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THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION
OF THE ‘NATURE OF THE WORLD

(*Lokasya Svabhāva*)’

and the Meaning of Saḥṛdaya*

‘*Avadhakiśoragurucaraṇasmṛtaii Samarpyate*’

The ancient Indian *Treatise on Theatre* (*Nāṭyaśāstra*) of Bharatamuni defines the art of theatre as the nature of the human world (*svabhāvo lokasya*) with its happiness and despair, endowed with the [four] ‘leads’

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Professor A.K. Narain (1925–2013) an eminent historian, numismatist, archaeologist, and Buddhologist passed away on July 10, 2013 at the age of 88 in his home town, Varanasi, India, after a very distinguished career, first as Professor of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology at Banaras Hindu University (India) and later as Professor of History & South Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA). A Ph.D. graduate from SOAS, University of London, and author of the ground-breaking book *The Indo-Greeks*, he had academic interests that ranged far and wide. His numerous articles on ancient Indian history, numismatics, archaeology have provided new ideas and directions for current and future researchers. He was the founder of the Indian Archaeological Society and its journal, *Puratattva*. His efforts toward the development of Buddhist Studies as a scholarly discipline contributed to the establishment of the International Association of Buddhist Studies and the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* and, later, the *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*. For last few years, he had been engaged in his ambitious project on Kurush to

beginning with ‘body-lead’.¹⁾ In order to grasp properly the way that not only theatre but also all other arts, affect the psyche of the *rasikas* (literally – ‘tasters’, i.e., art recipients), we have to broach upon the manner in which the said nature of the human world should be understood. To meet this requirement we shall make the concept of *saccidānandam* the main point of reference, while focusing on the idea of *ānanda* – satisfaction²⁾, which – we insist – holds latent in its womb both happiness and despair (*sukha* and *duḥkha*), which are awakened by the impulse of *kāma* – love. *Saccidānandam* – the famous upanishadic formula that appears to be an attempt to describe the nature of absolute reality, basically apophatic, singles out two potentialities of Being (*sat*). The first is pure consciousness (*cit*) and the second is satisfaction

Kanishka – A Millennium of Early History of Asia without Nation-state Boundaries: Movements and Interactions of Peoples, Ideas and Institutions. Some of the documentary historical volumes of the project are complete and are in different stages of publication. He believed in ‘connected histories’ and his writings are marked by an overall focus on India and the ‘other.’

I feel very much privileged by fate that I happened to have as my Ph.D. research supervisor Professor Avadh Kishor Narain. It was long ago in the 1960s that I found myself in Varanasi, enrolled as a Ph. D. student at the College of Indology of Banaras Hindu University. Professor A.K. Narain was at that time the Head of the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology. Asked about the planned topic of my research, I informed him that I would wish to concentrate on ancient Indian theatre and Sanskrit drama. Professor Narain, a historian of international repute, smiled and said that he will have to learn a lot from me, since this topic has never been within his sphere of research. Yet, notwithstanding his exemplary modesty he was extremely helpful in advising me how to sort out problems, how to organise my research and how to find scholars who, thanks to his recommendation, were more than ready to share with me their specific knowledge. Besides almost right from the beginning I was treated like a member of his family and at every step I felt his fatherly care. I am very grateful to providence, that just six months before his demise I was able to have his darśan and touch his feet. Let the following essay laid at his feet be a token of gratitude for the fact that I can count myself as one among his pupils.

¹⁾ (*Yo’yam svabhāvo lokasya sukhaduḥkhasamanvitaḥ // aṅgādyabhinoyopetaḥ nāṭyamityabhidhīyate //*) NŚ.I.119. We translate *abhinaya* as ‘a lead’ referring to the etymology of this word, which is derivative from the root *√nī* plus prefix *abhi* and means ‘to lead towards’.

²⁾ Neither bliss, which usually is considered the proper English equivalent of this Sanskrit term, nor joy or German Lust or Freude (Myrhofer Kurzgefasstes Etymologisches Wörterbuch) adequately and fully express the meaning of *ānanda*. Satisfaction is the best translation. As for instance in case of *ātma-jñāna-ānanda* – satisfied in self-realisation (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 5.9.1–2). [<http://vedabase.net/sb/5/9/1-2/en> (16.11.2014)].

(*ānanda*). Being is identical with both of them and both are undifferentiated in the womb of Being. The first is responsible for rationality and appears to be a correlate of the *manas* of the *Nāsadiya* hymn of the *Ṛgveda*. The second is responsible for emotionality and therefore appears to be a correlate of the *kāma* of the same hymn.³⁾ It is thus the latter that is of special interest to us now. For *kāma* signifies the activated *ānanda*, which is thereby made manifest so that this *ānanda* may be realised by the very Being Itself.

Such a realisation of *ānanda* comes about through the act of perception, which juxtaposes two aspects of being – 'it' and 'self'. For the only possible way to perform an act of perception in the case of 'one-without-the-second' (*ekamevādviṭīyam*) is to direct that act towards the self since no other object of perception exists. Consequently 'it' perceives its own 'self'— i.e. a *brahman* perceives itself (*ātmanam*). Such an act of perception means that consciousness (*cit*), latent in the Being (*sat*) prompted by *kāma*, stirs into action releasing enormous energy (*tapas*), which in effect embeds *ātman* into the womb of *prakṛti*. It is thus *prakṛti* that bestows upon the Absolute its *ātman*-ness and like in a mirror allows 'it' to perceive its own 'self'. It is for this very reason that the *Aitareya upaniṣad* says that seed becomes *ātman* in the warmth of a woman's womb⁴⁾, thus indicating that the human microcosm reflects faithfully the macrocosm of Being.

This process, most naturally, means the emergence of space, which accounts for the separation of a subject from an object of perception which, by the way, do not stop being identical with each other. This exactly is what is meant by the equation of *Brahman* with *Ātman*. The famous image of the golden embryo or the Egg of Brahma (*brahmāṇḍa*) breaking into two may be referred to at this moment. This act of stretching space (*tatam* – stretched) happens in time, which is implied when it is said that *Bhagavān* spent one year encased in that Egg.⁵⁾

Now time and space make evaluation possible. Thanks to time and space we may pass judgements such as something happens early or late, fast or slow or else something is located near or far, high up or down below. In short, together with time and space, we are given at our disposal a scale which

³⁾ कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताद्धि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत्।

सुतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन् हृदि प्रतीष्यां कुवयो मनीषा॥ ४॥ [http://vedaravindamu.wordpress.com/2011/10/11/origin-of-the-universe-nasadiya-sukta-of-rig-veda/\(17.09.2014\).](http://vedaravindamu.wordpress.com/2011/10/11/origin-of-the-universe-nasadiya-sukta-of-rig-veda/(17.09.2014).)

⁴⁾ *Aitareya upaniṣad* 2.1.2; See also Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (1998: 78).

⁵⁾ *Manusmṛti* I.12.

permits us to determine our position in time (a clock) and in space (a measuring tape). This is what is implied in the *Nāsadīya* hymn when it mentions the ṛiṣis and their raśmi with which they measured, i.e., categorised space.⁶⁾

The idea of the emergence of time and space does not thereby seem to be controversial. The difficulty appears when moral and aesthetic ‘space’ comes into view – when we have to somehow see the ‘bad’ and the ‘ugly’ within the monistic scheme of reality. It is easy to accommodate their positive counterparts but what to do with the negative ones? Here mathematics comes to our aid. Plus one and minus one are of equal status. When summed up they give zero. This is similar in the case of *sukha* and *duḥkha*. Both, as if integrated in the experience of man, result in satisfaction. The literal meaning of the Latin *satis-factiō*⁷⁾ seems to correspond well to what zero is in mathematics.

Now the question should be asked what may be the relation between *Ānanda* and the *sukhaduḥkha* aspect of the nature of the world as defined by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*? Is the positive connotation of the term *ānanda* beyond question after all? Can we accommodate within its precincts the negative *duḥkha*? Or should we – in the spirit of radical dualism – accept the contention that *duḥkha* belongs to the sphere of Non-Being? Certainly not!

The *Taittirīya upaniṣad* comes to our rescue here and furnishes us with a concept corresponding in the sphere of emotions to the zero of mathematics. ‘That which is well made that verily is the essence. Satisfied does he become who but finds the essence’⁸⁾ – runs the famous formula. Why should we invoke it here? If *saḥ* is the very same *Saccidānanda*, then it is yet another potentiality of Being, which has the power to reduce the scale of everyday perception to the one overwhelming feeling of awareness of – just – being – whether that means joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure or any other pair of such opposites that torment us so much in our mundane existence. In the same way that the zero in mathematics is the very edge of countable reality, as if standing between non-countable-ness and countable-ness, so *rasasvāda* is the liminal emotional experience, which permits one to perceive both *sukha* (+1)

⁶⁾ तिरश्चीनो विततो रुश्मिरेषामधः स्विदासी ३ दुपरि स्विदासी ३ त्।

रेतोधा आसन्महिमानं आसन्त्वधा आवस्तात्प्रयतिः परस्तात्॥५॥ <http://vedaravindamu, op.cit>.

⁷⁾ Latin *satisfactiōn-* (stem of *satisfactiō*) a doing enough, equivalent to satisfy (us) (past participle of *satisfacere*, equivalent to *satis* enough + *facere* to make [<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/satisfaction> (16.11.2014)].)

⁸⁾ *Taittirīya upaniṣad* [II.7] *Raso vai saḥ/ rasam hy evāyam labdhvā’nandī bhavati*. Som Raj Gupta, whose translation I am quoting renders *ānandī* as ‘blissful’. Gupta (1999: 193).

and *duḥkha* (-1) in the same vein and draw profound satisfaction (*ānanda*) from the fact.

Yet, there is one important condition that has to be met by the audience who watches the performance. Each member of it should be 'with heart' (*sahṛdaya*), i.e., capable of empathy. Here modern neurology comes to our succour, helping us to understand properly the process that results in the *rasasvāda*. The key term is empathy which, according to Simon Baron-Cohen, is the capacity to recognise the thoughts and feelings of another person and to react to them appropriately.⁹⁾ Such a capacity means that we are in a position to understand the condition of the other person and we are able to put ourselves in his or her situation.¹⁰⁾ In other words we should be prepared 'to get infected with the emotions of others'.¹¹⁾ Now actor-leaders (*nāyakāḥ, abhinētāraḥ*) are supposed to be experts in evoking such emotions and 'infecting' with them spectators. This is why '...we find it difficult to watch brutal or moving film scenes dispassionately. Watching a victim who is persecuted or tried by fate, although we know well that it is only an impersonating actor, we still experience his despair, pain and fear ourselves.'¹²⁾ Now, this capacity is apparently not anything illusive – a kind of attitude that we are taught while growing up – but is basically genetic. The experiments conducted clearly demonstrated that damaging certain parts of the brain makes the recognition of emotions difficult if not impossible.¹³⁾ It is fascinating that while investigating this problem, in order to make the perpetrator realise emotions of the victim, the method of impersonating the victim was used.¹⁴⁾ Thus, theatre proves helpful in psychotherapy. The author concludes that there are genes responsible for empathy¹⁵⁾ and empathy is the most precious resource that exists in our world.¹⁶⁾

It is worth noting that although there are no means of investigation accessible to us now, the ancient Indian codifiers of the art of theatre must have been aware of the role of empathy, which they most certainly understood

⁹⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 32).

¹⁰⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 33).

¹¹⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 50).

¹²⁾ Kwiatek, Hohol (2014: 51).

¹³⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 45).

¹⁴⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 137).

¹⁵⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 138).

¹⁶⁾ Baron-Cohen (2014: 139, 163).

under the term *saḥṛdaya*. Without this basic and indispensable qualifier, the perception of art would not be possible. This does not only refer to theatre but also to all other arts, which – according to Bharatamuni’s *dictum* – are to be seen in theatre.¹⁷⁾ Thus, thespians are not the only ones to be endowed with this capacity to evoke empathy in onlookers. The same maybe said about all artists.

But the transmission of emotions would not be possible, were their ontological source in the form of happiness and despair not embedded into the very nature (*svabhāva*) of Being in the concept of satisfaction (*ānanda*). It is for this very reason – I presume – that the term *ānanda* in the context of theatre is defined as ‘the thing wished for, the end of drama.’¹⁸⁾

There remain two more issues to be tackled. The first concerns theatre, termed by Bharatamuni as generating beneficial (*hitopadeśa-janana*) and universal (*sarvopadeśajanana*) instruction for the world (*lokopadeśajanana*).¹⁹⁾ It is precisely because theatre above all has the power to evoke an emotional response, but of a very special kind. Here the term *sādhāraṇīkārāṇa* should be referred to. The stage reality is precisely named *sādhāraṇīkṛta*, i.e., universalised or maybe better understood as ‘departicularised’. This means that this particular reality is neither the actual reality of an actor, nor that of a hero or for that matter that of a spectator – it is like everyone’s reality. Consequently, emotions generated by such a reality also have a similar character. This is why our emotional response is equally departicularised and consequently both positive as well as negative emotions affect us in a similar way and make us experience profound satisfaction (*ānanda*) when confronted both with happiness and with despair. This is supposed to condition us to the same reactions in our daily existence. For this differs only as far as the degree of ‘virtuality’ is concerned. After all, according to Indian philosophy both belong to the same sphere of *māyā*, i.e., to the reality that appears to our eyes while on the whole our senses do not guarantee that it is a one hundred percent faithful picture of reality.

The second issue is a consequence of our interpretation of the term *saḥṛdaya* as empathy. Thus theatre may play the role of a psychologist’s studio for collective therapy. It is a place where people are taught how to experience emotions and exercise empathy.

¹⁷⁾ *Nāṭyśāstra* of Bharatamuni, I. 116, Bharatamuni (1956: 41).

¹⁸⁾ Monier-Williams (1899: 139).

¹⁹⁾ *Nāṭyśāstra* of Bharatamuni, I. 113–115, Bharatamuni (1956: 40–41).

There are undoubtedly two skills that make men unique among all other living creatures. These are highly articulated speech and the ability to generate and sustain fire. Without much hesitation I would add a third one – theatre!

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