The Natyasastra and Indian Cinema: A Study of the Rasa Theory as a Cornerstone for Indian Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

Bharata Muni(200B.C), the Indian performance theorist and philosopher, is credited with the formulation of the ultimate text of performing arts as well the rasa theory and is aptly celebrated as the father of Indian performative arts. Bharata(trans.1995) in Natyasastra has strongly argued that the ultimate sensation depends upon the emotion felt by the audience (as guided by the actors performance). Bharata believes that the relevant representation of the durable psychological states acts a stimulus in evoking in the spectator a verisimilitude of other psychological states that is then known as a Sentiment or Rasa. The role of the eight rasas is quite central to Indian cinema and its structure. It not only works to drive the plot and accentuate the behaviour of the characters, its function is deeply engraved in the basic storyline. Taking up the example of Bollywood, in this paper I would try to argue that every aspect Indian cinema comprising the performance of the actors, the technique of acting, the music, sangeet, background score and even the emotions produced by the audience, is based on Rasa and the aesthetic principles of Natyasastra.

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