

Depiction of “The Rasa Theory” in Indian Folklore-Based Movies-Tracing the Relevance of *Raudra-Rasa* as a Pervasive Theme in *Kantara*

Pratikshya Tripathy¹, Dr. Krishnaprada Dash², Dr. Anshuman S S Mohanty³

¹Assistant Professor, DRIEMS

²Associate Professor and Head, Department of HSS, DRIEMS

³Assistant Professor, DSBM

Abstract: Time and again, Indian literature and traditions have been introduced on the celluloid with the objective to familiarise people with the undiscovered cultures and practices of foreign lands. For the longest time, Indian cinema has witnessed the realistic portrayal of Indian classical dances blended with drama for an alluring theatrical effect. Most of these age-old dance forms include essential elements like body movements, postures, gestures, and, most importantly, facial expressions, which are grouped into nava-rasas. One of the fundamental rasas out of the nava-rasas is the “raudra-rasa”, which has been portrayed as the dominant rasa in violent, dramatic performances. A recent marvel in Indian cinema, *Kantara* has highlighted the “furious sentiment” in a brilliant manner by incorporating the rasa with a legend of two religious figures, Panjurli and Guliga, the deities worshipped in the Tulunadu culture. *Kantara* is a balanced blend of action, emotion, and unfiltered tradition, which bring out the essence of Hindu religious rituals, where dance can be coupled with the theme of destruction to evoke devotion in the audience. This paper aims to trace the dominance of Raudra-rasa as an inextricable element of local cultures and legends, celebrated through the pivotal characters in this work of cinematic brilliance.

Keywords: Indian Cinema, Indian Literature, *Kantara*, Rasa, Bhava, Raudra-Rasa, Tradition

1. Introduction

Art is incomplete without emotions. These emotions translate into expressions that add flavour to an art form. Any art form devoid of “rasa” cannot bind the audience and thus fails to serve the aesthetic experience. For a long time, Indian cinema has adapted and appreciated the “essence of emotion” and the “Rasa theory” concept pioneered by Bharatmuni in his treatise of dramaturgy, *Natyashastra*. The presence of the eight rasas is central to the representation of characters on celluloid, as far as Indian folklore-based movies are concerned. Recent releases like *Karnan*, *Tumbbad*, *Stree*, and *Jallikattu* have brought to light the essence of the raw emotions in the various characters that drive the plot of the movies. Rasa means juice, nectar, essence, or taste in an artistic performance. These rasas are created by Bhavas (the states of mind). Rasa can be better defined as a viewer-response theory where the audience/spectators experience the transitions/emotional states of the characters to connect with them. This rasa-bhava theory has been incorporated into Indian performing arts like drama, dance, painting, and acting, which sparks various sentiments in the audience consuming an art form. The nine rasas that embellish the performing art forms are *Shringara* (Romantic Love), *Hasya* (Humour), *Karuna* (Compassion), *Raudra* (Rage), *Veera* (Valour), *Bhayanaka* (Fear), *Bibhatsya* (Disgust), *Adbhuta* (Surprise), and *Shanta* (Tranquility). Indian cinema has portrayed characters and the plot structure with a balanced blend of emotions and actions, which are highly inspired by the rasa concept propounded by Bharatmuni in Chapter 6 of *Natyashastra*. Contemporary movies have seen a radical shift in the content being delivered to a rather mindful audience that

values stories rooted in local folktales. The experimentation began years ago and resulted in the birth of cinematic masterpieces like *Kantara*. With a rich blend of cultural elements, a universal theme of man-nature conflict, caste politics, magic realism, and supernatural elements, the rasa aesthetics in the movie have blown the minds of moviegoers. The glorification of the authentic Tulunadu culture with the conceptualisation of the Bhoota kola performances has made *Kantara* an aesthetic movement to revive the rasa theory in modern times. The aggressive performance was meant to invoke the local deities, Panjurli and Guliga. Layered costumes, expressive makeup, headgear, ornaments, and masks magnify the performance by evoking the bhavas of the spectators. Although several sequences in the movie inspire myriads of emotions, the most pervasive among them is the *Raudra-rasa* or furious sentiment that has been an inherent attribute of all the major actors in the movie. From the spine-chilling screams of the possessed kola performer to the various dimensions of anger (*Krodha*) displayed by the lead character Shiva, the dramatic events in the movie have captured and dished out the essence of *raudra-rasa* in the brilliant narrative. The combination of the right *vibhavas* (Determinants), *anubhavas* (Consequents), *vyabharibhavas* (Accompanying Emotions), and *sthayibhavas* (Durable Psychological States) in different conditions and contexts display a magnificent show of the furious sentiment which continues throughout the narrative for a splendid climax at the end.

Objective of the Study

To trace the presence of latent and inherent aggression in the pivotal characters in the movie *KANTARA*.

2. Literature Review

According to Hindu mythology, Shiva is the “The Destroyer”, the supreme Lord who creates, protects, and destroys. As much as Shiva is exalted as the supreme being responsible for maintaining the balance of nature, he is known as “Rudra” for unleashing fury with his *Rudratandav*. “The cosmic dance of Lord Shiva symbolises the creation, destruction, sustenance, and other aspects of the Hindu culture. All the antagonism and polarisation of this phenomenal world merge in the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva” (Bhandari 103). It is believed that the cosmic dance of Shiva has both good and bad aspects, many of which have been explored by researchers earlier. Bharatmuni’s *Natyashastra* shows the various aspects of Shiva Tandava, in the 4th chapter, *Tandava Lakshanam*. Lord Shiva performs various types of Tandava, namely *Ananda Tandava* in happiness or joyful state, *Samara Tandava*, *KaaliTandava*, *Uma Tandava*, and *Gauri Tandava*.

Hundreds of movies in Indian cinema have celebrated the benevolence and wrath of Lord Shiva alike, the latest being Bollywood movies like *Brahmastra*, and *Baahubali*. The Bollywood movie *Shivaay* represents the protagonist as Shiva in human form, as the latter is believed to be human-like with all the flaws like a normal human being. Shiva can go from the furious state to a calm state, and that’s why he beheaded Daksha and later revived him with a goat’s head. Thus, the rage of Shiva is controlled, meant to restore the balance of the Universe. In the *Oath of Vayuputras*, there is a description of Shiva’s anger and the expression of *Raudra-rasa*, “Shiva’s eyes widened, as the rage bubbling under the surface broke through. Screaming at the top of his lungs, he drew a sword and charged” (Tripathy 3). Shiva’s uncle Manobhu had met the Pakrati chief, Yakhya, to discuss a peace treaty with him. When Manobhu failed to return, Shiva searched for him and encountered his mutilated body. Shiva failed to control his emotional rage. He, along with his tribe, destroyed the Pakrati village to find Yakhya. They rounded up five Pakrati men and asked for the location of Yakhya. (Jain and Vaishnav p.100)

From other perspectives, *raudra-rasa* has been shown as an essential part of feminist drama where “anger” is considered to be a medium to express concerns of women who are victims of various social evils in society.

On the contrary, its aim is to instigate the audience with the same rage of performers and of those women who experience it in reality. So, in this regard we may say that the dominant mood or *Rasa* of Indian women theatre is distinctively the *raudra rasa* or anger. Though the ancient *sastra* like *Natya Shastra* and the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* overlook the angry ‘*Nayika*’ (heroine), but the contemporary women theatre of India has no intention to ignore them; rather utilizes their wrath to lambaste the social evils. Indian women theatre attempts to display the *raudra rasa* and its relevance in our society through dramatization. (Biswas 2)

This paper will show how the various dimensions of the “furious sentiment” have been incorporated into the narrative and how the positive and negative aspects of

raudra-rasa in the movie *Kantara* have made it a work of universal appeal.

Raudra-Rasa in Kantara

Context 1 (The Demigod’s Scream)

In the initial segment of the movie, the audience are horrified by a powerful scream by a possessed villager, which is believed to be the spirit of Panjurli (one of the two demigods – the other being Guliga). The scream is the first antecedent to the disasters that would ensue ahead. Here, the reason of the God screaming was a warning sign for the king that in case the latter tries to deceive the villagers, the consequences would be unwelcome. Here, the scream is a precursor to the appearance of the furious form of Panjurli, Guliga, who is in charge of the safety and protection of the villagers. Thus, the scream here is an indicator of the *Ugra-rupa* within Panjurli that can be awakened if the king or his descendants dared break the deal. Years later, the descendant of the king demanded Shiva’s father (the kola performer), possessed by Panjurli, to return the lands.

Descendant: This place, this property, this land. None of these belong to the villagers. ... These are all mine. You have to ensure it is returned to me.

Panjurli: That is a great question! That is a great question, Landlord! I will ensure it is returned to you. I will ensure the land of the villagers is returned to you. But, can you return the peace that I have blessed you with, all these years?

Descendant: Listen! There is no problem if you will not be able to get it back for me. I know from where I can get my job done.

Panjurli: So, you will go to the court? But I shall pronounce your judgment on those stairs. The land belongs to the villagers. And, that decision will not be made today. A day will come in distant future.

Descendant: The land belongs to the villagers! Is this the Demigod speaking or the performer?

Panjurli: Is it the Demigod or the performer, let it be decided today. If it is the performer then you will find me again. However, if it is the Demigod ... [Screams]. (0.08.51 – 0.10.05 *Kantara*)

Stimulatingly, here the descendant of the king asks a question to the kola performer that supposedly triggers the wrath of the demigod. The descendant asks if the warning to leave the land to the villagers is being given by a *Daiva* or a dancer. At that particular moment, the audience can witness the anger building within the kola performer; his body shaking and profusely sweating are the indicators of the aggression building up within him. In real, such an insolent question awakens Guliga. The outcome was Shiva’s father running into the forest, spinning aggressively, and disappearing into oblivion. The fiery circle is a symbol of the imminent dangers ahead. The red hue that originates after the protagonist’s father has disappeared is a telltale sign of the *raudra-rasa* or *krodha*, which is the *sthayibhava* of the *raudra-rasa*. In the next scene the descendant is found

dying on the stairs of the court with the background voice of Panjurli “I shall pronounce your judgement on those stairs” (0.11.12 – 0.11.18 *Kantara*) determining the existence and prowess of the Demigod.

Context 2 (Kambala Fight Scene)

In the Kambala (a traditional buffalo race in Karnataka) fight scene, the protagonist Shiva is introduced as a muscular, aggressive contender with his face brimming with expressions of rage as he jumps into the muddy waters with the buffaloes racing ahead. The knitted eyebrows and loud screeches symbolise Shiva’s dominant nature and are precursor to his furious nature ahead. Shiva’s aggression has two sides-constructive and destructive. He is portrayed as someone who cannot stand injustice and quickly resists the advances of the wrongdoers when provoked. This can be seen when he fails to lay his hand on the medal and then fights off the henchmen of the landlord, Devendra Suttooru, in order to reclaim the medal. In doing so, Shiva emerges as a reflection of Lord Shiva, where he exercises his anger to restore the balance in the system where he has to exist in peace with the villagers and retain the trust of his patron.

Context 3 (Leela’s Aggressive Demeanour)

Shiva’s girlfriend Leela, is shown as a passive character in the film as she submits to Shiva’s anger and dominance for the sake of her love for him. On the contrary, the audience finds an aggressive side of Leela as well. For the first time, Leela wards off Shiva when he pinches her waist without her permission. At that particular moment, Leela’s expressions suggest her disgust and passive aggression, which is overlooked in the movie. Later, Leela’s responsibility as an employee in the police department helps her vent her anger on Shiva. On one occasion, Leela risks entering into the hideout of Shiva and his associates, where she gets into a verbal brawl with him, “The only thing you know is how to hit people, cut a tree and launch it at the Police, throw bombs at them ...” (1.22.40 – 1.22.44 *Kantara*).

Here, the bottled-up anger of Leela is entirely released, and the aggression can be seen through the expressions on her face, tightly clenched teeth, snatching away the food from Rampa, and ordering Lacchu to leave with her.

On many occasions, even Shiva’s mother has been shown as a frustrated character venting her anger on her son for hunting boars and engaging in fights. She is seen hitting his friends, too and even gets thrashed by the police when she tries to resist the attempt of the Government to identify their residential lands as encroached space.

Context 4 (Shiva’s Anger When Dealing with Women)

When dealing with women, Shiva’s anger is shown to be two-dimensional. In the scene where Shiva’s mother is thrashed onto the ground, Shiva can be seen approaching aggressively to combat the misbehaviour by the police officers on duty, which is a constructive aspect of his anger/aggression. In contrast, his attitude towards Leela right after he is served food by the former is appalling. This is where his anger is uncontrolled and directed in a toxic manner, something which falls under assertive anger.

Context 5 (The Climax Scene)

All the actions in the movie seem to end in a full circle, when Guliga possesses Shiva, the vicious form of Panjurli. The last ten minutes of the breathtaking fight sequence between Shiva and the landlord’s henchmen present a warlike scenario where Shiva kills the landlord and his men to restore balance. Shiva, possessed by Panjurli, is transformed into a state of divinity, like Rudra himself, Lord Shiva performing the *rudratandava* to destroy the wrongdoers. The fiery red circle reappears as he runs into the forest to reunite with his father, symbolising the harmony established at the end.

3. Conclusion

Every pivotal character in the movie has a unique expression of anger, ways of releasing it and different outcomes of the anger. While Shiva fights for justice, Murali fights for integrity. Numerous symbols in the movie show anger/aggression in various dimensions and intensities. The movie shows anger or *krodha* as a primary human emotion that can be triggered by social factors and cultural contexts too. As for Shiva in the movie, anger becomes a way of life, his perpetual way of expressing his desires, displeasure and social adaptation. His *krodha* becomes his identity and a major driving force to recognise his purpose. Anger is an important emotion that binds the whole plot of the story. Anger translates to aggression, authority and authenticity, thus giving each character its unique identity. *Kantara* not only revives and combines cinema with aesthetics but also leaves a framework for contemporary cinema to build on the inherent and latent emotions of the characters to make the movie appear larger than life.

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