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Trika and Advaita Vedānta Philosophies in Relation to Nāṭya

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Abstract

Nāṭya, the performing art consisting of music, dance, and drama traces its origin to the Nāṭya Veda given by Brahma and transferred to the holy hands of the sage Bharata. A feeling of 'me to we' and 'many to one', is seen to thereby transcend the physical self to a state of bliss or 'Ānanda'. All aspects in the arts, remain not just identified individually, but become a holistic therapy, whereby one can experience 'Śāntam' (equipoise) and 'Samatvam' (equanimity). A 'Samādhi' (experience of oneness with the divine) state is also at times within the reach. Trika Tāntric Śaivism gives the complete matrix of energy, the physical reality being only one part. Spandā is the energy that permeates the Universe during its process of evolution from which all existence evolves. Divine Consciousness is not simply cold, inert intellection. Nāṭya leads to the discovery that this Jiva is Śiva- Śakti. Enacting several roles, the artiste travels from third person to second, then to first person and finally, 'No Person'. Like the self-realised Yogin, one experiences oneself as a sheer actor in the drama of life, in various roles of outer being but remaining absolutely detached from the entire play. The dancer - actor and spectator participate in Śiva's Bliss of Śakti. Rasa is the reduction of objective identities to recognize the one Subject – Śiva. Advaita remains as the one and only Satya- Truth. The entire act of creation and presentation is a Sādhana with the inherent flexibility which has facilitated the unbroken continuity at one level, and constant flux, at the other.

Discussion

*gītādiviṣayāsvādāsamasaukhyaiikatātmanah |
yoginastanmayatvena manorūḍhestadātmatā ||
Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra, verse 73.*

Meaning - When a Yogi becomes mentally one with the incomparable joy of song and other objects, there is expansion of his mind and complete identity with the source of bliss.

Trika is a philosophy belonging to the Tantra school. Tantra exists in Vaiśnava, Śaiva, and Śākta forms, among others. The whole Universe is a creation of a divine consciousness (Sivā) and his active will-power (Śakti). Trika system by itself falls into three categories- the ritual- Āgama, vibration-Spanda and the self-recognition- Pratyabhijna. Spanda or Sphurana is the inner rhythm, an irrefutable truth of life. Pratyabhijnāhrdayam is the process whereby the limited citta

becomes the limitless citi/chit. Māya, the illusory nature of the universe is conceptualised as Māya Śakti - the divine mother who causes humans to identify with illusory forms, preventing them from seeing the fundamental reality of their inseparability from the divine.

Śiva Sūtras of Vasugupta, in its philosophical aphorisms refers to Ātma as Nartakaḥ Ātma, Antarātmā as theater and Indriyās as spectators. This is the pathway for man -Nara with the means of artistic energy- Śāktopāya, whereby he attains without any hardened ways, the state of Śivam, joyfully. The experience is eternal unitariness or Abheda through the pathway of unity in difference or Bhedābheda, originally starting from the empirical level or

Bheda. It is in modern terms, the movement from existential to the phenomenal levels. The vibration within the artist's and the spectator's hearts, recognizes the center of a mystical Cakra- Bindu as Śiva, inseparably dancing with Śakti. Artistic bliss is the experience towards becoming absorbed into light and its awareness- the concept of Prakāśa and Vimarśa, which forms the foundation of Tantrāgama as 'Spandānanda'. Abhinavgupta's Tantrāloka is the most comprehensive and authoritative text on Trika. This text expounds with clarity the Āgamic traditions of Kashmir Śaivism and the philosophical background for the Locana and Abhinavabhāratī, the commentaries by Abhinava on Ānandavardhanā's Dhvanyāloka and Bharatamuni's Nāṭya Śāstra . This system holds that every appearance is a manifestation, partly or wholly of the ultimate substratum and the world is Vāṅgmaya – blissful projection of the vibrating Self.

*tathāhi madhure gīte sparśe vā candanādike |
mādhyasthavigame yāsau hṛdaye
spandamānatā || ānandaśaktiḥ saivoktā yataḥ
sahrdayo janah || TĀ, 3/209-210.*

Advaita literally means "not two"; being non-dualistic. Advaita Vedānta encompasses oneness and goes even beyond (oneness is an affirmation, and "advaita" is a negation; the negation of duality encompasses the affirmation of unity). Its consolidator was Ādi Śankara (believed to be CE 788-820). Ādi Śankara expounded his theories largely based on previous teachings of the Upanishads and his own Guru Gaudapāda. In this philosophy, when a human being tries to know the Cosmic Spirit (Brahman) through his mind, Brahman becomes the Supreme Lord (Īśvara), under the

effect of an illusionary power of Brahman called Māya. An analogy is given that when the reflection of Brahman falls upon the mirror of Māya, its image is seen as Īśvara. The material universe and the appearance of the single Ātman to be seen as innumerable individual souls are also because of Māya. God is still perfect and untouched, just as a magician is not surprised by his own magic. True knowledge of the Brahman is the only way to liberation; when Māya gets removed. The key source texts for all schools of Vedānta are the Prasthānatrayī- the canonical texts consisting of the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gīta and the Brahma Sūtrās.

“Brahman is the only truth, the world is unreal, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and individual self”- says Śankara's commentary on Prasthānatrayī.

Advaita Vedānta extolls the role of the Gurū. Gurū in the Mūndaka Upaniṣad [1.2.12] is learned in the Vedic scriptures and sampradaya and established in Brahman; must have realized the oneness of Brahman in everything and in himself. The seeker must serve the Gurū and submit questions with all humility in order to remove all doubts (Bhagavad Gīta 4.34). According to Ādi Śankara, God, the Supreme Cosmic Spirit or Brahman is the One, the whole and the only reality. Brahman is infinite, omnipresent and omnipotent. It is the transcendent reality of all Being. It is the basis of the material world, which in turn is its illusionary transformation. Brahman is said to be the purest knowledge itself and is ever – lustrous like a source of infinite light.

There are stages in attaining this pinnacle. In the Āgama, Bhakti precedes Jñāna, i.e., the Sādhaka acquires Jñāna by

Bhakti, whereas in the Vedānta, Jñana precedes Bhakti. Māya is the most important contribution of Ādi Śankara. It is that complex illusory power of Brahman, Āvarana, which causes the Brahman to be seen as the distinct material world. It is commonly said that it has two main functions - one is to "cover up" Brahman from the human minds and the other is to present the material world in its stead. Māya is also indescribable. It is neither completely real nor completely unreal – hence it is indescribable. Its shelter is Brahman, but Brahman itself is untouched by the profanity of Māya. It is temporary and is destroyed with "true knowledge". Even energy, Śakti, is Māya- Śakti according to Śankara who has resolved the problem created by Sankhya which stated dual roles of Puruṣha and Prakriti that they never join or unite but may come close to each other. This way, one never found solutions to practical problems for which Advaita has the simple answer – that there IS just one Puruṣha, Consciousness, which words can neither describe nor express- Avarnaniya, Anirvachaniya. Īśvara is Brahman with Māya, - the manifested form of Brahman. Ādi Śankara uses a metaphor that when the "reflection" of the Cosmic Spirit falls upon the mirror of Māya, it appears as the Supreme Lord. The Supreme Lord is true only in the pragmatic level - his actual form in the transcendental level is the Cosmic Spirit.

Īśvara is Saguna Brahman or Brahman with innumerable auspicious qualities. He is both immanent and transcendent. He may be even regarded to have a personality. He is the subject of worship. He is the basis of morality and giver of the fruits of one's Karma. However, he himself is beyond sin and merit. He rules the world with his Māya - his divine

power. Īśvara can also be visualized and worshipped in anthropomorphic form as deities such as Viṣṇu, Devi, Śiva or any other form. In the pragmatic level, whenever we talk about Brahman, we are in fact talking about God. God is the highest knowledge theoretically possible in that level. Devotion (Bhakti) will nullify the effects of bad Karma and will make a person closer to the true knowledge by purifying his mind. Gradually with fervent practice, the difference between the worshipper and the worshipped is also removed at the time of liberation. The distinct features of Tantra that may differ from this philosophy are –

“The peculiar metaphysical position of the Tantra consists in the theory of Ābhāsa. It rejects the Vivartavāda of Neo-Vedānta, because the world is not originally a false appearance due to error. It is real in the same way as an image is real, but it has no existence apart from the medium in which it is manifested. Its existence is only the existence of the medium. To the Vedāntist the world appears as such to the ignorant owing to his ignorance and in the last analysis, it is resolved into Māya which is not identical with Brahman and is material; but to a Tāntrist the world is real and is expression of the Cit Śakti or Free Will of the Lord, really spiritual in essence like the Lord Himself. In the last resort it turns back into the Cit Śakti which is never withdrawn, for the Will (svātantrya) remains, even after the world has disappeared. The Vedānta system has had to fall back on the doctrine of Vivarta, because it denies in a sense Svātantrya to Pure Caitanya. The first stadium of creation is thus a Ābhāsa. The second stage shows how the Cit Śakti, already appearing (Ābhāsamāna) in the Pure Caitanya,

further progresses. Māya emerges on the scene now and the Vivarta is the logical outcome. The third stage marks how Māya becomes productive. This is the Parināma or Evolution which gets on till the bhūtas spring into manifestation. The fourth stage which represents creation out of the bhūtas is known as Ārambha or physico-chemical process of genesis. From the supreme stand-point of Tantrā, however, the entire creation is an Ābhāsa” [1].

Although Trika Śaivism stands for non-dualism like Advaita Vedānta’s absolute truth, it accepts the apparent reality of the world as creative manifestation of Iśvara. Parama Śiva has two aspects, transcendental and immanent. Self-awareness is a matrix of creative desire, containing the universe as a seed that has the tree. Consciousness is not a cold, inert intellection. It is a dynamic throb of life, a Tantra where body and mind, spirit and matter are employed with the goal to be surpassed. “Philosophy in the sense of vision is also a way of experiencing reality: in this it comes close to basic assumptions of literature and literary theories. The distinction between literature and philosophy becomes more superficial when we examine the two with reference to Trika. Not only do they share a common theoretical assumption, but also the methods and modes of exposition are similar” [2]. Like Advaitavedānta, Trika is monistic, yet like Vaishnavism it is theistic, like Yoga it is practical, like Nyāya it is logical and also soothing like Buddhism.

Tantrās have been revealed by Lord Śiva through his five mouths namely Iśāna, Tatpurusha, Shadyojāta, Vāmadeva, and Aghora. These very five mouths represent his five energies namely Citśakti (consciousness),

Ānandaśakti (Bliss), Ichhāsakti (will), Jnānaśakti (knowledge) and Kriyāśakti (Action) respectively. When these aforesaid five energies of Lord Śiva unite with each other in such a way that each of these takes hold of the rest simultaneously, they reveal sixty- four Bhairvatantrās which are ultimately monistic.

āṅgikam bhuvanam yasya vācikam sarvavāṅmayam |

āhāryam candratārādi tam numah sātvikam śivam || 1 ||

‘Nandikeśvara’s Abhinayadarpanam in its 1st verse, says- I bow down to Lord Śiva, who is the personification of the sentient being (sāttvika), whose movement of the body/comprising of limbs (āṅgika) denotes the universe (of space, time, matter and energy) and happenings in the universe, words emanated from whom (vācika) is the source of all sounds (spoken - heard and unheard) and who is adorned by moon and stars (āhārya) - the celestial objects. Abhinaya is made up of Abhi -towards and naya - to carry. It means representing a play towards the spectators. It discloses to spectators the play by means of words, gestures, costumes and essence-Sattva. Abhinaya is of four kinds:

1. Āṅgika : Body movement and gesture
2. Vācika : Spoken words, songs and music
3. Āhārya : Costumes and makeup
4. Sāttvika : Innermost emotional traits

It is perhaps through dance and drama that the puzzles inherent in philosophical discourse, find their meaning through psychological impacts. “The psychological state proceeding from the thing which is congenial to the heart, is the source of the sentiment and it pervades the body just as fire spreads over dry wood” [3]. It is Bhattanāyaka

who introduced Sādhāranikarana theory- the generalization in psychology of Rasa realization, says Abhinava. The artist who allegorically passes the doorways of Mṛtyu and Niyati, is able to face death of the individual ego and work out Kārmic baggage and is joined in this sublimation by a Rasika in whom is absent; a conditioned mind. The dramaturgy treatise is a perfect example of Parāvidyā or transcendental knowledge. The Self IS vibration in essence and the mind is the instrument of tasting, free of all obstacles and devoid of egoistic perceptions. The subject gets immersed in a camatkāra- ‘pure white’ magic wherein no distinction of oneself and others lies. Tāntric Śaivism gives the complete matrix of energy, the physical reality being only one part. Spandā is the energy that permeates the Universe during its process of evolution from which all existence evolves. It is the dynamic aspect, the Śakti that pulsates, throbs with a myriad emotions and expressions. In Traipura Siddhānta [tenets of the Tripura], the first tenet is ‘SAT TRIMŚAT TATVĀNI VIŚVAM’- the thirty-six Tattvās constitute the universe. Examining Trika and Nātya Śāstra together on the basic- Sāmānya, hidden- Guhya and metaphysical -Samādhi levels, we see that the commentary has connected the thirty-six chapters to the thirty-six Tattva-s in Trika. Replicating the stage as a Vedika, there is coexistence of Āgamic Pūja with Nātya and theatre being a micromodel of the universe. The space is enlivened, given breath and soul, infusing Prānapratishtha and consecration of all entities like in a worship.

Nātya Śāstra’s arrangement in thirty-six chapters is believed to correspond to the basic principles of Trika, through which an individual becomes limited to enjoy the world

but gets transformed into the divine with real knowledge. The Sāmkhya philosophical school is indeed the forerunner of Trika Tantra and eleven aspects are further added in the latter, to the twenty-five derivables of the former. The enumeration is-

- Puruṣa – Consciousness, spirit
- Prakṛti/Citta - Nature, raw materiality
- Buddhi/ Mahat - Intellect, discrimination
- Ahamkāra - Ego, I sense
- Manas - Mind
- Jñānendriyās - Cognitive sense organs [five]
- Karmendriyās - Action organs [five]
- Tanmātras - [five]
- Pancamahābhūtas - [five]

To the above are added the following:

- Śiva, Śakti, Sadāśiva, Īśvara, Śadvidyā along with Māya and the five Kancukās [limitors Kalā, Vidyā, Rāga, Niyati and Kāla]. The correspondence wherein Abhinava sees his Lord manifesting as the many in the very beginning verses, establishes the veracity of the path of Trika -

*yastanmayānhrdayasamvadanakrmeṇa
drākcitraśaktigaṇabhūmivibhāgabhāgī |
harṣoḷḷasaṭ paravikārajuṣaḥ karoti
vandetamām tamahamindukalāvataṃsam || 1 ||*

*ṣaḍtrimśa
kātmakajagaḍgaganāvabhāsasamvinmarīcicay
acumbitabimbaśobham | ṣaḍtrimśam
bharatasūtramidaṃ vivṛṇvaṅvande śivam
śrutitadarthaviveki dhāma || 2 ||*

*viśwabījaparohārtham mūlādhāratayā
sthitam |
Dharṭṛm śaktimayaṃ vande
Dharanūrūpamīśvaram || 3 ||*

Correspondence observed –

1st chapter - Origin of Nātya. Earth/mūladhāra is mentioned [the subtle Cakra] as the foundation for seed of cosmic tree.

2nd chapter - Construction of stage. Water for growth of saṁsāra, as foundation for world stage. [Cakra for element of water is swādishṭhāna].

3rd chapter – Puja. Fire element is the source through which Devās and men connect. [manipura is the Cakra].

4th – Tāṇḍava. This stands for mahābhūta of wind [anāhata cakra], ever-moving.

5th - Pūrvaraṅga. This denotes space [viśuddha cakra] as world - theatre.

6th - Rasādhyaya. The sense of smell or Gandha, 7th - Bhāva to tanmātra of Rasa, 8th - Upāṅgavidhāna to Rūpa, 9th - Āṅgikādhyaya to sparśa and 10th- other limbs to śabda [some corresponding verses missing in commentary and are gathered to be implied].

11th - cāriavidhāna, 12th - mandalādhyāya, 13th- gatipracāra praises the power of creating, invoking motion and the stable Lord as Vṛṣhānka, 14th - zones and Pravritti contain implicit references in some places, 15th - chaṇḍaśāstra/prosody and verbal representation to vāk as appropriate, thus covers the Karmendriyās: (1) Vāk (speech), (2) Pāni (hands), (3) Pāda (legs), (4) Pāyu (anus), and (5) Upastha (genitals). It has to be noted that Abhinava's co-relation overlaps at times and the order also inter-changes occasionally. None of these concepts can truly exist in isolation. 16th chapter until the 20th [Chāṇḍas, Lakśana, Bhāsha, Kāku and Daśarūpa] correspond to the Jñānendriyās: (1) Ghrāna (nose), (2) Rasana (tongue), (3) Cakśu (eye), (4) Tvak (skin), and (5) Śrotra (ear). The

21st until the 25th chapters [Sāṁdhi, Vṛtti, Nepathya, Sāmānyābhīnaya and Veshyā] denote the mind, ego, intellect, nature and spirit. Citrābhīnaya, Siddhi, Ātodya, Taṭa, Suśira- 26th to 30th chapters are likened to the five limitors or Kancukāh resulting from malā/ impurity, māya/ illusion and karma/ action. The final six chapters Tāla, Dhruva, Avanaddha, Prakṛti, Bhūmika and Natyāvatarāṇa stand for Māya, Śaḍvidyā/ Kalā, Íswara/ Bindu, Sadāśiva /Nāda, Śakti and Śiva.

The principles of Sadāśiva and Śakti are in these verses-

*yadbhūmikālābhaparāḥ sadāśivapadaṣṭhitāḥ |
tām vande paramām śaktim candramouleḥ
parām tanuṃ ||*

The final principle or Tattva of Śivam -
*yasmin nigūḍaparamārthamabudhyamānāḥ
saṁsāranātyarasabhāvamupāśrayante |
budhvā punarmuhuraho nijameva yānti taṭ'
pūrnadhāma śivataṭvamahaṁ prapadye ||*

A drama has its prologue or introductory portion known as Prastāva and its concluding portion known as Samhāra. When the Lord has presented the prologue, he alone can bring about its end, implying the liberation of man. As we compare the dance, music, drama of the Lord and the Yoga as given in this seminal text, we come to certain injunctions that become part and parcel of any spiritual practice where body, mind go hand in hand with spiritual aspirations. The text itself is so holistic in nature that we find the beginning of all allied arts and sciences, directly or referentially discussed throughout. Chittavritti Nirodha' is a must in Yogic meditation of a Vedāntin, as the body, breath and mind move towards the soul as a result of withdrawal and peaceful relaxation. The

disciplines of yoga like physical exercises, breathing techniques and also values mentioned in Yoga philosophy may be utilized by student of Vedānta since they prepare one towards higher knowledge. These techniques enable one to discover a mind that is quiet, mature and contemplative, ready to see the reality as per the texts of Vedānta. The ultimate goal in Yoga [Sāmkhya philosophy] is nirvikalpa samādhi, where the mind completely ceases to have thoughts. Patanjali Yoga follows the Vivekajamārga of discrimination where Purusha is isolated from Prakriti/Māya. Static meditation and dynamic meditation are two different Sādhanās or paths of spiritual practices. Nātya follows the Yogajamārga or Tantramārga of integration (Śakti and Śiva fused as one). Nātya -Yoga or Tantra-Yoga speaks of aesthetic visualisation and imagination with a communion or Bhāvana with the ultimate supreme reality. In drama, the spirit is not ascetical but aesthetic-Cittavrtti Vilāsa and not exactly Cittavrtti Nirodha, which is why it is the Tantraja Mārga. Practise of Vyāyamās and Āsanās with a focused mind is imperative for a stage artist. To be able to do justice to the movements, the stage as well as one's body (if we compare oneself to a Rangashirsha), should neither be rigid like a tortoise shell nor slippery like a fish. The usual training given is intense enough to make one adept and soulful like the Yogis. The extensive use of hand gestures is another distinct feature of Nātya, adapted from ritualistic gestures as well. While gestures in worship are within the secret chambers and not demonstrative, those in dance are for public consumption but simultaneously awaken the inner energies. Nātya -Yoga means that dance is inevitable in life and inseparable from life.

The true goal of Vedānta, as standing apart from Yoga, is not the experience of nirvikalpa samādhi since that would be a state of the mind that comes and goes. One need not remove the wave from the ocean to understand its real nature as water. Advaita Vedānta clearly gives Prakriti, just an apparent or relative value -Śakti which although has some reality in 'becoming', cannot be the absolute truth in 'Being' which is the only Purusha Śiva. The absolute reality is ONE, that is invariably, essentially present among all experiences and has to be realized AS IT IS. Advaita Vedānta in this regard comes closer to Nātya when in the experience of Rasa, the latter fructifies into the former unitariness. The master yogi Abhinavagupta brings the theory of Rasasutra by applying the Pratyabhijna principle- a recollection of the blissful self that you are but has been forgotten by you. It is a vibrating self-recognition of the ONE REAL subject, brought about by reduction in identity with THE MANY objective realities. The catalyst in this is another person or event (the actor/drama before you in this case) that brings you face to face with 'THIS I AM'. Abhinavagupta holds his thesis based on Kashmir Saivism as against pure Advaita. The latter, if it holds Brahman to be self-contained Jagat and world as Mithya or illusory, the former attributes a degree of reality to the world's manifestation. All the same, Jagadguru Śankara Bhagavatpāda also gave a relative existential value to the world when you see his varied works on devotion.

Application of the Mahavākyas

The great sentences with Nātya are:

1. Prajñānam brahma- Brahman is Consciousness, Aitareya, Rigveda

2. Aham Brahmāsmi - I am Brahman, Brihadāranyaka, Yajurveda
3. Tattvamasi - That thou art, chhāndogya, Sāma Veda
4. Ayamātmā brahma- This Ātman is Brahman, Māndukya, Atharva Veda

One could analyse the impact of these great sentences on Nātya- The world of Nāma-Rūpa [names/characters and sculpture/forms], Gita-Vādyā [vocal singing and instruments], Bhāva-Tāla [Expressions and rhythmic movement] and Sāhitya – Kavita [Prose and poetry].

Comparing the world of a dramatist with the world at large, considering Śankara's theory -

1. Ādi Śankara says that whatever thing remains eternal is real, and whatever is non-eternal, unreal. Since the world is created and destroyed, it is unreal. Nātya is not real as it reflects the worldly happenings.
2. Truth is the thing which is unchanging. Since the world is changing, it is not true. Same is the case with Nātya as it portrays this changing world. Bharata repeatedly confirms that Nātya is only lokānukṛti 'imitation of the world'; the world is its foundation. In fact, the world, technical knowledge, and intuitive knowledge are the three inter-related fundamental structures on which Nātya is built (NS XXV. 120).

*loko vedastathayātmaṃ pramāṇaṃ
trividhaṃ smṛtam |
vedādhyātmapadārtheṣu prāyo nātyaṃ
pratiṣṭhitam ||*

3. Whatever is independent of space and time is real, and whatever has space and time in itself is unreal. The stage and duration of the performance restricts the

independent nature and hence Nātya becomes unreal as well.

4. Just as one sees dreams in sleep, he sees a kind of super-dream when he is waking. The world is compared to this conscious dream. Nātya spins a dream as story.
5. The world is believed to be a superimposition of the Brahman. The internal emotional states shine forth in the soul on which consciousness has been super-imposed [Adhyāropa/Parakāya Praveśha] and negated [Apavāda Prakriya]. Superimposition or characterization cannot be real as is the case with Nātya.

On the other hand, we have to also consider drama in the framework of Śankara's simultaneous claims that the world is not absolutely false –

1. If the world were false, then with the liberation of the first human being, the world would have been annihilated. However, the world continues to exist even if a human attains liberation. Nātya has stood through ages and hence there is an element of truth in it.
2. Ādi Śankara believes in Karma, or good actions. This is a feature of this world. Thus, the world cannot be absolutely false. Nātya consolidates the position of good as supreme and so it is true.
3. The Supreme Reality Brahman is the basis of this world. The world is like its reflection. Hence the world cannot be totally false.
4. Considering that the elements of Nātya Veda were all derived and conglomerated from the four Vedas with the coherent aspects of poetry, music, expression and

aesthetic joy, endorse the respective principles of reality as stated in the four sentences of Vedānta. In the culmination of Nāṭya Sādhana, Ātman experiences Brahmānada.

5. That even matters like sorrow and such like, which are in themselves distasteful, produce transcendental joy is due to the extraordinary poetic function, called the power of suggestion- vyañjana. This is altogether different from the experiences of other means of cognition and admits to Rasa being non-ordinary or Alaukika, and identical with resting in reality/ consciousness- samvidviśrānti/ pratibhā.

Sri Ādi Śankara said ‘THAT’ is indescribable. Drama is like the world; is false but yet cannot be absolutely false due to the truth in the dramatic experience created by it. Aesthetic joy or Rasānubhāva is like tasting divinity - consciousness. Rasānubhāva is Advaitic. The aesthetic experience of grief or sorrow in Nāṭya and Kāvya is different from that experienced by people in actual life. Sahrdāyas turn back repeatedly to experience this aesthetic sorrow. If it were painful like in the real world, then nobody would ever want to witness plays or read poems full of the pathos. For that matter, the ninth Śānta Rasā is due to this, called ‘Śānta’ -blissful peace or Ānanda, and is devoid of any emotion. It is consciousness, the ‘Reality’ in “Being “and the other eight Rasās are simultaneously real in “Becoming”. The dramatic representation of the actor, based on the poem, is ultimately based on the generalized emotion – not the poet’s personal, but an impersonal feeling created by his sensibility and imagination (pratibhā). It is not the realistic but an idealistic sentiment that is emoted, evoked and

relished. Drama brings one to the experience of Truth. At the transcendental stage, Rasa is just ONE, like the joy of sad tales or the beauty of an ugly woman in a painting! Aesthetic experience is in tasting ones’s own essential beatitude and in this sense, Rasa is truly single and this ‘I’, THE SELF, gets coloured by determinants and consequents [vibhāvās and anubhāvās] but remains ITSELF.

“It is only the self-realized Śaiva who sees that the world is nothing but Śiva just as it is the self-realized Vedāntin who sees the world as Brahman. *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahman - Ādi Śankara* conceives it as ineffable transcendence; Śaivism conceives it as the manifestation of infinite appearances in the modes of space and time [4]”.

Supreme consciousness or Nādashrahman

This manifests itself as Śabdashrahman through the power of Māya Śakti. It emerges first as Parā Vāni in the Moolādhāra, then as Paśyanti in the Manipura, next as Madhyama in the Anāhata and then eventually as Vaikhari in the Viśuddha Cakrās. Parā is the first stage of sound and is the source of all creation. Though Brahman Āswāda Sahodara [aesthetic experience as brother of mystical experience of Brahman] in the arts is self-proved, we may propose some logical proofs:

1. Texts - the Śāstrās describe Brahman in almost exact manner as these.
2. Psychological - every person experiences his soul, or ātman. When the soul expands -Hrdaya in dramatic experience, it reaches Brahman.
3. Teleological - the world as is seen as a drama played by Brahman consists of many other replicas of the world itself ie-

mini or minor dramas played by mankind on stage and all these appear very well in order only due to the “conscious principle” of Brahman.

4. Essential - Brahman is the basis of this created world of the Chief Creator Brahma and the created Creators-producers of plays, and hence all these creations would be again Brahman in essence without diminishing the totality.
5. Perceptible feeling - many people, when they achieve the Turīya beyond deep sleep state, claim that their soul has become one with everything else after the stages of wakeful, dreaming, deep sleep - Jāgrut, Swapna, Sushupti. One can compare this with the aesthetic journey in the hearts of spectators through stages like physical, emotional, imaginative with the characters on stage, and then cathartic and finally the transcendental experience. Turīya is Brahmānubhāva. It is the state of consciousness where in, there is unity of everything. This is known to us when we see Jivan Mukta though one can actually reach that state only through experience.

vāgarthāvivasamprktau

vāgarthapatipattaye |

jagataḥ pitarau vande

pārvatīparameśvarau || - Kalidāsa

Raghuvamsam 1-1

This verse aptly underlines the foundation of Trika, wherein the mother Pārvatī and father Parameśvara are inseparably united as word and meaning. This stands for Bhedābheda or Parāpara- Identity in difference. It is strange that Abhinavagupta, the fountainhead of this philosophy, does not make any reference to Ādi Śankara who shows his approval of the basics of Āgamic principles

in his philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. All the great sages and seers have been exponents of yogic practices either throughout or at some time in their lives and achieved the awakening of the Kundalini Śakti or Serpent power. The control of Prāna or breath, the Āsanās postures and Mudrās or gestures have been scientifically codified with a progressive teaching method as well so that the Sādhaka or exponent is prepared for higher stages that would finally lead to enlightening of the soul. Technically speaking, this is a method to unfold and activate the Cakrās or subtle energy points or plexuses. The Yogic exercises combined with deep meditation will help one to realize the innate consciousness and spirit when the Kundalini Śakti lying dormant like a coiled serpent at the root of the spine – Mulādhāra rises up slowly, passing through the other psychic nerve centres and unites with Śivā at the crown at the top of the head – Sahasrāra. Single-pointed contemplation and meditation leads to this, easier with the guidance of the self - realized Guru offering grace and channelising Universal energy from the Self. This happens spontaneously through devotional fervour and with the help of divine music and dance. Actually, in the path of devotion, one surrenders to the same spirit that one essentially IS in order to become united with One's own true SELF.

Sri Rāmakrishna was initiated in Advaita Vedānta by a wandering monk named Totāpuri, in the city of Dakṣiṇeśwar. While he asserted the supreme validity of Advaita Vedānta, he also proclaimed that he accepts both the Nityā (eternal substratum) and the Leelā (literally meaning play, indicating the dynamic Phenomenal Reality) as aspects of the Brahman. The idea of the descent of

consciousness shows the influence of the Bhakti movement and certain sub-schools of Śaktism on Ramakrishna's thought. He adopted a name that is clearly Vaiṣṇavite (Rāma and Kriṣṇa are both incarnations of Viṣṇu), but was a devotee of Kāli, the mother Goddess.

The role of Premā – love and Bhakti-devotion

It is pivotal in divine dance forms as Bharatanātyam. The combination of Nrittā [pure dance], Abhinayā [pure expression] and Nrityā [expressional dancing] when portrayed in a spirit of total ecstasy, rising above the physical realm and parameters of the body shall lead the dancer close to the limitless domain of the cosmic self. Such Nātyopāsana –devotional fervour in dance wherein the dance assumes worshipful nature, leads to Nātyabrahman-Realizing the Universal within the individual self. A dancer uses his/her own personality comprising of physical form and mental states as the primary vehicle in the first stage, then enters or takes up the personality of the various characters represented as the secondary vehicle in the second stage, unwinds shackles of personal traits as the dance level develops and deepens and then he/she gets elevated to the highest spiritual sphere. In this relation, the relevant emotion and application of Bhakti and Prema Bhāva-s comes forth. In the Śāstra, it is termed as Śringāra-Love; and is given the first place among the aesthetic flavours of dance and drama. Śringāra is considered as the Rasa Rāja –it rules literally because in its portrayal alone is the inherent scope to touch upon the other Bhāva-s too. Taking its three basic delineations as Vātsalya [motherly affection],

Rati [union of male and female principles]and Bhakti [self-surrender and devotion to Lord Almighty], Śringāra becomes delectable in any form whatsoever and offers the easiest path to be ONE with the ethereal world. A dancer could be amply skilled and sincere too, but unless there is a sublimation of the ego, the dance cannot be effective in creating Rasānubhāva, the impact of splendour. The dancer merges into the spirit of dance, surrenders to the magnificence of dance and spontaneously expresses a divine energy and this is when the audiences are also transported to similar experiences. Inspiration and intuition through dance follow both in dancer and the onlooker and irrespective of language or religious barriers, audiences can feel the divine energy. It is through the emotion-packed songs and lyrics, their exposition with portrayal of episodes, events, legends, historical characters and characteristics that the divine aura, ambience and vibrations are created for the audience to empathize totally and derive a fulfilling Rasā. “The goal of any Nātya is only to create Rasā. Rasā is the enjoyment of an aesthetic bliss derived through witnessing or reading a production. The process through which this is achieved is the sub-structure of the varied rules analytically laid down in the Nātya Śāstra. The Bhāva, i.e. feeling, contained in a situation and the character involved has to be expressed by the actor or the writer, as the case may be, in such a way that it can be understood by the onlooker or reader. Unless the feelings and ideas are communicated, the audience cannot share those feelings, which ultimately is responsible for evoking Rasā [5]”.

The musicians and the dancers can become transmitters. Looking at the above

process and essence of Nāṭya, we can assess Advaita, Viśishtādvaita and Dvaita. The concept of a dancer becoming one with the dance through Nāṭya Yoga is principally and essentially holistic and Advaitic, while the aesthetic representation and appreciation of manifestations of divinity incorporated in dance are examples of admitting to theosophies like Viśishtādvaita. Again, the Bhakti-Mārg [the pathway to God] prescribed by magnanimous saints from all over the world is so much suffused with infectious love, humble devotion and self-surrender, that dancing to their innumerable compositions [Keertanam] has the potency to infuse spiritual well-being. Creating, adding form [from Nirguna to Saguna] and placing this divinity on the highest pedestal become the right tools to communicate and a must for successful dramatic representation. Advaitam, True Śāntam, resting in Monism can be the 'end' indeed where there cannot be any mundane expression but Nāṭya in order to carry the dancer and spectators, has to be thoroughly expressive and appear world-related. It is multi-dimensional, physically externalizing through movement and emotions using eyes, parts of face, neck, limbs and also all along internalizing by co-relating the mind. Above all, witnessing all these ephemeral states exist 'the mystical eye' that can make one see the divine reality in the dance. Hence, one can understand the dance as LIFE itself, as Cosmic movement, infinite cycles of creation, sustenance, absorption, removal of ignorance and deliverance- the DANCE OF ŚIVĀ!

The truth is arrived at when the dance is spontaneous, unmanipulated, unpremeditated and done in surrender to the dance. The Advaitic philosophy is the

substratum for both Nāṭya and Tantrā. Through Tāntric myths, symbols and rituals of the timeless gods and goddesses, we can unravel truths of our real self in relation with who we are now at this particular time and place. We can discover so many personalities in ourselves and learn to identify with each one of them as our own expression. For this purpose, a balanced, scientific nurturing of body, mind and soul is required for the full blossoming of our true well-being. The Yantra or vehicle which becomes a mystical design is the body, our Kshetra/ temple and must be nourished well, in every positive way. Tantra incorporated in Nāṭya is what trains us to believe that our body is a pulsating miracle, a beautiful gift from the Almighty. The entire Universe dwells in us and Nāṭya Sādhana proves it. Although Trika Tantra speaks of rituals and esoteric practices that appear dualistic in approach to God, the main essence is Vedāntic in nature. That of absolute Cosmic universality of creation, that creation which is only a projection, extension, manifestation of either 'The cosmic man or the One spirit'. Similarly, Nāṭya portrays so many shades but all along the Śānta Rasānubhāva [element of peace] continues as the underlying sheath below all the myriad actions and after all the dramatic experience. "On the other hand, the dancer loses himself completely to the dance! The dancer and the dance become one; there is unison, a harmony, a reaching into the unfathomable depths of body, mind and soul. No correction based on forethought can be made. The reality of the dance is spontaneous and unpremeditated [6]"

The first and highest strata of life, both as Vedānta or as Tantra, must be given to the Absolute, the Cosmic Soul (Paramātmā).

This can never be defined, explained or given characteristics. It is the Supreme Reality and the only real substance. But man, with his many limitations and imperfections, prefers to see THAT in manifestation and form. It is true that in the life of sages, their aim was the Absolute, but there always existed that deep understanding that men, for the most part, could only see and think of the Divine in the form and qualities they understood. In creation, or the process of manifestation, the actionless Absolute had to resort to action, and the non-dual gave rise to duality. “Bharata internalizes, incorporates the Upaniṣadic world-view at the level of concepts and the ultimate goal of the artistic-experience and creates a structure which is an analogue to brahmanical ritual /yajna. An experience of undifferentiation, of a state of (concentration) Samādhī, an acausal, intellectual state, intuitive and non-cognitive, alone, could be liberated from immediacy and boundaries. This could make it possible or probable for creation to take place. Whether stated in words or not, it is ‘rasa’ in the singular, the highly charged state of momentary freedom and emancipation which motivates, inspires creation. Distancing, Tatastha, is consistently implied and is an underlying tenet of the Nāṭyaśāstra [7]”.

The principle of Advaita Vedānta once realized is a unique self- experience, inexplicable, indescribable and if art is used as a medium, then it can be conveyed, communicated and shared through works of Dvaitic nature. For the spectators then, this sacred art can epitomize Jñāna but be lead only through Bhakti. The keys of universal spiritual practices are pure devotion and surrender of ego. Bharata repeatedly confirms that Nāṭya is

only lokānukṛti ‘imitation of the world’; the world is its foundation. In fact, the world, technical knowledge, and intuitive knowledge are the three inter-related fundamental structures on which Nāṭya is built (NS XXV. 120).

*loko vedastathayātmaṃ pramāṇaṃ trividhaṃ smṛtam |
vedādhyātmapadārtheṣu prāyo nāṭyaṃ
pratiṣṭhitam ||*

“Bharata reminds us that the entire act of creation and presentation is a sadhana where impersonalization, depersonalization and detachment is primary. This inbuilt flexibility which has facilitated the twin phenomena of unbroken continuity at one level, and constant movement or change and flux at the other [8]”. In Nāṭya, the enumerated first emotion is eternal love and culminating emotion is emotion[less] peace, between the two are seven constantly changing emotions, a constant flux. After comparison between philosophies, what is it, that happens within the dancer and the spectator in modern scientific parlance? “On those very rare occasions when the holistic cognitive operator functions, you can experience complete unity. This powerful, altered state of consciousness in which all sense of the individual and all sense of duality disappears has been described by mystics for centuries and is the goal of Eastern meditation and rituals. Because it is non-verbal and subjective, it cannot be described in terms acceptable to the language of the other five cognitive operators [9]”.

In the Āgama, Bhakti precedes Jñāna, i.e., the Sādhaka acquires Jñāna by Bhakti, whereas in the Vedānta, Jñāna precedes Bhakti. The sixth stage in Āgama is Unmani and the seventh is Kaula which in Vedānta

is Turiya. It is energy that consents to go from word to thought to action. It is the first moment of will, the initial motion of the spirit, which is presupposed by any form of consciousness. Spandā is the movement, the inner rhythm of the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience is an inner perception like pleasure and pain. “This, enjoyment, which is different from any other kind of perception as direct knowledge and memory consists of the states of fluidity, enlargement and expansion, is characterized by a resting by a lysis, in our own consciousness, constituted by Sattva and intermixed with Rajah and Tamah, and is similar to the tasting of the supreme Brahman” [10] Aesthetic Experience of Abhinavagupta by R. Gnoli by Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series office..... page 108. There are many investigators who recognize the fact that the ancient Rishis like Bharata, might have possessed a basic knowledge of Spanda, this mysterious energy and that they might have absorbed, transmitted and thus utilized it with unbelievably astounding results. Exactly as in poetry, music, dance and visual arts, the ‘unsaid’ silent is almost more important than the ‘said’ and ‘sung’. Here it is the most important implicit level which is not explicit. The two levels of the undifferentiated states of oneness, non-duality, and the differentiated states of diversity and multiplicity are connected. In Trika, the ideal is not only the realization of the essential or divine self but also Jagadānanda in which the world is realized as the bliss of the divine made visible” [11]. This art says the sage Bharata, augments intellects, reflects the deeds of three worlds and delivers supreme knowledge and bliss, concomitant with chanting Vedas, conducting sacrifices and such noble acts. Seeing beauty

in a portrayal through dance, acting and music entails acceptance of every aspect of life as a ‘sweetness’ where nothing is taboo or grotesque. Unless gifted with empathy, the spectator or reader cannot respond to the scenes presented on the stage or in the poem. This empathy is called Hṛdayasamvāda. This is followed successively, in Abhinavagupta’s words, by the stages of Tanmayībhāvana (identifying oneself with the scene but retaining a certain distance) and Rasa-Carvaṇa (aesthetic relishing). One of Abhinava’s favourite maxims is - Sarvam Sarvātmakam i.e. Everything has the nature of everything. Says he- Like the self-realised yogin, we experience ourselves as sheer actors in the play of life in various roles of outer being but absolutely detached.

Trika and Advaita Vedānta philosophies in relation to Nāṭya come to the best example of complementariness in the magnum opus, Soundarya Lahiri. Śankara, in the 27th verse, gives an apt paradigm for an ideal state of surrender-

*japo jalpaḥ śilpaṁ sakalamāpi mudrāvīracanā
gatiḥ*

*prādakṣiṇyakramaṇamaśanādyāhutividhiḥ
praṇāmassamveśassukhamakhilamātmārpaṇa
dṛśā*

*saparyāparyāyastava bhavatu yanme vilasitam
||*

Meaning - Let the mutterings that I do, with the sacrifice in my soul. Become chanting of your name; let all my movements become thine Mudra-s. Let my travel become circumambulations around thee, Let the act of consuming [food or water] become fire sacrifice to thee. Let my act of lying down become salutations to you, and let all actions of comforts of mine, Become parts of thine

worship. This wave of beauty as a poem on Sri Lalitāmbika, Sri Rajarājeshwari bears testimony to the saint's Tāntric knowledge, appreciation of divine beauty and surrender to Śakti. He starts the eulogy in the first verse, with the term Śivey and brings out an underlying semblance of Śiva and Śakti, the Goddess being a Pativrata. He again says in the same poem in the 41st verse –

- i. *tavādhāre mūle saha samayayā lāsyaparayā* | I pray in your holy wheel of Mūladhāra, You who likes to dance, Samayā,
- ii. *navātmānaṃ manye navarasamahātāṇḍavanaṭam* | And that Lord who performs the great vigorous dance, with all the shades of nine emotions.
- iii. *ubhābhyāmetābhyāmudayavidhimuddiśya dayayā* | This world has you both as parents, Because you in your mercy, together
- iv. *sanāthābhyāṃ jajñe janakajanānīmajjagadidam* || recreate the world, as the world gets destroyed in the grand deluge.

On the same lines, the Vedāntic Śaivite nature of Trika is seen in Abhinava's hymn –

*Nrutiyati, gāyati, hrushyati gāḍham,
Samvidiyam mama bhairavanātha,
Tvām priyamāpya sudarśanamekam,
Durlabham anya janaihi samayajñam*

Meaning - O Bhairava Nātha! At times, I dance, I sing, I rejoice within the moments of ecstasy. This is how I feel, what "Samvit" is for me. Because, "I see you in close proximity and in blissful radiance in your being [12]".

Bhavabhuti, the dramatist, is probably the first to mention Bharata Muni

as the author and he calls him a Tauryatrikāsūtrakāra. "Sūtra 9- Nartaka Ātma- Such a one who has realized his essential spiritual nature is a Self that is only an actor [on the world stage]; as has been said in the laudatory verse uttered by the goddess in the seventh section of Naisvasyatantra entitled 'Goddess and God as dancer': "In one aspect you are the inner Self, a dancer, (in another aspect) you are preserver of your essential nature as the Highest Self." Bhatta Srinarāyana also says in his Stavacintāmani Verse 59: "Śiva, you have produced a three-world drama which has in its interior Māya as the source of all the existence. You have presented the introductory portion of the drama. Where is the creative artist other than yourself who can bring about its' conclusion?" [13]. An artist who's privy to the experience and skilled to represent, enacts with the profundity of Trika philosophy that flows through his art, like a pot brimming with nectar and the spectator who's immersed in appreciating the act with heartfulness, responds for the ideal fulfilment of Advaitam as the one and only Satyam. "The aesthetic performance and experience lead the adept towards identity with Śiva by disclosing his or her possession of his immanent Śakti [14]".

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About Author



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Veda Samskruti Samiti

13-1-62 & 13-1-47/1

Veenapani Nagar, Malkajgiri

HYDERABAD Telangana



Veda Samskruti is an inherent intellectual property of Bhaarata dEsham. It is the basic duty and right of every citizen in Bhaarata dEsham to protect this Intellectual property. Indian Constitution and Law provides provision for protection and preservation of its culture, its monuments, architecture etc.

The Chaturvedas said to have 1131 shaakhaas right up to the time of Aadi Shankaraachaarya and thereafter during last more than ten centuries, many shaakhaas are out of practice due to various reasons and presently only seven shaakaas are in the practice of Guru shiShya parampara.

There is a need to continuously preserve these available shaakhaas which may likely to disappear in future due to various external forces acting in the country vigorously with the power of money and global politics. It is time for the intellectuals of Bharata dEsham to wake-up and work collectively to protect and preserve Veda Samskruti of Bharata dEsham, by empowering the Youth of Bharat dEsham, the future care takers of this great Indian Heritage , with suitable education of our correct history and culture.

The above background lead to formation of this Veda Samskruti Samiti which is registered under Societies acts of Government of Telangana, with Regd. No. 961/2016 by Sri A.H. Prabhakara Rao, who is the Founder and President of the Samiti.

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