

**Binding Experiences and Epistemologies:
Instances from Indian philosophy (*darsana sastra*),
Indian psychology (*moksa sastra*) and Indian dramaturgy (*natya sastra*)
in the context of recent discussions on consciousness**

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Besides the major focus on metaphysical and epistemological theories, discussions on the nature of self, its nature and scope, and, ways to self-exploration form the essential characteristic of Indian philosophical thinking. This presentation will look at the instances from Indian philosophy, Indian psychology and Indian dramaturgy in the context of recent discussions on consciousness in order to postulate and examine:

- (i) recent trends in consciousness studies,
- (ii) linearities in the ways of understanding, in current discussions,
- (iii) linearities in the ways of experiencing, in current discussions, and,
- (iv) the crux of binding problem as missing the very obvious leading to its non-conceptualization in entirety.

The ongoing multidisciplinary discussions on consciousness have caused a breakthrough in terms of redefining our standards for defining truth and causal mechanisms. This also has ensued both epistemological and experiential necessity to expand the scope of understanding a evasive phenomenon like consciousness and to recognize the importance of non-linear methods and primacy of subjective categories of thinking. This presentation, in this context, will also look at:

- (i) addressing the complexity: basics of Indian approaches,
- (ii) the concept of self and self-exploration in Indian philosophy, Indian psychology and Indian dramaturgy so as to facilitate:
 - (a) A redefinition of the concept and scope of experience with the help of theories of *moksa*, *atman* and *bhakti*
 - (b) A redefinition of the concept and scope of epistemology and problem-formulations with the help of theories of *jnana* and *natya*.
 - (c) A redefinition of the concept and scope of transcendence and the binding problem with the help of the above-mentioned theories.

Recent trends

Interestingly two dominant trends in the current discussions on consciousness, though conventionally look parallel on closer look, confront at inevitable junctions. Let me say which are these two trends and which are the inevitable junctions. The two dominant trends are:

- (i) to have a physical, neural account for discrete conscious experiences and build a theory of consciousness based on simple and finite number of neural laws and mechanisms. Instances are discussions on blindsight, phantom limb, and synesthesia.
- (ii) to have a non-physical account for unitary conscious experiences and build a theory of consciousness based on the subjective content of experiences. Instances are discussions on transcendental meditation, social cognition, and well-being.

Of the inevitable junctions where these two trends meet the most talked about is the binding problem about which I will be discussing later. On one hand we have physical, neural and discrete events that are called conscious experiences. And, on the other, we have non-physical, subjective, unitary experiences. Both the trends could equally question the existence/need of positing a singularity of consciousness. Both the epistemologies can very well do away with the presence of the ontological primacy of consciousness by introducing epistemological models and theories of intentionality, intelligence, transcendental states of mind etc. But the most interesting junction between these two trends questions their fundamental position of the adequacy of epistemological primacy of consciousness. This junction is where the discrete existence of a neural event becomes unstable without the subjective basis of self, and where the unitary experience becomes empty without the subjective basis of self-expression.

The unending number of emerging paradoxes in consciousness studies questioning both epistemological and ontological primacies of consciousness point towards the challenge of complementing first, second and third person approaches. The classical divide between knowing bereft of experience, and experiencing bereft of knowledge; epistemology untouched by phenomenology, and phenomenology untouched by epistemology, becomes the central issue. How to incorporate epistemological factors into a model centered on an ontological primacy of consciousness, and how to incorporate ontological factors into a model defined by epistemology is the challenge faced by recent discussions. It is like one end becoming slippery and evasive when you get hold of the tip of the other.

Linearities in ways of understanding

Objectivity has been the goal of classical (modern and contemporary) approaches in investigating a phenomenon which is yet to be classified as obeying certain natural laws and exhibiting certain predictive behaviors. Controlled experiments, arriving at uniformities through model building and theories, attempt at objectivity through a series

of approximate results. However refined our notions about objectivity and its place in theories of knowledge, it is to be kept in mind that our methods are highly influenced by the causal mode of thinking. Though the ideas themselves about arriving at objectivity and designing the method could be sophisticated, the fundamental process is ruled by the simplistic and ancient method of cause and result, starting point and end point, mechanism and function. What I mean to say is that our thinking and therefore even notions about experience is predominantly dualistic and temporally (/and spatially) dualistic and disunited. Can there be knowledge and objectivity at all without this basic duality in our thinking is an important question arising from this supposition. A possible response/counter question to this question is that what is the use of knowledge and objectivity , which brings soteriology and spiritual bearings into the issue.

Linearities in ways of experience

Refinement seems to be the goal of knowledge and objectivity building enterprises. One pervasive method therefore has been to build models based on a finite and fewer number of characteristics (of consciousness) and formulate theories which can explain and draw in more and larger number of characteristics. The building block approach has been central to our epistemological processes. But it is interesting that we seldom question the inherent problem in such approaches of having to throw the baby with the bath water ! What is retained at the end of pre-defined epistemological processes seems to be less important. The process somehow rules and takes over the place of the end. Realization of this paradox at various times inspires us to look at experience closely and focus on experience-based understanding of the phenomenon.

In the case of consciousness, what makes this paradox more interesting is that, we cannot say that consciousness is completely unknown to us. In fact it is the partial presence of consciousness that makes it so very interesting and to know what it looks like in its entirety . The unavoidable linearity, in the current discussions, is having to focus on transcendence in exclusivity. It is not only that demarcations of ordinary and transcendental is strikingly clear in such discussions, but the need of abandoning the ordinary becomes the central point. Either we are fascinated by simple sensory mechanisms like the visual mechanism and from there onwards to explain much complex mechanisms, or by transcendental experiences and from there onwards to ordinary experiences. In both cases there is the unavoidable recognition of experience as central to consciousness. In the first case it is a linearity favoring a building block approach, and in the second, it is linearity favoring the involution approach.

Puzzles of linearities

There is an interesting and serious turn taking place in the current discussions on consciousness. This turn is based on and compelled by the intractable relationship of consciousness with experience . The nearest empirical idea for the unity and subjective nature of consciousness is experience . Hence the scientific focus on experience . The

interesting part of discussions is that though there is a recognition of experience as vital in the study of consciousness, the attempt itself is to strip experience off the qualities which would make it have experiential nature (unitary and subjective) and study it on the basis of empirical standards such as causal connections, neural influences, neural locations etc. I am not suggesting that brain research is not needed or even less important. Certainly, it is very significant in its own right. But if our guidelines and methods are not based on our basic premise to study consciousness (experience, which is unitary and subjective) then certainly we cannot make a claim that brain studies apart from giving new knowledge about brain functions would also lead to a complete theory of consciousness. The puzzle in the current discussions on consciousness is that of the persistent conflict between epistemology and phenomenology.

However, if we look at the major semantic trends in the current discussions, the views that are discussed and debated, no more fall into the classical division of reductionistic and non-reductionistic, or empirical and non-empirical approaches. However third-person the approach is, when it comes to the descriptive definition of consciousness, ideas are based on qualitative features of consciousness. The discussions on empathy, meaning, meme, and mirror neurons are some instances. On the other side, the growing amount of discussions on meditation and altered states of consciousness give third-person references, however subjective the discussed experience is. A possible reason for this trend to interrelate and bridge first-person experience and third-person definition is the recognition of a distinct characteristic of consciousness, namely, that it is not completely defined by empirical standards and completely understood by first-person experience.

Puzzles of meanings

The extent of the meanings imputed to consciousness most often crosses the empirical limits and sometimes even becomes diffused to qualitative experiential descriptions. The one major problem in consciousness studies is the semantics of consciousness. Unfortunately this prominent meta-analysis of the discussions is dismissed in recent discussions. It is very important that there is not only a well laid out definition for the problem but also a methodological consistency. This does not mean that even before the enquiry starts a complete theory of consciousness is anticipated. To have the semantics of consciousness given importance in the start itself would mean that the theory will not be drawn based on the limitations of the methods, but on the original contention about consciousness.

What exactly are we trying to understand by the study of consciousness? The answers could range from neural functions to subjective experience. It is again interesting to see that the meanings we give for consciousness are much larger conceptually than the strict semantic (in current discussions) definition of consciousness. This is even clear at the starting point of discussion when the immediate reference is to experience.

It is in this context, I wish to juxtapose the idea of self as an alternative to the discussions of consciousness. The word self is more comprehensive than the word consciousness since it includes connotations at different levels of experience and also of the subjective identity which is important to understand unity of experience.

The discussion about consciousness is discussion about experience. The discussion about experience is discussion about the self. Experience and self certainly relates to something which is more than what is happening in the brain, more than abnormal conditions, more than ordinary conditions, more than transcendental states.

Why binding problem is binding and not liberating

Binding experiences has been the single most issue in the center of focus in the last decade of discussions on consciousness crossing disciplines: neurobiological, quantum mechanical, computational, theoretical, psychological etc. Though the details of what constitutes experience differ from method and perspective, a consensus has emerged that (i) to explain consciousness is to explain experience ; (ii) to explain experience is to explain its unity and binding nature. Following this preliminary consensus, however implicit it was, many discussions took place/are taking place from the first, second and third-person perspectives, though the mainstream discussion is still dominated to a greater extent by third-person approaches. The crux of the binding problem is that how discrete, physical (neural) events give rise to unitary, subjective experiences. How does physical events bind to give rise to subjective experiences? How does an event transform to become an experience? How does the objective become the subjective?

Still being a transmute of classical causal approach, binding problem is bound by the circularity of having to explain one (discrete physical event) in terms of the other (unitary conscious experience) and build a hierarchy of primacies, such as physical and non-physical, or dismissing one by the other by a method of reductive inclusion. The inability of binding problem to formulate a method of integration makes it still binding and not liberating.

Binding problem is the one issue in consciousness studies which has made current discussions not only challenging but also compelling to re-look at our very mechanisms to construe knowledge and appreciate experience. It precipitated, though indirectly, the insufficiency of causal mechanisms and linear causal theories in understanding experience. It also brought out, I think, two foundational questions about (i) complexity, (ii) self. This is where, I believe, binding problem could become no more binding but a liberating tool.

Is complexity intrinsic to the design and how we construe our mechanisms for understanding, or is it intrinsic to consciousness itself? Are the discussions on

objectivity and experience self-defeating if we do not juxtapose the idea of self with the idea of consciousness . The first question will help to redefine our epistemological mechanisms and the second emphasizes the importance of self-exploration and spiritual growth.

I wish to discuss the liberating side of the binding problem with the help of Indian approaches to experience , complexity and spiritual growth . The attempt is to present the thesis that if consciousness cannot be understood without looking at experience , certainly experience cannot be reduced for convenient reductive (physical, psychoanalytic and cultural) methods of understanding but will have to be open for a variety of meanings validated from first-person perspectives. This will definitely take away the reductive scientific monopoly of explaining consciousness in a singular way, but will encourage scientific methods to reexamine the normative criteria for truth and reality .

Instances from Indian philosophy

Two ideas and two paradigms

There are two key ideas in classical Indian philosophical thinking which would strike the attention of any student. These are *atma* and *darsana* . These words perform a major double function, which is also the distinctive feature of the whole of Indian thinking, of combining epistemology and phenomenology. For this reason, *atma* could mean either the self who is engaged in a particular act, or the self who is untouched by any act; *darsana* could mean discursive thought or intuitive thinking. The basic reason for such a foundational trend in the whole of Indian philosophical thinking goes beyond the facility of a strict structural language (Sanskrit). It is an attempt not to break apart, and define, self into identities based on the context; experience into ordinary and extraordinary; at the same time give thinking and understanding a depth which will be inclusive and open-ended but not divisive and hierarchical.

There are two paradigms in the classical schools, inspite of the differences in their metaphysical and epistemological positions. These are (i) what we see and experience, which is constituted by the given and the immanent, (ii) what we can see and experience which is constituted by the possibilities and the transcendent.

It is within these two paradigms that the elaborate and detailed discussion on fundamental experiences such as pain and pleasure, sorrow and happiness, selfishness and selflessness, freedom and bondage, the given and the possible etc. takes place. *Darsana* is an attempt to bridge the seemingly two contradicting paradigms through an exploration of the self, based on systematic discussions on (i) theoretical, (ii) experiential, and (iii) transcendental issues.

Complexity in theory

Theoretical problems are envisaged by the building of tools for thinking such as abstraction, generalization and conceptualization guided by the question of meaning, certainty and new knowledge. The factorization of new knowledge in epistemology gives importance to intuitive thinking all through the discussion. A general division can be made of the theories the *darsanakara*-s debate on, such as:

(i) theory of what is given: which relates to ontological questions about the nature of the world, the nature of the self, the nature of life and death,

(ii) theory of the what and how of knowledge which relates to epistemological questions about meaning and validity,

(iii) theory of what is beyond the given (if any) which relates to metaphysical and teleological questions about the nature of God, the nature of ultimate causes, the nature of self and the nature of reality,

(iv) theory of spiritual, mental and physical discipline which relates to questions about ethical issues, value systems, duty, responsibility, selfishness, transcendences and new perceptions about self-identity.

Self and self-knowledge

The concept of *jnana* is a complex concept and is not to be merely translated as knowledge as we understand it in popular fashion. The discussion on the given and the transcendent self (*jiva* and *atma*) is guided by the continuous and rigorous distinguishing of the one from each other at every instance of experiencing. The conflict between the near and given nature of self, and the distant and transcendent nature of self forms the focus of attention for the *darsana*. The attempt of *darsana* is to solve the conflict in such a manner that the duals involved in it are integrated than segregated. The idea of liberation hence is not a singular event in time but a constant understanding and experiencing of the complexity of the contradiction of the given and the transcendent. The distinguishing of the *atma* and *anatma* (the real nature and the given nature of self), *atma anatma vyaparaha*, is the singlemost exposition for which the rest of the epistemological, ethical and phenomenological theories are expounded. It is the metaphysical openness which is the hallmark of Indian thinking.

Instances from Indian psychology

Self and self-exploration

The distinct feature of the philosophical traditions of Indian thinking is its spiritual openness, by which I mean, not just a liberal philosophy, but the facility to integrate new

experience and new understanding into an evolving scheme of ideas all leading and pointing to self-exploration. The ideal of spiritual living is given foremost importance than to moral and epistemological theories. It is not to say that the ethical guidelines and practices are less important in these traditions but to suggest that all such theories and discussions are addressed from a spiritual platform which discusses the nature of self and the world of experience and the relationship between them.

Redefining experience

An important discussion in all classical schools of Indian philosophy is about *moksa*, which is popularly translated as liberation. Liberation is the key concept however radically different the guidelines for it suggested by different schools are. Identity and self are the key problems addressed to with the help of metaphysical positions, epistemological theories and ethical guidelines. The breadth and length of discussions in *darsana* is interestingly just not different discussions on what exactly the nature of self is, but mutually reinforcing dialogues on the consensus view that all discussions are to be guided by the co-coordinating concept of self. Invariably the discussions in *darsana* are discussions leading from the recognition of self and identity as larger categories for thinking. It could be of this reason that epistemology (*tarka*) does not have the supremacy in deciding the course of events and validation, but only with equal participation of reflective thinking (*vicara*) in discourse. Analytical thinking could be delivering its goods only if it is accompanied by reflective (*vicara*) and intuitive (*nidhidhyasana*) thinking.

Experience and transcendence

An interesting characteristic in the classical systems of Indian thinking is the overriding issue above all issues to connect and catapult from what would be considered as the given to what is possible. The conception about experience is not strictly what is caused by an extraneous factor/s but what could be possible by the distinctive and unique nature of the individual. Therefore, experience is not merely a theme for understanding based on its immediate context such as cause, or results, but a tool for further exploration of the self. The ordinariness and extra-ordinariness of an experience is understood from the standpoint of the self than from the standpoint of what causes it. This trend also impels the understanding of the self along with the understanding of the object of experience. The means of experience (*sadhana*), result of experience (*sadhya*) and the experiencer (*sadhaka*) constitutes the triad of the complex phenomenon of experience, each one of which is significant in the understanding of each other.

The major experiential issues which are discussed in the classical schools are also interconnected with the major transcendental issues. Thus the experience and understanding of pain and pleasure are connected with guidelines for transcending pleasure and pain; experience and understanding of freedom and bondage are connected with the guidelines for transcending self-identities and rigid perceptions about the

context; experience and understanding of different states of mind are connected with the guidelines for transcending words, verbal structures and attributed meanings.

Flowing Love and inseparable self-identity

It is essential to look at the devotional literature of India while Indian psychology is discussed. At face the picture of a *Bhakta* in classical devotional literature (specific references in this paper are from *Narada Bhaktisutra*) reveals the lover's intense devotion (towards chosen deity), unconditional love, undaunted trust and a liberated state of mind. The mind of a *Bhakta* is unique for two reasons: (i) The ontological state of his/her love is integrated with a trans-cognitive I-ness, and, (ii) The relationship between him/her and the world which is experienced transcends the duality.

To describe the mental states of a *Bhakta* as mystic will of course help us to place them in order in the area of consciousness studies. But will that be enough is the question. What makes the study of human mind interesting is not only the physical/non-physical structure and metaphysics of it but also the different methodologies employed in the understanding of the experiencer. The strangeness and uniqueness in the perceptions, and representations of those perceptions in the acts of a *Bhakta* belong to a totally different order of experience. The narrative is of a totally different world and a totally different I.

The pertinent issues concerning *bhakti* that could be of interest in Indian psychology are: whether the cognitive components involved in *bhakti* are of a different order of epistemological real; whether as a conscious being the ontological state of his/her being have a non-mystic correlate; whether the nature of emotions, perceptions and acts involved in *bhakti* transcend that of love in ordinary parlance; whether the experience-experiencer nexus involved in *bhakti* and in *atmajnana* (knowledge of the Self) are comparable and whether there exists a duality between the experienced world and the I-ness of the *bhakta*.

The *bhakta* pours out his soul in the form of prayers, apologies, and disagreements as well as vivid exposures of his/her weakness and confusions in terms of taking decisions and understanding his/her identity and relationships. The discourse, in this text, on *bhakti* takes place parallel to metaphysical discussions on self, activity, inactivity, non-activity, renunciation etc. There are two central threads of thought that are discussed repeatedly such as the meaning of identity and the experience of integral union. Emotions are employed as rational tools in the inquiry. They also behold an ontological factor since they transcend the limitations in an experiential level and also because the ultimate objective is dedication and dissolution of the experiencer. The focus is on understanding experience and integrating different experiences both to lead to an expansion of the experiencer/self.

Bhakti is described as, *anirvacaniya*, indescribable. This description could be understood in two ways. The experience of *bhakti* cannot be translated into a concept. *Bhakti* transcends its verbal expressions. If an experience cannot be translated into verbal expressions, how can it have an objective validity? Is objective validity a universal necessity when two orders of reality are compared? It is answered that the experience of *bhakti* cannot be exhaustively translated into verbal description since it is like taste enjoyed by the dumb. The dumb is incapable of describing the taste in words, though he might very much wish to.

The indescribability of the experience is not to be misunderstood as inexperience. That which is experienced need not be always explicable. That which is explicated need not exhaust the experience. Explanation is a second-person report. Explanation and Experience cannot be replaced by either nor exhausted by either.

To describe *bhakti* as indescribable will not be a tangible description to understand the phenomenon of *bhakti*. If *bhakti* cannot be described specifically as this, can it be described as what it is not? Narada makes an attempt to introduce a secondary description for *bhakti* after his opening statement about its indescribability. The primary statement that *bhakti* is indescribable is not indicative of a negative approach. In any other discourse description is the tool for validating. In the case of *bhakti* it is not so. There cannot be a standard description of *bhakti* which could be classified as the truth of *bhakti*. Even if a standard description of *bhakti* is accepted as true *bhakti* the experience of *bhakti* cannot be exhausted by its description. To humble the inquiring mind and divest it of any rational arrogance, Narada attempts to begin addressing the facets of *bhakti* only after a discouraging description of indescribability.

In continuation with the first description of *bhakti* (indescribable) Narada says that *bhakti* is without attributes, *gunarahitam*. That which cannot be described cannot have any attributes. Any attribute is indicative of the possibility of description and reportability. The nature of *bhakti* as attributeless qualifies it as a pure experience which cannot be repeated or reported. Repeatability and reportability originates from a pre-formed mental structure of ideas and memory. The experience of *bhakti* happens to a desireless, *kamanarahitam*, mind. The desirelessness of *bhakti* shows that there is no ontological divide between him/her and his/her deity. Desire is always for the other. For a *bhakta* there is no other. His/her *bhakti* is that which intensifies every moment, *pratiksnavardhamanam*. Since the identity of the *bhakta* is united with his/her deity, his/her love for deity is missed not even for a second. *bhakti* is continuous, *avicchinnam*, and subtlest, *suksmataram*. Such a phenomenon can be known only through experience, *anubhavarupam*.

Thus described, *bhakti* does not carry a dismal picture of impossibility. The emphasis is once again on the availability of *bhakti* as experience.

Instances from Indian dramaturgy

The foundational text of Indian dramaturgy is *Natya Sastra* authored by Bharatamuni. The text has an exhaustive thematic structure since it deals with a complex conception of drama (*natya*) constituted by what could be described as objective and subjective features. There is elaborate discussion, on one hand, on the characteristics of playhouse, different kinds of plays, different and complex gestures and movements, rules of prosody, metres and music, use of languages, style of characters, costumes and ornaments. On the other hand, there is discussion on emotions and mental states which are their causes, mutuality of emotions and mental states, rapport between actor and spectator, mental and physical nature of the actor and spectator, preliminary mystic rituals for effective representation and final goals of drama. At the same time there is a structural rigidity as to the epistemological structure, and openness about the subjective expression, relationship between the actor and the spectator, goals of drama etc.

The complexity of the text could be seen at three levels:

- (i) in addressing the representation of different kinds of characters (mostly mythical) with different states of minds through a joint participation of physical gesture and movements, mental states and emotions, ritualistic preliminaries, costumes, music and space configuration,
- (ii) in addressing the unique relationship between the actor and the spectator, of the actor invoking a specific state of emotion in the spectator's mind,
- (iii) in making possible a spontaneous and self-evolving nature of enjoyment for the audience in spite of the structured and specified composition.

The rigorous and specified rules of *natya* together with an integral approach to emotions, first-person experience of the actor and the spectator make *Natya Sastra* an insightful treatise as well as what could be conceived of as belonging to a higher order of cognition and experience, namely a wholesome re-representation of human emotions through the complex act of external body (physical body gestures, costumes, music and plot) and the spiritual body (emotions, states of mind and unique relationship between the one who is presenting the re-representation and one who is enjoying it).

It is not directly relevant to this paper to describe the technical details of the themes of various chapters of the text. But it is necessary to keep in the background of the reading of the forthcoming discussion that the elaborate description in the text mainly follows two patterns:

(i) discussion and detailed description of the different kinds of gestures of different parts of the body and their nuances; different kinds and features of plays and poetry; kinds of metres; characteristics of the actors, judges and spectators; use of languages; costumes and ornaments; and different kinds of musical instruments,

(ii) discussion and description of *rasa* (emotions) and *bhava* (mental states which produces emotions); the mental rapport between the actor and the spectator; the types of characters and mental and physical temperament suitable for their portrayal; the goals of drama and how they are fulfilled; and preliminary rituals and settings to invoke the conducive environment before the start of *natya*.

Wholesomeness of *natya*

The concept of *natya* evolves in the text through the development of both the above patterns which I would like to describe as third-person and first-person approaches. The prescribed set of rules for *abhinaya* exists along with the spontaneity of the actor in representing the structured, and in evoking the *rasa* in the spectator. The visual and the character-oriented together with the subjective and self-oriented produces the aesthetic experience which could be further described as a spiritual experience. The act of representation, the preliminary settings and rituals etc. is connected with the cosmogony that the physical world is the *angika abhinaya* of Siva, his *vacika abhinaya* is the world of language, his *aharya abhinaya* consists of the universe and his *satvika abhinaya* is ultimate happiness itself. The complexity of representing human emotions and at the same time invoking empathy in the spectator is brought out through *natya* in a comprehensive manner using a rigorous epistemology and first-person experience for both the actor and the spectator. The importance given to *natya* as a dramatic art has its origins in the act itself of the actor. It is the *nata* who is responsible for *natya* and not vice versa. This is a significant feature since it emphasizes the first-person oriented approach to a complex event such as *natya*.

Tasting the flavor

Rasa is a complex concept which is the central idea on which the experience of *natya* is founded. The word *rasa* is variously translated as relish, enjoyment and related to mean the object of relish or relish itself. According to Bharatamuni *rasa* emerges out of the combination of three basic components such as *vibhava*, *anubhava* and *vyabhicari*. They are also the (*karana*, *karya* and *sahakari*) determinant, consequent and auxiliary conditions of *rasa*. All three taken together is called the *sthayibhava* which is directly responsible for the production of *rasa*. *Bhava* is that which makes something happen. In *Natya Sastra* *bhava* is used as a technical word to relate to the mental states as responsible for producing *rasa* for the spectator through a combination of kinds of (*abhinaya*) gestures. Whether *rasa* is produced through *bhava* or vice versa or whether

they are mutually influenced is a debate which is prominent in the literature on *Natya Sastra* by various commentators.

The two levels of third-person reporting and first-person experience in *natya* are interesting to note at this point. Through the *bhavabhinaya* the actor represents the feelings of a person with a particular state of mind through the larger setting of stage, space, costumes and gesture (first instance of third-person reporting), and all the while undergoes the same state of mind so that the corresponding *rasa* is conveyed to the spectator (second level of third-person reporting). The enactment of the feelings is based on an understanding of the *bhava* (pure states of mind) and identifying with them (second level of first-person experience) which was earlier experienced by another person (first level of first-person experience).

One of the unique features of *natya* is that the epistemological and the experiential, the theory and technique are co-coordinated to form a mutually benefiting factor of the whole. Though the source of the following text is not authentically traced, it is said in both *Natya Sastra* and later in *Natyadarpana*, and is also popular to be the synoptic definition of *natya*, that the body should follow the tune, the hands must explain the meaning, eyes must speak the emotion and the feet must beat the time-measure; where the hands go there should go the eye, because where the eye goes there the mind goes with it, where the mind goes there follows the mental state, where the mental state is there is the feeling. These two verses represent the coordinated physical, mental and transcendental nature of *natya*. Equal importance is given to detailed and specific physical and mental factors involved, and each of their transcendence is specified, at the same time, to broaden the scope of experience both for the actor and the spectator.

Goals of *natya*

The goals of *natya* pertain to both objective and subjective features. Through the composite of external and physical enactment, and subjective states of mind and feelings representative of them, what is achieved for the (i) actor and (ii) spectator are: **For the spectator**, in the secondary level an appreciation of the characters and the theme, and in the primary level a temporary detachment with his/her self-identity is experienced. **For the actor**, in the primary level it is the complex task of representing a character, an idea or a nuance of a particular feeling through *abhinaya* and producing the corresponding *rasa* for the *preksaka*. In the secondary level a temporary detachment from his/her self-identity and identity with the particular character's self as a whole and various mental states which the character would have in the story narrated. The transcendence experienced by the actor is both transphysical and transmental since there is the combined use of body and mind. The transcendence experienced by the spectator is transmental.

For both the actor and the spectator it is a complex experience since there is the co-existence of his/her own dominant and real self-identity, and the identity with the mental states of the character portrayed. It is the co-existence, of the real self-identities of the actor and the spectator, and the identities with another-self, which determines the effectiveness of *natya*. The interesting and intriguing feature is the existence of a contradiction. For the effective transference of a particular *bhava* to the spectator the actor has to have an identity formed with it transcending the artificiality of enacting it. At the same time the actor has to be detached from any specific *bhava* of the character since what he/she is primarily concerned with is the narrating of the story. The actor has to play the twin role of being the character portrayed and also the narrator of the story. It is this twin and contradictory role played by the actor which enables the spectator to have the experience of *rasa* which also involves an interesting contradiction. Unless the spectator can be one with the mental state of the character portrayed he/she will not be able to appreciate the story and the specific nuance. At the same time unless a continuous detachment is maintained he/she will not be able to integrate the experience of that nuance in relation to his/her self-identity.

Depth and interconnectivity

What distinguishes the Indian way of thinking from what we today call as the Western way of thinking is the curious connection between theoretical, experiential and transcendental issues. It is also this distinguishing feature of Indian thinking which is often misappropriated as mystic and other-worldly. The important point missed here is that we fail to recognize that what interested Indian thinking was not the linearity and immediate conveniences through rigid structures of knowledge but an open-endedness where experience and reflection could together bring about a re-orientation of how we construe our self-identities and how we respond to the given.

The foundational issues, crossing the rigidity of being theoretical, experiential or transcendental, which are embedded in the *darsana* are (i) self-exploration, and (ii) self-identity. The guidelines for the understanding of these embedded issues are (i) abstraction: to identify the unitary in the discrete, (ii) placeability: to have an ontological meaning for any experience, its means and its experiencer, (iii) practise: to have values and discipline as essential guidelines for self-exploration.

If we look at Indian philosophy, psychology and dramaturgy we find that complexity is never intrinsic to the object of investigation or experience but the characteristic of design and methodology. This could be one reason that instrumentality (*sadhakatva*) and eligibility (*patrata*) are important factors in Indian ways of thinking and experiencing. The nature of experience as well as thinking is expected to transform by a transformation in attitudes, life styles, value systems and essentially how the means is construed for specific knowledge or experience.

This basic characteristic of Indian ways of thinking and experiencing also explains how self and self-exploration are intimately connected. Truth and objectivity are achieved through a process of interconnectivity by the deepening of self-awareness. Binding problem becomes a problem of binding epistemologies and experiences through self-exploration and spiritual growth.

This is only a draft version of the paper. The final version will include transliteration marks for Sanskrit words, references, acknowledgements and further discussions on a few more ideas briefly discussed in this draft.