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**PSYCHOLOGY OF RASA, EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCE IN  
THE STAGE PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI**

Submitted by:

**Ms. Garima Hariniwas Tiwari**

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Research Supervisor and Guide:

**Dr. Anshu Surve**

Assistant Professor

Department of English, Faculty of Arts

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara

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## Introduction

Drama as a literary form has evolved and come far away from the domains of antiquities. One of the oldest available treatise on the science of drama (dramaturgy) is *NāṭyaŚāstra* by Bharata, in which he has stated, “वस्तुनेतारसस्तेषां [नाट्यानां] भेदकः।” [Plot, Character and Rasa are the divider (base) of that (literary work)] (Unni). Fore grounded in this principle, the proposed research intends to assert the possibility, necessity and scope for psychological studies of Rasa (how the constituents of Rasa - vibhāva, anubhāva, vyabhichāribhāva, sthāyibhāva and sādḥārṇikaraṇa, etc. engage with psychological studies and how these can be interpreted), associated emotions and in the stage plays of Mahesh Dattani. The purpose of plays according to Kālidasa is – “नाट्यंभिन्नरुचेर्जनस्य बहुधाप्येकं समाराधनम्” (Nāṭya is the only thing which entertains and gives pleasure to the people of immensely different interests) (Rajan1, 7).. Entertainment and pleasure are affinity perceptible in Dattani’s plays like *Tara*, *The Big Fat City*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like A Man*, *On A Muggy Night In Mumbai*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Where did I Leave My Purdah?*, etc. which would help out in asserting the timelessness of the oldest Rasa theory of Indian drama.

Rasa theory is one of the most fascinating theories of Indian poetics that abounds encyclopedic and multifarious research and literature of more than one and a half millennium ranging from Bharata (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC) to Professor Sheldon Pollock (21<sup>st</sup> Century AD). Rasa as a concept cannot be said as unexcogitable but, is certainly inextricable since the word – “Rasa” emerged in the *Rig Veda*, from the dynamics of our

understandings of the hermeneutics of principles of Indian aesthetics. Hermeneutical and creative interpretations and reinterpretations of Rasa can be traced to the tradition of writing commentaries on Rasa that dates back to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa and Professor Sheldon Pollock, who is the last to write. Bharata has pronounced eight main Rasa - Śrīṅāra, Hāsyā, Karuṇā, Raudra, Vīra, Aḍbhuta, Bībhatsa and Bhayānaka. Sanskrit Poetics confirms the amalgamation of plot, character and Rasa and further determines drama in 10 main categories with 18 sub categories. *Daśarūpaka*, a treatise of 10<sup>th</sup> century remarkably presents types of plot, characters, Rasa and 10 types of plays. *Daśarūpaka* further elaborates four types of nāyaka and three types of nāyika and their interpretation on the basis of Rasa.

Emotions with their unique universality, irrespective of social, cultural or political identities are combinations of physiological arousal, psychological appraisal and subjective experiences. Emotions are articulated in the form of experiences within the conscious, subconscious or even unconscious framework of human psychology. Emotions have been assigned different interpretations in western thought and philosophy. This critical endeavor seeks to analyse Rasa, emotions (un/resolved), conflicts, guilt, ambivalences, and experiences (un/shared) traceable within, also expressed through the behavior of characters in the literary work (plays of Mahesh Dattani). Emotions in Loke's words are 'Internal Sensation resulting from the idea of good and evil' (1978, 229-230). Hume considered emotions as 'secondary' or 'reflective' impressions caused by impression of pleasure and pain (1978, 275). Hume identified external sensations as primary impressions and emotions as secondary impressions. James in *The Trouble with Emotions in Psychology* objected to the traditional concept of emotions stating that

Emotions are regarded too much as absolutely individual things. Freud considered emotions as capable of being repressed and gave meaning to the term 'unconscious'. According to Freud, emotions can be unconscious but feelings are necessarily conscious. He also considers emotions as intentional states of mind. Freud introduced that emotions are the causes of actions. Indian dramaturgy offers theory of Rasa rooted in emotions and experience through the characters and plot. Rasa invigorated with emotions is an inherent attribute of an artistic work that is relished with emotions as its evocative content, stimulating an incorporeal experience quite distinct from mundane realizations, practical worldly concerns and even pragmatic preaching, directing towards spiritual salvation. Rasa ingrained in aesthetic experience and aesthetic contemplation contributes in examining the emotive and experiential effect of literature on listeners/readers/audience. Literature plays an important role in not only in understanding of these emotions but also in sharing and realizing associated experiences of life.

An interdisciplinary evaluative analysis of Dattani's modern Indian stage plays based on the psychological study of Rasa theory along with the idea of emotions and experience composes interesting research and yields a new vista in the field of aesthetics and dramaturgy.

## Terminology used in the Research Title

वस्तुनेतारसस्तेषां (नाट्यानां)भेदकः। means Plot, character and rasa are the divider of a literary work).

Nāṭaka - nāṭaka is recognized to be the highest type of dramatic composition.

Nāṭikā is a kind of Upa-rūpaka that means a drama of the second order.

Rasa (“रस्यते अस्वाद्यते’ वा इति रसः”) is the aesthetic experience, which constitutes the quintessence of every performing art.

Bhāva (आत्मानुभवं भाव) refers to the psychological states of the mind or feelings of a soul

Sahridaya is the model spectator that empathizes with the author.

Brahmsahodaranand is a Transcendental State of a human.

Indian aesthetics is Indian art evolved with an emphasis on inducing special spiritual or philosophical states in the audience, or with representing them symbolically.

Emotion is a complex state of feeling that results in physical and psychological changes that influence thought and behavior in Psychology.

Experience is an act of living through an event or events; personal involvement in or observation of events as they occur.

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behavior. Psychologists are actively involved in studying and understanding mental processes, brain functions, and behavior.

Modernism was a movement in the arts in the first half of the twentieth century that rejects traditional values and techniques and emphasized the importance of individual experience.

Performativity and Performance derive from the verb to perform. They denote the capacity to execute an action, to carry something out actually and thoroughly, as well as to do according to prescribed ritual.

## **Rationale of the Study**

There is a consistent and continuous debate regarding relevance of Rasa theory, a theory that represents the legacy of Indian Poetics, drama and theatre. On the basis of that the tenants of Rasa theory are becoming obsolete and are difficult to relate to present day life and literature. Though there have been plethora of research and an entire corpse of knowledge has been created based on comprehending Rasa theory in its different context and its application on the critical analysis of various literary texts but seldom has been an attempt to look beyond Rasa theory being applied as a tool to analyse the text. This research aims to associate complexities of Modern Indian Theatre with Classical Rasa theory. How Rasa is associated with Psychology, Emotions and Experience that will be evaluated through the plays of Mahesh Dattani.



## Scope of the Research

This research examines the stage plays of an Indian English playwright Mahesh Dattani in the context of Sanskrit Dramaturgy as it is the oldest theory of Indian Drama. Dattani's plays which are very much contemporary and made to be staged would help out in testing the immortality of the theory. He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. His composition includes stage play, screenplay and radio play. He has used his craft to project social reality and issues. He founded his playgroup in 1984 and wrote his first play *Where There's A Will*. Since then he has written many plays such as *Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Final Solutions, Dance Like A Man, On A Muggy Night In Mumbai, Thirty Days in September, Where did I Leave My Purdah?, Seven Steps around the Fire*, etc. Dattani's following stage plays are incorporated as a scope of this research.

- ***Where There's a Will (1988)***: A play rooted in the Gujarati familial dynamic. The most tangible and dynamic reality in middle-class Indian lives is very well portrayed.
- ***Dance Like a Man (1989)***: This play depicts the conflict between tradition and modernity.
- ***Tara (1990)***: Highly read as a text in the classrooms of English literature and evaluated through various theories which tells a story of Tara and Chandan.
- ***Bravely Fought the Queen (1991)***: An empirical drama which removes the mask of hypocrisy from a seemingly normal urban household.
- ***Final Solutions (1993)***: This is one of the best plays of Dattani with the theme of the communal riots.

- ***Seven Steps around the Fire (1998)***: A protest play against the social exclusion of the hijras.
- ***On a Muggy Night in Mumbai (1998)***: This play is about the twin matters of gay and lesbianism and it takes Mumbai city as its background.
- ***Thirty Days in September (2001)***: It is based on a child's sexual abuse and its impact.
- ***The Big Fat City (2012)***: A play in which Dattani portrays Mumbai as a dreamlike, disastrous, glitzy destroyer of lives and relationships.
- ***Where Did I Leave My Purdah? (2012)***: This play is about an octogenarian former star who is nostalgic for the glorious days of historical theatre which is settled there in the backdrop of the Partition.

## Research Objectives

1. To study how Rasa theory has evolved over the centuries.
2. To find how the constituents of Rasa - vibhāva, anubhāva, vyabhichāribhāva, sthāyibhāva and sādharṇikarāṇa, etc. are engaged with psychological studies.
3. To examine how the theories of Rasa can be referred in the larger contemporary discourse of modern plays of Mahesh Dattani.
4. To understand how the stage plays of Mahesh Dattani are engaged with psychology of Rasa, emotions and experience.
5. To critically study whether Rasa is a key to character and plot or not.
6. To find is character a charioteer of Rasa, emotions and experience or not.
7. To analyze how Rasa is fundamental in determining type of play (As propounded in Daśarūpaka).
8. To examine is Rasa a charioteer of aesthetic delight in the plays of Mahesh Dattani.

The proposed research aims at reinterpreting the selected plays of Indian English playwright - Mahesh Dattani from the lenses of Sanskrit dramaturgy and psychological studies.

## Research Hypothesis

This thesis attempts to critically examine stage plays of Mahesh Dattani within the framework of Rasa studies as exhibited in *Daśarūpaka*, emotions and experience. In the discourse of Rasa Theory, dynamics of plot, character and Rasa have been explored in the stage plays of Mahesh Dattani. The plays are evaluated on the basis of bhāva, vibhāva, vyabhichāribhāva, sthāyibhāva which could also broadly be termed as emotions. Emotions and experience are studied as constituents of Rasa in Indian theory and Western idea of Emotions and experience are also taken into consideration.

## Research Questions

1. How Rasa theory has evolved over the centuries?
2. How do the constituents of Rasa - vibhāva, anubhāva, vyabhichāribhāva, sthāyibhāva and sādharṇikarāṇa, etc. engage with psychological studies?
3. How the theories of Rasa can be referred in the larger contemporary discourse of modern plays of Mahesh Dattani?
4. How do the stage plays of Mahesh Dattani engage with psychology of Rasa, emotions and experience?
5. Is Rasa a key to character and plot?
6. Is character a charioteer of Rasa, emotions and experience?
7. How Rasa is fundamental in determining type of play? (As propounded in Daśarūpaka)
8. Is Rasa a charioteer of aesthetic delight in the plays of Mahesh Dattani?

The proposed research aims at reinterpreting the selected plays of Indian English playwright - Mahesh Dattani from the lenses of Sanskrit dramaturgy and psychological studies.

## Research Methodology

This is a work of qualitative, exploratory and comparative research on the Rasa theory and Indian/Sanskrit dramaturgy through the plays of Dattani. The research is primarily textual, interdisciplinary and evaluative and engages the plays of Mahesh Dattani with Rasa theory of Sanskrit dramaturgy (*Daśarūpaka*). Rasa theory is intertwined with the idea of emotions and experience.

Theory of Rasa from *NāṭyaŚāstra* and *Daśarūpaka* helped in understanding how Rasa plays major role in the drama. Theory of plot from Dhanik Dhananjaya's *Daśarūpaka* helped in understanding how plot is an important and inseparable from the idea of Rasa. Dhanik Dhananjaya's *Daśarūpaka* (10th century) helped in understanding how the chemistry of plot, character and Rasa work.

Indian as well as Western theories of emotions and experience assisted in psychological studies of Mahesh Dattani's plays. This research focuses on reinterpretation of Rasa theory through the lenses of psychology, emotions and experience as reflected in Dattani's stage plays.

## Scheme of Chapterisation

The following tentative chapters will be part of my research work:

- Chapter 1      Introduction
- Chapter 2      Review of Relevant Literature
- Chapter 3      Theorizing *Dasharupakam*, Emotions and Experience
- Chapter 4      Analyzing Plays of Mahesh Dattani through the Lenses of Psychology of *Rasa*, Emotions and Experience
- Chapter 5      Conclusion

### **Chapter 1      Introduction**

The initial section of this chapter provides an overview of *Rasa* Theory and introduces the concepts of emotions and experience. The following part of this chapter explores the factual and historical aspects of Indian drama, Indian English Drama, Modern Indian Drama, and Mahesh Dattani as a prominent modern Indian English playwright. It also provides a concise overview of the stage plays and their respective themes. The subsequent section of the chapter focuses on the literature review, research objectives, research questions, relevance and scope of the study, its limitations, and the overall structure of the thesis in the form of chapter organization. Additionally, it emphasizes the central ideas that will be further developed in the following chapters.

### **Chapter 2      Review of Relevant Literature**

In the chapter, an attempt has been made to study all concepts related to main subject and showcase the scope for the present research. This chapter examines and explains the research done in the field of *Rasa* theory, emotions, experience, theatre, Indian aesthetics, and plays of Dattani in detail. A sincere attempt has been made to peruse and comprehend the numerous journal articles, thesis, available on print and digital media pertaining to the central idea to gain an in-depth understanding about the same.

### **Chapter 3     Theorizing *Dasharupakam*, Emotions and Experience**

The introductory section of this chapter delves into *Dasharupakam*, which serves as the foundation for the concepts of *Rasa*, plot, and character. The theory has been presented and expounded upon in the chapter. The subsequent section of the aforementioned chapter explores theories of emotions and experiences, examining both the Indian and Western perspectives and their correlation with the concept of *Rasa*.

### **Chapter 4     Analyzing Plays of Mahesh Dattani through the Lenses of Psychology of *Rasa*, Emotions and Experience**

This chapter deals with Psychology of *Rasa* and characters through the Stage Plays of Mahesh Dattani. It provides a detailed account of how Classical *Rasa* theory is closely associated with the recent idea of Psychology. How various terminologies associated with *Rasa* are correlated with Psychology. Plays of Mahesh Dattani have been a base to study Psychology of *Rasa* theory in depth, Emotions and Experience. The chapter also elaborates more on plot, types of the plays in the context of *Dasrupakam* and stage plays of Dattani.



## **Chapter 5      Conclusion**

The concluding chapter serves as a comprehensive synthesis of the fundamental concepts that have been examined throughout the preceding chapters. This analysis aims to underscore the significance of *Rasa* in contemporary Indian theatre by examining the stage plays of Mahesh Dattani. The final chapter of this study offers suggestions and recommendations for playwrights and researchers working within the same field.

## **Limitation of the Study**

For the purpose of this thesis, only stage plays of Mahesh Dattani and their performance has been analyzed through the lenses of Psychology of Indian Aesthetics, emotions and experience, the other theatrical aspects of the plays have not been delved into. The scope of this research is therefore limited to the Theatrical Performances of the ten stage plays of Mahesh Dattani and gender, identity, precarity, social, political and regional aspects have not been emphasized.

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