shattered, consolidated or maintained. To convey rasa is to *build* on those relationships, added Jayarajan: the more details we find in those relationships, the richer the *rasik* experience will become. As with human relationships, a dancer's relation to a god or a goddess in dance will allow her to get to know those deities in more intimate ways than, let's say, visiting a temple (J. Beaulieu). The ability to "chide the divine" and engage in a personal relationship with characters in dance puts the performer in a position that brings her closer to deep *rasik* experiences (L. Pada).

The relational nature of rasa theory also lies in the interaction with the audience "through evoking of collective emotion." It is a theory of communication "that shows that human expressivity and subjectivity are shaped and shared in relationships with one another and to the material world" (Chakravorty 2009a, 215). Nova Bhattacharya viewed rasa as imminent to the circular relationship that is forged between performer and audience. Rasa, it seems, is only fully realized and possible through relationships, and similarly to "new animism," it comes to life through the relation people have toward it (see Astor-Aguilera and Harvey 2018). A dancer can experience rasa on her own during rehearsal, but through relationships with characters; likewise, she can feel rasa onstage along with her audience. But rasa also emerges out of relationships with others and the environment, as clearly demonstrated by the role of *vibhavas* (causes, determinants) and *anubhavas* (reactions, consequents) in its theoretical and practical realization: the emotion of love arises because a woman sees or thinks about – or sees *because* she is imagining (Shulman 2012) – her lover. In addition, rasa may take form through one's relation or connection to the divine or ultimate power, through spirituality (Lata Pada). Hence, rasa would not be an objective quality of the dramatic artwork, nor a subjective feeling experienced by the spectator, but "a commensurate operation that distinguishes and relates the artwork and the audience, and through which the audience comes to know its self" (Mason 2015, 105)—and, I would add, the performer too.

Lastly, the relational nature of rasa rests in its strong synaesthesic quality and the relationships that are forged across sensory modalities as well as between sensations and emotions. These experiences are different for spectators and performers but overlap as well in several ways. Both spectators and dancers will shift their attention to particular sensory inputs (Hahn 2007, 171) in learning how the experience of rasa translates in their body. They will learn to associate specific melodies and musical scales (*ragas*) to corresponding moods, just as they will link particular facial expressions (*abhinaya*) and hand gestures (*hastas*) to given emotional states. They will also collectively see environments and hear dialogues through shared imaginary. Performers, however, also develop other forms of sensory relationship to rasa, as they acquire *rasik* knowledge through kinaesthesia, proprioception and rhythm (embodied through speech, hearing and movement)—for dancers, rasa translates through *the performer's own body*, and not only through external sensory means.

In addition, what Lata Pada and others have made clear is that our *relationship* to rasa has changed—but rasa is not different in itself. Every person's relationship to rasa makes up for a very different and distinct experience of emotion in performance, and even beyond. A new perspective

on rasa means that it has more flexibility and can sometimes transcend the world of the performing arts. Samyuktha Punthambekar transposed rasa (as highly emotional moments) in her daily life and challenges by putting emphasis on rasa as a *process*, not an end. In her study of dancer Chandralekha's legacy, Ananya Chatterjea notes that rasa "comes to be understood as aspirations for relationality and for a concrete sense of the location of individual-in-community" (Chatterjea 2004, 48). Each dancer's personal relation to rasa fuels her own performative style.

In a similar manner to Indian imagination as a "causally effective feature of the self" (Shulman 2012, 284), rasa only makes sense as part of a cause-and-effect emotional relation to one's environment and entourage. Hence, I believe that rasa, more than an emotional theory of aesthetic reception, is a causative system of emotional and sensational relationships, in a similar way to what Wetherell names "affective practice" in which "affective habits and associations are acquired […] [and] are inevitably carried forward into new relational fields in all the ways in which past practice sets the contexts for present practice" (Wetherell 2012, 155). As Michelle Z. Rosaldo highlighted in her critique of the body-mind opposition in anthropological inquiry, "[f]eelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell" (M. Z. Rosaldo 1985, 143). Although rasas correspond to moods or sentiments – the erotic, the odious, and so on – and *bhavas* refer to their corresponding emotional states – desire, disgust and the like – the *rasik* system encompasses so much more than emotions. It addresses flaws (e.g., arrogance) and qualities (e.g., sagacity), physical (e.g., sleeping) and imaginative states (e.g., recollection), mental (e.g., depression) and physiological conditions (e.g. intoxication)—and all of those are *caused* by prior crucial elements.

Indian philosophy, in particular the Samkhya and Nyaya schools, shows that the world as we experience it is in fact populated by these causal situations and that rasa can be understood as a form of conceptual perception within the framework of Nyaya philosophy. As pointed out by theorist Vishvanatha, rasa "does not exist unless it is apprehended" (Pollock 2016, 267). It only comes to life through complex relationships that are enacted, imagined, expressed, as "*rasa* itself cannot be played, rather it comes into being, is generated, through the interactive elements of performance" (Cooper 2013, 339). Rasa exists through the *effects* caused by dominant emotions and the transformation triggered them. Rasa lies in complex emotional and sensorial relationships that bring people together.

NEW AVENUES (AND STAGES)

This study of rasa is but a small contribution to the study of emotions and sensations in Indian society, aesthetics and performing arts. By providing input from current experienced and seasoned classical Indian dance artists from the Indian diaspora in Canada and outside of it, I have sought to exemplify the many ways in which rasa is being re-interpreted in relation to its current situatedness and expression(s). In addition, my aim was to demonstrate how rasa, as an aesthetic concept and tasteful experience, can enrich our understanding of culturally-formed emotional schemes and sensory models. This research shows that rasa, although different from its theoretical roots, is still relevant to Indian performing arts, where it is being re-interpreted, elevated and adapted to current social issues and diasporic challenges. Furthermore, my fieldwork data shows that rasa exists "in mysterious ways," as it is embodied and expressed, tacit and intangible, yet always on the mind of artists who try to tackle its aesthetic and emotional force through various means. For current artists, rasa is the bridge that forges the relationship between performer and

audience, all the while providing them with meaningful tools to deal with challenging situations and charged emotional moments in their everyday life.

However, the aesthetic concept of rasa has much more to offer. The originality of rasa as an aesthetic experience of both performers and spectators makes it a relevant research topic for multiple disciplines and research fields, such as performance studies and the anthropology of dance, philosophy and aesthetics, Sanskrit studies, audience reception theory, theatre and dance studies, but also politics or food, sensory and emotion studies. Rasa can reveal gender and political imbalances, historical discrepancies, emotional regimes (Reddy 2001) as well as the evolution of aesthetic and sensory preferences and inclinations in society. Rasa acts as a "counter-balancing ingredient" in the making of aesthetic experiences, as it questions and challenges our Western-centric, Cartesian understanding of emotions and the senses in performance and society. As such, rasa is the ingredient, that "extra special thing" (N. Bhattacharya) that provides spiciness to Western performative dishes and turns them into balanced yet contrasted tasting experiences. Rasa reflects embodied ways of being, sensing and emoting in Indian communities across the world and acts as a cultural nexus for the Indian diaspora as well. To quote Hahn once again, "[i]f dance is a 'way of knowing,' it is also a way of expressing what we know, what we embody, and who we are" (2007, 167).

There is still much research to be done on the topic of rasa that goes beyond its intellectual, aesthetic and post-colonial political history; because rasa is a concept that exists and is relevant *now* as well. My perspective as someone from outside the traditional context of rasa was founded on anthropological methods and inquiry. Yet, the embodied knowledge I acquired through this research, as well as my particular interests, are quite distinct from those of scholar-practitioners, for instance. What would spectators based in India say of rasa? Or what would Ayurvedic medicine practitioners make of this concept as part of their own knowledge system? Could Western poets embody and use the precepts of rasa theory in their writing, similarly to practitioners of the Rasaboxes exercise, and thus acquire a drastically different aesthetic appreciation of their work? Could rasa expand – and challenge – the psychological and neurobiological understanding of emotions, and even sensations?

We need to give more credit to the non-Indian spectator's experience (or absence of experience) of rasa, as well as to the performer's lived experience of rasa on and off stage. We should redefine rasa in relation to the performer's and the audience's embodied experiences, with special attention to the latter category as little research focuses on the public's experience of rasa, especially outside of the Indian diaspora. As suggested by this study, we are either facing a totally new experience or new interpretation of rasa informed by intercultural encounters and validating the non-*rasika*'s experience of rasa; or alternatively, we are witnessing a misunderstanding of rasa due to a lack of knowledge in Indian aesthetics. Either way, we cannot ignore the variety of ingredients that feed taste, or rasa, in Indian performing arts, and their impact on the experience of this purely Indian concept.

Figure 12. A Bharatanatyam dancer. (Drawing by the author.)

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1—LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND FIELDWORK SITES

LIST AND DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Figure 13. Julie Beaulieu. (Photo from the artist's website, *www.samskara.ca*, ©Martine Doyon)

Beaulieu, Julie: Julie Beaulieu is a Quebec-born, Caucasian Bharatanatyam dancer, scholar and dance and yoga teacher. At the time of the interview (August 2017), Beaulieu was in her late 30s. She holds a B.A. (1996) and M.A. (2015) in Dance from UQÀM and teaches contemporary dance at the Cégep level. She started focusing her training on Bharatanatyam in the early 2000s by first training in a small cultural centre in Montreal followed by six months of training in 2003 at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts (founded by Mrinalini Sarabhai and now run by her daughter Mallika Sarabhai) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. A few months later, she started training under the tutelage of her current *guru*, Vidwan Rohini R. Imarati, who is based in Dharwad, Karnataka, India, in the Bharatanatyam style of Tanjavur. Since 2003, Beaulieu has travelled extensively and stayed for long periods of time in India with her partner Jonathan Voyer. In Canada, Beaulieu formed in 2010 an artistic duo with Jonathan Voyer called Samskara, with the goal of "promoting intercultural dialogues via the arts" (*Samskara* website; my translation). She often collaborates and attends workshops with Canadian-based Indian classical and contemporary dancers in Canada. Examples of her work include *Arūpa* (with Sonia St-Michel, Odissi, and Jonathan Voyer, music), *Nāṭya* (with Jonathan Voyer and Shawn Mativetsky, music) and *Mousson dans la nuit* (with Jonathan Voyer and Shawn Mativetsky, music). Beaulieu has recently started a Ph.D. in "Études et pratiques des arts" at UQÀM. For additional information, see the following links:

- *Samskara* (https://www.samskara.ca/);
- Dance excerpts (https://www.samskara.ca/danse).

Bhattacharya, Nova: Nova Bhattacharya is a dancer, choreographer and artistic director at *Nova Dance.* She was born in 1968 in Halifax, NS, but her family is originally from Kolkata, West Bengal, India. As a child, she first studied ballet. However, she soon became Menaka Thakkar's very first Bharatanatyam student (in her house basement, before she launched her dance school) at the age of seven after her parents saw Thakkar perform in Toronto. Bhattacharya completed both her junior (1979) and senior (1985) *arangetrams* with Thakkar and studied with Kittappa Pillai and Kalanidhi Narayanan (in *abhinaya*) during her training at Thakkar's dance school, Nrtyakala. Bhattacharya quit dance after her senior *arangetram* to work in the investment industry, but when she saw Jai Govinda perform two years later, she decided to return to her dance practice. She started working

Figure 14. Nova Bhattacharya. (Photo from the artist's website, *www.novadance.ca*)

at the dance service organization *Dance Umbrella* and slowly began performing at various dance festivals. In 2008, Bhattacharya founded the dance company *Nova Dance*, where she is currently the artistic director. She worked with Hari Krishnan (artistic director of *inDance Studio*) for two years and collaborated with many other choreographers over time, such as José Navas (Montreal) and Louis Laberge-Côté (Toronto). Her current work is located in contemporary dance but highly influenced by Bharatanatyam movement and technique. In addition to her Bharatanatyam training, Bhattacharya learned various techniques such as Japanese *butoh* and the Graham technique. Examples of her work include *Maskura*, *Infinite Storms* and *Incantations*. For additional information, see the following links:

- Nova Dance (https://www.novadance.ca/);
- Dance and interview excerpt from CBC's *The Move*, Season II (https://youtu.be/S446Z6lF8xY).

Figure 15. Rajesh Chenthy. (Photo by the author)

Chenthy, Rajesh: Rajesh Chenthy was born in the state of Kerala, India. At the time of the interview (October 2018), he was in his 30s. Chenthy started dancing at around eight years old. He learned a number of dance styles growing up, including Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Mohinyattam, Kathakali, folk dance and tribal dance. While he was completing his undergraduate degree in commerce and worked as an accountant, he participated in a state Bharatanatyam competition in Kerala and won an award at the national level. This event convinced him to enroll at the Kalakshetra dance school in Chennai to pursue his studies in Bharatanatyam. He received a first degree (4 years), followed by a graduate degree (2 years) in Bharatanatyam from Kalakshetra. After his graduation, he performed as part of a dance company and toured worldwide. Chenthy moved to Montreal in 2016, where he works part-time as a Bharatanatyam teacher (as part of his dance school, *Kshetram Fine Arts Montreal*), offers dance workshops and performs at various events and festivals across Canada and the US. He is currently the director of *Bharatiya Sangeetha Sangham*, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Indian classical art forms in Quebec. For additional information, see the following links:

- Dance excerpt 1 (https://youtu.be/YgtL4TzyxaE);
- Dance excerpt 2 (https://youtu.be/tWGQsJmKKzQ).

Jayarajan, Neena: Neena Jayarajan was born and grew up in Toronto, but her family is originally from the state of Kerala, India. At the time of the interview (October 2017), she was in her mid-30s. She holds an M.A. in Dance from York University, where she did a comparative study of ballet and Bharatanatyam dance techniques, with a special focus on the basic positions of *plié* and *aramandi*. Jayarajan first learned basic Indian classical and folk dance with a *guru* in a house basement when she was about four years old before training in Bharatanatyam with Menaka Thakkar, starting at the age of six or seven. She completed her junior (1998-1999) and senior (2003) *arangetrams* with Thakkar. While studying at Thakkar's academy of classical Indian dance, *Nrtyakala*, Jayarajan received *abhinaya* training from Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan and Odissi training from artist Sujata Mohapatra. After her senior *arangetram*, she worked as an assistant artistic director, principal dancer and rehearsal director for six years at Thakkar's dance company, while teaching to children at her dance school. Jayarajan is currently an associate artist at *Nova Dance*. For additional information, see the following link:

Figure 16. Neena Jayarajan. (Photo from *www.novadance.ca*)

- Nova Dance (https://www.novadance.ca/neena-jayarajan).

Figure 17. Supriya Nayak. (Photo from the artist's website, *www.supriyaodissi.com*, ©Ajay Lal)

Nayak, Supriya: Supriya Nayak was born and grew up in New Delhi, India, and holds an M.A. in Modern Indian History (2006) from Delhi University. At the time of the interview (October 2017), she was in her 30s. Nayak first learned music as a child with her older sister and then started dancing around the age of eight. Throughout her childhood, she was exposed to Indian arts (her grand-father was a playwright and a poet) and would attend dance recitals on a regular basis. She trained in Odissi under *guru* Kiran Segal for over 15 years before switching to her two current *gurus*, Ambika Panikar and Aloka Paniker, in 2013. When she was 12, she quit dancing but resumed her training about four years later. She had a difficult relationship to dance, which she found painful, hard and unpleasant, but eventually started loving dance again with her new *gurus*. Before moving to Toronto in 2015, she taught Odissi at her former *guru*'s dance school, Pallavi Odissi Nritya Sangeet Vidyalaya. Nayak is currently an associate artist at *Nova Dance* and teaches Odissi on a part-time basis. For additional information, see the following links:

- Supriya Nayak, Odissi dancer (http://www.supriyaodissi.com/);
- Dance excerpt 1, *abhinaya* piece (https://vimeo.com/215474922);
- Dance excerpt 2 (https://youtu.be/2k15Dx_SfKA).

Pada, Lata: Lata Pada was born in 1947 in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. She holds an MFA in Dance (1996) from York University. She first received her Bharatanatyam training in Kochi at the age of seven before studying under Kalaimamani K. Kalyanasundaram from Mumbai (who is still her current *guru*) in the Tanjavur style, as well as under Smt. Kalanidhi Narayanan (in *abhinaya*) in Chennai later in her life. Pada moved to Canada in 1964 where she got married and had her first child. After five years, she moved to Indonesia with her family, where she stayed for ten years and had her second daughter. In 1979, she moved back to Canada, in Sudbury, ON. In 1985, as she was training with her *guru* in Mumbai, Pada lost her husband and two daughters in the Air India Kanishka 182 terrorist attack. Following this terrible event, she sold her house in Sudbury and returned to India, where she engaged in an intensive dance training that would help her heal from this loss. She finally moved back to Canada in 1990. After an extensive, worldwide dance career as a solo artist, she bought a house in Mississauga and soon established her dance studio and company, *Sampradaya* – a word that means "family tradition" – where she dedicated her time to teaching children Bharatanatyam and choreographing modern group performances. Her academy currently has about 140 students and is funded by governmental agencies. She uses a strict dance curriculum, the UK-based ISTD program, in which students have clear learning objectives and annual examinations. Throughout her career, she has received several significant awards, including the Order of Canada in 2009. Pada is still the director and principal instructor at the Sampradaya Dance Academy and artistic director and choreographer at Sampradaya Dance Creations in Mississauga, ON, and also works as an adjunct professor in dance at York University. Examples of her work include *Revealed by Fire*, *Soraab-Mirage* and *Shunya*. For additional information, see the following links:

Figure 18. Lata Pada. (Photo from the artist's website, *www.sampradaya.ca*)

- Sampradaya Dance Academy (http://www.sampradaya.ca/dance-academy/home/);
- Sampradaya Dance Creations (http://www.sampradaya.ca/dance-creations/home/);
- Short biography and dance excerpt (https://youtu.be/ZEXddV5gSAs);
- Dance excerpt, *Revealed by Fire* (https://youtu.be/_nkEWZvx7cw).

Figure 19. Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar. (Photo from the artist's website, *www.kalasadhanadc.com*)

Sharath Punthambekar, Samyuktha: Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar was born in 1984 in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. She holds an undergraduate degree in Economics and has in more recent years obtained certifications in Arts Management. She lived with her family in Dubai for the first five years of her life before returning to her hometown in Karnataka. Her mother had learned Bharatanatyam when she was younger and wanted her daughter to learn as well. Punthambekar started her Bharatanatyam lessons around the age of eight or nine, but also learned Kathak at the same time, throughout her high-school years, and started touring across India from a young age. After high school, she completed her Economics degree and worked for Google in Hyderabad for a short period of time. Around the age of 21 or 22, she decided to return to dance and enrolled at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, where she received her four-year degree in 2010. Following her studies at Kalakshetra, she taught Bharatanatyam in Singapore and Malaysia at the Temple of Fine Arts for six months but felt disconnected from her intensive dance practice back in India. In 2011, she moved to Mississauga, ON, to work at *Sampradaya* (Lata Pada's dance school), where she solidified the dance curriculum. This move was difficult for her because she had to adapt not only to a different dance pedagogy, but she also had to transition from a Kalakshetra style of Bharatanatyam to the Tanjavur style that was taught at *Sampradaya*. She worked there for about three years before moving to Toronto and deciding to work in the field of arts management. Punthambekar now lives in Ottawa, where she is self-employed and runs her arts management company, *Infinite Arts Projects*, alongside her dance company, *Kalasadhana Dance Company*, where she is the artistic director and offers solo performances as well as workshops and outreach programs. She is also thinking of pursuing a Ph.D. For additional information, see the following links:

- Infinite Arts Projects (https://www.infiniteartsprojects.com/);
- Kalasadhana Dance Company (https://www.kalasadhanadc.com/);
- Dance excerpt, TEDx Talks (https://youtu.be/S0cC9WvrrCM).

Voyer, Jonathan: Jonathan Voyer is a Quebec-born, Caucasian singer, musician, teacher and university lecturer who plays *santoor*, an Indian Hindustani (North India) hammered dulcimer instrument. At the time of the interview (August 2017), Voyer was in his late 30s-early 40s. Voyer holds a B.A. in Education (2000) and an M.A. in Religious Studies (2004) from UQÀM. He received his PhD in the program of "Étude et pratique des arts" from the same university in 2018, where his work examined the phenomenological experience of the music artist in his practice of *santoor*, a research topic that touched in part the significance of rasa in Indian music from a practice-based research. Voyer has travelled extensively and stayed for long periods of time in India since the late 1990s. He started studying Hindustani music and *santoor* under his *guru*, Pandit Satish Vyas, in the early 2000s and also studied Hindustani singing with Pandit Somanath Mardur. He co-founded the organism *Samskara: Artisans du passage* with Julie Beaulieu in 2010. Currently, he teaches at the high-school and university level in various disciplines (English, music, arts practice, religion and ethics) and also performs *santoor* in Montreal and India on various occasions. For additional information, see the following links:

- *Samskara* (https://www.samskara.ca/);
- Music excerpts (https://www.samskara.ca/musique).

Figure 20. Jonathan Voyer. (Photo from the artist's website, *www.samskara.ca*, ©Martine Doyon)

LIST OF FIELDWORK SITES

CANADA			
Toronto		Montreal	
May 2017	Preliminary fieldwork, researching potential participants for interviews; phone discussion with Menaka Thakkar	May-August 2016	Approximately 10 Bharatanatyam dance classes, ISKCON temple, with *guru* Rajesh Chenthy
July 2018	*Sarmapanan: An Offering*, Bharatanatyam recital by Arrthami Siva-Kuruvinth	2015-2017	Performances by Rajesh Chenthy—*Banyan* (group performance organized by BSS, 2015); Bangladesh Hindu temple (solo performance, Ville-Emard, 2016); performance at ISKCON (solo performance, 2016), performance for Montreal ISKCON's 50th anniversary (duo performance, Complexe Desjardins, 2016)
	Deep-end Weekend, *Nova Dance*	Interviews (2017-2018)	Julie Beaulieu (August 2017), Jonathan Voyer (August 2017), Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar (Online, December 2017), Rajesh Chenthy (October 2018)
Interviews (2017-2018)	Neena Jayarajan (October 2017), Samyuktha Sharath Punthambekar (October 2017), Supriya Nayak (October 2017), Lata Pada (July 2018), Nova Bhattacharya (July 2018)	August 2018 and September 2019	*Artasia* (organized by the Kabir Centre) Bharatnatyam and Kathakali lecture-demonstration by Sylvi Belleau and Mamata Niyogi-Nakra; Bharatanatyam lecture-demonstration by Deepa Nallappan (PROMIS)
		February 2019	Lecture-demonstration by Supriya Nayak (CCOV, Place-des-Arts) and follow-up discussion with her

INDIA			
Hyderabad		Chidambaram	
July 2015	Preliminary fieldwork and interviews with Dr. Anuradha Jonnalagadda and Dr. Aruna Bhikshu (Department of Dance, University of Hyderabad)	January 2019	Visit of Chidambaram temple (known as the "*Nataraja* temple"), including carvings of 108 *karanas* compiled in the *NS*
Chennai			
13-14 July 2015	Preliminary fieldwork and interviews at Kalakshetra Foundation (with on-site dance teachers, graduate students, outreach coordinator Apoorva Jayaraman and director Priyadarsini Govind)		
January 2019 (month-long fieldwork in India)	Fieldwork during music and dance festival in Chennai (*marghazi* month celebrations)—Free performances by junior and more experienced dancers, including Rajesh Chenthy and Samarthya Madhavan (Narada Gana Sabha; Mylapore Fine Arts Club); free and paying performances by renown and up-and-coming dance artists, including Sujata Mohapatra (Odissi), Parwanath Upadhye (Bharatanatyam), Mythili Prakash (Bharatanatyam), Praveen Kumar (Bharatanatyam) and Margi Kathakali School (Kathakali) (Madras Music Academy)		
January 2019	Visit to the Theosophical Society's headquarters		

APPENDIX 2—CONSENT FORM AND SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title:
A Sensorial and Cultural Analysis of the Notion of Rasa *in (Neo-)Classical Indian Dance*

Researcher:
Marie-Josée Blanchard, Ph.D. student in Humanities

Researcher's Contact Information:
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david.howes@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: N/A

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to study the Indian notion of *rasa* in classical Indian dance by documenting (in video, photo, audio and/or writing) performers', scholars' and spectators' knowledge about, and aesthetic experience(s) of, *rasa*. This data will be used for academic purposes.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to answer questions in an interview about your personal experience and understanding of the concept of *rasa*, as well as the role of your personal religious beliefs or other ideas in your approach to dance. The interview will be conducted in person or via Skype (or phone), and will be recorded in video, photo, audio and/or written format for academic use (thesis, potential publications).

In total, participating in this study will take about one hour and no more than two hours.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no anticipated risks during this research. Potential benefits include:

- Enhancing the knowledge of participants' own tradition through exposure to the researcher's work;
- Documentation of traditional and artistic practices available to participants;
- Thesis available for community building initiatives and/or documentation.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Your personal experience and understanding of the concept of *rasa*, including its role and place in your personal history, everyday life, dance training, religious beliefs, performances and/or spectatorship.
- Your contact information (for practical use, NOT for academic use)

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be identifiable. That means it will have your name directly on it.

We will protect the information by storing the data (video, photo, audio, transcriptions) in electronic form on the researcher's external hard drive, using password-protected files. Written notes will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's office.

We intend to publish the results of this research. Please indicate below whether you accept to be identified in the publications:

[ ] I accept that my name and the information I provide appear in publications of the results of the research.

[ ] Please do not publish my name as part of the results of the research.

E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before August 1st, 2019.

We will tell you if we learn of anything that could affect your decision to stay in the research.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW – SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Study Title: *A Sensorial and Cultural Analysis of the Notion of* Rasa *in (Neo-)Classical Indian Dance*

Principal Investigator: Marie-Josée Blanchard, PhD Humanities

This is a list of sample questions and topics that will potentially be part of the interview you agreed to participate in. As a semi-structured interview, our discussion might go beyond these questions and topics.

Remember that you do not have to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable with. You will be asked to discuss only topics that you want to share for academic purposes. If there is any information that was discussed but that you don't want to be part of the data collected for analysis, please let the researcher know and the information will be deleted from the records.

Again, thank you for your participation!

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

☐ Personal background:

- Please tell me where you are from (birth country, cultural background, social status, etc.).
- How long have you lived in Canada now?
- Do you manage to stay connected to your Indian cultural roots while in Canada? If so, how? (community, religious life, friends, etc.?)

☐ Dance background:

- What dance style did you first learn?
- When and where did you start learning dance? Who was your teacher then?
- Who did you study with throughout your training?
- How long have you studied dance?

- How has your knowledge of other dance forms informed your own practice as an artist? Or as a Bharatanātyam dancer?
- Did you learn different styles of Bharatanātyam throughout your training?
- I would like to know more about your dance training.
    - ☐ What was a typical session like?
    - ☐ What part did you like the best?
    - ☐ How much theoretical training did you receive during your dance training? Do you feel it has helped you as a professional dancer after your graduation?
    - ☐ Did you learn about the history of Bharatanātyam during (or outside of) your dance training?
    - ☐ How much emphasis was put on technical training? On "emotional" training (in the case of *rasa*, for instance)? On other types of training?
    - ☐ How much emphasis was put on tradition and the traditional knowledge(s) of Bharatanātyam?
    - ☐ How were you taught to perform *rasa*? (Please feel free to go in detail and use any technical language you need to!)
    - ☐ I am curious as to your approach to *śringāra* or *bhakti rasa*. How were you taught to dance *śringāra*? What was your teachers' perception of *śṛṅgāra*?
- Did you or are you currently teaching Bharatanātyam or other dance styles? If the answer is yes…
    - ☐ How do you teach *rasa* in Canada? If you taught dance in India, how is it different from teaching dance in Canada?
    - ☐ What is your approach in teaching *rasa* to students? At what age do you start addressing the complexity (sentimental VS strictly physical) of performing *rasa* with students?

☐ Religious background:

- Do you identify to any religion? If so, which one(s)?
- Do your religious background or beliefs help you in or influence your dance practice?
- For you, is Bharatanātyam religious or spiritual in any way? Or is Bharatanātyam secular in any way?
- Do you think that one needs a basic background in Hinduism to understand Bharatanātyam and feel *rasa*?

☐ Your personal approach and understanding of *rasa*:

- What is *rasa* to you? How do you understand *rasa*?
- What is the difference between *bhāva* and *rasa*? What type of relationship is there between the two?
- As a performer, can you feel *rasa* while you are dancing? Please explain in detail.

- Who can experience *rasa*? Do you feel, for instance, that anyone can experience *rasa* or that one should have at least a basic level of knowledge in classical Indian dance and *rasa* aesthetics to have this experience?
- How would you define a *rasika*? What knowledge is essential for one to be called a *rasika*?
- What techniques do you use to portray *rasa* on the stage, and to allow the audience to feel *rasa*?
- Do you think that *rasa* only applies to dance? Or does it also apply to other levels of your (personal or professional) life? (This could include other definitions of *rasa* that do not apply to performing arts.)

☐ Would you like to add anything else that you think is important to know (personal history, dance career, approach to *rasa*)?

Thank you!

APPENDIX 3—LIST OF *SHLOKAS* LEARNED IN DANCE TRAINING (SANSKRIT AND ENGLISH)

NAMASKAR

Every Bharatanatyam lesson, rehearsal or public performance starts and finishes with an invocation or prayer known as the *namaskar* ("greetings," "obeisance"), in which students ask forgiveness to and thank Mother Earth for allowing them to stomp on her, and pay respect to god (in this case, Shiva/Nataraja), the *guru* (and musicians) and the audience. There are slight variations on the *namaskar* based on the dance school or *guru*, but in general, it goes as follows:

Standing with feet together and hands in *katakamukha* at chest level, students start by stomping the right foot followed by the left foot. Then, they switch the hands to *shikhara hasta* and draw them to their shoulders (thumbs down touching the shoulders) and, as they slowly squat to the ground, they touch both fists together and transition to *pataka* as they touch the ground. Still in squat position, they raise their hands, still in *pataka*, and touch their closed eyes. Next, they stand up while raising their arms above their head and put their hands together in praying position (where they pay respect to god), then slowly lower their hands in the same *anjali* position at forehead level (where they pay respect to the *guru*), and finally they lower them to chest level (where they pay respect to the audience). The prayer is only accompanied by the *talam* stick or simply done in silence. Some *gurus* do accompany it with *sollukattu* (chanted syllables, usually *ta-ka-di-mi*).

For an example, see the following link: https://youtu.be/6GUjTqgfxrE

NATYA KRAMA SHLOKA (ABHINAYA SHLOKA)

These are the *abhinaya* lines, coming from the *Abhinaya Darpana* and mentioned in Chapter 3, that all dancers know by heart. They are not chanted but only recited. The *shloka* goes as follows:

Yatho hasta, sthatho drishti;
Yatho drishti, sthatho manaha;
Yatho manas, sthatho bhavo;
Yatho bhava, sthatho rasa.

It roughly translates as:

Where the hand goes, the eyes follow;
Where the gaze goes, the mind follows;
Where the mind goes, the emotions follow;
And where emotions go, there is sentiment (rasa).

The full *natya krama shloka* includes four more lines that are recited before this section and that translate as: "She [the dancer] should sing with her mouth, express the meaning (of the song) by (gestures of) her hands, show States [*bhavas*] by her eyes, and beat time with her feet" (*AD* 35-36, in Nandikeshvara 1957, 46).

DHYANA SHLOKA

The *dhyana shloka* represents the opening verses of the *Abhinaya Darpana*. It goes as follows:

Angikam bhuvanam yasya,
Vachikam sarva vangmayam,
Aharyam chandra taradi,
Tam numah satvikam Shivam.

This poem roughly translates as follows:

We bow to the perfect and pure Shiva,
Whose limbs are the universe,
Whose speech is the entire language,
Whose ornaments are the moon and the stars.

GURU STUTI

The *guru stuti* is generally recited at the beginning of dance lessons, often right after the *dhyana shloka*. It goes as follows:

Guru Brahma, guru Vishnu;
Guru Devo Maheshvarah;
Guru sakshat Parabrahma;
Tasmai shri gurave namaha.

This poem roughly translates as follows:

We see Brahma and Vishnu in our teacher,
We see Shiva in our teacher;
You are all united under one;
I bow to your feet my teacher.

ASAMYUTA SHLOKA (SINGLE-HAND GESTURES)

From a very young age, dance students learn to recite and enact the following list of single-hand *hastas*:

Pathakas, tripathako, ardhapataka, kartharimukhaha;
Mayurakyo, ardhachandrashcha, arala, shukhatundakaha;
Mushtishcha, shikharakhyashcha, kapitha, katakamukhaha;
Suchi, chandrakala, padmakosha, sarpashirasthatha;
Mrigashirsha, simhamukhaha, kangulashcha, alapadmakaha;
Chathuro, bhramarashchaiva, hamsasyo, hamsapakshakaha;
Samdamsho, mukulashchaiva, thamrachoda, thrishulakaha.

This *shloka* (and hence, the Sanskrit name of single-hand gestures) roughly translates as follows (Sarabhai 2018, 79–91):

Pataka: flag;
Tripataka: flag with three fingers/parts;
Ardhapataka: half-flag;
Kartarimukha: scissors;
Mayura: peacock;
Ardhachandra: half moon;
Arala: bend;
Shukatundaka: parrot head/beak;
Mushti: fist;
Shikhara: peak/top;
Kapitta: elephant;
Katakamukha: opening, in a bracelet;
Suchi: needle;
Chandrakala: (digit of the) moon;
Padmakosha: lotus flower/bud;
Sarpashirsha: snake hood;
Mrigashirsha: deer head;
Simhamukha: lion head;
Kangula: tail;
Alapadma: bloomed lotus;
Chatura: square;
Bhramara: bee;
Hamsasya: swan/goose beak/head;
Hamsapaksha: swan/goose wing;
Samdamsa: claws;
Mukula: blossom/bud;
Tamrachuda: red-crested rooster;
Trishula: trident.

SAMYUTA SHLOKA (COMBINED HAND GESTURES)

Combined hand gestures also have a *shloka*, which would be recited while doing the gestures as well. The list goes as follows:

Anjali: salutation;
Kapota: pigeon;
Karkata: crab;
Swastika: crossed (hands);
Dola: swing;
Pushpatu: handful of flowers;
Utsanga: embrace;
Shivalinga: *linga* of Shiva (one of Shiva's forms);
Katakavardhana: bracelet increase/opening;
Kartariswastika: crossed scissors;
Shakata: cart;
Shankha: conch;
Chakra: discus;
Pasha: cord;
Kilaka: bond;
Matsya: fish;
Kurma: tortoise;
Vahara: boar;
Garuda: mythical bird (Vishnu's vehicle);
Nagabandha: serpent knot;
Khatva: bedstead;
Bherunda: mythical bird with two heads;
Avahitta: dissimulation.

APPENDIX 4—A SHORT MODERN HISTORY OF BHARATANATYAM

The history of Bharatanatyam and the origins of the *devadasis* have been well documented (Apffel Marglin 1985; Kersenboom 1987; Orr 2000; Peterson and Soneji 2008; Soneji 2012a; 2012b). What I wish to offer here is an overview and synthesis of what has already been produced in the literature in relation to the history of Bharatanatyam, as I believe it informs the evolution of rasa in modern times. This evolution was marked by a significant transformation in aesthetics stemming from "the context of specific taste hierarchies that were created in the early part of the twentieth century"—a taste hierarchy that opposed the "good taste" of middle- and upper-class reformists to the "bad taste" of *devadasis* and their traditional performing art (Soneji 2012b, 24).

There are several discourses that surround the origins of Bharatanatyam. From a socio-historical perspective, Bharatanatyam was only born during the twentieth century, but according to Indian reformers of that same era, it represents Indian dance at its original state, which goes back to the early centuries CE. The former perspective traces classical dance as we know it today (*not* Bharatanatyam, but rather *dasi attam* or *sadir*) to the *devadasis*, "servants of God" and "temple dancers" whose tradition is fairly recent—around the sixteenth century (Soneji 2012a; 2012b; Orr 2000). The history of Bharatanatyam, claims Matthew Allen, was therefore characterized by "a re-vivification or bringing back to life" of *sadir*, but most importantly,

> it was equally a re-population (one social community appropriating a practice from another), a re-construction (altering and replacing elements of repertoire and choreography), a re-naming (from *nautch* to other terms to *bharata natyam*), a re-situation (from temple court, and salon to the public stage), and a re-storation (as used by Schechner […], a splicing together of selected 'strips' of performative behavior in a manner that simultaneously creates a new practice and invents an historical one). (Allen 1997, 63–64)

Devadasis were known as *nityasumangali*, "ever-auspicious-females" that were employed in temples where they honored the gods in various ways. These tasks included dance and singing (especially during festivals) in which *devadasis* were believed to "irradiate" auspiciousness, as well as the waving of pot-lamps (*purnakumbhadipa*) which protected the gods from the evil eye and maintained a balance between their feminine and masculine energy (Kersenboom 1987). As such, both Saskia C. Kersenboom and Amrit Srinivasan (1985, 1869) affirm that the term *devadasi* "indicated a *structural function* for which a limited number of people could apply, but not a caste that was devadasi by birth" (Kersenboom 1987, 184; emphasis in original).

The *devadasis* represented a matriarchal and marginal branch of society. Although they were ritually married to a temple divinity, they were independent women because they were not socially married to a man. They were educated and could often read and speak more than one language in addition to being experts in the arts of dance and music. Given their singular social status, they could acquire lands and other goods. But because their temple income was often insufficient to cover all their work-related expenses (jewelry, costumes, etc.), they eventually began offering performances in royal courts, which usually financed specific temples where *devadasis* were living. As a result, *devadasis* were soon associated with royal patrons following strict rules established by their mothers and grandmothers (similarly to an arranged marriage). These relationships, which often were partly sexual in nature, would benefit both parties—*devadasis* could preserve their financial independence, while patrons could maintain a socially-recognized extramarital relationship that would bring them prestige and auspiciousness.

During the nineteenth century, as the association between *devadasis* and royal courts was well established, the whole *devadasi* repertoire was reviewed by the Thanjavur royal court, and most specifically four Pillai brothers now known as the "Tanjore Quartet." They revisited the *sadir* repertoire and the composition of temple dance pieces to create a "*balanced concert repertoire* that combined the choicest dance-compositions into a *harmonious concert program*" (Kersenboom 1987, 44; emphasis in original). According to Hari Krishnan, the objective of the standardization of the arts in the royal court was to preserve and safeguard the repertoire for years to come. The result of the re-envisioning of the court repertoire "consisted of the development of seven primary genres for the solo female court dancer: *alarippu, jatisvaram, shabdam, varnam, padam, javali*, and *tillana* [which] represented, in a well-balanced manner, both abstract dance technique (nritta) and textual interpretation (*abhinaya*)" (Krishnan 2012, 73).

This repertoire became the norm among nineteenth- and twentieth-century *devadasi* performances and was preserved during the following reform of Bharatanatyam. The popularity of solo dance representations (*sadir*, sometimes called *dasi attam*) and salon recitals reached its peak in the late 1800s—a time when the reputation of the *devadasis* also started to decline in main part because of the English colonization's influence (fueled by Victorian values). Dancers were eventually associated with prostitution, as their repertoire dominated by erotic depictions (especially in *javalis*) contributed to this slow descent. An anti-*nautch* (popular or village dance) movement led by Brahmin and non-Brahmin men (mostly educated, Hindu government employees) soon rose and reinforced the association between *devadasis* and prostitution. According to the anti-*nautch* and anti-*devadasi* reformers, the source of this association resided in the *devadasis*' temple consecration (*pottukkattutal*, "dedication"), meaning their ritual marriage to a temple deity. This practice, claimed the reformers, led to the prostitution and abuse of women because they were not socially married to a man outside of the temple (Soneji 2012b, 114).

Hence, the anti-*nautch* movement focused on several elements associated with the status of women: *sati* (ritual suicide following the death of the husband), infanticide, the remarriage of widows, a revised age of consent and, of course, the criminalization of the *devadasi* status because of their "immoral" practices. "If sacrificial infanticide and *sati* had been banned earlier as 'murder,'" states Srinivasan, "then by the late nineteenth century temple-dancers were being presented as 'prostitutes,' and early marriage for women as 'rape' and 'child-molestation'" (2012, 141). As such, Indian cultural and religious practices, including those related to the *devadasis*, was directly affected by a changing discourse originating from Christian morality, in which independent and single women were frowned upon.

The politicization of the art and role of *devadasis* ultimately led to the criminalization of temple consecrations in 1947, which condemned temple dancers to social repudiation and to their eventual disappearance (A. Srinivasan 2012, 153; 1985, 1873). Private salons disappeared as well and made way for public stages and arts institutions. The abolition of temple consecrations was established by M. Reddy, the first female doctor (and *devadasi* descendant) to participate in the Madras Presidency and to create legislations promoting women's physical and social health in India (Soneji 2012a, xx–xxii). As "an embarrassing remnant of the pre-colonial and pre-nationalist feudal age," *devadasis*, who did not fit within the homogeneous definition of India's new identity (in which women were mothers and not lovers), were therefore dismissed by nationalists, counter-reformers and, paradoxically, Indian feminists who denied constitutional rights to lower cast women to the benefit of those from middle-class and high social status (Hubel 2012, 161, 172).

Meanwhile, as the Indian nationalist movement was getting stronger, a group of opponents to the anti-*nautch* reform, many of which were Theosophists[124], was created. These counter-reformers, who were also against prostitution, chose to preserve the art of *sadir* by dissociating it from its *devadasi* cultural and social history, hence reinforcing nationalist values attached to the artistic golden age of India. With the criminalization of *devadasi* temple consecrations, counter-reformers were able to transform the "immoral" *sadir* into a national art form that corresponded to new post-colonial norms and ideals, as argued by Srinivasan (2012, 157): "The argument that without the attendant immorality the dance was a form of yoga—an individual spiritual exercise—abstracted it from its specific community context, permitting its rebirth amongst the urban, educated and westernised elite." These women – among them Rukmini Devi Arundale – chose to "revive" the art form of *sadir* by renaming it *bharatanatyam* and promoting it as a "national trophy belonging to all Indians" (Hubel 2012, 174) and "an emblem of Indianness designed to display modern India's ties to its gloriously ancient past" (175). Hence, *sadir* was not "purified" as much as it was re-introduced into a more "proper" social class (A. Srinivasan 2012, 157).

Avanthi Meduri shows that in fact two dance revivals were initiated in the 1930s: one conducted by Rukmin Devi and the Theosophical Society, and one less-known initiative orchestrated by the Madras Music Academy and led by a series of scholars who wished to safeguard the art of *devadasis* and their teachers (*nattuvanars*). Nonetheless, both movements "idealized sadir in the new name of Bharatanatyam, referred the dance to the textual history of the *Natyasastra*, affirmed the devotional and spiritual aspects of the dance, and prioritized male teachers over and above devadasi dancers." According to Meduri, the Madras Music Academy's objective was to provide a second wind to *sadir* by informing the public about its history; whereas Rukmini Devi, motivated by the Theosophical Society's mission, was hoping to "give back the art form its lost dignity and status as ancient art form" (Meduri 2012, 256).

Rukmini Devi Arundale, a Brahmin woman, was at the forefront of the latter revival. She studied dance as a young woman under the great-great-grandson of one of the Tanjore Quartet's members. After only six months of training, she decided, against the will of her *guru*, to offer her first public performance (*arangetram*) with modified costumes (which would later become the norm in Bharatanatyam). After this debut, Devi decided to establish the first Bharatanatyam dance school – the Kalakshetra Foundation – where the traditional *guru-shishya parampara* were replaced by Brahmin teachers (Allen 1997, 66). She eventually transformed the dance's presentation by bringing the *guru* onstage during performance and having him sit down to the right of the dancer alongside musicians. In addition, she worked around three key symbols – god (*Nataraja*, Shiva in his dancing form), the *guru* and the temple – which she used as props onstage to realize her own visual and performative revival of Bharatanatyam (Meduri 2012, 258).

The Kalakshetra Foundation, founded in 1936 in Chennai (Madras), rapidly became the hallmark of Bharatanatyam. Students at the institution were taught Bharatanatyam alongside music, Kathakali, theatre, painting, sculpture, arts and crafts, and even ballet (in Tamil and

124. The Theosophical Society, which Matthew H. Allen describes as the "transnational creature bred by the United States, Europe, and India" (1997, 63), is a religious movement born out of spiritualism that wanted to distance itself from occult phenomena in favor of a rational philosophical approach to spirituality. In doing so, they combined philosophies from various world religious traditions in trying to explain life's biggest mysteries. The Theosophical Society still exists today and has its headquarters in Chennai—a few steps away from the Kalakshetra Foundation.

English). In 1944, Devi created her first group dance-drama choreography based on Sanskrit theatre (Kuttiyattam) and Kathakali, on the *Kuravanci* drama performed by *devadasis*, the Bhagarata Mela theatre tradition of Thanjavur, as well as her own exposure to Western theatre and dance—a performance type that would become the norm at Kalakshetra and beyond, alongside solo dancing, over the years (Soneji 2012a, xxx). She brought Hindu myths to the stage and interpreted them using *abhinaya* (expressive dance) which was typically reserved for non-linear storytelling. In fact, she "spiritualized" a dance form that was not associated with such (chaste) religious devotion previously, including the nomination of the *Nataraja* as patron of dancers and the strong emphasis on *bhaktirasa* (devotional love) over *shringararasa* (erotic desire). As suggested by Janet O'Shea, "[i]n revivifying the values of Sanskrit drama through bharata natyam, Rukmin Devi validated her choreographic innovations through recourse to a tradition that predated the devadasi repertoire" (O'Shea 2007, 44). Furthermore, Devi''s strategy in focusing on technique (*nritta*) rather than expression (*abhinaya*) in dance training allowed her to conventionalize the art form through a formal teaching curriculum, solidifying its transmission and ensuring its presence on an international and global stage. Devi's efforts officially became part of history in the 1950s as Bharatanatyam became a nationally recognized classical dance style (46).

In contrast to Rukmini Devi, T. Balasaraswati – an influential proponent of the revival of dance based on its hereditary legitimacy – and her group were strongly opposed to Reddy's new legislations against the rights of *devadasis* and to Devi's approach to the revitalization of dance centered on its transmission to middle- and upper-class women. Balasaraswati's aim was not so much to revive the *devadasis*'s dance form as much as to safeguard its hereditary transmission, which she traced all the way back to the Tanjore court (O'Shea 2007, 16). She emphasized the traditional depictions of *vipralambha shringara* (love thwarted) in her performances, in which comical and ironic sentiments (*hasyarasa*) would arise from erotic scenarios. Yet, she also believed that dance was a form of *yoga* and *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) that was devotional in nature despite its erotic depictions and repertoire (especially in *javalis* and *ashtapadis*).

But Balasaraswati was not the only one who was opposed to Rukmini Devi's approach to traditional Indian dance. In the 1980s, other classical dancers have also started questioning the legitimacy of Devi's dance heritage in their work. Today, while Bharatanatyam's "classicism" is still celebrated in practice, students are increasingly aware of its tumultuous history and its original heritage. Scholar-practitioners like Chandralekha and Shobana Jeyasingh, and later Janet O'Shea (2003; 2007), Priya Srinivasan (2011) and Pallabi Chakravorty (2008) were instrumental in shifting the attention from Bharatanatyam as a a-historical art form to the realities of its politics and history, as well as its role in the global economy and in gender representations. Since its "revival" in the 1930s, Bharatanatyam thus became the object of criticism because of the ways in which it established binaries between tradition and classicism, the religious and the secular, chastity and eroticism, global and local, history and modernity, as well as Orientalism and the new realities of its diasporic community.