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Audience of Theatre: An analysis of Bharata's and Abhinavagupta's Vision

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Abstract

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni is an encyclopaedic treatise on performing arts which has influenced dance, music and literary traditions in India. It is a vast treatise consisting of about six thousand poetic verses divided into thirty-six chapters. The only surviving commentary on the text is *Abhinavabharatī* of eleventh century philosopher Abhinavagupta. The goal of performing arts, according to *Nāṭyaśāstra* is ultimately to let the audience experience their own consciousness, then evaluate and feel the spiritual values innate in them, and rise to a higher level of consciousness. The present article discusses Bharata and Abhinavagupta's vision regarding the audience of theatre. It goes into the discussion of various categories of audience and elaborates the structure of this differentiation. The second part of this article deals with Abhinavagupta's idea regarding the audience of theatre. It elaborates the significance of a theatrical performance while considering the requirement of a receptive and connoisseur audience. Eventually, the article attempts to examine the logic behind this difference of opinion between two of the greatest thinkers of Indian tradition.

Keywords: Bharata, Abhinavagupta, Audience, *Sāmājika*, *Prekṣaka*, *Prāśnika*, *Sahṛdaya*

Introduction:

Āchārya Bharata is considered the first literary critic, dramaturgic and aesthetician of Indian knowledge system. His *Nāṭyaśāstra* (200 BCE-200 CE) is a vast treatise on dramaturgy containing thirty-six chapters. It is a work of great psychological insight. Theatre appeals to sight and hearing at the same time, (the only senses that are capable, according to some Indian thinkers, of raising above the boundaries of the limited 'I') and is then considered the highest form of art. Sight and hearing collaborate to arouse in the spectator more forcibly than any other form of art; a state of consciousness conceived intuitively and called *rasa*. It is an art whose aim is to give joy to the people of society –*sāmājikas*. The only complete commentary available on *Nāṭyaśāstra* is *Abhinavabharatī* of Āchārya Abhinavagupta (950-1020 CE). It is of seminal importance for understanding the classical theories of aesthetics and poetics. The present article is about Bharata and Abhinavagupta's vision regarding the audience of theatre. It starts with elaborating the threefold distinction of audience that Bharata has stated. The article attempts to explain the requirement of categorising so many types of audience. It further goes into Abhinavagupta's idea regarding the audience. The major objective of this article is to understand the divergence of Abhinavagupta's vision from that of Bharata's in this regard. To illustrate the same, the impact of theatre on the audience and their receptiveness has also been discussed in the article.

Bharata's Vision of Audience:

Bharata has discussed the audience of theatre at various junctures of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In the beginning, the first chapter

gives details about the general audience of a theatrical performance. In the context of *rasa* he uses ‘*sumanasah prekṣaka*’ for the audience in the sixth chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In the twenty-seventh chapter of the text we find a detailed discussion on two other types of audience *Prekṣaka* and *Prāśnika*. The distinction between these categories and their unique characteristics has been discussed in this article.

Sāmājika: The General Audience:

Bharata has written this treatise to guide a director on how to stage a drama including everything from the beginning of drama, the stage, the theatre hall, *rasa* in drama, types of acting, types of plays, and usage of language, dance and music. In the first chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra* which discusses the origin of *Nāṭya* (drama), Bharata states very important points about its recipients. He says that since Vedas cannot be studied by everyone, Brahma has created this *Nāṭya* for all the *varṇas* by taking extracts from various fields of knowledge. Since the conventional Vedas could not be spoken within the earshot of *Śūdras*, a fifth Veda was evolved that would benefit all *varṇas*. This is the first text on literary criticism in India and in the introduction it grants the readership of poetry to all the sections of the society.

Na vedavyavahāro’yam samśrāvyah śūdrajātīsu.

*Tasmātsrjāparam vedam panchamam sārvaṅvārṇikam.*¹

(*Nāṭyaśāstra*, 1.12)

This does not mean that literature is less significant than the other disciplines of knowledge in Indian tradition. In corroboration of this fact, Bharata states its origin saying, Brahmā took the text for recitation from the *R̥gveda*, the music from *Sāmaveda*, the gestural representations from *Yajurveda* and aesthetic emotions from the *Atharvaveda*. Thus the omniscient god created the *Nāṭyaveda* related to the Vedas

and *Upavedas*. After creating the *Nāṭyaveda*, Brahmā instructed Indra that this Veda called *Nāṭya* should be devolved among those who are proficient, wise, eloquent and indefatigable. Abhinavagupta notes in *Abhinavabharatī*, his commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, that the poet is like *Pitāmaha*—the creator Brahma since he creates the drama which is the body of *Nāṭyaveda*. People like *Bharatamuni* along with his disciples are the actors. Occasions like festivals are the proper time for performance. Unbiased connoisseurs ‘*Sahr̥dayas*’ are the audience who possess the ability to become one with the character portrayed. Abhinavagupta states ‘*nirmalah̥daya-mukure sati tanmayībhavanayogyatopeta āhitarasāsvāda sāmājīkah.*’ (*Abhinavabharatī* I, 1992: 44) The terms used here are similar to his definition of *Sahr̥daya* given in *Locana* commentary on *Dhvanyāloka*.

Bharata further says that Brahma has written the drama to portray the different aspects, emotions and situations that are encountered in the world. Abhinavagupta lays much stress on ‘*anuvyavasāya*’—perception of a sentiment—as the central principle of *Nāṭya*. He states, ‘*tenānuvyavasāyavat viśeś-viśyikāryam Nāṭyam.*’ (*Abhinavabharatī* I, 1992: 65) He explains his view incorporating many constituents like i) the absence of individuality of the person who puts on the role; ii) defacement of his personality with the four kinds of representation; iii) ability of the audience to perceive things by their natural inclination; iv) the capability of the audience to identify with the character represented; v) capacity to enjoy all sentiments to the level of extreme bliss; vi) relish of the sentiment referred to as *bhoga*. All these combined factors constitute the *Nāṭya*.

The general audience of drama is explained in *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in the discussion about the nature of a drama.

The drama would portray the activities of people who were exalted, low and middle class and would contain instructions for their benefit. It would provide advice on matters of business and actions of various types. It would provide solace to the afflicted, fatigued, miserable ones and ascetics tired of religious ceremonies. The art of drama would promote virtue, bring fame and longevity, provide benefit, increase the intelligence and provide proper advice to the world. (NS, 1.113-115)² The nature of the world which contains both pleasure as well as pain is represented through actions and gesticulations and is therefore called *Nāṭya*. Commenting upon the word '*rasabhavakriyatmika*' Abhinavagupta says '*rasānām bhāvo bhāvana; kavi-nāṭa-sāmājika-hṛdayavyapti*' which is greatly inspired by Bhammatauta's argument that the experience of the poet, the hero and the listener is identical.³

*Yo'yam svabhāvo lokasya sukhaduhkhasamanvitah.
So'ṅgādyabhinayopeto Nāṭyamityabhidhīyate.*

(NS, 1.119)

Thus Bharata has clearly defined that *Nāṭya* was meant for everyone and its content would be taken from the society. It was considered to be a form of art which took from the society and gave back in a form of refined expression that delighted and enlightened the members of society. This is an attempt of an Āchārya of the tradition to prove the inclusive nature of Indian society. Any form of art such as theatre is not meant to be only for the purpose of entertainment. It is a medium of imparting knowledge to the marginal sections of the society. If there was a section which remained deprived of education due to various reasons, this would become their means towards understanding the dharma, the righteous path. Thus we have Mammaṭa in the tradition of critics who

describes six-fold purpose of poetry.⁴ This is the reason why Bharata asserts on the Vedic origin of the theatre so as to put it on an equal platform as the four Vedas in the matter of knowledge. Theatre or other forms of literature are an effort from the Indian scholarship to impart knowledge to all the sections of society.

Prekṣaka: The Ideal Audience

The all inclusivity of theatre poses a serious question. Even though it is meant for everyone yet it is a form of art, art that was meant for liberation. There is also the matter of judging its blemishes and counting the virtues as it is a performed art. If theatre was meant to be a discipline of knowledge then its quality had to be maintained. What would be the parameters of deciding a good or bad theatre? Keeping these challenges in mind, in chapter twenty-seven of *Nāṭyaśāstra* Bharata goes on to describe the characteristics of the ideal spectators '*Prekṣaka*'. The *Prekṣaka* is said to be bereft of confusion and have expertise to distinguish between good and bad by conjecture along with an absence of blemish and a genuine interest in histrionics.⁵

However, the aforementioned qualities may not occur in every spectator since knowledge is vast and one's span of life is short. As far as one's duty is concerned one should adhere to the prescribed course in the matter of craft, dress, action and movements. Bharata acknowledges that people are of different habits and the action has its basis on the habits which differ among noble, average and low, old, childish and women characters. The youngsters find pleasure in love affairs. Intellectuals find enthusiasm in scientific matters. Those who have an eye for wealth are interested in financial matters and those with a sense of detachment are desirous of liberation. The valorous find interest in heroism, fury, fight,

duel and the like while the old people are always fond of virtuous episodes and *Purāṇas*. He alone is called a truly great spectator who feels glad when others are glad, becomes miserable when others feel misery, gets angry when others are angry and feels frightened when others are frightened.

*Ye tuṣṭau tuṣṭimāyānti śoke śokam vrajanti ca.
Dainye dīntvamāyānti te nāmye prekṣkāh smṛtāh.*

(NS 27.42)

Thus in the matter of representation of emotions he who feels the respective feelings is called a true spectator because these qualities make the role of *Prekṣakas* more clear. These spectators would be one of the parameters to decide if a theatrical performance was high-quality or not. If a performance pleases the minds of these ideal spectators it should be considered a good performance. An ideal spectator should possess a general aptitude, a pure intuitive heart which would enable him to find out the quintessential virtues of poetry. ‘*vimalamukurakalpībhūtanijahṛdayah*’ He should be well read and wise and also initiated into the theoretical intricacies of poetic discourse. Not all men can respond to all emotions properly. ‘*sarvasya na sarvatra hṛdayasamvādah*’. The *hṛidaya-samvad-* is not positioned against ‘monologue’. It is a situation where the monic unit converts itself into virtual binaries so that as Ananda Coomaraswamy calls it, conviviality becomes possible. Once we fully understand this basic principle we can never fail to understand what constituents go to make an ideal spectator of the theatre. That spectator has an admirable potential of transcending self-consciousness. Hiriyanna argues, ‘it is this transcending of self-consciousness – this migrating from the narrow self that constitutes the secret of aesthetic delight.’ (Hiriyanna, 1997: 20) Thus from the vast ocean of general audience Bharata

selects a few specific spectators, pleasing whom must be the purpose of the director of theatre.

***Prāśnika*: The Arbitrator Audience**

The category of ideal spectators still does not suffice to be the only authority on *Nāṭya*. Bharata states one more category of spectators, who should be present to assess the art of dramaturgy. He has named them arbitrators '*Prāśnika*' and described their characteristics in order to assess the virtues and blemishes of the dramatic performance. When there is a dispute about any technical matter of dramaturgy there arbitrators are to be consulted. The discussion gives another kind of spectatorship related to the dramatic art. Arbitrators' decision is considered to be of utmost importance in the case of difference of opinion. Bharata asserts that arbitrators should have great moral strength and should belong to noble families. Their nature should be quiet and should possess sound knowledge in the scientific lore; they should have zest for fame and virtue; they should be impartial and mature in age; connoisseurs in dramaturgy with its six-fold auxiliaries, good learning and purity of heart; equanimity in intellectual attainments, experts in four kinds of musical instruments, knowledgeable in the matter of dress, pious by nature, proficient in regional languages, expertise in arts and artefacts, familiar with the principles of the four types of representation (speech, emotion, gesture and dress); considerable acquaintance with *Rasas* and *Bhāvas* (sentiments and emotions); conversant with the rules of grammar and prosody and well-versed in the different *śāstras*. (NS 27.50-53).⁶

Bharata maintains that the arbitrator should be the one who knows sacrificial rites, a dancer; one proficient in prosody, an expert in grammar, a king; one well skilled in archery, an artist who paints, a courtesan, a singer and an official of the

king. In matters of sacrifices one proficient in sacrifice is needed. In relation to dramatic performances the services of a dancer is required. An expert in prosody in matters of metre and an adept in grammar in relation to the text of the play are necessary. In matters of royalty and prosperity as also those relating to harem and royal service of a king is a must. In order to assess the physical appearance an archer is considered as an expert. The usefulness of a painter is in regard to the size, shape, movement, mode of dress, wearing of ornaments and painting the face. In connection with the gallant services the expertise of a courtesan is necessary, while a singer alone could assess the intonation and rhythm of music. In the case of services the expertise of a king's officer becomes useful. These people should assess the performance and enunciate the shortcomings and merits of a production.

The services of such arbitrators whom Bharata has described become necessary when dispute arises among people ignorant of scientific treatise in respect of certain finer points of dramatic performances. Disputes occur among actors who clash because of jealousy and difference of opinion. This could be due to the instructions of the patrons of the performance for the sake of financial considerations or for the flag as a token of achievement. Such disputes should be settled impartially and before the dispute is discussed a trophy in the form of cash or flag should be instituted to be given away.

Bharata's purpose of discussing characteristics of arbitrators here is that *Nāṭya* is a viewable and audible form of art. Its structure is very complex with so many people and processes involved in it that it needs to be assessed by intellectual people of different fields. While in case of poetry (*kāvya*) it can be read by anyone in isolation where the reader

assesses its virtues and blemishes. In order to do so he has to have expertise in various fields of knowledge. Critics after Bharata have given this responsibility to *Sahṛdaya*. The characteristics of arbitrators and ideal spectators combined together become the basis of further development of the concept of *Sahṛdaya* as described by his commentator Abhinavagupta. The distinction was made that *Nāṭya* could be enjoyed by everyone and was available for everyone yet there were only a few who were able to truly connect with it.

This is the beginning of Abhinavagupta's '*tanmaya Sahṛdaya*'. Even for some great connoisseurs of poetry, drama can further cleanse their *hṛdaya* exactly how moonbeams sparkle when they fall on a shining jewel. Not only for *Sahṛdayas*, *Nāṭya* is capable of cleansing even those minds which are not *Sahṛdayas*, those which have not practiced poetry and are not virtuous to be able to understand it. '*Ahṛdayānām ca tadaiva nairmalyādhāyī*' (*Abhinavabharatī*, 1996:84) The purpose of a theatrical performance is to give aesthetic pleasure to its audience. Aesthetic experience depends on the aesthetic receptiveness of the receiver. Prof. KC Pandey argues that if the audience is naturally possessed of forgetting himself during the performance and if his mind rises above the personal joys and sorrows on hearing the recitation of drama; and if his power of imagination be sufficient to complete the picture of dramatist's imagination with the help of poetic presentation, he can have the aesthetic experience. The other various aspects of dramatic presentation on stage are meant for those who have not got the powers mentioned above. (Pandey, 1959: 186)

Abhinavagupta's Vision of an Audience:

Abhinavagupta is the finest portrayer of a recipient's perspective in Sanskrit poetics. Besides the vast commentary *Abhinavabharatī* on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, he has also written *Locana* commentary on Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* in the field of poetics. Abhinavagupta has compiled the views of all the theorists before him and has sorted out the differences in them. Scholars who were followed by him have unanimously accepted his theories in this regard. He states in *Abhinavabharatī* that it is easier to experience *rasa* in *Nāṭya* than in poetry and assigns the place of ideal reader to *Sahṛdaya*. The matter goes on to describe the process of experiencing the *rasa* that pleases the audience which is the ultimate purpose of a theatrical performance or of literature.

***Sahṛdaya*: The Connoisseur Audience**

In Abhinavagupta's *Locana* commentary on Ānandavardhana's *Dhvānyaloka*, we find the definition of *Sahṛdaya* for the first time. It is a term used to denote audience which was popular before his time yet was never defined. He says,

Yesām kāvyānuśīlanābhyāsavaśādviśadībhūte manomukure varṇanīyatanmayībhavanayogyatā te svahṛdaya-samvādabhājah Sahṛdayah. (Dhvānyalokalocana on 1.1) (Dhvānyalokalocana, Pathak, 1997: 39-40)

Those people who are capable of identifying with the subject-matter, as the mirror of their hearts has been cleansed and polished through constant repetition and study of poetry, and who sympathetically respond in their own hearts –those people are what are known as *Sahṛdayas*. (Ingalls, 1990) The mind of a *Sahṛdaya* first becomes attuned to the emotional situation expressed in the literature '*hṛdaya-samvāda*'; then completely absorbed in its portrayal

‘*tanmayībhavan*’; and finally results in aesthetic experience ‘*rasānubhava*’. This gives us four characteristics of these special kind of readers as a) those who have been exposed to appreciation of literary work and who have made it a habit to think about the literary work; b) who, because of this previous exposure, attuned their minds to create the reflection of poetic emotions in their minds; c) who, because of this reflection, could get themselves assimilated, as it were, with the emotions experienced by the character; and d) whose stable emotions are capable of being triggered into a sympathetic resonance with the emotions portrayed.

The consciousness of a *Sahṛdaya* is cleared of all the distorting factors such as preconceived notions, prejudice and other irritants blocking aesthetic enjoyment and thus becomes maximally receptive. A *Sahṛdaya* knows the true nature of poetry which is expressed through dance, physical movements and eye gestures etc. ‘*Nanu ye tādrśamapūrvam kāvyarūpatayā jānanti ta eva saḥṛdayāḥ*. (Locana, Pathak, 1997:24-25) Abhinavagupta uses a verse in both *Abhinava-Bharatī* and *Locana* which says that the meaning which communicates with heart ‘*rasa dhvani*,’ pervades the body of the audience as fire pervades a dry log. The state proceeding from the thing which is congenial to the heart is the source of aesthetic delight and it pervades the body just as fire spreads over the dry wood.

*Yo'rtho hṛdayasamvādī tasya bhāvo rasodbhavaḥ
śarīram vyāpyate tena śuckam kācmamivāgninā.
(Dhvānyalokalocana on 1.1)*

The Theatrical Performance:

In *Abhinavabharatī*, Abhinavagupta discusses how a viewer’s experience differs from that of a reader’s and talks about the qualities of a drama through which a viewer

connects himself with the subject matter. The role of an audience is utmost important in *sadhāraṇīkaraṇa*, the theory developed by him to explain the process of experiencing *rasa* ‘*Rasānubhava*’. The other terms that he has used for the audience are *Bhāvaka* and *Rasika*. *Rasa* defined as the affective response of the reader/spectator to a composition, is born when the pre-existing emotional set ‘*bhāva*’ in the reader/spectator’s mind is expressed and generates poetic meaning. The audience that relishes this poetic meaning is *Bhāvaka*. ‘*Kāvyaṛthān bhāvayantīti bhāvakah.*’ The *rasika* is by definition the kind of respondent who is capable of savouring *rasa*. ‘*Rasika eva rasāsvade योग्या.*’ Abhinavagupta has described this quality as the capacity to respond to aesthetic stimuli. ‘*Rasajñataiva Sahṛdayatvam*’ he maintains that experiencing the *rasa* is synonymous with being a *Sahṛdaya*.

Abhinavagupta defines *Nāṭya*, ‘*tatra Nāṭyam nāma namagatābhīnayaprabhāvasāksātkārāyamāṇaikaghana-mānasaniścalādhyavaseyah samastanāmakādyanyatama-kāvaviśecācca dyotanīyo’rtha*’ (*Abhinavabharatī* II, 1996: 18) which appears as real because of actor’s acting, is experienced by unmoving concentration of mind and is illuminated by both poetic meaning and theatrical performance is called *Nāṭya*. It is an art whose aim is to give joy to the people of society. Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theories are based on philosophy and his views on this matter are also philosophical. He stresses upon experience and oneness in poetry also. *Nāṭyaśāstra* is considered a treatise on *Rasa* school of Sanskrit poetics. The whole process of *Rasānubhava* and the constituents of *Rasa*, *Vibhāva*, *Anubhāva* and *Vyabhichāri* hold a special relation with the audiences’ psychology.

Abhinavagupta states that theatre is the highest form of poetry because it is capable of making them experience *rasa* who are not trained in this field. Theatre employs appropriate language and presents the aesthetic configuration more completely than any other kind of poetry by pressing into its service different modes of action, change of voice under the influence of different emotions, make-up, dress and scenery. In poetry (*prabandha* and *muktaka*) the readers have to be well trained in experiencing *rasa* as they will have to imagine all these things. There are no dialogs in poetry and all the characters of the piece speak in the same language, though it does not fit in the mouth of different characters, belonging to different social levels, countries and climes. But while watching theatre this effort is lesser, as the audience can see actors dressed up in suitable costumes and conversing as if it were real. (Pandey, 1959: 292) Thus Abhinavagupta says that in theatre even an *ahridaya* viewer is transformed into *Sahrdaya* as the performance cleanses their conscience. It is obvious from this discussion that progressively more and more is expected of an audience when they are enjoying *Dṛśyakāvya*, *Dṛśyavat*, *Śravyakāvya* and *Muktaka* respectively. The first makes use of maximum number of props to facilitate transmission and relishing of the *rasa*. These are progressively reduced in the subsequent varieties of poetics, and in order to relish them the audience has to make efforts for it by his personal equipment namely, the study of poetry and exposure to different experiences and imagination.

The process of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

The concept of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* emphasizes the value of identification, which results in sublimation and extension of consciousness of the audience. This concept includes all the three factors in the aesthetics: the poet's creative

experience, the performance and the audiences' response to it. The emotions embodied in a poem enter directly into our hearts to vibrate and dance before our mental eye, '*nirvighna pratitigrahyam sakshad ive hrdaye... rasah.*' (*Abhinavabharatī* I, 1992:279) These emotions do not have spatial and temporal determinations. There exists no living being who is devoid of the latent impressions of the nine mental states (*sthāyī bhāvas*). (*Abhinavabharatī* I, 1992:252) The realisation of *Rasa*, as *Viśvanāth* points out, ultimately results in the expansion of one's consciousness '*Chamatkārastu cittavistārārūpo vismayāparaparyāyah.*' (*Sāhityadarpaṇa* I, 3.3 Parashar, 334)

Abhinavagupta mentions the significance of a fine audience in the process of experiencing the *rasa Rasānubhuti*. In *Abhinavabharatī* possibly to follow Bharata, he uses the word *sāmājika* for the audience more often than *Sahṛdaya*. He says that the audience trained in inference of ordinary world, does not sit neutral while watching a drama, rather by the ability of *hridayasamvādātmaka Sahṛdayatā* they connect with the roles played by actors. This process of relishing the *rasa* does not follow direct perception, inference, memory (*pratyakśa, anumān, smṛti*) or other factors because it is ever-new and has never been experienced in the same way before. Abhinavagupta gives examples of *sadhāraṇī-karaṇa* where *Vibhāvas*, *Anubhāvas* and *Vyabhicharibhāvas* are prominent respectively. He goes on to explain that even though one of these can become the reason of *sadhāraṇī-karaṇa* of *sāmājika*, the best kind of poetry is one where all of these are equally prominent and that is found especially in *daśarūpakas*. Abhinavagupta quotes Vāmana (1.3.30-31) in this context '*Sandarbheśu daśarūpakam śreyah. Tad-vichitram chitrapatavadviśecasākalyāt.*' (*Abhinavabharatī* I, 1992: 83) which means that in long stories ten kinds of drama

is the best because they are fascinating like a colourful picture. Abhinavagupta again says that those whose hearts are naturally purified, who are not affected by anger, attachments and expectation etc. in the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* in Daśarūpaka they instantly experience *rasa* and relish it to find joy. And those who are not like this, for them to acquire such relish, Bharata has taught actors to act and the process of songs and music so these people can get rid of the anger, attachments and expectations of their hearts.

Abhinavagupta gives an analogy of the tree to explain the constituents of experiencing *rasa*. As a seed is situated in a tree's roots, *Rasa* is considered the root of poetry. Thus the cause of knowledge combined with joy '*Ānandamaya jñāna* is *rasa*. *Rasa* which resides in a poet, when gets universalized, results in actor's acting. *Sāmājika* who is hypnotised by this poetic knowledge '*kavigata-samvit*', experiences all these emotions after experiencing the *Rasa*. Thus poetic knowledge is the cause of this whole process and *Sāmājika* is like poet only. '*tadevam mūlam bījasthāniya kavigato rasah. Kavirhi sāmājikatulya eva.*' (*Abhinavabharatī* I, 1992: 108) Abhinavagupta gives an analogy of a tree to explain the constituents of *Rasa*. '*Bijam yathā vṛakśamūlatvensthitam tathā rasāh. Tanmūlā hi prītipūrvikā vyutpattirīti... tatra phalsthānīyah sāmājikarasāsvādah. Tena rasamayev viśvam.*' (*Abhinavabharatī*, 1992: 108) Whole tree is poetry and *rasa* is situated as the roots of this tree, as the cause of poetic bliss-*rasānubhava/Ānanda*. Flowers are acting etc work of actors. This tree's fruit is viewers' '*sāmājika-rasāsvāda*'. Thus, the whole process is successful only if it results in delighting its audience.

Abhinavagupta argues that the poetic sensibility in the audience is nothing but the faculty of entering into an identity

with the poet's heart. '*Kavihrdayāt ātmyāpatti योग्याता*' (*Abhinavabharatī* II, 1996: 339). The terms *Sahrdaya*, *Bhāvaka* and *Rasika* have much wider connotation and they do not directly refer to the activity of watching theatre. But the flair, penchant, taste, sensibility, and perceptiveness denoted by them can be easily applied here to convey the qualities of a responsive audience. If we analyse the structure of a tree shown by Abhinavagupta, we find four entities: the world, the creative writer, the literary form and the recipient receiving the literature. Krishna Chaitanya argues 'the circle is complete when aesthetic experience makes the *Sahrdaya* a more sensitively functioning entity in the world, with enriched and refined activities. This clear delineation of a circuit of poetic experience is one of the most significant contributions of Sanskrit poetics.' (Chaitnya, 1966: 34)

Conclusion:

For Bharata, the spectator's response was a major aspect of the success or failure of a performance. He wanted the responsibilities of each audience member laid down clearly since, to him, the main purpose of the theatre was to intellectually enrich the masses. As a result, he has discussed the various categories of the audience *Sāmājika*, *Prekṣaka* and *Prāśnika* and has defined their characteristics elaborately. Abhinavagupta's commentary was composed at least a thousand years after the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In this duration Sanskrit poetics had progressed with the insights of various great thinkers. *Nāṭyaśāstra* arguably being the first text of this discipline had to set the statutes of the field and give it a structure. This could be the reason why Bharata explicitly states that it is a discourse meant for all the classes of society and denotes the audience as *sāmājikas*—the general public. By the time of Abhinavagupta it was a fact well established

hence he does not comment upon this point. Rather his task was to refine the concept of the recipient of literature, be it the audience of theatre or the reader of poetry and other forms of literature. He moved a step further from the distinction of *Sāmājika*, *Prekṣaka*, *Prāśnika* and calls the audience *Sahṛdaya* –the one with a heart. The general audience of theatre is recognised as connoisseurs. Aesthetic experience depends on the aesthetic receptiveness of the audience. The recipient is still the general public but the success of a performance depends upon their quintessential quality of being a *Sahṛdaya*. Being a *Sahṛdaya* is being one with the whole performance, forgetting the duality and relishing it within.

The audience, according to both Bharata and Abhinavagupta, is an active participant in the process of understanding while enjoying the theatrical performance. He has the final say on the worth of performance. His *rasānubhūti* is the ultimate goal to be attained by the director. Abhinavagupta's concept of *Sahṛdaya* is not limited to a few members of the society. His theory of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* through the medium of poetry shows that he is seeking for the universal in individuals. It is in this perspective that we have to appreciate, the insistence that a true *Sahṛdaya* should also be a *sāmājika* as visualised by Bharata. He is a member of a community sharing common codes, conventions, and values of aesthetic experience, making concepts like *rasa* and *dhvani* commonly acceptable standards of evaluation.

Notes:

¹There are variations of the text in different editions of *Nāṭyaśāstra*. I have followed Oriental Institute, Vadodara's

editions for the purpose of the study. The numbers of verses are also according to the same edition.

² *Uttamādhama madhyānām narānām karmasamśrayam.
Hitopadeśajananaṁ dhṛtikrī āsukhādikṛt.* (NS, 1.113)
*Dharmyam yaśasyamāyucyam hitam buddhivivardha-
nam.*

Lokopadeśajananaṁ Nāṭyametaadbhavicatyati. (NS, 1.115)

³ “*Nāyakasya kaveḥ śrotuḥ samānonubhavastataḥ*” quoted by Abhinavagupta in *Dhvānyalokalocana*.

⁴ *Kāvyaṁ yaśase arthakṛte vyavahāravideśivetakṛtaye.
Sadyaḥ paranirvṛttaye kāntāsammitatayopadeśayuje.
(Kavyaparakasha, 1.3)*

⁵ *Avyagrairindriyaiḥ śuddha uḥāpohaviśāradaḥ.
Tyaktadoconurāgī ca sa nāmye prekṣakah smṛtaḥ.
Na caivaite guḠāḥ samyak sarvasmin prekṣake smṛtāḥ.
vejñeyasyāprameyatvātsamkīrṇānām ca pariṣḍi.
(27.54-55)*

⁶ *Cāritrābhijanopetā śāntavṛtataḥ kṛtāśrmāḥ
Yaśodharmaratāścaiva madhyasthavayasānvitāḥ.
ŚaḍaṅgaNāṭyakuśalāḥ prabuddhāḥśucayah samāḥ.
Caturātodyakuśalā vṛtatajñāstadvadarśinaḥ.
Deśabhācāvidhānajñāḥ kalāśilpaprayojakāḥ.
Caturdhābhīnāyopetā rasabhāvavikalpakāḥ.
śabdacchhandovidhānajñā nānāśāstravicakṣaṇāḥ.
Evamvidhāstu kartavyāḥ prāśanikā daśarūpataḥ.*

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