

Navrasa on Screen: Exploring Classical Aesthetics in Modern Cinema

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Abstract—This paper explores how Rasa theory, from Natyashastra by Bharatmuni, can be applied to movies. The nine Rasas like love, humor, anger, compassion, heroism, fear, disgust, wonder, and peace are shown through different movies and genres. According to Natyashastra, every performance whether it is drama, dance or film it should create certain type of feelings to the audience and this is called Rasas... for example Humor, love, fear, compassion etc. Today's modern cinema is full of emotions. They use Songs, dance, dialogues and dramatic scenes which makes people laugh, cry or feeling excited. This makes films perfect example to study Natyashastra and rasa theory in modern times. And we will see how all these 9 Rasas are applied in modern cinema in this research paper. This research paper will explore how Movies show different Rasas, how they combined them and how they connect with the audience emotionally. It will also challenge of applying an classical and ancient theory to modern cinema.

Index Terms—Classical, Natyashastra, Rasa, Aestheticism, Modern Cinema

I. INTRODUCTION

Rasa theory in Indian aesthetics:

Rasa theory, first articulated in Natyashastra by Bharatmuni. It is a foundational concept in Indian aesthetics. The term refers to the emotional experience evoked in the spectator through art. In Indian aesthetics, a rasa (Sanskrit: रस) literally means juice, essence or taste. It is a concept in Indian arts denoting the aesthetic flavor of any visual, literary or musical work that evokes an indescribable feeling in the reader or audience. It refers to the emotional flavors/essence crafted into the work by the writer or a performer and relished by a 'sensitive spectator' or sahrdaya, literally one who has heart, and can connect to the work with emotion, without dryness.

According to the Natyashastra, bhavas are of three types: Sthayi (stable), Sanchari (travelling) and Sattvika (pure). These classifications are based on how the rasas are developed or enacted during the aesthetic experience. This is seen in the following passage: पुनश्च भवान्वक्ष्यामि स्थायिसञ्चारिसत्त्वजान्॥६.१६॥(transl. Again I shall declare the beings born of the permanent and moving beings.)

1. Sthayi Bhava (Permanent Mood) These are the dominant emotions that stay in the heart from the beginning to the

end of a performance. They are "stable" and provide the foundation for the specific Rasa. Nature: Long-lasting and deep-seated. Number: Traditionally 8 (later 9 with Santa). Examples: Rati (Love): Leads to Shringara Rasa. Krodha (Anger): Leads to Raudra Rasa. Bhaya (Fear): Leads to Bhayanaka Rasa. Utsaha (Energy/Heroism): Leads to Veera Rasa.

2. Sanchari (or Vyabhichari) Bhava (Transitory States)

These are fleeting or moving emotions that cross the mind. They don't last long; they appear, support the Sthayi Bhava, and then disappear—like waves rising and falling in the ocean. Nature: Variable and temporary. They help intensify the main emotion. Number: 33 types. Examples: If the main mood (Sthayi) is Love, a character might feel Anxiety (Chinta) because their lover is late, or Joy (Harsha) when they arrive. These are Sanchari Bhavas. Other examples: Shyness (Lajja), Doubt (Shanka), Weariness (Glani), or Sleep (Nidra).

3. Sattvika Bhava (Temperamental/Involuntary States)

These are involuntary physical reactions that arise from deep mental concentration or genuine feeling. Unlike other gestures, these cannot be easily faked because they are "pure" (Sattva) physiological responses. Nature: Spontaneous and internal. They

show that the actor has truly "become" the character. Number: 8 types. The Eight Sattvika Bhavas: Stambha: Paralysis or being stunned. Sveda: Sweating., Romancha: Goosebumps (horripilation), Svarabheda : Faltering or breaking of the voice, Vepathu: Trembling, Vaivarnya : Change of color (turning pale or red), Ashru: Tears, Pralaya : Fainting or loss of consciousness.

Cinema can be seen as the modern Nāṭyaśāstra, carrying forward Bharata's vision of art as a union of emotions, music, and drama. Where the ancient text codified the nine rasas, cinema translates them into visuals, sound, and performance. It mirrors society, educates, entertains, and elevates audiences, just as classical drama once did. By fusing technology with storytelling, cinema becomes today's living scripture of aesthetics, a universal stage for human emotions. Now let's see, how the 9-rasa theory of sthāyi bhava that given by Bharatmuni applies into modern cinema.

- Śṛṅgāra (Love/Beauty)

Explanation: The rasa of romance, attraction, and aesthetic delight. It emphasizes beauty, passion, and emotional intimacy.

Colour : Shyama. While often translated as "Dark Blue" (associated with Lord Krishna), many performance traditions use a light green hue to represent fertility, growth, and the blossoming of love. Example: Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995), Sringara rasa is expressed mainly through Raj and Simran's youthful romance blossoms amidst scenic landscapes, vibrant costumes, and soulful songs like Tujhe Dekha To Yeh Jana Sanam, or mere khwabon me jo aaye... while the conflict with Simran's father adds moments of separation before culminating in a joyous union that became a cultural symbol of love's triumph.

Veer-Zaara (2004) also shows Sringara (separation), portraying the deep, sacrificial love between Veer and Zaara, whose relationship is torn apart by political and social barriers; the film's soft visuals and poignant songs like Tere Liye and Do Pal intensify longing and devotion, and their eventual reunion after decades elevates romance into a spiritual experience of eternal commitment. Together, these films show how modern cinema adapts classical aesthetics of Sringara rasa - one through joyous union and the other through soulful separation.

- Hāsya (Humor/laughter)

Explanation: The rasa of laughter, joy, and comic relief. It lightens narratives and connects audiences through shared amusement.

Colour : Sita (White). White represents purity, lightness, and the absence of malice, reflecting the "clean" nature of genuine laughter

Example: Phir Hera Pheri (2006) Raju, Shyam, and Baburao suddenly find themselves rich after their first adventure, but greed quickly takes over. Dreaming of doubling their fortune, they fall for a "magic scheme" and lose everything. Once again poor, they get tangled in hilarious chaos while trying to repay a gangster's loan. Misunderstandings pile up, Paresh Rawal's comic timing steals the show, and the trio's greed-driven antics keep the laughter flowing nonstop. It's a perfect mix of comedy, confusion, and unforgettable dialogues.

Golmaal: Fun Unlimited (2006) Four mischievous friends—Gopal, Madhav, Lucky, and Laxman—are always up to silly scams and pranks. To escape trouble, they hide in a blind couple's house, pretending to be good boys. Their lies and tricks create endless comic confusion, with each friend's quirky personality adding to the fun. Ajay Devgn shines as the tough leader, while Tusshar Kapoor's mute comedy brings extra laughs. The film is a rollercoaster of jokes, chaos, and unlimited entertainment that leaves audiences smiling throughout.

- Karuṇā (Compassion/Pathos)

Explanation: The rasa of empathy, sorrow, and pity. It evokes deep emotional resonance and catharsis.

Colour : Kapota (Grey/Ash). Like a dove or ash, grey symbolizes the fading of life's brightness, mourning, and the weight of sorrow.

Example: Baghban (2003) Raj Malhotra and his wife Pooja spend their lives raising four sons with love and sacrifice. When Raj retires, they hope to live happily with their children, but instead face neglect and separation. Each son avoids responsibility, forcing the couple to live apart and depend on strangers for kindness. The story beautifully shows the pain of aging parents and the value of respect in family. Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini's emotional performances make the film a touching reminder of gratitude and love.

Taare Zameen Par (2007) Ishaan, a young boy, struggles in school because of dyslexia, but his parents and teachers mistake it for laziness. He feels lonely and misunderstood until art teacher Ram Shankar

Nikumbh enters his life. Nikumbh recognizes Ishaan's hidden talent and helps him shine through creativity and confidence. The film highlights the importance of empathy, patience, and understanding children's unique abilities. With heartfelt storytelling and Aamir Khan's guidance, Ishaan's journey becomes an inspiring tale of hope and acceptance.

- Raudra (Anger)

Explanation: The rasa that shows fury, aggression, and intensity. Often linked with revenge or justice.

Colour: Rakta (Red). Red is the universal colour of blood, heat, and fire, representing the boiling blood of an angry person.

Example: The Kantara universe seen through Raudra Rasa burns with divine fury and primal energy. The forest deity's wrath becomes the heartbeat of the land, punishing arrogance and greed with unstoppable force. Shiva's possession is not gentle mysticism but a storm of rage, his body channeling cosmic anger to restore balance. Every clash between villagers and exploiters erupts like fire, echoing the ferocity of nature itself. The drums, chants, and glowing eyes of the deity intensify the atmosphere, painting the forest as a battlefield of justice. In this vision, wrath is not chaos but sacred order, a fierce reminder that dharma survives only through the fire of divine rage.

The Gangs of Wasseypur saga, when seen through the lens of Raudra Rasa, becomes a relentless symphony of fury and vengeance. The coal mafia wars are drenched in blood and rage, where every feud is fueled by generations of anger. Characters like Sardar Khan and Faizal embody wrath as destiny, their lives consumed by violent retaliation. The streets of Wasseypur echo with gunfire, curses, and the primal roar of revenge, turning the town into a theatre of rage. Betrayals ignite tempests of fury, and every act of violence feels like divine punishment unleashed. In this vision, Raudra Rasa transforms the narrative into a cycle of wrath, where anger is both the weapon and the curse that defines Wasseypur's legacy.

- Vira (Heroism)

Explanation: The rasa of courage, valor, and determination. It celebrates triumph over adversity.

Colour : Gaura (Yellowish-white/Pale Orange). This is the color of radiance and high energy. It signifies the "Tejas" (brilliance) of a warrior or a righteous person.

Example: The story of Chhava celebrates the fearless spirit of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. From a young age, he showed unmatched courage in protecting his

land and people. His daring guerrilla tactics against mighty enemies became legendary. Every battle reflected his determination to uphold swarajya (self-rule). His leadership inspired loyalty and bravery among his soldiers. The narrative shines with valor, sacrifice, and the heroic duty of defending dharma. Truly, Shivaji's life is a living embodiment of Vira Rasa.

The Baahubali series is drenched in heroic valor and grandeur. Amarendra Baahubali stands tall as a warrior who fights for justice and his kingdom. His strength, compassion, and fearless battles against enemies highlight the essence of courage. Even when betrayed, his legacy continues through Mahendra Baahubali. The breathtaking war scenes between kalakeya and, sacrifices, and determination to protect Mahishmati bring Vira Rasa alive. It's a tale of bravery, loyalty, and the triumph of righteousness. The series makes heroism feel larger than life.

- Bhayanaka (fear)

Explanation: The rasa of dread, suspense, and anxiety. It thrives in horror and thrillers.

Colour: Krishna (Black). Representing the unknown, darkness, and the "void" that creates terror in the human mind.

Example: Stree universe [stree & stree 2] , munjya, bhediya, thamma is the best example of bhayanak rasa. In the Stree universe, Bhayanak Rasa is expressed through the constant atmosphere of fear and suspense created by the mysterious ghostly woman who haunts the town. The dark nights, sudden disappearances, and eerie silence build tension and keep the villagers anxious, never knowing when Stree might appear. This rasa highlights the terror of the unknown and makes the audience feel the same dread as the characters. At the same time, the mix of humor with horror intensifies the frightening moments, making them more memorable. Through Bhayanak Rasa, the story shows how fear can unite people against a supernatural threat, reminding them of hidden dangers and the need for collective courage.

The Conjuring Universe is one of the most famous modern horror franchises, built around supernatural investigations and terrifying hauntings. Here's a clear, easy explanation. It began with The Conjuring (2013), directed by James Wan, based on the real-life cases of paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren. The universe includes films like The Conjuring series, Annabelle trilogy, The Nun, and The Curse of La

Llorona. Its central theme is Bhayanak Rasa (fear and horror), shown through haunted houses, cursed objects, and demonic possessions. The eerie atmosphere - dark settings, sudden apparitions, and suspenseful silence - creates constant dread. Unlike pure gore, the Conjuring films rely on psychological tension and spiritual terror, making the fear feel more real.

- Bībhatsa (Disgust)

Explanation: The rasa of aversion and repulsion, often used to critique or shock.

Colour : Nila (Blue). Specifically, a "vile" or deep indigo-blue, associated with decay, bruising, or the unpalatable aspects of nature.

Example: Bandit Queen (1994) Shekhar Kapur's Bandit Queen is a powerful example of Bibhatsa rasa, as it portrays the harrowing life of Phoolan Devi. The film depicts caste oppression, sexual violence, and humiliation in raw detail, evoking disgust and revulsion in the audience. Scenes of exploitation and brutality are deliberately unsettling, forcing viewers to confront the ugliness of social realities. The rasa here is not meant for shock alone but to highlight the cruelty faced by marginalized women. By showing Phoolan's suffering, the film makes the audience recoil at the injustice while also empathizing with her pain. The disgust becomes a tool to underline the need for change and justice. Thus, Bandit Queen uses Bibhatsa rasa to expose the grotesque side of human behavior and society's failure to protect the vulnerable.

Todd Phillips' Joker (2019) is a striking example of Bibhatsa rasa, as it evokes disgust and revulsion through the disturbing transformation of Arthur Fleck into the Joker. The film portrays the grotesque realities of poverty, mental illness, and social neglect, making the audience recoil at the cruelty of society. Scenes of Arthur's humiliation, his uncontrollable laughter, and the eventual acts of violence highlight the ugliness of human behavior. The subway killing and the climactic talk-show murder are deeply unsettling, designed to shock and disturb viewers. This disgust is not gratuitous—it serves to underline the decay of morality and the consequences of systemic apathy. By immersing audiences in Arthur's disturbing descent, Joker uses Bibhatsa rasa to confront the grotesque side of human existence and force reflection on the darker truths of society.

Adbhuta (Wonder)

Explanation: The rasa of amazement, curiosity, and awe. It thrives in fantasy and sci-fi.

Colour: Pila (Yellow). Yellow signifies the sudden "flash" of enlightenment or the golden glow of a miraculous event.

Example: The film PK (2014) beautifully represents Adbhuta Rasa, the mood of wonder and amazement. The alien protagonist arrives on Earth with childlike curiosity, seeing human customs and traditions with fresh eyes. His innocent questions about religion, love, and society evoke surprise and force viewers to reflect. The audience experiences wonder at his unusual behavior, his magical gadgets, and his pure-hearted perspective. Every scene highlights amazement—whether it is his struggle to understand language or his fearless questioning of blind faith. Through humor and innocence, PK creates a sense of awe that embodies the essence of Adbhuta Rasa.

The film Koi... Mil Gaya beautifully expresses Adbhuta Rasa, the aesthetic of wonder and amazement. The story revolves around Rohit, a young man who befriends an alien named Jadoo. Their bond evokes awe and fascination, as Jadoo's magical powers transform Rohit's life. The audience experiences amazement at the extraordinary friendship, the supernatural abilities, and the sense of childlike curiosity throughout the film. Scenes of Jadoo healing Rohit and helping him overcome challenges highlight the rasa of wonder. After that when his child Krishna was also blessed by superpowers and magic like his father. By blending science fiction with emotional storytelling, Koi... Mil Gaya creates a world of marvel that perfectly embodies Adbhuta Rasa.

- Śānta (Peace/Tranquility)

Explanation: The rasa of calmness, detachment, and spiritual serenity. It often concludes narratives with resolution.

Colour : Dhavala/Shveta (Jasmine White or Crystal Clear). Though not in the original 8-rasa list of Bharatmuni, the Abhinavabharati (Abhinavagupta's commentary) describes its colour as the pure white of a moonbeam or a swan, representing absolute clarity and stillness.

Example: In the movie Guide (1965), the journey of Raju from a tourist guide to a spiritual figure beautifully reflects Santa Rasa, the mood of peace and detachment. After facing betrayal and imprisonment, he renounces worldly desires and embraces a higher

purpose. His transformation is marked by calm acceptance of suffering and a serene devotion to the villagers' faith. The final scenes, where he fasts and prays for rain, show tranquility and surrender to destiny. Instead of fear or anger, Raju radiates inner peace, embodying the essence of Santa Rasa. The film ends not with victory or loss, but with spiritual transcendence and quiet liberation. The movie Anand shows Śānta Rasa, which means peace and calmness. Anand, the main character, knows he is going to die soon, but he accepts it with a smile. Instead of being sad, he spreads happiness and love to everyone around him. His calm attitude towards death teaches others to live life with joy and courage. The film's ending is peaceful, showing acceptance of destiny rather than fear. Through Anand's serenity and positive spirit, the movie beautifully represents the rasa of peace and detachment. Examples that show multiple Rasas: Mahabharat - ek dharmayuddha

- Vīra (Heroism): The kurukshetra yuddha where all the Pandavas and Kauravas with bhishma, guru drone and angraj karna prepared for fight.
- Karuṇa (Compassion): when Draupadi and Subhadra lost their sons and their loved ones in the fight still came stronger.
- Raudra (Anger): Bhima's fury against Duryodhana and all Kauravas and later all the Kauravas were killed by bhima and Angraj karna and bhishma were killed by Arjun and guru dronacharya was killed by dhrishtidyumna..
- Śānta (Peace): Krishna's calm wisdom in the Bhagavad Geeta between battlefield of kurukshetra when arjun refused to fight against his loved ones and elders.

Shakuntalam Movie:

- Śṛṅgāra (Love): Shakuntala and Dushyanta's love development throughout the whole movie that shows sringara rasa.
- Karuṇa (Compassion): Shakuntala's suffering when rejected and her departure from the ashram where kalidasa shows that whole ashram is crying even trees, deer and flowers.
- Adbhuta (Wonder): The magical intervention of gods.
- Śānta (Peace): Eventually both Dushyanta and Shakuntala met and their son Bharat became king of Bharatkhand.

These examples show how multiple rasas coexist in one narrative, enriching the emotional experience.

The study emphasizes that the nine rasas (emotions) outlined in Bharata's *Natyashastra* remain central to cinematic storytelling. By analyzing how filmmakers use expressions, narrative arcs, and visual techniques to evoke these rasas, the paper concludes that cinema is not merely entertainment but a powerful medium of emotional education. It shows that Navarasa bridges tradition and modernity, helping audiences connect deeply with stories while reflecting universal human emotions across cultures.

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