



Abhinavagupta on Śānta Rasa

The Logic of Emotional Repose

Sthaneswar Timalsina

Contents

Introduction	2
<i>Rasa</i> in the Absence of Emotions	3
Serenity Emerges from Cessation (<i>Nirodha</i>): Position I	7
Position II: Serenity Emerges from Dispassion (<i>Nirveda</i>)	9
Position III: Serenity Emerges from Self-Awareness (<i>Ātmajñāna</i>)	12
The Phenomenology of Savoring Serenity	14
Definitions of Key Terms	17
Summary Points	17
References	18

Abstract

This chapter explores the ways Abhinavagupta, an eleventh-century Kashmirian polymath, establishes the experience of serenity (*śānta*) as one of the appraised emotions called *rasa*. Beyond the issue of whether serenity can be the savoring of *rasa*, this chapter explores various models from classical Hindu and Buddhist philosophies that establish serenity in order to contextualize the phenomenology of experiencing serenity. For Abhinava, this experience is not a mere negation of emotions but a positive experience. And to establish his argument, Abhinava explores the ways absence is analyzed in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. One of the central problems of aesthetics that overlaps metaphysics is whether the experience of serenity is identical to the experience of liberation. Abhinava paves his path through the middle, without collapsing this experience to the mystical experience of the Brahman or to common everyday experiences. By rejecting the argument that serenity is a product of cessation or that dispassion evolves into serenity, Abhinava argues that serenity emerges from self-awareness.

S. Timalsina (✉)
Religious Studies, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA

Keywords

Abhāva · Abhinavabhāratī · Abhinavagupta · Ānandavardhana · Ātmajñāna · Bharata · Bhāva · Dhvanyāloka · Locana · Lokottara · Nirodha · Nirveda · Rasa · Śānta · Sthāyī bhāva · Viśrānti

Introduction

Classical Hindu *rasa* aesthetics rests on emotions, their commixture, and their appraisal. Central argument for *rasa* is that similar to relishing sweet and sour dishes, people savor emotions when they are harmonized and aesthetically evaluated. Furthermore, it is not just the positive emotions such as erotism, heroism, comic sense, or wonder, argument goes; even the negative ones such as disgust, fear, or fury can be aesthetically evaluated and savored. This, however, is not to say that every layman is entitled to savoring *rasa*, as it requires a connoisseur for it. As it comes to the savoring of *śānta* or serenity, there are unique problems that even the *rasa* theorists could not agree upon. Some do not consider serenity as a distinctive *rasa*. Even among those who consider this as a separate *rasa*, there is no agreement upon what counts as enduring *bhāva* for the surge of serenity. Furthermore, the very notion of *sthāyī bhāva* as enduring emotion is to be questioned here, for all the portions to be presented in the following sections demonstrate *śānta* is not an exalted form of some emotion, infused with some other emotions. If what is meant by *śānta* is a form of tranquility, savored by the enlightened beings such as the Buddha, what type of savoring would there be? Even in the *rasa* paradigm, if this experience parallels the mystical experience of the state of liberation, what factors would there be to separate these two modes of aesthetic and mystical experiences? In order for me to engage some of these issues, it is first required to determine the classical parameters in which the savoring of *śānta* has been delineated. And for that, this essay will rest on arguments upon concepts surrounding the position of Abhinavagupta, a prominent eleventh-century Kashmiri polymath. The real challenge here is in deciphering rather than tracing Abhinava's words to read what he has said without words, or what he suggests (*dhvanita*) without a literal statement.

Abhinavagupta's arguments in defense of serenity (*śānta*) as a *rasa*, in addition to the standard eight *rasas*, are scattered in two of his commentarial works: *Abhinavabhāratī* (ABh) upon the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata and *Locana* upon Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*. In my reading, the savoring of serenity the way Abhinava has argued is categorically distinct from the savoring of other *rasas*. There is an even deeper resemblance of this experience with the liberating experience as that which is being evaluated for the emergence of serenity is not akin to other enduring emotions, whether someone were to follow Abhinava or the other aestheticians. Most of the classical *rasa* theorists present serenity as transcending all emotions. This chapter will conclude with a position that the state of serenity needs to be appraised for it to be *rasa*; however, the determining factors for its surge are not emotions. Rather than tracing back to *śānta*, this essay considers it as

the foundational being, the state of the self within its own immanence, having the latency for the surge of any of the *rasas*. And what constitutes liberation in the Trika and Pratyabhijñā paradigm is not the blissful state that contrasts everyday experience, not pure consciousness that negates its being in the world, and not a pure being that juxtaposes the manifold. The intention of this chapter is therefore to read *śānta* as a philosophical consequence of the aforementioned schools and not as an aberration.

Rasa in the Absence of Emotions

Even if *śānta* is not an emotion like the others, it is the foundation for the emotions to emerge. This understanding contrasts with those that define *śānta* as emerging from the lack of emotions. This is not to claim emotionality of *śānta* but merely arguing that experiencing serenity does not need to be juxtaposed with emotional being. This understanding rests on my reading of Abhinava's treatment of self-experience and serenity. But before addressing this position, it is necessary to delineate the presuppositions that Abhinava rejects. Of primary concern are the ways in which negation is understood in different philosophical schools: to begin with, if serenity emerges from the state of cessation, whether this cessation is confirmative, negation of x as (i) confirming the substrate of x , or (ii) it confirming something else ($\sim x = y$), the confirmation of y , or if it is a form of absolute negation – the negation of x not confirming anything. Although Abhinavagupta does not cite distinct philosophers when addressing *śānta rasa*, it is clear when one reads his commentaries that he anticipates Nyāya/Mīmāṃsā and Sautrāntika/Mādhyaṃika presuppositions regarding negation. Reading the Abhinavaguptian logic of aesthetics demands reading between the lines, to explicate the positions that he critiques without identifying them. And this takes one to reconsidering negation even though Abhinavaguptian aesthetics of serenity do not rest on evaluating negative contents.

From the Nyāya standpoint, there are two types of absence – relational absence or *samsargābhāva* and difference or *anyonyābhāva/bheda*. The first or relational absence is threefold: antecedent absence (*prāgabhāva*) or the absence of effect prior to its emergence; consequent absence (*pradhvaṃsābhāva*) or destruction; and absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*). The second type of absence, difference or *bheda*, relates to the absence of x in y . It is crucial to understand the structure of negation in the classical philosophical context in order to contextualize serenity as an aesthetic savoring. For, only when one keeps the structure of absence in mind, he can contextualize the absolute absence of emotion, the cessation that in all likelihood is the Prāsaṅgika interpretation of serenity, in contrast to the absence of the flux of emotion in itself being a form of emotion, or the termination of the turmoil revealing the surface wherein the emotions surge. The position that Abhinava maintains and the one that he reconciles with are also divided on interpreting serenity, whether this serenity is antecedent to the surge of emotions – a position cited without crediting to anybody – or, Abhinava's position, of a consequent absence, the return of the mind to the serene state, liberated from emotional flow.

The first issue, in light of the above conversation on absence, is to locate the phenomenal content of serenity so that one can determine whether it is a distinct form of being or presence, or a sheer absence that one confronts when experiencing serenity. When engaged his interpretation of “dispassion” (*vairāgya*), Abhinava explores both the possibilities of reading dispassion as having a positive content or the lack thereof. By creating a hierarchy of dispassion where the first is simple frustration/depression and the second the exalted form of self-recognition, Abhinava argues that serenity is a presentive consciousness that stems from the enduring mode of self-awareness. Thus, to argue that what lies at the heart of evaluating serenity is its phenomenological content. And the fundamental divide is whether this is an exalted or elevated form of absence or a positive experience of directly encountering the self. Questions associated with this premise are whether serenity can be aesthetically appraised, whether an underlying basic enduring emotion evolves into *rasa*, or if *śānta* is an absence of emotion. Above all, it asks whether sheer lack can be considered as phenomenal content, or if absence of content is itself the content that is transformed into *rasa*.

Some scholars believe that Abhinava failed to reconcile his aesthetics with his metaphysics. His treatment of serenity as emerging from self-awareness while keeping it within the fold of aesthetic experience, separating it from the experience of self-realization, does make one wonder. Gerow (1994), for instance, argues, “*śānta rasa* represents a challenge to Abhinava’s philosophical position, as well as to his aesthetics.” The problem begins when a vertical split between the aesthetic and the mystical is anticipated or when one assumes that the serenity experienced by a liberated being is qualitatively distinct from that savored in the ordinary sense. If read Abhinava closely, he is not only merging the aesthetic with the mystical, he is also keeping the everyday experience within the domain of self-realization. This is not a philosophy that contrasts the world with the recognition of the self. Nevertheless, one can argue, Abhinava does categorize these experiences, aesthetic and mystical, as transcendent or outside the scope of the sensory faculties (*lokottara*). This argument, however, does not prove that these two experiences are categorically different, quite the opposite. Even this stratification is merely a process of bracketing so that the most intricate modes of experience are revealed without supporting a dichotomy. To begin with, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are not two opposites in his philosophical paradigm. This issue will be pursued further in the last section.

Nonetheless, Abhinava does not make the experience of serenity identical with the recognition of the self. Even while they both are qualitatively similar, liberation stands for termination of all the afflictions (*kleśa*), while the aesthetic experience of serenity relies merely on a transitory escape from these factors. From the Trika-Pratyabhijñā perspective, liberation is nothing but absolute freedom, and experiencing serenity is merely one of its consequences. In essence the aesthetic experience of serenity is a window through which one can measure the state of liberation. Everyday experiences reoccupy the mental landscape even after savoring serenity. In contrast, self-realization is considered final, with no afflicting emotions further conditioning the subject. By shifting his attention from cessation and the factors that condition experience to making self-awareness an enduring mode of being that

culminates into the savoring of *śānta*, Abhinava is guiding us from the metaphysics that explains liberating experience merely in negative terms.

For Abhinava, any emotion needs to be aesthetically evaluated for it to evolve into *rasa*. It needs to have *camatkāra*, the reflexivity intrinsic to consciousness. And this thesis provides the platform for a departure from *nirodha*-based aesthetics that lack reflexive evaluating modes for the appraisal of emotions. It is this reflexive mode embedded with savoring that allows Abhinava to establish self-awareness as the foundational mode. To feel serenity is not just feeling serene but enjoying serenity, according to Abhinava. In this paradigm, the very surge of serenity becomes savoring in the form of *rasa*. Most fundamentally, serenity is not a resting ground or metaphoric cremation ground of emotions but a transitory station for the emotions to repose and be stimulated again. While Abhinava explains serenity as the resting station, he agrees with the argument that this may be the fountain for emotions to spring forth. If serenity were a final repose to be experienced by liberated beings alone, this would not be yet another *rasa*, an experience accessible to all the connoisseurs. *Śānta rasa*, as a window for liberating experience, also retains its higher status by having self-recognition as the mode of experience or emotional state that transforms into *rasa*. Noteworthy also is that the experience of the self is not a cognitive mode oriented toward an object but a unique kind of reflexive consciousness. At the same time, the experiencing that is equated with the self is also an emotional state. If bereft of emotion, this experiencing of the self could not be elevated into *rasa*.

Abhinava's formulation that the very self-experience functions as the enduring state that transforms into *śānta* is problematic for several philosophical schools. For instance, when Nyāya philosophers maintain the state of liberation as a total termination of suffering, this liberated state is described in terms of negation. This is a qualitatively distinct state to that which Abhinava maintains by classifying self-experience as the basis for the surge of *śānta*. In a total lack of consciousness, the liberated state that the Nyāya philosophers have maintained, no aesthetic judgment is possible. On the other hand, although the Advaita of Śāṅkara maintains pure consciousness as the basis to which the self-realized subject returns to, even being in this state cannot be complemented with the aspect of "savoring." What makes Abhinava's thesis unique is he makes the exposition on *śānta* the foundation for explaining the phenomenal content of the liberated state, arguing that the self is constantly savoring its own being while at the same time liberating experience is immanent and embodied. Furthermore, Abhinava flattens the ground, making aesthetic judgment of serenity accessible to all the connoisseurs even while maintaining that this is transcendent (*lokottara*) and in that regard akin to liberating experience. There apparently is an overlap between everyday experiences, aesthetic, and mystical ones, and Abhinava finds the savoring of serenity a bridging point.

The only departure is, rather than making serenity a place to return to, this essay is reading it as a state filled with the potential for the surge of emotions. It is not the lack of feelings or their surge in various forms of emotions that defines liberation. From the Abhinavaguptian perspective, it is the absolute freedom (*svātantrya*), being in the state of Bhairava, as what liberation is all about. Everyday experience is not

subordinate due to its emotionality or objectivity. It rather is the limitation, a separation from the realm of experience, that makes subjects finite. Absolute freedom allows liberated subjects to exercise their being in the world, savoring feelings and emotions without being conditioned by them.

If *śānta* is understood as repose, a tranquil state that leads to rest, reading from Latin *repausare*, this concept of reposing makes it possible to keep returning to this state. The concept of *śānta* is captured in Abhinava's analysis of *viśrānti*, repose. This essay concurs with Arindam in explaining *viśrānti* as a polymorphic term. As he suggests, repose is both an ontological and epistemological category, and the term is used to refer to the self, natural fullness, self-savoring creative leisure, freedom, and also the absolute *citi* or consciousness deified (Chakrabarti 2006, p. 294). This essay is exploiting the freedom aspect of *viśrānti* in arguing that subject's freedom to experience repose is not final and can continue to savor this state. When read this as qualitatively similar to the state of liberation, this freedom of experiencing the world is not to be terminated from the free subjects. Along these lines, just as the absolute self retains the potential to give rise to the manifold, so also *śānta* has the potential for the surge of emotions hidden. Rather than making *śānta* emotionally empty, this reading makes it pregnant with all the future expression of emotion. To say that serenity is the most natural of all the emotional states is also to say that other emotional states are its transformation. This is similar to saying that white light contains all wavelengths of visible light. Furthermore, if aesthetic savoring is yet another expression of bliss (*ānanda*), this cannot be expunged from the self, with bliss being its inherent nature. If it is the repose to the self, the reflexive anchoring of the self within itself, that constitutes joyousness, this is the same joyousness that is expressed in savoring *rasa*. Serenity, along these lines, is the foundation of all emotions, and there is something inherent to it that, given the circumstances, emotions can evolve.

The hypothesis above is merely an extension of the position that Bharata has outlined:

*svaṃ svaṃ nimittam āsādyā śāntād bhāvaḥ pravartate|
punar nimittāpāye tu śānta eva pralīyate||*. (Nāṭyaśāstra, Chap. 6, p. 335)

Corresponding emotions emerge from the basis of serenity when appropriate conditions are met, and when those conditions are removed, they dissolve back to serenity again.

What is the catalyst for the surge of serenity? According to Abhinava, it is “the cognitive state that lacks the surge of any specific mode” (*anupajātaviśeṣāntaracit-tavṛttirūpa*. Locana, p. 391). In other words, a non-specified cognitive mode, or mental state lacking specific direction, functions as the source or the enduring mode (*sthāyibhāva*) for the surge of serenity. The general translation of *bhāva* as emotion fails here, as “a non-specified or non-directional state of the mind” is not what one anticipates when addressing emotion. To be discussed in the next sections, if serenity is the emergent property of the very absence of emotions, or even the lack of

cognitive activity, they do not fit to be called emotional state. Also noteworthy is, for Abhinava, this still is a “mental modification” (*cittavṛtti*) that surges into the savoring of serenity. *Bhāva*, in these accounts, is simply a mode of consciousness, a particular becoming. And this is neutral as it comes to emotional or cognitive or volitional modes.

This conversation started addressing absence. When engaged what the classical aestheticians considered as the enduring mode (*sthāyibhāva*) for the surge of serenity, the discussion of absence becomes essential. What is it that is lacking and what the lack is like when evaluated the qualitative state of experiencing non-being are relevant questions in addressing serenity. According to the passage of Bharata cited above, all the modes of being, or the expressions of emotions, spring forth from this foundational serenity. If this is the case and if serenity is an extension of some lack, the tension of a lack giving rise to something phenomenal, the state of *śānta* being the source for the surge of different *bhāvas*, needs to be resolved. If the state of serenity is from which *bhāvas* unfold, this would be the state having an antecedent absence (*prāgabhāva*) or the absence of effect prior to its emergence. On the other hand, if this is the state that emerges upon cessation of emotions, this would have a “consequent absence” (*pradhvaṃsābhāva*) of emotions. When doing mere phenomenology, there may not be any qualitative difference in the state no matter the particular type of absence. This, however, is crucial metaphysically. It is not the same to say it is serenity from which all the emotions spring forth as it is to say it is in serenity that all emotions dissolve. The reading of *śānta* in this essay along the lines of Bharata parallels the opening and closing or *unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa*, the two metaphors for the cosmogony and cosmic dissolution in the *Spandakārikā* (I.1). If the cosmic unfolding of the self is a constant cyclical process, emotionality of the self is likewise the same. There is no need for a final suspension of the eternal rejuvenation, splashing into the surge of *rasas*, even if some are bitter and sour. Aesthetic savoring can therefore be even better than yogic savoring, as in the first the subject is actively evaluating, appraising his cognitive and emotional state while undergoing the surge of emotions. It cannot be said the same about the second.

Serenity Emerges from Cessation (*Nirodha*): Position I

Abhinava cites one position that the enduring emotion for *śānta* is the cessation of all the cognitive modes (*sarvacittavṛttiprasāma*. Locana, p. 390). According to this perspective, the absence of passion or aversion functions as subsequent emotions (*anubhāva*) to complement the emergence of serenity. Abhinava’s objection, as mentioned in the introductory section, is that if this absence of cognitive functions is considered to be an absolute negation, it will not amount to being a *bhāva*, a cognitive/emotional modification of consciousness. On the other hand, if this is a relational absence, confirming y by means of negating x, Abhinava finds this identical to his own position. By addressing negation, Abhinava not only distinguishes his aesthetics of serenity from that of the Buddhist philosophers, he also affirms his model of liberation as having positive content. Both the Buddhist and

Hindu aestheticians maintain that savoring of serenity mirrors the penultimate experience of liberation. However, Abhinava rejects the experience of cessation (*śama*) as an enduring mode for the surge of serenity. He interprets this as absence, a sheer non-being that lacks the content to be savored. In essence, the difference relates to the qualitative state of serenity that mirrors the qualitative state of liberating experience. To say that there is a phenomenological content in cessation would be tantamount to saying that the absence of cognitive content is somehow revealed to consciousness. If the argument is that cessation as a cognitive state is given to consciousness, this would contradict the position that the state of *nirvāṇa* lacks any inherent nature (*svabhāva*). Abhinava's critique of cessation needs to be read in this light.

There are other problems embedded in the position that cognitive or emotional cessation transforms into serenity. If this state of cessation were to function as an enduring mode or emotion for the emergence of serenity, there needs to be a distinctive mode of consciousness to evaluate this mode, and the subject savoring serenity could not merely be experiencing cessation. In absence of any cognitive function, this appraisal seems impossible. If the state of serenity is nothing but the cessation of cognitive functions, there literally is no distinction between cessation and serenity. Furthermore, the absence of particular cognitive functions cannot in themselves be constitutive for the emergence of something positive, as serenity is a positive experience and the lack of passion and aversion cannot be considered transient factors in the surge of *rasa*.

Abhinava argues that positive qualitative content is what determines psychological states, including the states of deep sleep or being unconscious, as these states are determined on the basis of deep breathing or collapsing (Abhinavabhāratī, Chap. 6, p. 333). The argument is, in absence of any positive content, the state of serenity cannot be confirmed. Noteworthy in this conversation is all the examples he gives are intersubjective, as these relate to subjects determining the psychological states of some other subjects. In the case of cessation, or even more when in savoring cessation in the form of serenity, no external symptoms are visible. And if this identification is not even based on the very subject having experience, referring to the savoring of serenity, this state cannot be subjectively confirmed either. The issue of the absence of experience in cessation also appears in *Locana* where Abhinava argues that if the absence of cognitive functions is negative in nature, i.e., referring to absolute absence, no cognitive function can correspond to this state, including the aesthetically evaluated experience of serenity. As far as enduring an emotion is concerned, if cessation is explained in terms of lack, this absence cannot be transformed and thereby judged to be aesthetically serene. Abhinava therefore takes the option that negation in the cognitive state of cessation is reciprocal, affirming y by means of the negation of x. If interpreted along these terms, Abhinava collapses this model within his own (*Locana*, p. 390).

Position II: Serenity Emerges from Dispassion (*Nirveda*)

Unlike cessation of the cognitive function, Abhinava considers dispassion as an active positive emotional state, a state in which the subject actively rejects the sway of the external stimuli that condition his subjectivity. Abhinava, however, understands dispassion (*nirveda*) in two different ways. The first is the emotion that can be better understood in terms of aversion or apathy. This relates to an acute state of frustration. There is no problem with this state being emotional and being complementary to other enduring emotions. The other, dispassion, Abhinava argues, is the culmination of self-awareness, the insight that keeps the subject lacking any desire to be stimulated by the external objects. This is where the understanding of *bhāva* in terms of enduring emotion collapses. Abhinava rejects the first model of dispassion while subsumes the second model within his own system. The first position is more compatible with the Advaita of Śāṅkara, while the second position relies on the Pratyabhijñā system. This is how Abhinava dialogues with other systems even without mentioning them for once.

When dispassion is interpreted in the first sense, or in terms of apathy, Abhinava synthesizes this position that makes dispassion as the enduring mode that evolves into the savoring of serenity:

tr̥ṣṇānām viṣayābhilāṣānām yaḥ kṣayaḥ sarvato nivṛttirūpo nirvedaḥ tad eva sukham tasya śthāyibhūtasya yaḥ paripoṣo rasyamānatākṛtas tad eva lakṣaṇam yasya sa śānto rasaḥ.
(Dhvanyaloka Locana, p. 390)

The absolute cessation of the cognitive mode of desire or the wanting of something, a resignation [of the mind from being engaged] is in itself a joyous state. The savoring of serenity is characterized by the cultivation of this very enduring emotion which is caused by making it an object of sustained savoring.

According to this position, just like passion or fear transforms into the savoring of beauty or horror, there should be a mechanism to evaluate the elevated state of dispassion, and this is what amounts to the savoring of serenity. It is where dispassion functions as enduring mode or enduring emotion and serenity becomes its appraised state combined with other subsequent and transient emotions. The same dispassion functions as enduring emotion for the savoring of serenity, and this is the same experience that leads to liberation. There is then a categorical difference between experiencing dispassion and the experience of liberation, and this can be mapped by the gap between dispassion and serenity, an aesthetically evaluated emotion.

There are key differences in the liberating mode of experience and this savoring. However, this has not come to conversation in Abhinava's discourse on serenity. The starkest case is the qualitative state of liberating experience in contrast to aesthetic judgment: there is no subject-object dichotomy in evaluating or savoring the experience of liberation. However, as an aesthetic experience, serenity is savored and is

objectified. Nevertheless, according to Abhinava, every single aesthetic experience is *lokottara* or outside of the sensory realm, something that is not quite captured by the sensory modalities. Basically, there is something it is like in the savoring of *rasa* that is not an object of phenomenological analysis which makes qualitative comparison impossible.

Abhinava at this juncture demonstrates that there is yet another dimension to dispassion, as self-realization transforms into dispassion in its highest state. Abhinava argues the experience that leads to the savoring of serenity is not frustration or depression. There is another dimension of serenity, a positive one, that drives the subject in actualizing the foundational being of oneself. Yet again the conversation on aesthetic experience overlaps the discourse on liberation: for Abhinava, liberating experience is positive, and has phenomenal content, reflexivity itself becomes its basis, and in liberation the self is savoring its own being.

Abhinava derives his interpretation of dispassion (*nirveda*) from the Vyāsa-bhāṣya of the Yogasūtra. The text says, “dispassion is the very culmination of self-realization” (*jñānasyaiva parākāṣṭhā vairāgyam* | YS I.16–17). This makes dispassion a twofold psychological state. From the perspective of emotion, it relates to aversion from the world that culminates into the savoring of serenity. However, following the second interpretation, *nirveda* is a cognitive state, where self-realization functions as a catalyst for achieving the higher state of *nirveda*. The fundamental divide therefore rests on the ways the term *nirveda* is explained. Abhinava argues:

tataś ca tattvajñānam evedaṃ tattvajñānamālayā paripoṣyamāṇam iti na nirvedaḥ sthāyī kin tu tattvajñānam eva sthāyī bhavet | (Abhinavabhāratī, p. 334)

With this, the very recognition of the reality becomes nourished in a chain of recognizing reality and so dispassion will not be the enduring emotion, it will be the recognition of reality.

Abhinava, however, does not collapse the *nirveda* model with his own. Even though he acknowledges that dispassion can be understood in two different ways, he is aware that the advocates of dispassion who apply the terminology of *nirveda* may not come to conformity with his interpretation. This is where he separates the two terms of *nirveda* and *vairāgya*:

nirvedho hi śokapravāhāprasasarūpaś cittavṛttiviśeṣaḥ | (Abhinavabhāratī, p. 335)

Nirveda is the specific state of the mind that has the expanse of the flow of grief.

vairāgyam tu rāgādīnām pradhvaṃsaḥ | (Abhinavabhāratī, p. 335)

Dispassion (*vairāgya*) is the cessation of passion etc.

Even with this distinction, the deeper meaning of *vairāgya* as a culmination of self-realization, that Abhinava seeks, is not acquired. Nevertheless, the definitions above demonstrate a radical difference in the terminology of *nirveda* and *vairāgya*: the first has a positive being, a phenomenal content, of negative experience, such as grief, while the second simply refers to the destruction, absence of passion. One should not be too quick to equate this with cessation though, as what Abhinava anticipates in this definition is the type of negation that confirms y in negation of x.

Even when the cognitive mode has been negated, its foundation remains unchallenged. If this is a negation that confirms difference, basically the negation of x implying the presence of y, *rasa* experience would not be empty of its own content, or empty of having its own *svabhāva*, self-regulating nature. On the other hand, if this is a form of absolute negation, this would make the experience of *śānta* a form of absolute negation. This is where the conversation crosses the boundary of aesthetics and enters interdisciplinary metaphysics. As a consequence, how one interprets negation not only relates to describing everyday experience, this also concerns the ways one comprehends the penultimate goal of liberation.

It has been addressed earlier that both Buddhist and Nyāya philosophers describe the state of liberation in terms of negation, as *duḥkhadhvamśa*, the final termination of suffering. Unlike the Buddhist counterparts, the negation of the cognitive functions or of consciousness does not translate into the negation of the self for the Naiyāyikas. For them, consciousness is not an inherent nature of the self, but rather, it is one of the secondary tropes or properties that the self can exist even in its absence. As far as the enduring nature of consciousness is concerned, Nyāya position contrasts that of the Advaita of Śāṅkara. Nevertheless, in both Nyāya and Advaita accounts, understanding *nirveda* in positive terms (negation of x confirming y) makes it possible to trace back to the self that has its inherent nature (*svabhāva*).

In all accounts, the foundational problem is that if there is nothing to savor, no emotion or cognitive content to be appraised, that state cannot be *rasa*, as it violates the very notion of relishing. Particularly from the perspective of cessation, if there is no enduring self, there is not even a subject savoring *rasa*. It is the phenomenal content, something being savored, that makes savoring savoring. It is the qualitative state that makes one *rasa* distinct from the other, and if there is nothing positive to appraise in serenity, this may likewise be the case with savoring eroticism or humor, and the categorization of *rasa* would be meaningless. Abhinava responds to this position with a caveat. On the one hand, there is something enduring, something having luminous quality in all *rasa* experiences including the savoring of serenity. On the other hand, this savoring relates only to the initial surge of *rasa*, as its qualitative state cannot be savored once the *rasa* overpowers the subjective gaze since *rasa* itself is considered “beyond the scope of the sensory faculties” (*lokottara*). As if a person merging into a deep lake, a subject merges within *rasa* experience, and there is no duality, no subject-object relation, no appraisal, while remaining merged in this pure fluidity.

Even for Abhinava, the establishment of *śānta* as a positive experience refers only to its early stage of emergence where the savoring begins and the enduring emotions transform, but not in their exalted states. Abhinava rejects having any representational content in the exalted state of experiencing *śānta*, or for that matter, any other *rasa*. The descriptions of savoring in this essay, the difference that has been maintained on *rasa*, and even the analysis of the internal structure, all rest on the initial stage before all the differences collapse and the experience that determines two horizons of subject and object collapses into one, as in this singular experience, there is just the savoring of being and awareness. In other words, the positivity of *rasa* experience is a description of the foreground and not the essential core. Even then, Abhinava's objections to the negative hermeneutics of serenity stand. Experiencing serenity, or for that matter experiencing anything, cannot ever be confirmed as having a negative content. An experience, whether that corresponds to positive or negative entity, still stands as positive, has its own self-determining nature (*svabhāva*).

Position III: Serenity Emerges from Self-Awareness (*Ātmajñāna*)

Three enduring emotions or states of being (*bhāva*) – cessation (*śama*), frustration (*nirveda*), and dispassion (*vairāgya*) – have so far been examined as the potential candidates to elevate into the savoring of serenity. According to Abhinava, none of these qualify to be so. Even when he seems to confirm one of the above models, he is either collapsing the model within his own or interpreting the categories differently. Abhinava ultimately establishes his own position that the enduring state of being, enduring psychological state (*sthāyībhāva*), is “recognizing reality” (*tattvajñāna*). What he means by “recognizing reality” is self-realization (*tattvajñānam ca nāmātmajñānam eva* | Abhinavabhāratī, p. 336). It is by making self-realization the cause for savoring serenity that Abhinava ties the two systems of aesthetics and Pratyabhijñā together.

This, however, raises various questions. The first glaring question is the inclusion of self-awareness (*ātmajñāna*) as the enduring *bhāva*. This does not even count in Bharata's list of enduring emotions, and Abhinava is well aware of this issue. Next, the translation of *bhāva* as emotion fails here as what type of emotion would self-realization be? All in all, it is in addressing *śānta rasa* that one encounters a real cultural shift where cognitive and emotional states, mental and somatic states, all fall under the category of *bhāva*. In his paradigm, *bhāvas* are the modes of the self or consciousness, and these include both cognition and emotion. Another issue here is that self-realization cannot be of the same category to cognizing objects. When cognizing external entities, there is a fundamental difference in the cognizing self and the cognizing objects. In the case of knowing the self, it cannot be an object, even for itself, for the reason that when objectified as the other, it no longer is the subject (*paro hy evam ātmā anātmaiva syāt* | Abhinavabhāratī, p. 336). Knowing the self is unique in the sense that there is no difference in the awareness between the cognizing self, the consciousness that is being self- given, and the reflexivity that is grasping

consciousness itself. On the contrary, if self-awareness were to be similar to knowing external objects, this would not be the knowledge of the self in any account. That which is projected to be the self, the objectified subjectivity, is not the self. Keeping these two premises in mind, Abhinava argues:

tena ātmaiva jñānānandādivisuddhadharmayogī parikalpitaviṣayopabhogarahito 'tra sthāyī | (Abhinavabhāratī, p. 336)

Therefore, the enduring [emotion for the surge of serenity] is the very self that is associated with the pure attributes such as consciousness and bliss and is bereft of enjoying the conceptualized objects.

Accordingly, when in contact with the external stimuli, the subject enjoys the simulated objects, its own copies that resemble the externals. And it is in this outward gaze that the self deviates from its immanence and finds itself differentiated, manifesting in the modes of volition, cognition, and action. Any and all modes of consciousness that make the subject hidden from its own reflexivity make the self associate with the transient *bhāvas*. This self-awareness is therefore not similar to other enduring emotions because those others endured briefly, may be conditions for the surge of *rasa*, but are not fundamental to the self. Self-awareness, however, is always there: it is due to orientation outward that this consciousness remains obscure. Because the self is nothing but consciousness and since consciousness in this paradigm is reflexive, this self-awareness of the self is the basis of all other experiences. The same way, the savoring of serenity is the basis for the experience of all the *rasas*. Abhinava therefore argues that “this is the foundation for all other emotions and is therefore most enduring of all the enduring emotions” (*sakalabhāvāntarabhittisthānīyaṃ sarvasthāyibhyaḥ sthāyitamam* ... | Abhinavabhāratī, p. 336).

This is where the savoring of serenity becomes synonymous to resting on the self. Following the model presented by Bharata, this foundation is not expunged of all emotions. On the contrary, this foundation is filled with latency for the self to actualize all other modes of emotion, as has been epitomized in his statement, “all *bhāvas* spring forth from the state of serenity” (*śāntād bhāvaḥ pravartate*). This leads to another question: is there something intrinsic to egoity, something unique to the self, that constitutes self-experience as distinct from other experiences or that gives an ontological status to self-experience? This question characterizes the discourse on the inherent nature (*svabhāva*) of the self or the lack of self-nature, a classical debate between the Hindu and Buddhist philosophers expanding for over a millennium. With Abhinava’s analysis of the savoring of serenity, this question emerges again, as what constitutes the savoring of serenity is not as straightforward as one might assume. Being or the lack of inherent nature is at the core of defining the experience of serenity, and the question is also relevant phenomenologically: whether or not there is something like savoring serenity? Also embedded is the question, whether or not the self deviates from its primordial immanence in savoring

serenity? Abhinava's position, as mentioned earlier, is that the appraised emotional state, even if that makes double appraisal with the basic emotions themselves being appraised, only endures in the preliminary phase of the surge of *rasas*, not just serenity but all other *rasas*. It is in this initial ground, the early exposure of emotion, that serenity is determined as serenity. For when the experience overpowers and eventually erases the horizons of subject and object, all that remains is the surplus, or the overflow, of *rasas*. Abhinava actually classes subjectivity as a postscript of this singularity. Or all differences merge within this outpouring of emotions appraised and savored in terms of *rasa*. This now reverses the paradigm, and *rasas* become primary, more intimate to the self, and *bhāvas* become the post-experiential analytical state of experience.

This convergence of self-experience and the savoring of serenity resolves perennial issues embedded with the Pratyabhijñā system. What is confirmed from the discourse above is that the very self is the foundation for all the enduring emotions. Not just that, this very self becomes yet another enduring *bhāva* in savoring serenity, and this is where the issue of translating *bhāva* as emotion becomes problematic. From this perspective, there is marginal difference in the self being aware of itself and evaluating its immanence in terms of the savoring of serenity. This also goes without saying then that the self in its most pristine form is not necessarily expunged of the latencies for emotions, and when the episodes emerge, there is no categorical difference in cognitive and emotional modes. This comes from my reading of consciousness in terms of luminosity or *prakāśa* that is accompanied by reflexivity or *vimarśa*. This reflexivity or *vimarśa* has something like it, a qualitative state, a stickiness (\sqrt{mrs}) the sense of which is not contained by reflexivity. It integrates feeling, it incorporates what it is like, and it involves savoring or bliss (*ānanda*). Consciousness or *citi* in this paradigm is not passive. The dynamism of consciousness involves being in the world, and this very engagement is the mechanism that allows the inherent tendencies embedded within consciousness to unfold in the form of emotions.

When Abhinava says that the evaluative aspect or the savoring of *rasa* rests only on the initial ground of emergence, what it implies is that self-awareness is not yet another mode of consciousness that objectifies. This actually is the consciousness, in its complete immanence, that lacks directionality. And since it is not directed toward any object, it has no external object to grasp or otherwise that would not be self-knowledge. The appraisal of emotions – the cognitive mechanism that transforms the enduring emotion into *rasa* – in the case of experiencing serenity is the very self, as there is no difference in consciousness that grasps the self and the self itself.

The Phenomenology of Savoring Serenity

The issue common to the savoring of any *rasa*, and in particular of savoring serenity, is its intentionality. On one hand, any emotional appraisal requires something to be appraised, some phenomenal content, while on the other hand, Abhinavaguptian aesthetics not only establishes *rasa* experience as *lokottara* or transcending the

sensory realm, but he also confirms again and again that the innermost core of *rasa* experience cannot be described. Even the confirmation of positive being of savoring, along these lines, is based on the initial exposure of *rasa*. As it comes to conceiving and describing the savoring of serenity, it becomes all the more difficult. For one, even the enduring mode (*sthāyin*) is self-awareness, a state of consciousness that lacks representation. If serenity is described as the repose of all emotions, the resting of all the cognitive functions, this negation, an empty void of emotional surge, cannot have any positive content, something for the mind to objectify. Abhinavagupta is particularly conscious that this experience can be interpreted as a mere lack. While Abhinava does not explain this enduring mode in negative terms – as it is the very self-awareness that functions in his aesthetics as the basis for the savoring of serenity – it is not just the Buddhist aesthetes, including Ānandavardhana, who hold the idea that the removal of passion, etc. is the basis for the emergence of *śānta*. In this platform, however, the enduring emotion would be delightful. Ānandavardhana thus does not terminate the possibility of having the savoring of serenity appraised.

What one confront is the possibility that there is no objective horizon (if considered the cessation model), or there is not even a subject evaluating the rapturous surge of emotions when engaging Buddhist perspective. As long as there is mind, there always is something for it to grasp, whether in terms of being or absence. Abhinava subsumes mind and subjectivity in all-embracing *aham*, but this is not the subject or the ego of everyday convention. This is the totality experiencing itself immanently. In his discourse on *rasa*, Abhinava occasionally eludes to this state but refrains from merging two disciplines of aesthetics and metaphysics. The mind and mentation, the ego and its other, are all dissolved in the mode of experiencing, whether the experience is mystical or aesthetic. Abhinava differentiates these two states based on subjective evaluation. Nevertheless, even the aesthetic experience transcends the cognitive horizon in its depth. The perplexity here is what would then be the structure of phenomenality and what form of intentionality can one assign to this state of savoring? If intentionality is understood as what Frega would have, “a mode of presentation,” there does not appear to have any modality for serenity to uncover. Following Kriegel’s (2002) model, when experiencing blue, there exists a representational content that stands for something blue alongside a phenomenal character that there is something in it that makes the experience of blue blueish. From Abhinava’s perspective, there seems to be different layers of the savoring of serenity. In its initial surge, the subject is capable of evaluating the experience, ergo finding it worth savoring. However, when the *rasa* experience becomes intense, it takes over the horizons of subject and object, making it impossible to describe. The following statement of Abhinava is particularly insightful to peel off the layers of this experience, as he nonetheless provides a scaffolding for this savoring to be determined:

*uparāgadāyibhir utsāharatyādibhir uparaktam yad ātmasvarūpaṃ tad eva
viralombhitaratnāntarālanirbhāsamānasitatarasūtravad yadāhitatsvarūpaṃ sakaleṣu*

ratyādiṣūpa-rañjakeṣu tathābhāvenāpi sakṛdvibhāto 'yamātmēti nyāyena bhāsamānaṃ parāṅkukhatātmakasakaladuḥkhajālahiṇaṃ paramānandalābhasaṃvidekatvena kāvyaprayo-gaprabandhābhyāṃ sādharmaṇatayā nirbhāsamānam antarmukhāvasthābhedenā lokottarānandā-nayanam tathāvidhahṛdayaṃ vidhatta iti |. (Abhinavabhāratī, pp. 340–341)

What is vividly manifest is the essential nature of the self, that is transparent even when being colored by stimulation or passion that color [the self] following the maxim that ‘the self is simultaneously manifesting’ while having its essential nature being covered in accordance with the stimulants such as passion. The essential nature of the self is similar to a shining white thread manifesting in the gaps of sparsely threaded gems. [This manifestation] constitutes the heart such that it generates extra-sensory bliss by being one with the state of inward facing that is free from all the nets of suffering, having the character of facing outward and manifesting in the homogenous form of being one with the awareness of encountering the absolute bliss by means of poetry and drama.

The above description delineates a two-tier strategy to determine the phenomenal content of savoring serenity. From this perspective, the description of serenity, or for that matter the savoring of any *rasa*, is based on initial capturing or objectifying of the state. This is to say that both the qualitative state and its evaluation are possible in this phase of origination. *Rasa* experience, along these lines, surges and overflows the barriers of the body-mind so that it fails to determine its horizons but rather the experiencing subject soaks into it or submerges in the surplus of bliss. But this also results in saying that this experience cannot be represented, as it is not conceptualized by the mind. Embedded with this statement is that the constitution of the transcendent object and the immanence of the ego is subsequent to this ground. It is the non-dual experience wherein the two horizons are carved. This also confirms the foundational being wherein the description in terms of luminosity (*prakāśa*) and reflexivity (*vimarśa*) do not apply. If this non-dual state were to confirm human subjectivity, it is in this very foundation that emotions endure in their latency.

Rather than adopting Abhinava’s approach to complete the analysis of the surge of serenity, this essay proposes a return to Bharata’s poignant statement that had some proponents in classical times. For Bharata, serenity is not just a resting ground without return but a reservoir teeming with latency for the exuberance to overflow. And it is in this fullness that the cognitive horizon is carved. Every cognitive instance along these lines retains some form of savoring, and every instance of being therefore is infused with *rasa*. The more the experience moves to its pristine form, the less it is captured by the scaffolding of concepts.

What one calls *śānta* is therefore merely based on the way the experience reveals itself to a subject in its first exposure (Locana 390–94). Since the heightened state of serenity coupled with savoring is theorized as extra-sensory (*alaukika*) or transcendent (*lokottara*), it makes sense to acknowledge that the aspects of this experience can be determined after the experience subsides and the two banks of subject and object manifest again. In other words, if *rasa* experience is determined in its constitutive phase, this can also be determined when the intensity of experience phases out and the constitutive elements are analytically given. But as far as the core

of experience is concerned, no judgment of the state is possible. There is no horizon given, and in the lack of the grasping subject and grasped object, no appraisal possible. Finite human subjectivity and the limits of cognition, then, are constituted in this very foundation of serenity. This is why self-awareness plays as the foreground for its savoring. Whether Abhinava wrote his epistemology to confirm his aesthetics or his aesthetics to establish his epistemology, it is in the analysis of serenity that both epistemology and aesthetics collapse their disciplinary boundaries and endeavor to confirm the most intricate core of human experience.

Definitions of Key Terms

Abhāva: absence. Classical Indian philosophers analyzed absence primarily as relational absence or *saṃsargābhāva* and difference or *anyonyābhāva/bheda*. The first or relational absence is threefold: antecedent absence (*prāgabhāva*) or the absence of effect prior to its emergence; consequent absence (*pradhvaṃsābhāva*) or destruction; and absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*). The second type of absence, difference or *bheda*, relates to the absence of x in y.

Ātmajñāna: self-realization. Abhinava uses this term in the context of analyzing serenity, arguing that self-realization forms the basis for the experience of serenity.

Lokottara: transcending the commonsense world or transcending the realm of sensory experience. Abhinava uses this term to explain the experience of *śānta*.

Nirodha: cessation. Classical Buddhist and Hindu yogic practices focus on *nirodha* to pacify the fluctuations of the mind. Some have argued that *nirodha* functions as the basis for the surge of *śānta*.

Nirveda: dispassion. Some classical philosophers have argued that *nirveda* forms the basis for the emergence of *śānta rasa*.

Rasa: elixir, savoring. *Rasa* is the most fundamental theory based on emotional analysis and fusion of emotions to ground aesthetic experience.

Śānta: the experience of serenity. This in the aesthetic context is considered the ninth *rasa*.

Sthāyī bhāva: enduring emotion. Every *rasa* experience is unique in the sense that it has, for its basis, a distinctive enduring emotion that evolves into *rasa* when combined with other emotions and appraised accordingly.

Viśrānti: resting. In Trika system, this term refers to the returning of self-consciousness to its core and reside in its immanence. Abhinava uses this category to explain the experiencing of *śānta*.

Summary Points

1. *Rasa* is a key term to describe aesthetic experience that evolves from evaluating the commixture of emotions. While majority of *rasa* theorists advocated for eight *rasa*, Abhinavagupta and his followers argued that the aesthetic experience of serenity counts as an additional *rasa*.

2. *Śānta* is the ninth *rasa* in classical Sanskrit aesthetics. Since all *rasas* have one or another central emotional core called *sthāyī bhāva*, the issue of what becomes the enduring emotion for the emergence of *śānta* becomes one of the central issues in the classical philosophy of aesthetics. While Abhinavagupta explores the models based on cessation or the suspension of all the mental fluctuations and dispassion-based models, he argues that none of these satisfy to be the enduring emotion for the surge of *śānta*. He argues on this ground that it is the very self-realization that becomes the catalyst for the surge of serenity.
3. *Nirodha*, common to early Buddhist and Hindu yoga practices, refers to the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. While in the Buddhist context the experience of *nirodha* is simply to suspend all the mental activities, in the Hindu context, this only relates to suspending the factors that are blocking the access to the self-illuminating consciousness or the self.
4. Abhinava explains dispassion in both ways: as a catalyst for self-actualization and as the product of self-actualization. While Abhinava objects to dispassion being the basis for the experience of serenity, he reconciles his own position with the second one, i.e., dispassion is the product of self-realization.
5. One of the major arguments of Abhinava in analyzing *śānta* is that self-experience is at the core of experiencing serenity. He compares the self with the thread and our emotional life as the color beads. By exploiting this metaphor, we can argue that there are interruptions in each of the mental fluctuations but at the same time, even during those mental fluctuations, self-experience is merely covered and not absent.

References

- Abhinavabhāratī. Abhinavagupta. See Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata Muni.
- Chakrabarti, Arindam. 2006. From *Vimarsha* to *Vishrama*: You, I, and the tranquil taste of freedom. In *Abhinavagupta: Reconsiderations*, ed. Makarand Paranjape and Sunthar Vishuvalingam. New Delhi: Samvad India Foundation.
- Gerow, Edwin. 1994. Abhinavagupta's aesthetics as a speculative paradigm. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114 (2): 186–208.
- Kriegel, U. 2002. Phenomenal content. *Erkenntnis* 57 (2): 175–198.
- Locana. The commentary of Abhinavagupta upon Dhvanyāloka. See Dhvanyāloka.