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## (Musings) Why I study aesthetics: an unwritten essay

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द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।  
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्त्यनश्नन्नन्यो अभिचाकशीति ॥

*'Two birds with shining wings,  
Always intertwined—deepest of friends,  
Cling on the same tree.  
One eats the sweet fruit.  
The other, without eating—watches'*

The *Rig Veda Samhita* 1.164.20-22, later incorporated in *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.1.1-2, and *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.6-7 —Adapted from the translations of JL Masson, MV Patwardhan, and Swamini Svratmavidyananda

Too idle am I—  
To talk, or write, or even to think—  
So I float—and drift—and soar,  
To explode in bits of joy  
In a dreamless sleep.

—Dyutiman Mukhopadhyay

The aim is to study the state of consciousness that makes us experience detached passion. The study itself is inconsequential since detached passion can only be experienced and the study provides no additional dimensions to the experience. The awareness that the study is inconsequential imparts the characteristics of detachment to the study itself. The study itself thus becomes an experience of detached passion.

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#### Footnote & References:

The musings above are based upon Kashmiri Shaivist Abhinavagupta's concept of *Santa Rasa* (10th Century AD) and my *Advait* beliefs stemmed from the *Upanishads*. Abhinavagupta was a prodigious philosopher, aesthete, and literary critic who single-handedly '*alamkārasāstrām tenaiva śāstratvam prāpitam—alone turned poetics into a science.*' (Masson & Patwardhan, 1969). Abhinavagupta extends the eight *Rasas* by adding the concept of the *Santa Rasa* which he regards as the essence of all *Rasas*. It is this 9<sup>th</sup> *Rasa* which according to Abhinavagupta lets the *Rasika* (*sahridaya*) attain the metacognitive aesthetic detachment and savour the essences of all other *Rasas* and therefore the true aesthetic delight. The introduction of the 9<sup>th</sup> *Rasa* integrates the concepts of Bharata's *Rasasutra* and Patanjali's *Yoga* theory – the detachment necessary to introspect inwards into the inherent state of freedom and bliss (aesthetic consciousness). Abhinavagupta felt it necessary to provide a unified theory of *Rasa* since the Kashmiri Shaivists thought of integrating aesthetic experience with states of religious ecstasy as well as transcendental *Tantric* sexual ecstasy. It is therefore not at all surprising that the Indian *Rasasutra*, *Kamasutra* and *Yogasutra* all strive for the same transcendental eternal where the transcendence of the self is the primary goal obtained through detached passion – although the three methods are different altogether. Through this detached passion, the world is viewed with the dual detachment and involvement, through the access of imaginative experience (*hrdayānupraveśa*) and empathic response (*hrdayasamvāda*) of the perfect spectator (Masson & Patwardhan, 1969), who is both moved and yet distanced from the object he contemplates.

The essence of Abhinavagupta's *Santa Rasa* had been wonderfully summarized through the translations of J.L. Masson and M.V. Patwardhan in their influential book '*Santarasa and Abinavagupta's theory of aesthetics*' (1969) as follows:

*'Reduced to its bare essentials the theory is as follows: watching a play or reading a poem for the sensitive reader (sahridaya) entails a loss of the sense of present time and space. All worldly considerations for the time being cease. Since we are not indifferent (tatastha) to what is taking place, our involvement must be of a purer variety than we normally experience. We are not directly and personally involved, so the usual medley of desires and anxieties dissolve. Our hearts respond sympathetically (hrdayasamvāda) but not selfishly. Finally the response becomes total, all-engrossing, and we identify with the situation depicted (tanmayibhavana). The ego is transcended, and for the duration of the aesthetic experience, the normal waking "I" is suspended. Once this actually happens, we suddenly find that our responses are not like anything we have hitherto experienced, for now that all normal emotions are gone, now that the hard knot of "selfness" has been untied, we find ourselves in an unprecedented state of mental and emotional calm. The purity of our emotion and the intensity of it take us to a higher level of pleasure than we could know before — we experience sheer undifferentiated bliss (ānandaikaghana) for we have come into direct contact with the deepest recesses of our own unconscious where the memory of a primaeval unity between man and the universe is still strong. Inadvertently, says Abhinavagupta, we have arrived at the same inner terrain as that occupied by the mystic, though our aim was very different from his. Such an experience cannot but make us impatient with the ordinary turmoil of emotions that is our inner life, and though Abhinava never explicitly says so, one cannot help feeling that he expects the reader to search out now these experiences on a more permanent basis.'*

For a detailed overview of Abinavagupta's aesthetics, the following work can be consulted: Masson J. L. & Patwardhan M.V. (1969) *Santarasa And Abhinavaguptas Theory Of Aesthetics*, Bhandarkar Oriental Series No. 9.

For an updated overview of the *Rasa* theory and the neuroscience, psychology and the principles of dual detachment and involvement my following papers might be consulted:

Mukhopadhyay, D. (2014). Understanding the neuropsychology of aesthetic paradox: the dual-phase oscillation hypothesis. *Review of General Psychology (USA)*, 18(3), 237-248. ISSN: 1089- 2680. <https://doi.org/10.1037%2Fgpr0000009>

Mukhopadhyay, D. (2021) *Dancing with Nine Colours: The Nine emotional states of Indian Rasa theory*. *PhilPapers*, <https://philarchive.org/rec/MUKDWN>.

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