A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF SARASVATI KṚTIS BY PROF. R. VISHWESHWARAN

Dr. Uma Kumar

Book Review

TRUTH, BEAUTY, AND THE AESTHETIC QUEST: ARJUN BHARADWAJ'S EXPLORATION OF HOMER THROUGH INDIAN THOUGHT

Featured

BHARATA MUNI AS A MICROCOSM OF COSMIC EMANATION: SUSTAINING, OFFERING AND EXPANDING NĀṬYA THROUGH ICCHĀ, JÑĀNA, AND KRIYĀ

Shri Piyal Bhattacharya

Aims and Scope

Poorvam promotes interdisciplinary scholarship bridging performing arts, visual arts, literature, cultural studies, and digital humanities. It amplifies diverse voices, emphasising Indian, Eastern, Indigenous traditions, and Western discourses. The journal ensures academic rigour through double-blind peer review, anti-plagiarism measures, and the use of Turnitin. It fosters accessibility through open-access publication and inspires innovation with original, thought-provoking contributions.

Editorial Policies

- Employs a double-blind peer review process to ensure impartiality and fairness.
- Review criteria include originality, relevance, methodology, clarity, and ethics.
- All submissions are screened for plagiarism using advanced detection software.
- Authors must adhere to the MLA 9th Edition for citations and formatting.

AI Usage Policy

- AI tools may be used for data analysis, but must be disclosed in submissions.
- AI must not be used for generating text or creative content.
- Submissions suspected of AI misuse may be rejected, and authors may face bans.

Plagiarism Policy [Visit]

- Plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is strictly prohibited.
- Submissions are checked using plagiarism detection software.
- Plagiarised submissions are rejected, and repeat offenders may be banned.

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Preface

IN OUR INTERCONNECTED YET FRAGMENTED WORLD, the arts serve as both a bridge and sanctuary, connecting disparate cultures while offering refuge from the turbulence of contemporary life. The Poorvam International Journal of Creative Arts and Cultural Expressions (PIJCACE) emerges from this recognition, born of the conviction that scholarly discourse in the creative arts must transcend traditional boundaries to address the complex realities of our time.

The Need for New Dialogues

Recent global events have underscored the urgency of fostering meaningful cross-cultural dialogue through artistic expression. Political tensions, social upheavals, and technological disruptions continuously reshape the landscape in which artists and scholars operate. Within this dynamic environment, we witness the profound capacity of creative arts to transform conflict into understanding, isolation into connection, and uncertainty into possibility.

This transformative power is not new. Ancient Vedic traditions understood the relationship between *ranaranga* (the battlefield) and *rasaranga* (the aesthetic realm), recognising that the same energies that fuel conflict can be channelled into creative expression. Classical Indian aesthetics, through concepts like *rasa* and *dhvani*, developed sophisticated frameworks for understanding how art mediates between human experience and transcendent meaning. These insights remain profoundly relevant as we navigate contemporary challenges.

Historical Foundations, Contemporary Needs

Throughout history, artistic practice has sustained itself through two primary pathways: institutional patronage and resistance to established power. From Bharata's *Natyashastra* to contemporary postcolonial art movements, creative expression has simultaneously served and challenged the structures that shape society. Today, as traditional patronage systems evolve and new forms of cultural resistance emerge, artists and scholars require fresh platforms for dialogue and discovery.

PIJCACE addresses this need by creating space for interdisciplinary conversation that honours diverse traditions while engaging contemporary concerns. We recognise that meaningful scholarship in the creative arts must embrace multiple perspectives—Indian, Eastern, Indigenous, and Western—without privileging any single framework over others.

Our Vision in Practice

This journal represents more than a new publication; it embodies our commitment to fostering an authentic scholarly community. We have designed PIJCACE as a cornerstone initiative that will grow into a broader ecosystem of engagement, including conferences, workshops, and digital platforms dedicated to advancing knowledge in creative arts and cultural studies.

Our upcoming Aksara Bharata Conference 2025, focused on "Transcultural Aesthetics—South-Asian Heritage in Contemporary and Digital Arts," exemplifies our approach: bringing together classical aesthetic theories with cutting-edge digital practices to explore new possibilities for cultural expression.

A Commitment to Authenticity

As we launch this initiative, we do so with clear awareness of the challenges facing contemporary academic publishing. The proliferation of AI-generated content and the pressure for rapid publication output threaten to diminish the very authenticity that makes scholarly discourse valuable. We are committed to maintaining rigorous standards not merely for their own sake, but because genuine intellectual exchange requires the vulnerability and commitment that only authentic engagement can provide.

We seek contributors who share this commitment—scholars and practitioners who understand that meaningful participation in academic discourse enriches both individual understanding and collective knowledge. Our goal is not simply to add another journal to the academic landscape, but to cultivate a space where transformative conversations can flourish.

Moving Forward

In launching PIJCACE, we acknowledge that no single initiative can address all the complexities facing creative arts scholarship today. Yet we believe that thoughtful, inclusive dialogue across disciplines and cultures remains essential for advancing human understanding. Through this journal, we invite you to join us in exploring how creative expression can serve as a force for connection, healing, and transformation in our shared global community.

This inaugural issue represents a beginning—the first step in what we hope will be a long journey of discovery, dialogue, and mutual enrichment. We welcome you to this conversation and look forward to the insights and innovations that will emerge from our collective engagement with the vital questions that creative arts and cultural expressions pose for our world today.

Bharata Muni as a Microcosm of Cosmic Emanation: Sustaining, Offering and Expanding Nāṭya through Icchā, Jñāna, and Kriyā[1]

Shri Piyal Bhattacharya

Namaste, everyone!

I render my veneration to all the masters and seniors, and my greetings to all the dignitaries present here. I am humbled to speak on Bharata Muni and see it as a privilege. I thank Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, from the bottom of my heart for giving me this opportunity. My humble gratitude to Dr. Sandhya Purecha, the Chairman, and Shri Raju Das, the Secretary of Sangeet Natak Akademi. It is indeed a novel task to understand Bharata Muni during this 'Amrit Kaal', as I sincerely feel that it is crucial to empower us to reflect on the Indian performance traditions under a new light, and help us to determine newer paths to contribute back to the pool.

In today's time, as someone begins to know about Bharata Muni and understand his treatise, they may come across a lot of prevalent presuppositions. In pre- as well as post-Independent India, a few Indic scholars, alongside some of their contemporaries abroad, began translating Bharata Muni's text into European and other modern Indian languages. They intended to bring the repository of knowledge embedded in there and an intricate, documented system of Indian dramaturgy to the fore. In that due course, they expressed a few doubts – Who was Bharata? Was he a lone person, just as the number of the word suggests? Or was it the name of an erstwhile clan or community? The questions were not alien, they said, and pointed at the textual pieces of evidence to corroborate their rumination. The śāstrika system of studying, however, never had any such deliberation insofar as modern Indic scholars of Indology and later from the South Asian studies, who had apprehensions about the traditional Indian way of looking at Bharata Muni. The second set of apprehensions was raised by some modern practitioners – how should we embrace Bharata? Should we stick to the text itself as it is, or treat it as a treatise on tradition? Or better still, is Bharata Muni binding us and restricting us with his prescriptions or opening a new vista?

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[1] **Editorial Note**

This volume presents a lecture on Bharata Muni delivered at the *Amrit Yuva Kalotsav 2024*, organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi at Kala Academy, Goa. Part of a series on foundational figures of Indian classical arts, the lecture explores Bharata Muni—author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—through a traditional *śāstrika* lens.

Rather than debating his historicity, the speaker interprets Bharata as a cosmic principle of performative knowledge (*nāṭya-jñāna*), using Sanskrit philology to unpack the name *Bharata* as *bharati-rāti-tanoti* (sustains-offers-expands). Drawing from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Abhinavabhāratī*, Upanishads, and *dharmaśāstra* texts, the paper aligns aesthetic theory with spiritual goals like *dharma*, *rasa*, and *mokṣa*.

This is not just a scholarly text but a living dialogue with tradition. Sanskrit terms appear with transliteration and translation. Readers unfamiliar with these concepts may consult the reference list provided.

This text preserves the oral character of the original lecture, including direct addresses to the audience and traditional Sanskrit invocations. The title is given by the Editorial Team.

The illuminated minds in the following times came together and tried to reconcile many such queries. We see Sangeet Natak Akademi organising a grand seminar on Natyashastra under the able guidance of Premlata Sharma, the convenor, and Girish Karnad, then Chairman. We also see Kapila Vatsyayan, following the line of her teacher Vasudeva Sharan Agrawal unequivocally clarifying that the thrust should not be on proving or disproving whether Bharata Muni was a single person as it may have a multitude of meanings – what is most important here is to understand that more than willing to posit himself as an individual, Bharata Muni is trying to offer himself not as an authoritative figure but as an instrument (*karaṇa*) through whom a larger plethora of knowledge (*jñāna*) will be get emanated. Thus, the personal Bharata Muni is not important here; rather, the history of discourse and system unfolded through his speech is. This has always been the demarcating feature in the tradition of Indian streams of knowledge – the *śāstrakartā*s, the *ṛṣi*s never emphasised the *ādhāra* as they themselves were, but focused more on the *ādheya* – the *jñāna* which is manifested through them, for which the supreme unconditioned I-consciousness is the spring. In the same line neither it is neither important to detect the physical time when Bharata Muni lived.

Here, one idea should be pellucid – the empirical time we may go back to, only denotes one point of time when the act of physical documentation of the knowledge took place in some particular geographical space. As per the social-ethnographers, the act of carrying that knowledge forward dates back much further, whereas in the case of the traditional Indian system, that purview, too, will render inadequate as *jñāna* is *anādi* – it resides in the *hṛdaya* of the Supreme Being and only manifests the causal, subtle and palpable world with its *icchā* or Universal Will. We shall come back to this in a while.

Talking about the naming of Bharata, we, again, find another widely accepted notion of treating Bharata as an acronym – Bha-Ra-Ta. Following the 18th century textual exposition of **Balarāma Bhāratam** by Maharaja Balarama Varma, this notion treats Bha

coming from *bhāva*, Ra from *rāga*, and Ta from *tāla*. However, I shall not follow this line of understanding as well.

Today, I would like to understand Bharata Muni from another *śāstrika* point of view and would try to establish the relevance of Bharata Muni's vision in regard to contemporary times.

The way the word '*Bhairava*' is understood may help us to pave the path. भरति रवति वमति यः – he who sustains the creation, pulsates and emanates everything is *Bhairava*. And quite similarly, he who fills and sustains (*bharati*), offers it to the others (*rāti*) and expands it (*tanoti*) is Bharata – भरति राति तनोति यः, सः भरतः । What does he sustain? – the *jñāna* of *nāṭya*. What does he offer? – that same illuminating knowledge of *nāṭya*. What does he expand? – The blissful experience of *rasa*.

Now, stating them in such simplistic fashion may sound easy, nevertheless, the connotation is far profound. Let's focus on each one of them in sequence to acquire a vivid perception about Bharata.

In the 36th chapter of **Nāṭyaśāstra**, we find Bharata Muni expounding something intriguing –

धुर्यवदेको यस्मादुद्धारोऽनेकभूमिकायुक्तः ।
भाण्डग्रहोपकरणैनाट्यं भरतो भवेत् तस्मात् ॥२३ ॥[2]

So, we can very well comprehend that Bharata here is nothing but a vessel, the *ādhāra*. There, within the *ādhāra* of the body, one bears the characters. To rephrase – भरति भूमिकान्स्वाङ्गे यः, सः भरतोत्युच्यते[3] ।

Quite intriguingly, Bharata represents a microcosmic model of cosmic emanation functioning on *icchā-jñāna-kriyā*. All the possibility of the *jñāna* of *nāṭya* lies in repose within him. It is with his will (*icchā*) to offer them, the characters get manifested, and thus, the body of *nāṭya* begins to get expanded. So, this *icchā* results in *dāna* – an active participation – a *sakarmaka dhatu* – √रा आदत्ते । This Bharata, or Bharatas, will continue to offer *nāṭya* to keep the stream of *jñāna* enriched.

Therefore, we can see how Bharata in one way stands for not any mere ancient Indian individual scholar but a community of artists – a *sampradāya* of actors, dancers, poets, musicians. This ideation represents a worldview and a mechanism – the *jñāna* is *anādi*, it is only manifested just as it is manifested at the arousal of Universal Will (*icchā*) and manifests everything with *kriyā*. What may be seen out there can very well be seen in here – यथा ब्रह्माण्डे तथा भाण्डे ।[4]

This act of offering or *dāna* is important as that immediately invokes the memory of *yajña*. *Dāna* has been an inseparable part of the *satra* of *yajña*. "In order to produce something", says Shatavadhani R. Ganesh, "we have to work hard and, having produced it, we should share it." This hard work alludes to the notion of *tapas,* and the *phala* is not just for one to enjoy but to share for the benefit of all sentient beings. This is why we find Parāśara Smriti eulogising *dāna* –

तपः परं कृतयुगे त्रेतायां ज्ञानमुच्यते ।

द्वापरे यज्ञमेवाहुर्दानमेकं कलौ युगे ॥ २३॥ (प्रथमोऽध्यायः)[5]

Now we may also grasp why Ācārya Abhinavagupta expounded on the *naṭadharmatva* in the Abhinavabhāratī, his commentary on Bharata Muni's Nāṭyaśāstra, as the name 'Bharata' itself puts forth a *dharma* – the *dharma* of manifesting the *jñāna* of *nāṭya* and offering it for the benefit of the commoners, as once the *jñāna* of *nāṭya* was emanated by Brahmā in a *dṛśya-śravya* medium. This *dāna* must not be mere entertainment, for Bharata is not laying the foundation of something as trivial as recreation since it was manifested by Brahmā with a completely different purpose –

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[2] Translation: Who can pull off performing multiple characters in one go, just as a fit bearer of loads, who is adept in playing the percussions and sustaining the required elements of *nāṭya*, is to be called Bharata.

[3] Translation: He who embodies roles within himself is called Bharata.

[4] Translation: As in the cosmos, so in the pot (in the body).

[5] Translation: In the *Satyayuga*, performing austerity was the highest form of *dharma*, in *Tretā,* that became the acquiring of *jñāna*, whereas in *Dvāpara* it lay in performing *yajña* and in *Kaliyuga* it resides in the act of philanthropy.

धर्म्यमर्थ्यं यशस्यं च सोपदेश्यं ससङ्ग्रहम् ।
भविष्यतश्च लोकस्य सर्वकर्मानुदर्शकम् ॥ १४॥[6]

सर्वशास्त्रार्थसम्पन्नं सर्वशिल्पप्रवर्तकम् ।
नाट्याख्यं पञ्चमं वेदं सेतिहासं करोम्यहम् ॥ १५॥[7]

It may be viewed as an edutainment, if to put it in today's terms, and not mere recreation. Ācārya Abhinavagupta emphasises '√विद् धातु ज्ञाने' to comprehend *nāṭya* or all art forms as Veda, and makes us aware that Bharata Muni is not merely asking a *naṭa* to sing and dance to make merry –

न चाप्यस्योपदिश्यते 'गायेत्, नृत्येत्' इति ।[8]

He demarcates this system of practice as the *dharma* for the *naṭa sampradāya* –

नटानां तावदेतत् स्वधर्माम्नायरूपतया अनुष्ठ्येयमेव ।[9]

So, comprehending the true connotation of Bharata will continue to take us away from any feeling of losing something, as the act of giving is not associated with insecurity. That understanding may also lead us to refrain from the unwanted foliage of vanity or exhibitionism, as the performing arts sometimes pose to be in the contemporary world. The act of practising art must be undertaken modestly.

What is the kind of *dāna* suggested by the *ra* of the word Bharata? It is the Supreme kind of offering of all offerings – taking one to the path of Self-realisation. In the 36th chapter, Bharata says –

या गतिर्वेदविदुषां या गतिर्यज्ञकारिणाम् ।
या गतिर्दानशीलानां तां गतिं प्राप्नुयादधि सः ॥ २७ ॥[10]

दानधर्मेषु सर्वेषु कीर्त्यते तु महत् फलम् ।
प्रेक्षणीयप्रदानं हि सर्वदानेषु शस्यते ॥ २८ ॥[11]

गान्धर्वं चेह नाट्यं च यः सम्यक् परिपालयेत् ।
स ईश्वरगणेशानां लभते सद्गतिं पराम् ॥ ३० ॥[12]

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[6] Translation: That which is righteous, purposeful, and brings fame; instructive and comprehensive; and which will serve as a guide for all future human actions— such is this (work).

[7] Translation: Endowed with the essence of all śāstras and the source of all arts, I create the fifth Veda called Nāṭya, complete with history (itihāsa).

[8] Translation: Nor is it instructed in this (text) that one should merely 'sing' or 'dance.'

[9] Translation: For actors, this alone must be performed properly according to their own prescribed duty (svadharma)

[10] Translation: The final avenue of liberation, which is walked by the true realiser of Veda, by the true knower-performer of *yajña*, by the one renowned for charity, is also offered to the one who offers the *jñāna* of *nāṭya*

[11] Translation: All eulogise the act of philanthropy to be the bestower of great fruit, whereas offering *nāṭya* is the highest among all such activities.

[12] Translation: Should one sustain the practice and wisdom of *gāndharva* and *nāṭya* properly, they attain the rightful passage of life, i.e. liberation (*mokṣa*).

Now, at this juncture, let us understand *dharma* in this context. Many have opted for a much linear translation 'duty' for *dharma*, whereas duty is just one bit of *dharma* – it is rather an essence of sustainability which forms the core of *dharma*, so what we get to learn from Bharata is the sustenance of a knowledge-stem flowing since time immemorial for the benefit of many beings – बहुजन सुखाय बहुजन हिताय च[13] ।

This principle of sustenance must also be practised, which incites the aspect of *sādhanā* or *tapas*. Bharata Muni himself epitomises the notion of *śiṣya* – he is a learner who learns the wisdom of performance from Brahmā, the art of *kaiśikī vṛtti* from Nandīkeśvara; he never jumps the gun, yet indulges in creative expression of art whilst adhering to the *śāstrika* parameters. His own activities within the treatise of Nāṭyaśāstra aid us in grasping the true meaning of *śāstra* and its necessity – *śāstra* "helps us remain within a time-tested framework and prevents us from slipping away." Śaṅkarācārya says, the sole purpose of *śāstra* is to help us, since it is the essential reminder for us and not an enforcer of activities.

ज्ञापकं हि शास्त्रं न कारकमेति स्थितिः (भाष्य, बृहदारण्यकोपनिषद १.४.१०)[14]

Thus, we may actually rediscover the word 'Bharata' as the distinguishing marker for the *dharma* of the *naṭas* (नटधर्मत्वपरिच्छेदकः).

We have so far discussed *bharati* and *rāti* for Bha and Ra. Now, let us move towards *tanoti* for Ta. What does Bharata or the Bharatas expand? They expand the body of *nāṭya* through their own bodies, and as a result expand *rasa*, which is *akhaṇḍa*. It is interesting how the same root *tan* renders two aspects quintessential to *nāṭya*–*tanu* and *tantrī*. A strike on the stringed instrument creates an expansion of *āhata nāda*, but it fades away after a certain span of time. In the same way, our body also gets manifested and then decays and finally gets into oblivion – Bhartṛhari in the **Vākyapadīya** says –

अध्याहितकलां यस्य कालशक्तिमुपाश्रिताः ।
जन्मादयो विकाराः षड्भावभेदस्य योनयः ॥ १.३ ॥[15]

Ever since birth, we go through sustenance and growth, before maturing, decay, and ultimately our physical body gets dissolved in the *pañca-bhūtas*. Likewise, the body of the *nāṭya* gets expanded. A treatment is found in the **Daśarūpaka** where we see how, on the basis of *pañca-arthaprakṛti* and *pañca-avasthā*, the body of *nāṭya* gets expanded. The treatment, much curiously, is alike a body. The body of *nāṭya* that is *kathāvastu* is referred to as *śarīra*. The five states or *pañca-avasthā* render the psychological state of the characters –

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[13] Translation: For the happiness of the many, for the welfare of the many.

[14] Translation: Scripture is revelatory (indicative), not causative — this is the established view.

[15] Translation: He, into whom all the arts (*kalāḥ*) are infused, and whose power of Time (*kāla-śakti*) is the basis — From whom arise the transformations beginning with birth, the sources of the sixfold modes of being.

अवस्थाः पञ्च कार्यस्य प्रारब्धस्य फलार्थिभिः।
आरम्भयत्नप्राप्त्याशानियताप्तिफलागमाः॥ १९ ॥[16]

The struggle, the ascension and descension creating such states are the fruits of the *prārabdha* or deeds of the characters. What is intended here is to render a multi-faceted fruit of watching the performance of *kathāvastu* in *nāṭya* – the first layer is becoming aware by observing the toils of the characters and acting justly. If properly done, one may enjoy the fruit of the good deeds as shown in the performances. This is the layer of *dharma* and *artha*. The savouring of the visual aesthetic, the mellifluous tune of the music

emits a pleasurable experience for the *prekṣaka*s. This corresponds to satiating *kama*. However, as the *kavi* employs the *pañca-arthaprakṛti* (*bīja-bindu-patākā-prakarī-kārya*) to craft the *avasthā* of the characters, one realises, both by performing and witnessing, how fleeting can be any joy, how momentary can be any rejoice, and so how empty they are. Receiving such impetus over and over again may render a sense of detachment from the fruits of one's actions or experience impersonalisation in their enactment, just as **Bhāgavad Gītā** says–

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ।। (श्रीमद्भागवद्गीता २.५६)[17]

This may prepare one to be a *jivanmukta* – the state of being liberated during one's lifetime.

The *śarīra* of *nāṭya* consists of five joints, just like a human body – *mukha*, *garbha*, etc., to give not just the psychological rendition but also a physical sense of the body. In this way, with the joints and inner (*antaḥkaraṇa*) and outer body (*bhogāyatana śarīra*), the aspect of *tanoti* of Bharata's name really treats the body as a tool to attain liberation. It becomes the instrument – *karaṇa*, for that. No wonder Bharata's system upholds such a practice of *āṅgikābhinaya* through *karaṇa,* which takes the practitioners beyond the dichotomy of *heya* and *upādeya,* and turns their physical bodies into *naivedya,* and in the end, attains the body of Śiva that is a complete transcendence from the physical space to no space!

The naming of the *sandhi*s of *itivṛtta* as per the limbs of the human body also alludes to the cycle of cosmic time and universe as the manifested cosmic body of the Supreme Being – *Puruṣa*, as depicted in the *Puruṣa sūktam*. The **Nāṭyaśāstra,** being a part of the *śāstrika* system, also compels one to join the dots and arrive at the greater schema of time, where empirical time becomes insignificant. All these realisations happen for both the spectators and the actors in Bharata's system, not through any arid journey but through a joyous experience of *rasa* – the aesthetic experience of savouring art. Thus, *rasa* takes us from the material to the spiritual, which finally culminates in corresponding, says

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[16] Translation: The five stages of an undertaken action (*kārya*), pursued by those desiring its result, are: initiation (*ārambha*), effort (*yatna*), attainment (*prāpti*), expectation (*āśā*), certainty of attainment (*niyatāpti*), and receipt of the result (*phalāgama*).

[17] Translation: He whose mind is undisturbed in sorrow,
who is free from desire in pleasure,
who is devoid of attachment, fear, and anger —
such a sage of steady wisdom is called *sthita-dhīḥ* (one of steady intellect).

Shatavadhani R. Ganesh, and in becoming *Brahman*. This is the ultimate goal of Bharata's *nāṭya* – रसो वै सः, सः वै रसिकः[18] –

to attain the realisation that we all have come out of that Unconditioned Bliss and in the end shall go back to that Supreme Bliss –

आनन्दाध्येव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते। आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति । आनन्दं प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्तीति ।[19]
- (तैत्तिरीयोपनिषद्, भृगुवल्ली, षष्ठोऽनुवाकः - १)

In today's time of recurrent bout of emotional upheavals and incessant pull of rat-race, it is important to keep the head straight with such reminder in an endearing way – that is the way of *nāṭya*'s teaching – to impart *kāntā-sammita upadeśa* – so that none's ego is hurt and they take the medicine mixed with jaggery.

To conclude, let us see another illuminating layer – the status of Bharata as 'Muni'. The writings in English on Bharata Muni or referring to his text many a time omit this 'Muni'. Withstanding the gravity, one may falsely recognise it to be a mere act of veneration added in the later days. However, it is not so. Whenever Indian traditions refer to anyone who has divulged the ultimate truth or *Brahmavidyā* of any particular knowledge-stem has been regarded with such reverence. These ultimate sayings are called the *āptavākya*s. The same kind of venerating remarks can also be found in the **Abhinavabhāratī** where Ācārya Abhinavagupta refers to Bharata Muni's sayings as '*ādivākya*' and refers to them as unsurmountable. The same kind of veneration is also observed for Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali in the case of *vyākaraṇa*. They are called the *ārṣa ācārya* who have revealed the *apauraṣeya jñāna* to be carried forward and used as an igniting means for Self-realisation. And so, they are not to be treated in an individualistic sense at any given point in time.

In this way, the layered meaning of the word Bharata may be understood. As Bharata Muni himself has drawn the analogy of *bīja* and *vṛkṣa* several times in his

treatise, his name itself is found to be enacting like a seed, and this body of the text and its practice are the tree sprouted from there. If in this way we try to understand Bharata Muni, we can definitely begin to stride on the path of sustaining the invaluable, intangible repository of Indian knowledge systems and move closer towards realising our true Self, and through this process help Bharatavarsh to awake to a new *svarga*.

Thank you!

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[18] Translation: Indeed, He (Brahman) is Rasa. He alone is the rasika
[19] Translation: From Bliss (Ānanda) indeed are all these beings born.
By Bliss, having been born, do they live.
Into Bliss they enter and merge at the end.

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Moral Dilemmas and Values of the Middle Class in Mrinal Sen's Films: A Study of *Ek Din Pratidin* and *Kharij*

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Introduction

Cinema is a compositional art form where all other art forms co-exist. Fundamental artistic elements such as dance, music, drama, and painting are inherently present in cinema. The relationship between cinema and poetry is profoundly intimate. In cinema, the role of dialogue is secondary; it is the image or the visual that plays the primary role. When shots are taken one by one with a camera, they carry no complete meaning in isolation. It is only through the combination of multiple shots that a complete cinematic language emerges—just as a poem takes shape through the stringing together of words (Rhodes, 2011).

In early Indian cinema, filmmakers primarily adapted mythological, social, historical narratives, or stories based on literature. However, Mrinal Sen deviated from this tradition by deconstructing literary narratives and reconstructing them with his own interpretation. He offered a personal reading of these narratives, often minimizing the emphasis on plot events. Rather than focusing on grand occurrences, Sen highlighted the seemingly trivial incidents from our daily lives—events we often ignore or fail to notice. Through the lens of his camera, he invested these small occurrences with layered meanings, presenting them with powerful interrogative undertones (Chakravarty, 1993; Ghosh, 2015).

Backdrop of Mrinal Sen's Films and the Middle Class

Mrinal Sen was the filmmaker who elevated Bengali cinema to the global stage, yet at heart, he remained a lifelong Bengali. His films spoke for the masses—the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the struggling—and conveyed the ultimate realities of life. He broke the conventional grammar of filmmaking and created a distinct cinematic idiom of his own. In doing so, he elevated Bengali cinema into a realm of serious art (Sen, 2002).

Mrinal Sen was not merely a filmmaker; his films were more than just cinema. He was a torchbearer of cultural and social movements, using film as a powerful medium for political and social commentary. For him, cinema served as a document of society, politics, and culture, embodying the voices of the common people (Ghosh, 2013).

The most compelling aspect of Mrinal Sen's cinema lies in the realism of his stories. There was no space for fantasy. The stories of ordinary people, their surroundings, the country's socio-political climate, and the struggles of daily life were central to his narrative. His films were created for the sake of art itself, not for personal gain. As a true artist, he sought to develop the art form rather than merely advancing his own career (Mukherjee, 2017).

Revolution, protest, and inquiry were recurring themes in his work. This ideological underpinning rooted him in Marxist philosophy, and his association with the Communist Party's cultural wing and the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) reflected these beliefs. However, Mrinal Sen cannot be pigeonholed with other Marxist filmmakers. Some critics refer to him as a dialectical materialist analyst, as his characters often become symbols of existential pain and resistance. In *Interview* (1971), the protagonist's inability to obtain a Western suit for a job interview awakens his consciousness and transforms him into a rebel. In *Akash Kusum* (1965), the middle-class protagonist eventually realizes that success in life isn't easy, and love cannot be gained by hiding one's class identity behind a facade (Chakrabarty, 2015).

Mrinal Sen himself came from a middle-class background, which explains his persistent focus on the middle class in his films. His deep and personal understanding of the middle class shaped his cinematic representations. Unlike Satyajit Ray or Ritwik Ghatak, Sen examined the

vulnerabilities and contradictions of the middle class with greater intensity, making his voice unique and significant among this demographic (Dutta, 2020).

From the kitchen stoves to everyday utensils of lower-middle and middle-class families, Sen brought all into his cinematic frame. No other director had observed the middle class so closely. Yet, he had no sympathy or romanticism for this urban class. As Sen once stated, "This class is manipulative, ready to compromise with injustice at any cost, and tends to flee in times of crisis" (Sen, 1982). This sentiment is visible in *Akaler Sandhane* (1980), where the young director halts shooting and escapes. Similarly, in *Khandhar* (1984), the photographer deceives a helpless woman and her ailing mother.

In *Kharij* (1982), the protagonist fails to grasp the depth of his guilt when the death of a child laborer occurs under his watch. The middle class tries to suppress the truth by bribing the father of the deceased boy. In *Ek Din Pratidin* (1979), when a young woman does not return home one night, the surrounding middle-class neighbors show intrusive and nearly obscene curiosity. In this collective awakening, Mrinal Sen also saw himself. Through such portrayals, we understand that the Bengali middle class is expanding, but it is also decaying.

Throughout his life, Sen observed the silent bleeding of the middle class. He knew that the middle class is not suited to be a villain. To become a true antagonist, one needs a spine— perhaps something that the Partition had broken. This essay mainly discusses *Ek Din Pratidin* and *Kharij*, focusing on how Mrinal Sen critically portrays the contradictions and moral ambiguity of the middle class (Banerjee, 2022).

Ek Din Pratidin: Surveillance, Shame, and the Female Body

Mrinal Sen's *Ek Din Pratidin* (*And Quiet Rolls the Dawn*) offers a poignant exploration of middle-class life in late 1970s and early 1980s Kolkata. Through the microcosm of a single household in a dilapidated tenement of North Kolkata, Sen Paints a vivid portrait of economic hardship, gender-based hypocrisy, and the fragility of societal values under pressure.

Set in a conservative neighborhood, the film revolves around a seven-member middle-class family surviving on the modest pension of its patriarch, Rishikesh Babu, and the salary of the eldest daughter, Chinu—a bank employee and the sole breadwinner. The setting—a crumbling, century-old building shared by numerous families—is not merely a backdrop, but a symbolic extension of their precarious existence, embodying the decay of traditional values and the burden of economic struggle.

The central crisis of the film unfolds one evening when Chinu fails to return home at her usual time. What initially begins as mere concern gradually descends into panic, speculation, and, ultimately, societal judgment. This simple delay becomes a narrative device through which Mrinal Sen exposes the deep-seated contradictions within the Bengali middle class—particularly its conservative, patriarchal attitudes towards working women.

Rather than genuine concern for Chinu's safety, the family's foremost anxiety revolves around the potential damage to their social reputation. The neighbors, instead of offering comfort, intrude upon the family's private anguish, feeding off the uncertainty with relentless gossip and unsolicited advice. This lack of personal space and the performative morality of the community highlight the claustrophobic nature of middle-class life, where every action is dictated by fear of public perception.

As the family desperately searches for Chinu—visiting police stations, hospitals, and even a morgue—the film starkly confronts the vulnerability of women in urban India. Despite being a working professional, Chinu is not exempt from the pervasive social policing that continues to dictate the boundaries of female autonomy.

Sen masterfully uses dialogue and silence to expose the duplicity of societal norms. The family's emotional responses—the helplessness of the parents, the brother's frustration, and the sister's quiet reflection—offer a nuanced portrait of a household caught between economic necessity and moral conservatism. Their muted suffering reflects the quiet resilience of the Bengali middle class, constantly struggling to balance survival with a crumbling value system.

Chinu's eventual return does not bring closure; instead, it confronts the family with the weight of their own prejudice. A fault in the telephone lines had prevented her from informing them—a banal, technical mishap that triggered a storm of character judgment. Yet, upon her return, she is met not with relief, but with suspicious silence. They ask her nothing—perhaps out of fear of the answers, or perhaps in recognition of their own unspoken guilt. This silence is not comforting; it is deeply unsettling. It speaks volumes about their unease with the idea of women's independence and freedom.

By choosing not to interrogate Chinu, the family inadvertently reveals their internal conflict. They have already judged her in their minds—questioning where she went, with whom, and why. But when she appears composed and unharmed, their imagined narratives collapse, leaving them speechless. This moment of restrained silence becomes a hallmark of Mrinal Sen's cinematic language. He does not deliver overt messages; instead, he allows silence to carry the weight of critique. These "unspoken words" disturb the audience, prompting reflection—thus revealing the true power of his cinema.

Yet Chinu's return is not a return to safety or belonging. Instead of comfort, she encounters suspicion. Her late arrival becomes an unspoken indictment, and her composure is met with scorn rather than empathy. In a powerful moment of emotional honesty, she expresses the tragic irony of her situation: that her safe return has caused more shame than if she had met with an accident. The daughter who financially sustains the family becomes, in a matter of hours, a moral liability. Her autonomy is considered a threat—not only to familial structure, but to societal honor.

The cruelty of this social order is further underscored through the intimate conversations between Chinu's siblings. Amidst the oppressive silence of the elders, their dialogue becomes a

subtle act of resistance—a voice of moral clarity amid the surrounding hypocrisy. Through their perspective, Sen injects a glimmer of protest against patriarchal values and rigid societal norms.

Ek Din Pratidin lays bare the alarming curtailment of women's rights even in so-called modern times. Chinu, despite being educated and self-reliant, cannot exercise freedom over her time, her finances, or her personal choices without being subjected to scrutiny. The omnipresent fear of "what people will say" dictates the terms of her existence. In this world, middle-class morality is less about ethics and more about public performance.

Sen also captures the emotional paradox of the middle-class family: the tension between parental love and social fear. In moments of crisis, the need to maintain social respectability often supersedes the impulse for compassion. Layer by layer, the film unravels the moral decay, economic anxiety, and emotional fragility of a class desperately clinging to its outdated ideals.

In the end, *Ek Din Pratidin* is not simply a story about a missing woman—it is an indictment of the structures that police women's behavior and a mirror held up to a society that fears change more than injustice. Through minimalism, silence, and symbolic mise-en-scène, Mrinal Sen crafts a powerful, introspective narrative that lingers well beyond its final frame. The true crisis is not Chinu's delay, but the social order that allows such a delay to become catastrophic.

Class and Death in *Kharij*

The social crisis of the middle-class family has always been a central theme in Mrinal Sen's films. This leftist filmmaker has consistently tried to portray the struggles of the so-called lower classes and marginalized sections of society. At the same time, his camera has documented the moral and social decay within the middle class. In this context, *Kharij* (1982), based on the novel by Ramapada Chowdhury, is particularly noteworthy.

The plot of *Kharij* revolves around the death of a boy named Palan. Palan worked as a domestic help in a middle-class household in Kolkata, where he also resided. He used to sleep in the kitchen. On a bitterly cold winter night, in need of a little warmth, a small fire was lit using charcoal in the enclosed kitchen space. Palan died in his sleep from carbon monoxide poisoning

due to the lack of ventilation. His death leaves us with the question: who is responsible for Palan's death? Whose negligence led to this tragic end of a young life?

It is undeniable that institutions do not kill directly. However, be it through suffocation or other forms of neglect, the institution bears an indirect responsibility in such unnatural deaths. Take Palan's case, for instance. Coming from a drought-affected, impoverished agricultural family in Bankura, Palan had to take up domestic work in a middle-class family in Kolkata to survive. In truth, it was extreme poverty and lack of food that forced him into child labor. *Kharij*, in its portrayal of middle-class dilemmas, also touches upon the issue of child labor.

Palan, who should have been attending school, was instead working in a household as a child laborer due to his family's destitution. Child labor is illegal under Article 24 of the Indian Constitution. Ironically, while one child in the middle-class household grows up with safety, care, and opportunities, another child—the domestic help—loses his childhood and ultimately, his life. Palan's role in that household was reduced to that of a mechanical relief from domestic chores. His basic human needs were neither acknowledged nor addressed, and ultimately, he was neglected to a fatal extent. In depicting Palan's death, the director clearly shows the audience that the family continued employing him for child labor, fully aware of the injustice.

Thus, the crisis of the middle class is revealed as a moral one—a decay of social values. The reactions of the family where Palan worked, the doctor, the landlord, and the neighbors all reflect not genuine grief over the sudden death of a child, but rather anxiety about the potential consequences and a relentless effort to avoid them. This effort often crosses into shamelessness, exposing the moral bankruptcy of the middle class.

Only two people appear genuinely grief-stricken over Palan's death—one is the family's own child, Tukai, who used to play with Palan, and the other is Palan's father, a man defeated at every level by the institutional power structures.

Compared to Mrinal Sen's earlier politically charged films like *Padatik* (1973) or *Chorus* (1974), *Kharij* may seem to operate at a relatively softer political pitch. While class conflict has always been a notable theme in Sen's leftist cinema, in *Kharij* the conflict is more psychological than overtly political. The crisis of the middle class and its decaying values seem to pierce the

conscience of the employer's family. Following Palan's death, through their psychological turmoil and internal tension, the true face of the middle class emerges from behind its polished mask.

The autopsy of Palan's body becomes symbolic of the autopsy of middle-class moral values. At some point, the family seems to realize that, although they didn't physically abuse Palan, what they did was still inhuman. Understanding this inner crisis becomes the hidden strength of the film.

Their offer of financial compensation to Palan's grief-stricken and shattered father is an inadequate attempt to escape their overwhelming sense of guilt. But this also exposes the selfishness and hypocrisy of the middle class. In a capitalist society, where everything—including human life—has a monetary value, this harsh truth is laid bare. However, Palan's father refuses the money, and in doing so, his silent and dignified rejection strips away the rotting mask of the middle class's decaying values.

His rejection reveals how institutional frameworks dehumanize the poor and invalidate their very humanity. And this is precisely where *Kharij* succeeds so powerfully—as a critique not only of one family, but of an entire social structure that 'dismisses' the humanity of the marginalized.

A Cinema of Ethical Interrogation: Mrinal Sen and the Bengali Middle Class

Mrinal Sen's films *Ek Din Pratidin* (1979) and *Kharij* (1982) stand as profound cinematic explorations of moral ambiguity, class contradictions, and social complicity. Rather than dispensing moral verdicts or offering solutions, Sen engages in what may be termed a "cinema of ethical interrogation." Through quiet realism and evocative silences, he invites viewers to examine not only the characters on screen but also themselves. In this way, Sen's work becomes a mirror to the ethical discomforts of the urban Bengali middle class—a class often celebrated as the custodian of morality and culture in post-Independence India.

In *Ek Din Pratidin*, the disappearance of a young working woman, who is the sole breadwinner of her family, triggers not only panic but also the unraveling of middle-class pretensions. The family's anxious attempts to hide her absence from neighbors, while avoiding questions about her profession, expose their underlying hypocrisy and fear of social judgment. Sen masterfully refrains from melodrama, instead focusing on everyday gestures—anxious glances, unfinished conversations, silences—that convey the emotional and moral breakdown of the household (Chakravarty, 1993). This restraint is central to Sen's approach; it transforms the domestic into a site of political interrogation.

Similarly, *Kharij* centers on the death of a child domestic worker in a middle-class home. The employer family, seemingly "good people," responds not with overt cruelty but with a combination of detachment, bureaucratic appeasement, and shallow regret. The film avoids spectacle; instead, it exposes the normalized violence embedded in structures of class and privilege. The boy's death is not just a personal tragedy—it is a societal indictment. Sen foregrounds the failure of moral introspection and the ease with which responsibility is deflected. As Banerjee (2008) notes, *Kharij* dismantles "the illusion of innocence" that the middle class constructs around itself.

What is striking in both films is Sen's refusal to caricature his middle-class protagonists. They are not villains; rather, they are complex, often well-meaning individuals ensnared by the very system they benefit from. This nuanced portrayal makes the viewer's confrontation with ethical complicity all the more unsettling. Sen challenges the assumption that good intentions suffice in the face of structural injustice. His cinema insists that morality without justice is performative—a mere social script enacted to maintain hegemony and privilege.

Furthermore, Sen interrogates the gendered dimensions of middle-class life. In *Ek Din Pratidin*, the family's control over the daughter's autonomy reflects broader patterns of surveillance and patriarchal containment. Her economic role does not grant her liberation but deepens the burden of respectability and fear of scandal. Meanwhile, *Kharij* subtly points to the erasure of working-class voices, especially those of domestic workers and children, from mainstream moral discourse. The middle class, in Sen's vision, sustains itself through mechanisms of exclusion and selective empathy (Ghosh, 2002).

Ultimately, Mrinal Sen's cinema is less about moral resolution and more about the uncomfortable questions that remain unanswered. His ethical realism resists closure and calls for sustained introspection. In revealing the performative nature of middle-class virtue, Sen reorients the cinematic gaze—from spectacle to subtlety, from judgment to interrogation.

Conclusion

Identifying a crisis is the first step toward its resolution. In society, the struggles of the upper and lower classes are often starkly visible and, in many cases, solutions to their problems appear relatively direct. However, the crises of the middle class are far more ambiguous—neither clearly articulated nor easily resolvable. This class is plagued by a constant internal conflict, oscillating between aspiration and limitation, modernity and tradition, freedom and social conformity. Such ambivalence gives rise to a state of chronic indecision, which becomes a defining characteristic of the middle-class psyche.

In the films of Mrinal Sen, this existential dilemma is poignantly portrayed through the fractured relationships, trust deficits, and moral uncertainties that haunt middle-class families. His cinematic narrative refuses to offer comforting illusions. Instead, he compels the audience to confront uncomfortable truths. Sen's approach was not to romanticize or mystify everyday life, but to expose its contradictions and unresolved tensions. His realism was not of the passive, observational kind, but one that actively dissected the sociopolitical undercurrents of urban, middle-class existence in post-independence India.

As Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen note in *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, Mrinal Sen's work is part of a radical tradition that critiques the social order by "foregrounding structures of class, gender, and ideology" (Rajadhyaksha & Willemen, 1999, p. 314). Films like *Ek Din Pratidin* (1979) and *Kharij* (1982) exemplify this critical gaze. In *Ek Din Pratidin*, the disappearance of a working woman from a middle-class family triggers a crisis that exposes latent patriarchal biases and the fragility of moral posturing. Similarly, in *Kharij*, the accidental death of a servant boy in a middle-class household unravels the complacency and quiet cruelty

embedded in class privilege. These films are not merely stories; they are cinematic case studies of societal contradictions.

Sen believed that in a world divided by class and economic disparities, sweet tales of romantic love risk leading the viewer into false consciousness. As he once said, "Cinema must disturb. It must provoke thought, not pacify" (Sen, 2002). He was not interested in escapism. His realism was sharp-edged, critical, and ideologically charged. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Sen did not use cinema as a medium of comfort but as a tool for ideological confrontation. His commitment to Marxist humanism and Brechtian aesthetics enabled him to use cinema as a form of social inquiry.

Thus, in the context of South Asian cinema, Mrinal Sen emerges as one of the most courageous and candid filmmakers. His unflinching critique of the middle class—its hypocrisies, moral dilemmas, and internal dissonances—set him apart as a filmmaker who refused to pander to either popular sentiment or elite ideologies. He dissected the Indian middle class with surgical precision, refusing to let his audience settle into comfort. As the Indian subcontinent continues to wrestle with old hierarchies and new anxieties, Sen's cinema remains profoundly relevant—serving both as a mirror and a warning.

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Cinema Between the Surgeon and the Observer: Benjamin, Bazin, and Hitchcock's *Psycho*

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I

Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" conceptualized a curious comparison between the painter and the cinematographer. When Benjamin wrote this essay in late 1935, the new visual medium of cinema was often compared to the existing visual medium of painting. Many writers, now recognized as early film theorists[1], explored the new medium of the twentieth century, as cinema presented a grand spectacle hitherto unimaginable in any visual form (with sound joining later). Among them was André Bazin, whose "Ontology of the Photographic Image" remains a quintessential text in early film theory. In this essay, like Benjamin, Bazin reflected extensively on the roles of the painter and the camera operator. This essay was published in 1945 – exactly a decade after Benjamin's essay, though this decade proved to be one of the most dramatic periods in the history of Western civilization. Hitler's rise to power had already occurred in 1933, so Benjamin wrote his essay while in exile in France. The Second World War began in September 1939 with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland; Benjamin committed suicide on the French-Spanish border following a failed escape on September 26th, 1940; and the war ended in another September in 1945 with Japan's surrender. Thus,

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[1] Béla Balázs, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein – to name the most famous ones.

these two essays were written at two crucial points in history – the former following the rise of Fascism in Europe, and the latter on the brink of massive destruction's end and Fascism's defeat.

In this paper, following the remarks on painting and cinema, I shall try to read these two essays together. I shall try to critically explore the differences in these two essays – how, following the same comparison between these two mediums, the authors formulated different conclusions. By doing so, I shall try to read a particular sequence from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)*,* made much later than this historical point, which, neither of the authors have seen.

II

In Section XIV of his essay, Benjamin compared the conditions of a film set to those of a theatre performance. He discussed an ideal spectatorial position that closely resembles the concept of the vanishing point in perspective painting — the point where the spectator must be positioned to achieve the perfect illusion of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional canvas. Erwin Panofsky (1991) defined the vanishing point in his famous book *Perspective as Symbolic form*, "First, all perpendiculars or "orthogonals" meet at the so-called central vanishing point, which is determined by the perpendicular drawn from the eye to the picture plane" (28) This principle is applied not only to painting, but to the most of the visual arts of the modern age in the western world. Before seriously challenged by the experiments of the artists of twentieth century (cubists, for example), this principle was the central one in the entire oeuvre of western painting.

Benjamin defined the same point in terms of theatre in the following terms: "In principle, the theater includes a position from which the action on the stage cannot easily be detected as an illusion." (35) This is the so-called vanishing point in theatre, from which the entire action appears most realistic, just as a perspective painting resembles reality when viewed from its vanishing point. But Benjamin wanted to contrast this with the situation of a film set. Curiously, he did not mention the finished film yet at this point. He argued that in a film set filled with camera, lights and other necessary equipment it is impossible to achieve something like the vanishing point, unless, "the alignment of the spectator's pupil coincided with that of the camera" (34-35). Therefore, film, by nature of its dependence on the mechanical production, can never be termed with classical arts. Instead, to achieve the illusion of reality, one has to depend on the instruments – there is no way instruments can be detached from the surface of the (filmic) real. To quote from his own words,

> In the film studio the apparatus has penetrated so deeply into reality that a pure view of that reality, free of the foreign body of equipment, is the result of a special procedure – namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted photographic device. (35)

At this point, it is important to note that here Benjamin is thinking about the existence of reality in a film set, i.e., a reality which, at least theoretically, can be in existence beyond the instruments. One can fundamentally argue about this point, since reality in cinema can be discussing in terms of its finished product, not just the reality which is there before the shooting. It is termed as pro-filmic, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication, which is "everything placed in front of the camera that is then captured on

film and so constitutes the film image"[2]. Therefore, Benjamin argues that it is practically "superficial" and "irrelevant" (35) to discuss the question of pro-filmic reality without emphasizing the role of the instruments involved. While talking about Bazin, I shall come back to this point extensively.

Then Benjamin highlighted the role of editing to create the illusion – "the illusory nature of film is of the second degree; it is the result of editing". Here, one can read the influence of soviet film makers and theorists – Eisenstein or Pudovkin, who emphasized the role of montage as the main source of filmic signification. Although these two filmmakers debated on the role of montage as collision or linkage (Eisenstein 1949, 37-38); both of them agreed that in cinema, meaning is created through joining the bits and parts of images *after* filming. In other words, the cinematic apparatus (as this word would be used by later film theorists[3]) depends on editing while creating meaning, not on the existence of the pro-filmic reality.

After this, Benjamin used a fascinating metaphor to willfully complicate (or, one might say, making it rather inscrutable) the entire situation. He compared the camera operator working on the (pro-filmic) reality as the surgeon works on a patient's body. In his schema, "magician is to surgeon as painter is to cinematographer" (35); because, unlike the cinematographer, painters do not use mechanical instruments to work on the reality;

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[2]
https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-2160

[3] Jean-Louis Baudry published "Ideological Effects of Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" in 1970. This is the most influential essay which borrowed Louis Althusser's concept of apparatus and applied it to the instruments used for filmmaking. Peter Wollen, Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey – all of their early works reside within this broader domain.

therefore, she maintains a safe distance from the real while working on it. For Benjamin, thus painter can be compared to the magician on work, because "the magician maintains the natural distance between himself and the person treated" (35). How these two approaches are different? Let us read from his own word –

> The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The attitude of the magician, who heals a sick person by a laying-on of hands, differs from that of the surgeon, who makes an intervention in the patient. The magician maintains the natural distance between himself and the person treated; more precisely, he reduces it slightly by laying on his hands, but increases it greatly by his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse: he greatly diminishes the distance from the patient by penetrating the patient's body and increases it only slightly by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short: unlike the magician, the surgeon abstains at the decisive moment from confronting his patient person to person; instead, he penetrates the patient by operating. (35)

Several points can be raised on this comparison. First, the question of distance – for Benjamin, the cinematographer (or, if we should say, the filmmaker in general) diminishes the distance between the pro-filmic real and the apparatus which a painter naturally maintains. Second, the metaphor of *penetration* – capturing reality through camera is an act of penetrating the reality. After a few sentences, Benjamin wrote "the painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue" (35). Third, the question of construction – though painting is also a (re)construction of reality, cinema uses *mechanical means* to (re)construct it – therefore, in this schema, these two are fundamentally different. Benjamin argued, "The images obtained by each differ enormously. The painter's is a total image, whereas that of the cinematographer is piecemeal,

its manifold parts being assembled according to a new law" (35). The new law is montage, as we mentioned earlier. But this concept of totality is a curious one – since it assumes a different kind of construction in terms of the fragmented nature of cinematographer's work. Finally, Benjamin concluded that this construction functioned as a liberating potential for the masses of the twentieth century — a point I shall not elaborate on for the purpose of this paper. Instead, having this framework in mind, I shall turn to Andre Bazin's thoughts about the same.

III

The question of pro-filmic and the reality was equally important for Andre Bazin. While writing in 1940s, his primary point of reference was the contemporary cinema; and unlike Benjamin, he did not treat cinema as a homogenous entity. We have already seen that Benjamin emphasized the presence of mechanical instruments in cinema, that is to say, in *all kinds of cinema*. Bazin looked at the medium more closely – he had a distinction in mind while talking about *different kinds of cinema* produced till then. This is the time where sound cinema already became the central point of discussion, most people took sound as the primary marker of difference. Instead of dividing the medium into silent and sound; Bazin took up a different schema. In his essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema*",* Bazin (1967) identified two distinct stylistic trends in the history of cinema up to that point. He claimed this as his 'working hypothesis', "I will distinguish, in the cinema between 1920 and 1940, between those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality". (24) Although 'faith' is a bit convoluted term, given its translation from the original

French; Bazin's claims can be understandable putting the surrounding films and its makers in context. Before going to the "Ontology" essay, I want to dwell on this a little bit.

As mentioned earlier, in "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema", Bazin was particularly tackling with the problem of the coming of sound around the late 1920s. There was one strand of argument which claims that sound gave birth to a totally new kind of cinema. Bazin acknowledged this argument, but put a question mark to this claim. "In other words, did the years from 1928 to 1930 actually witness the birth of a new cinema?" (23). His answer focused mostly on editing, although he did not fully support the claim – "Certainly, as regards editing, history does not actually show as wide a breach as might be expected between the silent and the sound film" (23). But his major intervention was the next claim which, I want to quote at length

> On the contrary there is discernible evidence of a close relationship between certain directors of 1925 and 1935 and especially of the 1940's through the 1950's. Compare for example Erich von Stroheim and Jean Renoir or Orson Welles, or again Carl Theodore Dreyer and Robert Bresson. These more or less clear-cut affinities demonstrate first of all that the gap separating the 1920's and the 1930's can be bridged, and secondly that certain cinematic values actually carry over from the silent to the sound film and, above all, *that it is less a matter of setting silence over against sound that of contrasting certain families of styles, certain basically different concepts of cinematographic expression.* (23-24, emphasis added)

The "certain families of styles" – that was the expression I want to highlight. For Bazin, one of the stylistic family had that "faith in image", another had the "faith in reality". Bazin distinguished these two by the basis of the fact that the former relied more on the

plasticity of the image, i.e., making the image more evocative and layered through different means of cinematographic artifice. On the contrary, there are certain stylistic tendencies where the pro-filmic became more important – those filmmakers used techniques to enhance the existence of reality in front of the camera.

One might argue, here Bazin's point is more nuanced than Benjamin's. He is talking about different ways to deal with the pro-filmic through the apparatus, where Benjamin argued about the penetration of the pro-filmic through the apparatus. But, having said that, Bazin was more interested in those kinds of cinema where the apparatus prefers to maintain a distance (using Benjamin's term, but which he used for painting). To elaborate this point, I want to briefly invoke Bazin's reading of the short film *Le Ballon Rouge* in his article "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage". While describing the film, he wrote, "the important thing about it is that this story owes everything to the cinema precisely because, essentially, it owes it nothing" (46). Although, it seems a bit paradoxical by the first glance, but one can decipher the double take on the word 'cinema' – Bazin is advocating *a type of* cinema which can be made possible without the apparent intrusion of the *devices* and *techniques* of cinema (in other words, the apparatus of cinema). These devices and techniques, for him, works as a suggestion (as he claimed while discussing Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*) over the actual reality. He prefers a cinematic style that minimizes these techniques, allowing reality to emerge through the image.

This thought of having a cinematic style which prefers a distance from the pro-filmic is something which goes counter to Benjamin's argument. Here, as Benjamin proposed a penetrative gesture of the mechanical instrument (camera) as a fundamental existence of

cinema as a medium, Bazin is not ready to accept the presence of camera in this way. For him, one can use the machines in a certain way, which would maintain the distance to allow the reality to emerge in itself. Instead of penetration, here the machines constitute the real. Having this in mind, we might look at his argument in the essay "Ontology of the Photographic Image".

In a sweeping overview spanning from Egyptian mummies to the portrait of Louis XIV, Bazin (2022) traced the evolution of visual arts as a pursuit of greater realism. He termed it as the "resemblance complex" (10) and argued that it managed to be manifested itself through the discovery of perspective system.

> The decisive event was the invention of the first scientific and, in a sense, already mechanical system: perspective. Perspective made it possible for artists to create the illusion of three-dimensional space in which objects could be placed the way they would it we perceived them directly. (10)

Now, again Bazin argued about two distinct tendencies in painting. Once artists achieved the means to create the illusion of depth and reality on canvas, one tendency focused on expressing spiritual reality, conveying the artist's inner quest, while the other aimed to replicate the external world as accurately as possible. Bazin named the former as aesthetic, and the later, psychological. Then, again in a provocative manner, he argued that due to the perspective system, the desire to replicate the external world, i.e., the psychological tendency, eventually overshadowed the pursuit of aesthetic one. In two successive sentences, though bridging two different paragraphs, he wrote – "Perspective was painting's original sin. / Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Lumière were its redeemers". (11)

But how the problem of this psychological desire towards greater realism was solved by the invention of camera? The fact that the camera can reproduce the outside world in a fraction of a second was not considered artistic by most people. But Bazin found a unique potentiality through this act of mechanical reproduction. For him, painting is always a human process, whereas photography, by its very nature, is a collaboration between human and the machine. He championed photography for the relative absence of the human intervention within the frame chosen by the photographer. He argued that painting always depends on the human subjectivity – however realistic the painter might be. But, besides choosing the frame and pulling the shutter, a photographer cannot control the inside of a photographed image[4].

To quote Bazin,

> For the first time, the only thing to come between an object and its representation is another object. For the first time, an image of the outside world takes shape automatically, without creative human intervention, in accordance with a strict determinism. The photographer's personality is at work only in the selection, orientation and pedagogy of the phenomenon: as evident as this personality may be in the final product, it is not present in the same way as that of a painter. All art it founded on human agency; photography alone draws its effectiveness from an absence of such agency. A photograph acts upon as a *natural* phenomenon, like a flower or snowflake whose beauty is inseparable from its vegetal or earthly origin. (12, emphasis original)

Therefore, the act of mechanical reproduction is celebrated by Bazin as something which creates the possibility of being faithful to the real. According to Bazin, using a camera

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[4] Needless to say, here we are talking about analogue photography. This point is severely challenged through the invention of digital editing softwire applications like Photoshop.

allows one to capture the outside world without intervening or, if I may say, *penetrating* the fabric of that reality.

IV

Now, we have reached the fundamental difference between these two thinkers. André Bazin argues for a distant relationship with reality through the mechanical instrument, while Benjamin emphasizes penetrating that reality using the same mechanical instrument. For Bazin, using montage or editing to alter the meaning of an image captured in a single shot is one way to modify the effect of that reality, a technique largely employed by Soviet filmmakers. Here, the sense of meaning is not inherently contained within the image; rather, it is derived exclusively from its juxtaposition with other images. While Bazin would not advocate for this technique in cinema, Benjamin argued that editing is the fundamental element of cinematic expression.

The question is, how to bridge the gap? Film theory, as it evolved later in the second half of the twentieth century, did not take Benjamin and Bazin together to answer this question. This is a paradox which the discipline of film studies did not pay much attention, because after 1960s, the entire ontological argument was considered naïve by scholars. One of them, Colin MacCabe (2010), later wrote, "for many in the '70s, Bazin was read not through the cinema but through the nets of Parisian theory. When I first wrote about Bazin, in *Screen* in the summer of 1974, I treated him as a theoretically naïve empiricist, a kind of idiot of the family' (66). Bazin's conception of mechanical image staying at a distant is an intriguing one, since it does not subsume itself within the structuralist question of

signification. On the other hand, Benjamin's metaphor of surgeon and penetration is also not explored much, although it is an important conception of theorizing moving image.

In this paper, I am not claiming to fill out the gap – because that's too ambitious a project to contain within one single term paper. Instead, I shall focus to a concrete piece of film – famous in its own right – to think through the framework we established so far.

V

When Alfred Hitchcock made *Psycho* in 1960, none of these two thinkers was alive. In many ways, *Psycho* can be read as inciting the most important questions of the film studies in the following decades[5] - the questions of voyeurism, gaze, pleasure etc. This film was a popular and critical phenomenon in 1960, its famous shower scene is sometimes compared to the Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). This film holds a series of firsts — never before had a Hollywood film portrayed its heroine killed within the first 40 minutes, never before had American cinema shown a close-up of a flushing commode, and never before had a Hollywood film used 78 different camera setups and 52 cuts to capture just 45 seconds of screen time. And, of course, last but not least, never before had an American audience witnessed someone brutally killed in one of life's most vulnerable moments — naked in the shower.

I want to focus on that sequence, when Marion Crane (played by Janet Leigh) was slashed in the shower by Norman Bates (played by Anthony Perkins). Within our framework, I chose this sequence not for its cult status in cinephile or academic circles, but because it

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[5] This point is also hinted by David Thomson in his book *The Moment of Psycho.*

strikingly illustrates Benjamin's metaphor of penetration in a literal sense. As mentioned earlier, Benjamin likened the mechanical instrument of the camera to a surgeon penetrating the fabric of reality, much like a scalpel on a patient's body. In this particular sequence, a character within the film's reality is murdered with a knife that penetrates both the character's body and the reality itself. But what should we make of this?

I want to take a look at the sequence just preceded by this shower scene. Marion Crane and Norman bates had their supper in the office room in the Bates Motel, they had a conversation which gradually became tensed and uncomfortable. Marion went on to her room adjacent to the office. We now stay with Norman; his expression and body language clearly suggest an intention to do something immoral. He hesitates a bit, looks at the signature (which Marion signed by faking her name) at the hotel register and then looked at a particular painting at the wall (fig. 1)

Fig. 1

This is a curious painting which camera shows in close-up for a fraction of a second. It was panted by the Dutch artist Frans van Mieris, the Elder, and it is called "Suzanne et lei veillards". This was part of a series of paintings depicting a fully frontal nude woman portrayed as being groped and about to be raped by two old men. This reference of non-consensual sexual transgression becomes clear to us within seconds, because, Norman takes off the picture and looks through a hole (Fig. 2 & 3). With this in mind, the word "penetration" acquires an additional layer of meaning.
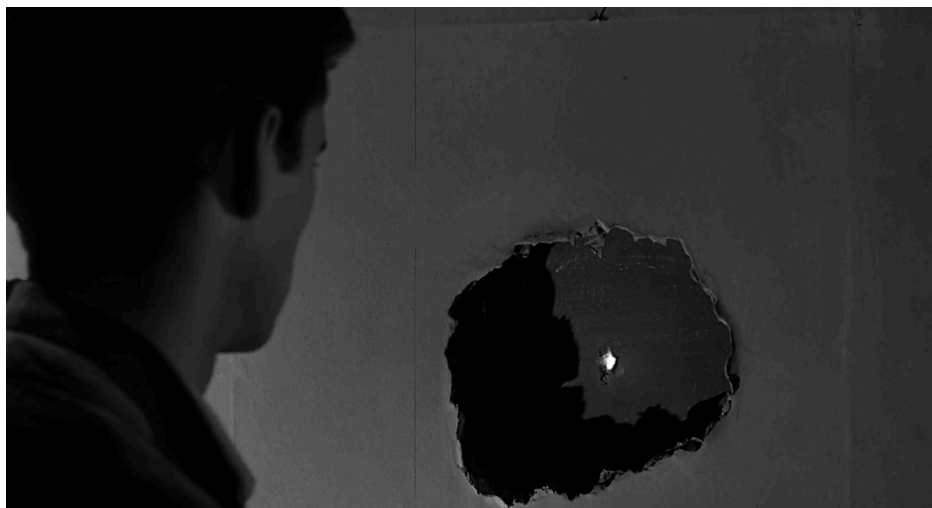
Fig. 2
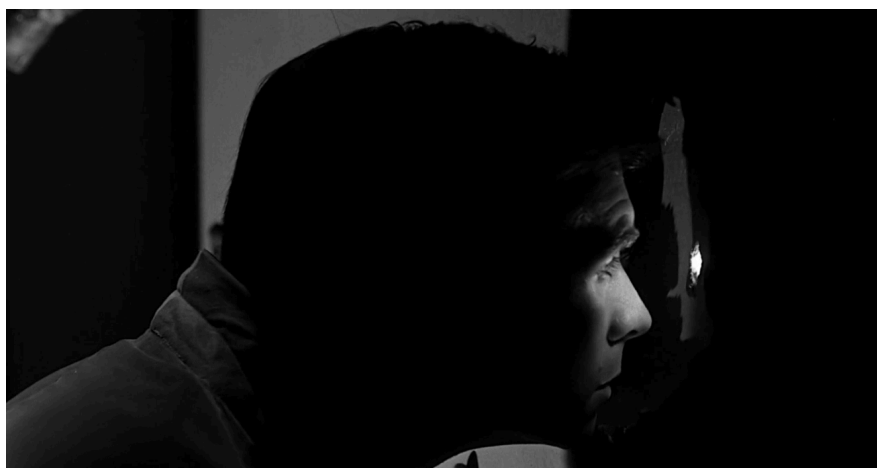
Fig. 3

This particular frame highlights the act of voyeur – we can connect it to the first shot of the film where the camera travels the city and gets inside the hotel room with two people in their private moment. Here, we need to focus on the camera angle as well – up until now the camera shows Norman from a (supposedly) neutral point – the viewer still watches Norman doing something. But now that thin boundary will be crossed, the camera (and we) would see what the character looks at. (fig. 4)

Fig. 4

This subjective shot — the act of aligning the viewer's point of view with the camera's perspective — is crucial here. From this perspective, the subsequent shower murder is not committed solely by a character but also by the camera itself, which takes pleasure in observing the characters like a voyeur. Hitchcock purposefully invites us (and the camera) to join the crime.

The reference of penetration and active participation is something which echoes the words of Benjamin as we discussed in the opening section of this paper. In the shower scene, camera started becoming fused with the knife (like the scalpel used by surgeons), and it penetrates the characters' body. I want to cite a couple of frame enlargements where it seems that camera takes the POV of the knife itself[6]. (Fig 5 – 8)

Fig. 5

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[6] One can bring in the theorization of gaze here, following Lacan or Zizek. But I am not going into that direction here in this paper.

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

But, this is one aspect of this sequence. I want to argue that to understand its significance and the lasting effects on the viewers, Bazin's description of 'photography as a natural phenomenon' is equally important. As mentioned earlier in the paper, Bazin wrote about the presence of a machine between the reality and its image – and it is precisely this fact which becomes responsible of photographed image's credibility. According to Bazin, no matter how distorted or out of focus the image is, "it has been created out of the ontology of the model. It is the model". (13).

I want to argue that in *Psycho*, the filmmakers exploited this indexical quality of the photographed image (Bazin[7]) along with the penetrative aspect (Benjamin), to create the intended shock. On a first glance, 'penetration' and 'editing' seem to be the only important case here – but the fact of having the sequences imprinted within photographed image, not in other medium (say, novel, for example) is key to understand its lasting shocking value. One

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[7] Although Bazin never used the term, this word was not used very frequently before the structuralist intervention in humanities academia.

can cite numerous examples when people got shocked watching the film for the first time[8] – and these would have been impossible without the presence of this cinematic medium with its twofold manifestation of the qualities described by Benjamin and Bazin.

To conclude, I want to argue that these two aspects of moving images – penetrating the real and keeping a distance to make it ontologically connected to the real – actually complements each other. This shower sequence can be taken as one example, but any sequence from any film can be analyzed following the framework, and one needs to think this through to create the bridge between these two thinkers.

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[8] Hitchcock and Dick Cavett discussed instances of people getting afraid to take shower after watching this film. I talked with James Lastra while he screened the film for one of our courses in Cinema Studies department. He mentioned that his mother did not take shower for at least a week after watching the film in 1960. These types of anecdotes can be found in books also, such as, *Psycho in the Shower,* written by Philip J. Skerry, *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: A Casebook,* edited by Robert Kolker.

A Comprehensive Analysis of Sarasvatī Kṛtis by Prof. R. Visweswaran

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1. Introduction

> "Ambitamē   nadītamē dēvi tamē Sarasvatī
> Apraśatā iva smasi praśastimamba naskṛdhi"

O Dēvī Sarasvatī! The greatest among the Mothers, the most divine among the Goddesses, Grace us with the highest knowledge. May your blessings of wisdom confer the supreme accolades. **(Ṛgvēda 102)**

The Ṛgvēda makes at least seventy references to the river Sarasvatī. The Sapta Sindhu is mentioned in the Vēdas, especially the River Sarasvatī, which indicates that this divine river of knowledge occupied an unequalled place in the ancient civilisation of India. The Sapta Sindhu was referred to as 'Hapta Hendu' by the Persians. **(Grenet 34)** The people of this region were called Sapta Saindhavas. In the nadi stuti sūkta of Ṛgvēda, we find the following 10 rivers: Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Sutudri, Paruśni, Asikni, Marudvrdha, Vitasta, Arjikiya, Susoma. The Shutudri was Sutlej, Paruśni was Ravi, Asikni was Chenab and Vitasta was Jhelum. The 5 rivers, Sutudri, Paruśni, Asikni, Vitasta, and Vipas, were all tributaries of the Sindhu River. Together with Sarasawti and Sindhu, these 5 rivers constituted the Sapta Sindhu. **(Which Were the 7 Rivers)** Though the river Sarasvatī has been a myth for many, satellite imagery analysed by Yash Pal and others clearly shows that a river system with a very wide basin right up to the Rann of Kutch did exist. In his essay 'Saraswati and Her Consorts' from 'On the Veda', Sri Aurobindo says, "The psychological significance of Sarasvatī carries with it a psychological significance of the whole symbol of Vedic waters". **(Aurobindo 107)**

With due course of time, Sarasvatī is worshipped as the river of consciousness and enlightenment whose rays dispel the darkness of ignorance. The current case study deals with the compositions on Goddess Sarasvatī composed by Saṅgīta Chūḍāmaṇi Prof. R. Visweswaran. In the contemporary parlance, Goddess Sarasvatī, who once existed as a river and nourished the human civilisation, has now remained immortal in the hearts of millions of artists, nourishing the belief in absolute truth. In this case study, an in-depth analysis of the Sarasvatī stutis composed by Prof. R. Visweswaran is conducted to bring forth the intricacies of rāgas and talas employed along with their lyrical beauty. The group kṛtis on Goddess Sarasvatī is a set of 11 kṛtis, composed in rāgas ranging from mēla, audava, vakra, rakti and Hindustānī rāga. The compositions are beautifully woven with apt rāga mudras, svarākśaras, chitte svaras, madhyamakāla sāhityas and scholarly usage of Saṁskṛta and Telugu languages. A detailed description of the kṛtis and their investigation in order to understand the musical vitality is undertaken in the present study. The above-mentioned kṛtis on Goddess Sarasvatī

draw us back to the ancient period in Indian scriptures with their special mention of the following usage of Sanskrit lyrics. A few kṛtis have been taken for illustration in the current case study

2. Literature Review

The scholarly foundation for Sarasvatī studies rests primarily on Dr. K.S. Narayana Charya's *Veda Samskṛtiya Parichaya,* which establishes the Vedic understanding of Sarasvatī's significance in ancient Indian civilisation (Narayana Charya 93-94, 482-490). Sri Aurobindo's *On the Veda* provides a crucial interpretation of Sarasvatī's "psychological significance of the whole symbol of Vedic waters," offering a hermeneutical framework for understanding devotional compositions **(Aurobindo 107)**.

In Carnatic musicology, Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy's *Rāgas in Carnatic Music* offers systematic rāga classification essential for analysing contemporary devotional compositions. Prof. R. Visweswaran's *Vaggeya Vishweshwari* serves as primary source material, documenting his compositional methodology and the philosophical foundations of his Sarasvatī compositions, including his account of rāga innovations like Antara Kaiśikī **(Visweswaran 379, 395)**.

Contemporary interdisciplinary research, including Tara Rajendran's study of anatomical analogies between the human body and Sarasvatī Vīṇa, demonstrates expanding analytical approaches to traditional symbolic understanding. These works collectively establish the theoretical foundation for examining how modern composers continue the ancient tradition of honouring Sarasvatī through musical composition.

3. Methodology

This study employs systematic musicological analysis to examine eleven Sarasvatī kṛtis composed by Prof. R. Visweswaran. The methodology integrates traditional Carnatic music analytical techniques with textual analysis to understand both musical craftsmanship and devotional content.

3.1 Analytical Framework

The research examines each composition across three dimensions: **musical structure** (rāga analysis, tāḷa employment, and melodic architecture including rāga mudrās, svarākṣarās, and chiṭṭe svarās), **textual analysis** (Sanskrit and Telugu lyrical content, literary devices, and philosophical concepts), and **cultural contextualization** (connections to Vedic traditions and contemporary practice).

3.2 Selection and Scope

The study focuses on representative compositions from Prof. Visweswaran's complete eleven-kṛti cycle, selecting works that demonstrate diverse rāga treatments (mēḷa, auḍava, vakra, rakti, and Hindustānī classifications) and varied textual approaches. This selective analysis allows detailed examination while maintaining a comprehensive understanding of the compositional cycle's artistic unity.

4. Objectives
- To critically examine the musical architecture and stylistic nuances embedded in the Sarasvatī kṛtis composed by Prof. R. Visweswaran
- To undertake a rigorous textual analysis of Vedic and post-Vedic scriptures that invoke or conceptualise Goddess Sarasvatī

5. Musical and Lyrical Analysis of select kṛtis

The kṛtis "Svadhamēkrita" and "Jagadrakṣiṇi" in rāgas Hindōḷa and Amṛtavarṣiṇī, respectively, speak of Vīṇa held by the Divine mother. In the Hindōḷa kṛti, the line "Sarasa kacchapi vinādi nādaṁśuke" speaks of the kacchapī vīṇa that is in the shape of a tortoise. In the ancient sculptures of Indian tradition, such a portrayal of the vīṇa was very much prevalent. The Amaravathi school of sculpture showcases similar artwork. (Visweswaran 395) Vīṇa is considered to be the divine instrument. The Vīṇa held by Goddess Sarasvatī is called Kacchapi. The mention of kacchapi Vīṇa is seen in Lalitā sahasranāma in the line "Nija sallāpa mādhurya vinirbharsita Kacchapi".The cosmic vāk in Goddess Lalitā Paramēśvari overpowered the divine sound of Kacchappi held by Goddess Sarasvatī. There is an instance which explains the above Saṁskṛta verse, wherein Goddess Sarasvatī felt it appropriate to remain silent without playing the kacchappi Vīṇa in order to contemplate on Goddess Lalitā's ethereal voice. The following line in the kṛti Jagadrakṣiṇi "Vipañci vādana samaye tvannakha kiraṇa nindita" (the lustre of the finger nails of the Goddess that play the Vipañci vīṇa over shadows the rays of the Sun) in the rāga Amṛtavarṣiṇī, unveils the composer's subtle experiences with the Divine mother and his admiration for the Divine just as a child adores its mother. The mention of Vipañci Vīṇa is also mentioned in the Soundarya Lahari of Jagadguru Shankaracharya in the verse, "Vipañcyā gāyantyā Vividham apadanam paśupate". **(Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, Shloka 66)** In this kṛti, the composer articulates that the Vīṇa held by Goddess Sarasvatī is a symbolic representation of Advaita Philosophy. This thought has been earlier supported by an Advaita follower. Yedatore Subramanya Sharma. The two Kannada books, namely 'Sandhyā vandanīya tatvārtha' and 'Vēda Prakāśike', authored by Yedatore Subramanya Sharma, published in 1936, seem to be one of the earliest literary works which give an impressive description of Vīṇa and its resemblance to the human body. The anatomical similarity between the whole spine sagittal Computerised Tomography (CT) image and the sagittal view of Sarasvatī Vīṇa is enigmatical**. (Rajendran)** It is thought-provoking, especially with the 24 human presacral vertebrae size and the inter-fret distance towards the dragon head of the Vīṇa. There is something peculiar about the 24 frets of Sarasvatī Vīṇa. The inter-fret distance increases towards the dragon's head. There exists a curve at both the sacrococcyx and the dragonhead of the instrument. The Vīṇa strings that run parallel over the fretboard are close to how the spinal cord is enclosed within the vertebral column. This might be a fascinating avenue to explore in the future. **(Rajendran)** This is definitely a study to be undertaken for further clarity on the subject. The Vīṇa serves as a reminder to tune one's heart and mind to live in harmony with others in the world.

Another interesting feature of the Hindōḷa kṛti 'Svadhāmīkṛta' is its employment of Atīta graha to the entire kṛti, the pattern of tala commencement after a few notes of music. The kṛti also speaks of the Sārasvata Tradition. This tradition is believed to have been followed by people who inhabited the northwestern part of India, the region between the Sarasvatī River and the Driśadvati River, thousands of years ago. There are a number of references given

about the Sārasvat clan in works like Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Sahyadri Kāṇḍa of Skanda Purāṇa and in the great epic Mahābhārata. The version given in the Mahābhārata emphasises how the Sārasvat community, consisting of 60000 people, learnt Vēdas from one surviving Vedic preceptor of that period, Maharṣi Saraswat (Son of Maharṣi Dadhīci). This probably gave rise to the Sārasvat Tradition or the Vedic Tradition on the banks of the River Sarasvatī, who actually groomed Sarasvat Maharṣi. **(Our History)** The last line of the caraṇa refers to the slaying of the demon Dhūmralōcana. This makes one recall the verses of Lalitā Sahasranāma and Durga saptaśati from Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa and Mārkandēya Purāṇa, respectively.

The Kṛti "Namōstute Sarasvatī samasta vāgadhīśvari" in rāga vāgadhīśvari is the first one according to the composer in the bunch of these kṛtis. The word vāgadhīśvari serves as the rāga mudra, and it is also suggestive of the higher faculties of speech, the Para, Paśyanti, Madhyama and Vaikhari. The composer describes her as samasta vāgadhīśvari – the one who is the cause of the speech, in the entire world. The para, paśyanti, madhyama and vaikhari are the four sequential faculties of vāk through which we communicate. Vaikhari is the verbally expressed thought through the mouth. For example, the daily spoken language. This resides in the mouth. Madhyama is the speech that comes after considerable thought and action done wisely. This resides in the mind and intellect. The language spoken from the heart is the paśyanti. This resides in the heart. The ancient sages, through their yogic powers, used to communicate through the heart. Para is the highest and the supreme. It is the highest eternal sound. This can be heard or realised only in the state of 'no mind'. This originates in the first chakra of the human body, the mūlādhāra cakra. In the normal course of our daily lives, we experience only the vaikhari. **(Svododa)** The other three are hidden inside our body, and it is experienced by only self-realised souls. The ancient sages who formulated the divine hymns of Ṛgvēda attained this supernatural power of higher faculties of speech on the banks of the river Sarasvatī. That justifies why Indians look up to Goddess Sarasvatī as a river of knowledge.

The viḷamba kāla kṛti in rāga Kīravāṇi 'Kīravāṇi Gīrvāṇi' describes Goddess Sarasvatī as the bestower of non-dualistic knowledge to sincere spiritual seekers. "Paramadvaita tatva jnana prade", which means she, who is the parabrahma svarūpiṇi, confers on her true devotees the knowledge of "Tat tvam asi"- *Thou art that*. This is the slogan word of Chāndōgyopaniṣad of Sāmavēda, the Absolute truth preached by Uddālaka to his son Svētakētu. *'That'* refers to Brahman, and *'Thou'* refers to each individual soul. The composer has very beautifully fashioned this kṛti in a viḷamba gati, the profoundness of which subtly suggests how difficult it is to understand the absolute truth. It has to be assimilated by true seekers in an unhurried and tolerant manner(viḷamba gati). The structure of the composition gives ample scope for an artist of high calibre to perceive it into a Pallavi of the Rāgam Tānam Pallavi genre, the epitome of Manōdharma Sangīta in Karnāṭaka Classical Music.

The kṛti in rāga Antara Kaiśikī " Sarasvatīm Aham āśrayāmi" can be described as a fine fabric embroidered with meaningful usage of rāgamudra and yati. The Rāga Antara Kaiśikī is a Svarāntara rāgaḥ with 4 svaras in the ascent and descent of its scale. Along with the prakṛti svara sa and pa, it has antara gāndhāra and Kaiśikī nisāda employed to rightly suit the nomenclature "Antara Kaiśikī". The rāga mudra appears in the first line of the Anupallavi as "Bharatīm tām hṛdayāntara Kaiśikī prachōdinim". It explains that Goddess Sarasvatī is the inspiration behind our expression of the heart. A stellar representation of Śrōtōvāha yati can

be observed in the Pallavi section of the kṛti; the sahitya syllabus is arranged in such a manner that it resembles the flow of a river.

Sarasvatīm aham āśrayāmi vidyāpradām
Sarasvatīm aham āśrayāmi Kavitā vidyāpradām
Sarasvatīm aham āśrayāmi jñāna smṛti Pratibhā Kavitā vidyāpradām

The intriguing feature is whether the choice of Śrōtōvāha is coincidental or intentional by the composer! Śrōtōvāha suggests the flow of the river, and in this context, Goddess Sarasvatī is equated with the Sarasvatī River of Rig Vedic civilisation. The phrase Bhārata jñāna in the second line of Anupallavi suggests both the Sanātana Dharma of India and also Bhāva, Rāga, Tala (Bha, Ra, Ta), which is the heart of Indian music and dance. The composer also mentions in his work "Vaggeya Vishweshwari " that this Svarāntara rāgaḥ(4 svaras) – Antara Kaiśikī was the first rāga that was discovered by him during the 1950s. The composition of the above kṛti was in the 1970s, and later during the 1980s, Dr. Balamurali Krishna was credited as the discoverer of Rāga Mahati, which bore exactly the scale as of Antara Kaiśikī. **(Visweswaran 379)** He expresses how certain research-oriented explorations can be episodes of recurrence by different persons periodically!

The kṛti in the rāga Rasāḷi is another exclusive pearl in the garland of Sarasvatī kṛtis. The main characteristic feature that draws the attention of the listener to the kṛti is its usage of the word Bhārati. The composer has drawn inspiration from the Tyāgaraja kṛti 'Aparadhamulanōrva', which is probably the only known composition in this rāga. In order to delve into the depths of this rāga, a meticulous attempt has been made with the finest intricacies in the approach to rāga and also the Rhetorics. The composer has employed the yamaka alaṅkāra, an interesting figure of speech wherein a particular word is used with more than one meaning in different contexts.

P|| Bhāratīm Gāna Bhāratīm ||
AP || Bhāratīm karadhṛta pustakākṣa mālā Bhā ra tim ||

The word Bhārati is the Saṁskṛta name for one of the four styles of dramatic performance. The theatrical presentation, which is characterised by a preponderating use of speech (in Skt..) and in which male characters are exclusively to be employed, is said to be in the *Verbal Style*. **(Bharata Muni 401)** This is applicable mainly in the evocation of the Pathetic and the Marvellous Sentiments. In the present context, the first **Bhāratīm** refers to Goddess Sarasvatī, the second **Gāna Bhāratīm** refers to one who is proficient in music, the third **Prabhārati** refers to the delight(rati) experienced by Goddess seeing her own lusturous finger nails (**nakha prabha**) while playing the Vīṇa. The fourth Bhaa (shine brightly)– ra – ti (happy) means the reflection of her sparkling nails is seen in her quartz beads (sphaṭika akṣamālā) held in her fingers, making her look cheerful. Also, in the split of the word Bhārati, Bha means philosophy of the higher consciousness (Brahma tatva). Rati means the eternal bliss. Bhārati is the embodiment of supreme ecstasy.

Further on, in the same kṛti, in rāga Rasaḷi, the composer relates to Āhata and Anāhata nāda in the last two lines of madhyamakāla sāhitya. "Sunāda svarūpam Āhataanāhata prēraṇam". In the true journey of every music student, he or she encounters the terms Āhata nāda and Anāhata nāda. Āhata nada is the sound produced by the acoustics of friction, and heard by all. Anāhata nada pertains to the unstruck or the unbeaten sound, which is the cosmic sound. It is all-pervasive and omnipresent, audible only to yogic minds. However, both the sounds can be realised only with the will of the Providence.

The viḷamba kala kṛti **Gandharva vēda rūpiṇi** in Rāga Śuddha Kalyāṇ is a solid illustration of how music is transformed from Hindustānī Classical Style of music to Karnāṭaka Classical style. This kṛti is composed in the Dhrupad style. The intent of the Dhrupad style of singing was to introduce spirituality in the performer and create peace and contemplation both in the singer and the listener. It has its roots in Sāmavēda. It is often said that this kind of pensive music can be experienced and revered only if the spirit of Yakśas, Gandharvas and Yakshas is initiated in an individual. Yakśas, Kinnaras and Gandharvas are divine forces who are well versed in performing arts like dance, music and theatre. According to ancient Indian science, it is said that these spirits are custodians of certain skills, and they manifest in a true performer through right inspiration. The knowledge of music, dance and theatre is termed as Gandharva vēda or Pañcssama vēda. This is again an expression of the Divine Mother Sarasvatī. It is through her invocation that these skills can be nurtured and passed on to posterity. Prof. Visweswaran has composed this kṛti in a very impressive and erudite style, with ample scope for elaboration and reflecting the serenity of the mind required to comprehend the music of the soul.

6. Conclusion

From an overall perspective, the study and practice of the Sarasvatī group kṛtis composed by Sri. Prof. R. Visweswaran gives us an opportunity to recapture the Sanātana Dharma that was prevalent in India during the Vedic Sarasvatī civilisation. It is a path that is crucial to every individual towards personal growth and self-realisation. A cursory look into the other cultures of the world brings us back to the exact intent that Indian culture built its foundation thousands of years ago. Confucius in China stated, "Music is that which moves man from the internal. True literature is one which cultivates and refines an individual". Pythagoras in Greece observed that certain tunes can calm the mind and the soul. It is said that he preferred string instruments like a lyre, and this again is a hint towards the practice of Vīṇa, a stringed instrument which is our ancient Indian tradition. **(Pythagoras on Music)** Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and theologian of the 15th century, believed that he who knows music has a good nature, and he was strongly convinced that music should play a central part in children's education. **(Martin Luther and Church Music)** The diverse views of different philosophers of the world point to that eternal belief which Indians have always been inclined towards from time immemorial, and that is Sanatana Dharma, a universal, axiomatic law beyond the temporary belief system.

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The Psychological Background of Colour Symbolism in Sri Lankan Traditional Masks

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Introduction

Sri Lanka's Southern and Western regions host vibrant ritualistic traditions known as *ranga shaileen*, including the prominent healing rituals of Matara, Bentara, and Raigama (Kottegoda, *Pahatharata Shanthikarma* 25-30). These are divided into *Deva thovil* (divine), *Yak thovil* (spirit), and *Graha thovil* (planetary) forms, all relying on elaborate masks and performative elements. The *Kolam* folk theatre tradition, often performed alongside these rituals, provides valuable insights into the symbolic use of colour within ritual contexts. This paper explores the psychological and cultural symbolism embedded in ritual mask colours. Although numerous *shantikarma* are practised across the island, this study focuses on masks with significant psycho-cultural and semiotic relevance. Two theoretical lenses guide the analysis: colour psychology and semiotics. In colour psychology, hues elicit emotional and cognitive responses—red may signify aggression or vitality, while blue suggests calm or wisdom—responses shaped by both biology and culture. Semiotics offers a framework to interpret masks as cultural texts, where each colour and design acts as a signifier within Sri Lankan cosmology and ritual practice. Through visual analysis, symbolic interpretation, ethnographic accounts, and historical texts (Kottegoda, *Pahatharata Shanthikarma* 6-25), this study examines how colour in *thovil* masks communicates complex layers of meaning within ritual performance.

> **Red:** Often used in *Yak thovil* masks representing demonic or aggressive spirits, red is associated with energy, anger, and danger. It serves both to portray the volatile nature of the spirits and to provoke an emotional response from the audience, including fear and awe.

> **Black:** Symbolising death, mystery, or the unknown, black is frequently seen in *Graha thovil* masks that address planetary afflictions. Psychologically, black can create a sense of foreboding and gravity, appropriate for rituals aimed at appeasing cosmic forces.

> **Yellow and Gold:** These colours, frequently used in *Deva thovil* masks, signify divinity, prosperity, and light. Their brightness evokes feelings of hope, sanctity, and healing.

> **Blue and Green:** Blue often represents healing, calmness, and protection, while green is linked to fertility and growth. Their usage in masks can suggest the benevolence of certain spirits or deities.

Viewed through colour psychology, Sri Lankan ritual masks serve as tools for emotional regulation and transformation, not mere aesthetic objects. Their colours evoke responses from awe to catharsis. Semiotic analysis reveals masks as cultural texts; colours symbolise identity, power, and cosmological beliefs, such as red demon masks signifying disorder and the need for ritual control. This qualitative study combined ethnographic fieldwork, performance observation, interviews with mask artisans and performers, and a literature review. Masks were photographed and categorised by colour, character, and role, linking visual symbolism with psychological and narrative functions in *Deva thovil*, *Yak thovil*, *Graha thovil*, and *Kolam* traditions.

Methodology/Creative process

This research employed a qualitative approach, integrating ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and literature review. Over one month, *Shantikarma* rituals and *Kolam* dramas in Sri Lanka's Southern Province were observed. Ten experienced mask performers and artisans were interviewed over four months, focusing on their interpretations of mask colours, emotional experiences, and audience reactions. A review of anthropological literature provided cultural and psychological context. The creative process included photographing masks, analysing dominant colour themes, character types, and their psychological and narrative functions.

Symbolic Colour Coding in Sri Lankan Masks

Colour in Sri Lanka's traditional masks is deliberate, drawing from a symbolic palette that speaks to emotional resonance and social coding.

Colour Perception and Its Psychological and Cultural Implications

When considering colour, it becomes evident that colours have a significant impact on human emotions and can stimulate specific emotional responses. Colours act as psychological stimuli that influence emotional and cognitive states.

Psychological Effects of Colour

- Red increases heart rate and stimulation. It symbolises power, energy, anger, and vitality. (Birren 61-63)
- Blue has a calming effect on the mind. (Birren 75-77)
- Yellow elevates an individual's mood and promotes optimism. (Birren- 69-71)
- Green represents fertility and nature, signifying balance and growth. (Birren – 83-85)
- Black evokes fear or seriousness and can create a sense of mystery or gravity. (Birren -93-95)

Cognitive Perception of Colour

Colour plays a crucial role in perception, memory, and symbolic interpretation. In ritual contexts like *shantikarma*, masks are used as therapeutic tools to enhance mental well-being. Practitioners select mask colours deliberately to support the healing process (Bentarage, 08 January 2025). Beyond aesthetics, colour functions within a cultural semiotic system. In low-country ritual masks, colours act as signifiers of culturally embedded meanings, not mere decoration. These meanings have evolved historically and are conveyed through performance traditions and artistic conventions handed down over generations (Bentarage, 08 January 2025). Thus, colour bridges cognitive perception and cultural symbolism in these healing rituals.

Psychological and Semiotic Perspectives on the Use of Masks

Viewed through psychological and semiotic lenses, mask usage in Sri Lankan rituals reveals the interplay between cultural **sy**mbolism and universal psychological responses. The colour red, symbolising danger**,** power, tension, and vitality, heightens the dramatic impact of healing ceremonies *(shantikarma)*. Performers internalise these meanings; wearing a red demon mask often induces an aggressive demeanour and heightened emotional state, enhancing character portrayal and audience response. In *Shantikarma,* colour strategically manipulates spiritual energy and psychological states. Audiences rapidly interpret colour cues, facilitating immediate recognition of a character's role or morality. This dynamic enriches both narrative comprehension and emotional engagement.

Red colour Mask

The use of red in Sri Lankan *kolam* folk theatre is associated with demon characters and is also found in the demon exorcism ritual known as *Sanni Yakuma*. In these contexts, red symbolizes power, energy, anger, blood, and life force.(Olaboduwa 11 January 2025)

The Naga Raksha (Cobra Demon) Masks (Bentharage 15 and 28)

Figure 1 – Naga Raksha (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 30)   Figure 2- Naga Raksha (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 15)

This mask is featured in the southern Sri Lankan *kolam* folk theatre, particularly in the traditions of Ambalangoda, Olaboduwa, and Mirissa. It portrays a powerful demon character, and red is predominantly used in its design. The performance style emphasizes strength and dynamic energy, visually communicated through the red colour scheme. (Piris)

The Reeri Yaka (Blood Demon) Masks

Figure 3 – *Riri Yaka* (Bentharage, *Reeri Yak Sankalpaya* 1)

Figure 4 – Riri Yaka (Kottegoda, *Sampradaika Narthanaadum* 104)

The *Reeri Yaka* mask and its accompanying costume predominantly use red. The demon character represents illnesses related to blood. Through performance, it is implied that the afflicted person suffers from a blood-related disease, and the demon symbolises the cause. The ritual uses psychological intervention by creating awareness of the illness's source, while also symbolically neutralising the demon's influence. Here, the red colour enhances psychological

focus and intensifies emotional expression. It plays a central role in amplifying emotional arousal and cognitive attention, aiding both healing and dramatic effectiveness

Yellow-colour Masks

In healing rituals (*shantikarma*), the colour yellow is used to symbolise royal characters, divinity, prosperity, protection, power, and sanctity. It represents spiritual wisdom and divine protection. Artists believe that this colour evokes auspiciousness and blessings.
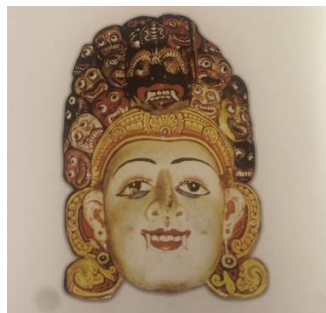
Deva Sanniya Masks

Figure 5 – *Deva Sanniya* (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 176)

Figure 6 – *Deva Sanniya*(Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 174)

Figure 7 - *Riri Yaka* (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 177)

In the widely practised *Sanni Yakuma* healing ritual in the Southern and Western provinces of Sri Lanka, there are sixteen primary demon ailments (*sanni*) and sixteen *pali* demons. Each is represented by a specific mask character. At the conclusion of the ritual, the *Deva Sanniya* appears. (Vidanagamage) Through a final dance, this divine figure bestows blessings, marking the completion of the healing ritual.

Salu Paliya Mask

Figure 8 – *Salu Paliya* (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 186)

Within the same ritual tradition, the *Salu Paliya* is a comedic and symbolic character, marked by the colour yellow. (Sadun) During the performance, he sings of the birth of the goddess Pattini and uses a white cloth (*saluwa*) as part of the healing narrative. (Sampath) The character uses humorous language to make the audience laugh, thereby contributing to the psychological well-being of both the patient and the audience.

Green-colour Masks

The colour green symbolises fertility, nature, healing, and rejuvenation. It is often used for characters who are compassionate or neutral in their moral alignment.

King and Queen Masks

Figure 9 – Maha Sammatha King (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 30)

Figure 10- Maha Sammatha Queen (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 15)

Before the commencement of performances in the *kolam maduwa* (kolam stage), the King and Queen enter the scene. Subsequently, various characters perform their acts before them. The purpose of these performances is to ease the Queen's emotional burden, which is believed to

stem from her unfulfilled maternal desire—known as *doladuka*—the longing to see, feed, and care for a child after giving birth. (Olaboduwa)

Blue-coloured Masks

According to traditional healing performers, blue symbolises calmness, wisdom, and mystical power. It is associated with characters that embody serenity and insight.

Gara yaka Mask

Figure 11- *Gara yaka* (Kottegoda, *Pahatharata Shanthikarma* 22)

Figure 12 – *Gara yaka* (Vigesuriya 41)

Gara Yaka, a divine protector, features in the now rare *Garamaduwa* ritual of Sri Lanka's Southern Province. Traditionally performed to safeguard fishing communities, the ritual concludes with the appearance of the Gara Yaka mask, which offers blessings and invokes

protection. (Jayantha) It is believed to purify the eyes and speech of both the patient and spectators. The ritual fosters communal well-being, aiming to enhance fishing yields and remove misfortunes, symbolising collective hopes for prosperity and **a**bundance.

Kalu Yaka Mask

Figure 13 – Kalu yaka (Kottegoda, *Sampradaika Narthanaadum* 104)

Figure 14 – Kalu yaka (Kottegoda, *Sampradaika Narthanaadum* 104)

Figure 15– Wadi Sanniya (Kottegoda, *Sampradaika Narthanaadum* 136)

In the *Sanni Yakuma* ritual, *Kalu Yaka* symbolises a demon believed to cause illness in women who consume impure or forbidden foods. Sinhalese tradition holds that oily foods require an offering or discarding portion to appease spirits; neglecting this invites illness. (Migama) The ritual features *Kalu Yaka* dramatically confronting the patient, then symbolically removing the illness before departing. This performance fosters psychological healing, reinforcing the belief that the illness has been expelled. (Dayas) It exemplifies the ritual's therapeutic, symbolic purpose.

Mahasohon Yaka Mask

Figure 16 – Maha sohon Yaka (Bentharage, *Art of Mask Making* 71)

Figure 17 – Maha sohon Yaka (Kottegoda, *Sampradaika Narthanaadum* 85)

The *Mahasohon Samayama* is a unique healing ritual from Sri Lanka's Southern Province, rooted in legends from King Dutugemunu's era. *Mahasohon Yaka,* a feared demon, is believed to haunt graveyards and cause illness or death. (Chathuranga)

Consuming wild boar meat is thought to invite his influence. When symptoms suggest his presence, ritual specialists (*adura*) conduct an exorcism. During the ritual, Mahasohon Yaka is invoked and then expelled, symbolising the patient's recovery. The ritual reinforces communal belief in symbolic healing, with the demon's feared status so pervasive that his name is often avoided in conversation. (Thilakarathna)

Discussion

The interplay of colour and psychology in mask performances functions as a non-verbal language. A red mask signals danger or aggression, heightening audience alertness, while gold or yellow evokes reverence. Performers also report psychological shifts; one Kolam artist (Piris) felt "energised and confrontational" in a red demon mask, another experienced peace in a yellow divine mask. (Chaturanga) Thus, colour influences both audience perception and performer mindset, enhancing embodied storytelling. In Shantikarma, precise colour use is considered essential for ritual success.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that colour symbolism in traditional Sri Lankan ritual masks plays a dual role: as a psychological stimulant and a cultural signifier. Colours such as red, black, yellow, green, and blue are meticulously selected to convey emotional and narrative cues rooted

in cultural semiotics and psychological theory. These hues are far from arbitrary; they elicit specific emotional responses, guide audience perception, and enable performers to inhabit their roles with greater authenticity and emotional depth. In healing rituals like *shantikarma*, colour serves as a therapeutic medium, helping participants and spectators process emotional tension, interpret symbolic illness, and achieve psychological relief.

Furthermore, the masks' symbolic palettes embody a rich cultural worldview where spirituality, emotion, and performance converge. The interplay between colour psychology and traditional beliefs enhances the masks' role as instruments of communal healing and narrative expression. This research highlights the traditional Sri Lankan performance art's value beyond cultural preservation, suggesting its potential applications in modern art therapy and cross-cultural psychological practices.

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The Ferocious Consciousness:

Spirit Subjugation and the Dissolution of Otherness in the Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra

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Introduction:

The *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* is an esoteric tāntric text that focuses largely on spirit-magic. In this tradition, the practitioner conjures, binds, and commands spirits to carry out their wishes. These spirits mainly include *yakṣas, piśācas, vetālas, nāgas,* and other liminal beings, who are summoned to provide protection, wealth, and success in worldly matters. At first glance, the text resembles a ritual manual of conjuring. Yet, woven into its layers is a recurring urge for *mokṣa*, which stands in juxtaposition to pragmatic spirit control and the language of absolute freedom. It is commonly held that the idea of moksha is equated with self-realisation, while conjuring deals with the material world. Furthermore, spirit-magic is supposed to lead to the realm of spirits, and not the higher planes. This raises a fundamental question: How can a system grounded in the forceful manipulation of supernatural agencies claim to deliver the radical non-dual liberation as found in the *Kaula* Tantras?

This paper takes this tension as its starting point. It asks: How does the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* reconcile the apparent contradiction between coercive ritual magic and the dissolution of Otherness inherent in *mokṣa*? To address this issue, the argument is derived from the Trika doctrine, redefining *Bhairava* not as an external wrathful entity, but as non-dual active Consciousness[1].

The paper first situates the paradox in its textual context and then attempts to examine the name *Krodha Bhairava* as indicative of the 'ferocious' aspect of 'Consciousness'. To further understand the spirits conjured, a Jungian framework is employed, reading

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[1] Consciousness, with a capital 'C', indicates *caitanya*. This is different form the consiousness of a human produced in the brain, with a small 'c'. This Consciousness indicates the absolute *Being*.

these entities as archetypal projections of the subconscious. It is then argued that these arise from absolute Consciousness, and are not something external to it. Finally, it is argued that the spirit-magic is best understood as a ritualised confrontation with the innermost esoteric aspects of Consciousness, appearing as shadows, which, when faced and ferociously dissolved, establishes one in the highest state.

Framing the problem: Liberation vs Conjuring

The central problem follows from the question raised in the beginning. It raises a concern of the contemporary times where one is incapable of austerities but needs the magic to fulfil their material needs. In contrast, it is further added that one also needs to attain *mokṣa*[2]. To establish this, the mantra of the presiding deity who binds and strikes fear in the entities is provided, which is *Krodha Bhairava*.[3] Acting as a means to an end, this deity is first invoked to protect and command over spirits, which follows the rest of the text. The text, therefore, provides a clear power dynamic where the spirits are meant to be controlled, threatened, or even destroyed if they disobey.

Furthermore, towards the end, it is stated that such knowledge is for the worshipper of the *Devi*[4], and not for those who worship the *Brahman*[5]. Which raises a further issue, as to why use the term mokṣa in the first place? On one hand, woven into this practical system of spirit-magic is the promise of mokṣa—ultimate freedom from fear and bondage. On the other hand, the text makes a clear restriction about who may receive its teachings by stating its powerful rites are not to be shared with those who seek only the formless *Tāraka Brahman,* but are meant solely for the devotee who remains devoted to the *Devi*.

A possible reason for this boundary might be that liberation is not about dissolving into an empty transcendence but about attaining fearless mastery within the vibrant, relational presence of the Goddess herself, as we see in *vīrabhāva*[6].

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[2] *Kenopāyena naśyanti kalu kalauduṣṭagharāśayaḥ/*
Labhyante sidhayaḥ sarvvā mokṣapadhatayaḥ śubhāḥ//
Sidhayo'pyanimādyāśca mahāpātaka nāśikāḥ// Bhūtaḍāmara: 1.5

[3] Alternately Vajrapāni, Krodhīśa, and other names are found.

[4] The name "Devi" is derived from the root 'div' which means to sport. Implyind a dynamic nature of Consciousness, than an entity

[5] *Tārako brahmaṇo bhṛtyaṃ bināpyatrādhikāriṇa, Bhūtaḍāmara: 16/12*

[6] Vīra bhāva, is indicative of the state where one is fighting to trasncend duality, and establish in

This gives rise to the central question this paper explores: *What does it mean for a ritual tradition so invested in subjugating the 'other'—the spirits that populate the world—to also claim to dissolve 'otherness' altogether?* How does *Krodha Bhairava*'s fierce nature hold together the aims of dominating spirits and realising non-dual liberation? To examine this, the following sections situate the text in its doctrinal context, unpack its key symbols, and approach its spirits not merely as external beings but as vivid expressions of the mind's hidden projections, which ultimately serve as a method of approaching the state of non-dual being for a *vīra sādhaka*.

Exegetical context:

The text *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* occupies a distinctive position within popular tantric literature. The recovered version, which is predominantly a Hindu text, seems to bridge elements found in both Hindu and Buddhist esoteric traditions, while in some manuscripts it appears mainly as a Buddhist text. The central wrathful figure is identified as *Vajrapāni* and also as *Krodha Bhairava*[7]. *Vajrapāni* is a fierce protector prominent in *Vajrayāna* Buddhist practice, while *Krodha Bhairava* is one of the eight principal *Bhairava*s recognised in Hindu tantric rituals[8]. Despite these differing views, the text's main content and ritual structure remain consistent: a diverse assembly of spirits is brought under the strict authority of a wrathful lord whose fierce presence guarantees their submission.

Regarding the name of the text, the word *bhūta* may be understood in two senses: one denoting "spirit" and the other as "past,"[9] referring to the residue of past actions and impressions that shape a person's psyche. The word *ḍāmara* simply means 'fearsome', or "that which strikes fear in one's heart," referring to the objects of fear, which are spirits and the past. Taken together, the *Bhūtaḍāmara* can be read in two ways: first, as referring to spirits which cause fear, and second, as pointing to

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non-duality, thus facing off the fear arising form duality.

[7] Text uses both the names.

[8] List of name varies, but Krodha Bhairava is somewhat common.

[9] Giriratna Mishra makes this note in his edition.

repressed traumas of the past that create unease in one's psyche. Considering both meanings, the text becomes more than just a handbook for controlling unruly spirits; it also offers, in coded form, a method for confronting and dismantling the deep-seated fears and conditioned patterns that persist within the practitioner's awareness.

Doctrinally, the text strongly resonates with the widespread image of Tantra as an occult tradition. The content reflects discussions that align with popular understandings of tantric lore. This involves acts like exorcism, where the occultist invokes legions of powerful entities to force the undesired spirits out. To such practitioners, the deity *Bhairava* stands as a fierce and protective presence, whose blessing and power support them along this demanding path. Yet *Bhairava* is not simply a terrifying guardian; he is equally revered as the fullest expression of Consciousness itself, utterly sovereign, fearless, and capable of granting the same fearlessness to a mind burdened by the anxieties of worldly life. He who sounds the drum is the master of the assembly of accomplished yogins—this *Bhairava*, who sustains and governs the entire universe, triumphs as the supreme one in the form of pure consciousness. This suggests that the spirits become a spontaneous expression of *Bhairava* himself, acting out his will and not otherwise.

Krodha as Consciousness is intense:

To unravel the paradox at the heart of the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra*, it is necessary to dwell on how the text itself portrays Krodha Bhairava: not merely as an exorcistic deity but as the very ferocity of awareness refusing to be deceived by its projections. A key verse from the Trika tradition succinctly encodes this:

> *bhīrūṇām abhaya-prado bhava-bhayākrandasya hetus*
> *tato hṛd-dhāmni prathitaś ca bhīravarucām īśo 'ntakas yāntakaḥ |*
> *bheraṃ vāyati yaḥ su-yogini-vahas tasya prabhu*
> *bhairavo viśvasmin bharaṇādi-kṛd vijayate vijñāna-rūpaḥ paraḥ ||*[10]

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[10] S*tuti-candrikā,* Ishvar ashram Trust

The deity is praised as "the giver of fearlessness to the fearful, the cause of ending the cry of worldly dread, manifest in the heart-space, destroyer of death itself, and supreme in the form of pure consciousness."

First, fearlessness is not mere bravery but the experiential dismantling of the subtle tremor—*kṣobha*[11]—that arises when awareness forgets its plenitude and imagines Otherness as a threat. The text insists that Bhairava's ferocity is not projected outward alone; it is *hṛd*[12]-*dhāmni prathitaḥ*—residing in the heart-centre, the innermost sanctuary of *prakāśa-vimarśa,* self-luminous self-awareness.

Secondly, *Bhairava* is the destroyer of death—*antakasya antakaḥ*. In Trika exegesis, death represents the ultimate *other*: the final negation of the self's continuity. *Krodha Bhairava*, by radiating absolute presence, reveals that even death is not alien but an appearance within the unbroken field of consciousness.

Furthermore, the image of the drum and *Yoginīs* (*bheraṃ vāyati yaḥ su-yogini-vahaḥ*) intensifies this phenomenology: the drum signifies the primal pulsation (*spanda)* that awakens mind from torpor; the *Yoginīs* are the dynamic energies dancing within the same field, ensuring that awareness remains fluid and not fossilised into rigid duality.

Finally, the verse's closing affirmation—*viśvasmin bharaṇādi-kṛt vijayate vijñāna-rūpaḥ paraḥ*—places *Krodha Bhairava* as the supreme consciousness that both sustains and dissolves the universe. His ferocity underlines the last function: the power to dissolve the stubborn residue of Otherness that fear gives rise to.

Taken phenomenologically, this means that the wrathful aspect of Bhairava is not about emotional aggression but about an epistemic act: the Self recognising itself so intensely that no projection stands apart. Thus, in the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra*, ferocity is an ontological mode—Consciousness refusing to abandon its sovereignty.

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[11] Indicating aggitation, of Consiousness.
[12] *Hṛdaya* is a technical term which indicates the centre of awareness where the duality dissolves in non- dual Consciousness.

Spirits of the Subconscious:

While the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* treats *yakṣas*[13], *piśācas*[14], *vetālas*[15], *nāgas*[16], and other beings[17] as spirits to be summoned, threatened, and compelled, a psychological reading interprets them as archetypal facets of the practitioner's psyche. From a Jungian perspective, each spirit-type symbolises a recognisable function, energy, or complex that the ego often disowns—until it returns as an autonomous force that seems alien. The *Yakṣas* represent the Guardians or Provider archetype: protective instincts tied to prosperity and rootedness, which, unchecked, can evolve into greed and misery. The *Piśāca*s and *Vetālas* represent the darkest parts of the mind: raw desires, hidden anger, and forbidden cravings. The Vetāla, known for possessing corpses, shows how buried instincts can take over one's conscious mind. Facing these spirits is really about facing and taking back control of these rejected parts of oneself. *Bhūta*s, as restless ghosts, symbolise the lingering residues of unresolved memories or traumas—fragments of the personal unconscious that disturb present awareness—so the tantra's injunction to transform the *bhūtinī* into a wife, sister, or mother suggests a ritual domesticating of haunting memories: converting fear into intimacy with one's past. *Rākṣasa*s function as the Trickster Shadow: hostile deception, unchecked destructive power, and cunning illusions, the shape-shifting aspects of mind that confound moral certainty; their wrathful binding represents psychic discipline over self-sabotaging trickery. *Nāga*s are serpentine beings, archetypally linked to deep instinctual wisdom and life-force (libido); they guard hidden treasures beneath the conscious threshold, so by ritual marriage to a *nāginī*, the practitioner symbolically unites with buried vitality and intuition—an act of anima integration. *Kinnara*s and *gandharvas* stand for the Lover or Muse: the enchanting voice of art, music, romance, and ecstatic play, which must be tamed not because it is evil but because ungoverned aesthetic allure can unground the yogi; conscious channelling turns their song into a

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[13] Similar to gnomes, to preserve wealth
[14] Entites that are supposedly daemonic, intermediates, who preside on felsh and blood.
[15] Ghouls
[16] Reptilian serpent beings
[17] Ghosts, servitors, yoginis, yākṣini-s and so on. This also involes spells to perform acts of binding, banishing, supression and others.

hymn to the Heart. *Preta*s, or hungry ghosts, illustrate archetypal insatiable craving, addiction, envy, and the anxiety of lack; protective mantras sever this cycle by confronting the illusion of endless want. *Apsara*s, the heavenly seductresses, personify the sensuous, tempting side of the anima projection: the fantasy of beauty which distracts or entraps unless recognised as an inner force. *Mahoragas* and *garuḍas*, finally, express the tension between primal serpent energy (earthly instinct) and soaring eagle-like vision (spiritual will); *Krodha Bhairava*'s dominion over both embodies the harmonisation of instinct and intellect within a sovereign self. Thus accordingly, the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* emerges as a psychic map for how the conscious self must confront, bind, and reintegrate these archetypal energies, with the ferocious deity standing as the unwavering presence that ensures none of these forces run riot as unconscious projections but instead serve as disciplined allies within the integrated heart of awareness.

Spirit Magic as a Phenomenological Activity:

Having clarified both the phenomenology of *Krodha Bhairava* and the archetypal nature of the spirits, we can now see that the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* uses ritual magic as a deliberate, embodied strategy for bracketing 'otherness' within the field of awareness. If we think in Husserlian terms, by bracketing (*epoché)* the natural attitude towards a phenomenon's supposed externality, revealing its structure within consciousness, and treating the spirit invocation in the *Bhūtaḍāmara* likewise. Then it would be observed that it is not merely the manipulation of literal ghosts; it is the ritual intensification of psychic contents that normally lurk half-seen at the edges of the mind.

The process is precise: spirits are summoned deliberately into presence, their threat is subsumed through invocations, and their resistance is broken by the commanding ferocity of *Krodha Bhairava.* Thus, forcing them to swear an oath for the time being, binding them to the practitioner's service, or face symbolic annihilation through burning by the wrathful thunderbolt. This performative coercion mirrors what Jung describes in analytical therapy: when a complex is made conscious, its autonomous

power to "possess" the ego is neutralised and redirected as usable psychic energy. This ritual bracketing, however, is not a gentle invitation but a ferocious confrontation. The practitioner becomes *Krodha Bhairava* in visualisation and mantra, embodying a field of consciousness so fearless that no repressed energy—however ghastly—can hold an independent seat. Like ceremonial magic elsewhere, where angels bind demons under divine Names, here the wrathful mantra and fierce iconography force the spirit-as-shadow to submit. Each entity's destructive or distracting potency is transformed into protective or creative power once brought under the Heart's sovereignty. The practitioner thus moves from naive fear of the *other* (whether ghost, trauma, or desire) to an assertive recognition: "This, too, arises in my field of awareness; it shall not master me—I shall master it." Spirit-magic becomes a rigorous experiential method for dismantling projection and reclaiming the fragmented energies of the psyche. To put it otherwise, it is an enactment of *pratyabhijñā*[18]—the recognition that no 'other' ultimately stands apart from the Self's luminous pulsation[19].

Resolving the paradox:

Now to address the central paradox: How does the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* reconcile the promise of liberation (*mokṣa)* with its seemingly worldly programme of spirit coercion?

The resolution lies in seeing that the entire ritual economy through the lens of *Kaula-Trika* doctrine: fear and bondage arise when consciousness projects a residual 'other', mistaking its dynamic energies as alien forces to dread or appease. The spirits catalogued in the *tantra—yakṣas, piśāacas, vetālas, nāgas*—are named and addressed precisely because naming brings the hidden into the circle of awareness. The mantric threat, the binding oath, and the threat of annihilation enact a refusal: the practitioner

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[18] This the name of the philosophy, based on the methodology, which is the act of recognition, through an observation and analysis of the inward movement of Consciousness, where the triad of subject cognition and objects, becoming one.
[19] Since the system holds Self as self revealing, so once the duality is removed, the Self shines forth as everything that is.

will not let these energies remain shadowy tyrants. Instead, they are incorporated as conscious extensions of the Heart.

This explains why the text prohibits its use by those seeking the formless *Taraka Brahman.* The aim here is not to dissolve the play of energies into an abstract void but to master and delight in them as *Śiva*'s dance[20]. Trika doctrine upholds that *prakāśa* without *vimarśa* is inert[21]: pure light must know itself reflexively, and independently. *Krodha Bhairava*'s wrath is precisely this reflexivity in its fiercest mood—burning away forgetfulness and establishing the Heart as sovereign even amid spirits, desires, and fears.

From a phenomenological standpoint, then, spirit subjugation is the means; fearless non-dual awareness is the fruit. Each spirit that bows to the practitioner symbolises a psychic knot untied, a projection reabsorbed, a fear undone. Liberation (*mokṣa*) here is not flight into formlessness but an unshakeable recognition (*pratyabhijñā)* that nothing can stand outside the radiant Heart.

To conclude in the spirit of a Trika logician: fear arises because the mind forgets its inherent plenitude and, in that forgetfulness, projects an alien Other that seems to stand apart. *Krodha Bhairava*'s ferocity obliterates this imagined Other by refusing to grant it any objective foothold in consciousness. The myriad spirits described in the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* are thus symbolic condensations of this projection—manifestations of fragmented energies that appear threatening precisely because they are misrecognized as separate. Through the tantra's fierce ritual choreography, spirit-magic becomes the method for bracketing these projections and reintegrating them within the sovereign field of awareness. The final fruit is mokṣa, not as an abstract void but as an unbroken recognition that all appearance is the Heart's dynamic play. Such a state is irreconcilable with the pursuit of a static, formless *Brahman* severed from the living Goddess who embodies this plenitude. In this light, the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* stands revealed as a ferocious soteriology: a

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[20] *Śiva* is called as the *Nartaka,* or a dancer, in the *Śiva Sūtra-* 3.9. This form being in motion, represents the inseperable dynamism.

[21] A major point of critique against bare Consciousness, as Consciousness has to be intentional, and thus posess a minimal uncaused subjectivity, akṛtm aham.

fearless path that trains the practitioner to remain unafraid amidst the world's terrifying diversity, mastering it not by withdrawal but through unwavering sovereign awareness.

Conclusion:

The *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra,* often misread as a mere manual of spirit exorcism and occult acquisition, emerges—when approached phenomenologically and through the lens of Jungian depth psychology—as a profound soteriological map for reclaiming the Heart's sovereignty over fear and fragmentation. Its central figure, *Krodha Bhairava,* is not wrathful in the ordinary sense of rage directed outward; rather, he personifies a ferocity inherent in Consciousness associated with objectivity itself: the luminous refusal to abandon its completeness in the face of projections that appear alien and threatening, where each spirit subjugated is a knot of subconscious energy untied, no longer a source of fear but a resource aligned with the practitioner's fearless awareness.

What appears on the surface as coercive spirit-magic is, therefore, an enacted phenomenology: a deliberate ritual of facing, naming, and dissolving the projections that the mind habitually casts as external threats or temptations. In this light, the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* testifies to a radical vision of freedom: the end of fear does not lie in withdrawing from the world but in dissolving the residual belief in Otherness altogether. *Krodha Bhairava*'s wrath thus reveals itself as the heart's vow never again to tremble before its reflection. The practitioner who embodies this ferocious consciousness becomes master of all spirits, all fears, and finally, of themselves, which establishes them as a *vīra sādhaka,* realising that the true magic lies not in commanding the spirits but in realising that they were never truly separate to begin with.

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[Book Review]

Truth, Beauty, and the Aesthetic Quest: Arjun Bharadwaj's Exploration of Homer through Indian Thought

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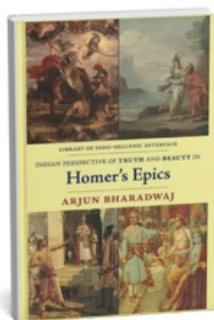Author, Director, Producer

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Bharadwaj, Arjun.
*Indian Perspective of **Truth** and **Beauty** in Homer's Epics.*
Prekshaa Pratisthana, Ed II, Oct. 2024.

The qualitative assessment of any art form is fundamentally based on two dialectical perspectives: first, the socio-historical, and second, the aesthetic. Although these two may appear distinct at first glance, they ultimately serve the same purpose. The practice of purely aesthetic elements, devoid of social elements, seems ungrounded. When evaluating art from a perspective of social utility, the fundamental question posed by the connoisseur, reader, or spectator is whether the artwork embodies truth. From an aesthetic standpoint, the question is whether the artwork is beautiful. However, in this context, "truth" and "beauty" are not mere commercial catchphrases but philosophical terminologies.

For several millennia, Indian aesthetic theorists such as Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Ānandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta have explored how art can encapsulate truth and beauty. The book under discussion presents the work of a contemporary artist and poet, Śrī Arjun Bharadwaj, who seeks to trace these eternal aesthetic principles within Homer's two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Upon reading the book, however, I felt that rather than merely examining Homer, the author seems to be searching for Vālmīki and Vyāsa within his works. Is he attempting to uncover a universality that transcends the spatial-temporal distances between these two civilisations? In that case, could Arjun Bharadwaj's approach be likened to Byomkesh Bakshi, the famed literary detective created by Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay—an investigator pursuing artistic truth? These are the very questions we aim to explore in this discussion.

The book, titled *Indian Perspective of Truth and Beauty in Homer's Epics*, highlights "Truth" and "Beauty" in bold—an immediate indication of its core subject. As previously mentioned, the inquiry into an intrinsic unity beyond apparent civilisational differences sheds light on art's broader social history and aesthetics. Who, then, is the intended reader of this book? Any connoisseur, spectator, or individual interested in literature and the arts can engage with it. Moreover, Arjun Bharadwaj ensures that the reader does not feel burdened by the necessity of prior familiarity with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Indian aesthetic philosophy is not a singular theoretical proposition but the culmination of millennia of artistic inquiry and the pursuit of the Absolute through art. Here, art is not merely an object but a *sādhana* (spiritual practice); the artist is a *sādhaka* (seeker). As Kapila Vatsyayan observes,

> *"Any form of sādhana is a means of achieving a state of complete harmony (samarasya) and thus of total release (svātantrya) from the 'so-much-ness' (iyattā) of life; it leads to a recognition of one's truer self."* (Vatsyayan, 5)

However, this realisation does not come through the negation of sensory faculties but rather through their engagement, where both the artist and the connoisseur experience the transition from the manifest to the unmanifest, from the *saguṇa* to the *nirguṇa*. In this framework, art becomes a form of *yoga*, *yajña*, and *pūjā*. From Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, the *Agni Purāṇa*, and the works of aestheticians such as Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Ānandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta, we find the same guiding principles shaping the understanding of art.

The preservation of the Vedas was the primary necessity behind Bharata's composition of the Nāṭyaśāstra. The objective was to guide society—those not inclined toward the path of renunciation—toward a spiritual trajectory through the experience of aesthetic relish (*rasa*). The aforementioned masters of aesthetics sought to eliminate any hindrances to this experience. The artist, while composing his work with physiurgic (*ādhibhautika*) elements, elevates them into the realm of the theurgic (*ādhidaivika*). This journey from the physiurgic (*ādhibhautika*) to the theurgic (*ādhidaivika*) can be termed hierurgic (*ādhyājñika)*, following the perspective of Dr R. Ganesh, wherein artistic practice itself is a form of *yajña* (sacrificial offering). (Ganesh and Hari 35-39) Thus, every actual work of art is inherently theurgic (*ādhidaivika*). The entire cast of the Rāmāyaṇa embodies theurgic qualities, and the internal universe of the Mahābhārata is likewise theurgic in nature. Through this theurgic artistic sensibility and its aesthetic experience, the connoisseur (*rasika*) attains a higher realisation—an aesthetic intuition, archirhetic (*adhirasa*). Within this supreme aesthetic

experience, the *Rasika* first relishes the qualitative aesthetic essence (*saguṇa rasa*)[1] and, beyond that, perceives a noetic glimpse of über-worldly aesthetic essence (*nirguṇa Rasa*)[2]. Through this fleeting glimpse of the *nirguṇa,* the *Rasika* momentarily apprehends the noergic (*adhyātma*), the Ultimate Truth and enjoys Bliss (*Brahmāsvādan*). Simply put, the perception of Truth and Beauty transforms the empirical (*ādhibhautika*) into the spiritual (*adhyātma*). Now, Arjun takes Bharata's attempt to elevate the connoisseur (rasika) to the status of a Vedic knower (*vedajña*) through the experience of rasa and the aestheticians' efforts to remove any impediments to such an experience one step further—he seeks to explore the universality of this very aesthetic experience.

For Arjun, beauty and truth are not merely attributes of literature or poetry; instead, they constitute the intrinsic value of art. To him, truth is not just a collection of facts but aligns with the concept of Puruṣārtha—the fundamental goals of human life. Similarly, regarding beauty, M. Hiriyanna once wrote:

> *"Those who identify beauty with these external factors and seek it as an attribute forget that while these are perceivable by the senses, beauty is disclosed only to the 'inward eye.' True beauty is neither expressible in words nor knowable objectively; it can only be realised."* (Hiriyanna 9)

Arjun firmly subscribes to this view. Thus, the truth and beauty he seeks in Homer's poetry are not transient or superficial but rather an eternal essence—the ultimate of poetry.

To my knowledge, no other civilisation has developed such a continuous and intricate aesthetic tradition as India. Even the scope of Aristotle's *Poetics* does not extend to such vast dimensions. The Western notions of truth, reality, and falsity diverge to some extent from Indian conceptualisations. Consequently, because of the colonial influences, the scholarly discourse over the past two centuries has primarily been centred on investigating the extent of Hellenic influence on Indian civilisation. However, Bharadwaj's approach appears to take a reverse trajectory, challenging the dominant framework of the Aryan Migration Theory to some extent. Therefore, examining the objectives and methodology underlying this work is worthwhile.

Arjun adopts a comparative approach, placing the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Iliad*, and *Odyssey* side by side to explore their spatial and temporal constructs, ethical dimensions of characters, and the intricate relationship between the human and the divine, along with the evocation of aesthetic emotions (Bharadwaj 302-351). By weaving Indian philosophical and

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[1] In the context of *saguṇa rasa (Rasyate iti rasaḥ)*, the experience of *rasa* occurs **within the realm of qualities (guṇas)**—where artistic beauty and aesthetic delight are associated with form, attributes, and perceptible elements.

[2] *Nirguṇa rasa (Rasanam rasaḥ)* refers to an experience of *rasa* that transcends perceptible qualities (*guṇas*). It points toward **a formless, attribute-free aesthetic or spiritual experience**, where *rasa* is not tied to specific artistic forms but becomes an intuitive realization of the ultimate essence (*parama-tattva*).

literary concepts such as *puruṣārthas* and *rasas* into studying these Western epics, he creates a dialogue between traditions while maintaining an Indian vantage point (Bharadwaj 314-325). The reliance on Indian frameworks might appear biased to some in the present socio-political context, as Greek epics are being evaluated against ideals they were never meant to align with (e.g., *mokṣa* p. 325). However, one cannot ignore the fact that for centuries, Indian epics, too, have been viewed through the lens of Greek ideals—without ever being labelled as biased.

Arjun's analysis is not limited to ideologies; it also extends to the practical aspects of poetry, where he maintains a balanced perspective. He examines the application of Indian aesthetic theory—particularly the concept of *arthālaṅkāras* (figures of sense)—to analyse the rhetorical devices in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Drawing a parallel between Homer and the Indian poets Vālmīki and Vyāsa, he highlights their shared mastery in crafting nuanced expressions (Bharadwaj 363–364). He relies on the *Loeb Classical Library* translations of the Iliad and Odyssey for textual analysis, cross-referencing them with the original Greek (Bharadwaj 365). His study reveals that due to Greek's linguistic constraints, sound-based figures (*śabdālaṅkāras*) are less prevalent, making *arthālaṅkāras* more prominent and abundant (Bharadwaj 365). By employing Indian poetics to interpret Greek literature, Arjun's cross-cultural approach offers fresh insights into Homer's artistry while systematically cataloguing and analysing various literary devices.

The defining characteristic of an epic is its vastness— not just in scale but in its comprehensive scope and depth. Before Vālmīki composed the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the discipline of Yoga was already established, and the extensive *Brāhmaṇa* texts had been composed. The presence of numerous narrative elements within these *Brāhmaṇas* suggests that the *Purāṇas* may have existed in some form before they were systematised. This makes it evident that the foundation for the epic compositions of Vālmīki and Vyāsa was already laid. However, in the case of Homer, the same cannot be said. Within his cultural context, he was the first of his kind. His blindness, much like that of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the Mahābhārata, raises numerous questions about the nature of his vision—both literal and metaphorical.

Homer's epics have, both directly and indirectly, shaped Western literature, art, and even scientific thought for over a millennium. His influence was profoundly felt even during the European Renaissance. Arjun Bharadwaj's perspective on this matter is therefore well-founded:

> *"The Greek poet Homer occupies a stature similar to that occupied by the seer-poets Vyāsa and Vālmīki in India—he is the first epic poet of the West and occupies the highest echelons among the best poets the world has ever seen. Just as Vyāsa and Vālmīki laid the foundations for everything Indian, Homer laid the foundation for the classical culture of the West."* (Bharadwaj XX)

The book is structured into four primary chapters. The first and second chapters interpret the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* through the lens of Indian aesthetic thought and the concept of *puruṣārthas*. The third chapter presents a comparative study of the four great epics—Indian and Greek. The fourth chapter examines the presence of *arthālaṅkāra,* drawing definitions from the Indian treatise *Candrāloka* by *Jayadeva* within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. (Bharadwaj 365) Following the author's suggestion in the prologue, I approached the book non-linearly—starting with the third chapter, then moving to the fourth, and finally reading the first and second chapters.

One of the most commendable aspects of this book is its structural precision. For the diligent and curious reader, the appendices, index, and glossary serve as valuable resources, while the chapter titled *A Note on Other Technical Terms Associated with Indian Aesthetics* caters to newer readers. Such meticulous book design is a rarity amidst today's publishing trends, making it a welcome feature.

That which is true is also beautiful. That which is true and beautiful is *śiva* (the universal). But has Arjun Bharadwaj discovered this universality within Homer's works? And if so, how? These are questions that demand an engaged reading of the book. I will conclude by stating that Bharadwaj does not merely approach this inquiry from the perspective of a research scholar. Instead, he immerses himself in Homer's world as a *poet*, experiencing and articulating his engagement with profound artistic sensibility. As one reads the book, it feels like a conversation unfolding between Vālmīki, Vyāsa, Homer, and Arjun himself. Across a span of millennia, Homer's poetic imagination, Vālmīki and Vyāsa's seer-vision, and Arjun's linguistic brilliance weave together a new tapestry of thought and expression. Whether he has succeeded in this endeavour is not for me to judge, nor do I presume to do so.

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