

LIBERATION AND DESIRE

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This thesis prioritizes the use of Sanskrit primary texts and adopts a philological and comparative philosophical methodology. It investigates the relationship between the enlightened mental state which occurs penultimately to liberation in relationship to the experience of liberation itself, through the lens of desire. The desire for liberation plays a key role in praxis for the Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta schools. However, all desire must be eliminated prior to liberation, which is then understood as a passive and inactive state. By contrast, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Vraja traditions of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* consider both the penultimate enlightened mental state and liberation to be active states, characterized by personal and eternal devotional desire for God. Kṛṣṇa theologian Rūpa Gosvāmi draws on the work of previous *rasa* theorists in order to establish his unique aesthetic-religious understanding of *rasa*, which is synonymous with liberation. The correlated *siddha-deha* doctrine postulates the eternal embodiment of a liberated Kṛṣṇa devotee in a *brahman* body composed of consciousness and bliss. This thesis culminates in a detailed analysis of potential origins of this perfected eternal body, ultimately suggesting two divergent theories. While each theory provides potential insights, each also raises further questions about whether devotional desire can activate, shape, and sustain the state of liberation.

## **Dedication**

To Mom & Dad

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## Introduction

Most Indic *mokṣa* traditions set up a dichotomy between worldly experience (*bhoga*) and liberation (*apavarga*).<sup>1</sup> While human life can include the pursuit of either, it can ultimately find its end only in an experience of liberation, known to the Patañjali Yoga school as *apavarga* or *kaivalya* and more broadly as *nirvāṇa* or *mokṣa*. Until a liberated state is attained, an embodied being remains in the cycle of rebirth known as *saṃsāra*, subject to ongoing *karma* and its requisite lifetimes of continuous embodiment and re-embodiment, accompanied by suffering. For the soteriological schools of Indian philosophy such as Yoga, Nyāya, and Vedānta, liberation from this cycle is the highest good or ultimate aim of human life.<sup>2</sup> The means to attain *mokṣa* is *sādhana*, pre-liberation praxis done by a spiritual practitioner or *sādhaka*. While these daily practices vary greatly according to tradition, as do the experiences of liberation which are pursued and ultimately attained, any particular experience of *mokṣa* correlates to a self experiencing the highest ontological truth.

But what is the relationship between the enlightened mental state which is penultimate to liberation, and the experience of liberation itself? Although soteriological schools differ in defining what this penultimate state is, it is broadly characterized as an *abhyāsa* state of mental cultivation. For instance, the *virāma-pratyāya* or “terminating cognition”<sup>3</sup> in Yoga Sūtra 1.18 characterizes the penultimate mental state for the Patañjali Yoga school. By contrast, the *jñāna saṃskāra* or true cognition of *brahman* is

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Yoga Sūtra 2.18.

<sup>2</sup> As illustrated by Yoga Sūtra 2.18 and Nyāya-sūtra 1.1.1.

<sup>3</sup> My own translation; all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

synonymous with the penultimate state for Advaita Vedānta. Three potential models of the variegated states of final liberation will be considered here, in order to effectively explore this relationship between the penultimate mental and ultimate liberated state. These three potential models are: liberation as the individuated self itself, as in the *ātman* of Nyāya and *puruṣa* of the Yoga school; liberation as non-individuated, synonymous with monistic, ultimate impersonal truth as in *brahman* of Advaita Vedānta; and liberation as the individuated self in eternal relationship to ultimate personal truth, as in the various schools of Vaiṣṇavism.

I have schematized the variegated penultimate mental states reflected in these schools in three ways: *eliminative*, in which an ontological object is removed; *revelative*, in which an ontological truth which already exists is correctly seen or revealed without the concurrence of ontological change; or *transformative*, in which the ontological contents of the self are permanently transfigured. I have further schematized that the experience of liberation can then itself be either *revelative*, in which the previously recognized truth is directly experienced, or *relocative*, in which the contents of the self pervade or inhabit a distinct ontological location. Although soteriological schools do not lend themselves to neat compartmentalization and a certain amount of categorical overlapping will certainly occur, these categories may serve as a useful preliminary organizational tool through which philosophical nuances, points of comparison, and points of difference can be productively explored.

*Rāga*, defined as a “feeling or passion, (esp.) love, affection or sympathy for, vehement desire of, interest or joy or delight in,”<sup>4</sup> is a component of central concern for

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<sup>4</sup> A *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by Monier Williams, 1956, s.v. “*rāga*.”

such soteriological schools. While the schools uniformly accept that *rāga* for anything other than an experience of the highest ontological reality must be discarded, the specific desire for liberation (called *mumukṣā* in Vedānta) becomes indispensable to pre-liberation praxis. For Nyāya, Yoga and Advaita Vedānta, even *mumukṣā* must be eliminated in the epiphany of liberation. The state of liberation for each of these three schools is then passive and inactive, although each school retains its own particular understanding of the experiential reality of this ultimate liberated state. By contrast, in the 16th century traditions of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*,<sup>5</sup> *rāga* for ultimate reality Kṛṣṇa characterizes not only the preceding mental state but the subsequent post-mortem state of liberation as well. In this case, while the material faculties of body and mind are discharged at liberation along with all associated *rāgas* as in the normative *mokṣa* traditions, an eternal and perfected spiritual body known as the *siddha-deha* also manifests. The *siddha-deha* is specifically characterized by eternal *rāga* towards God, and it becomes the activated vehicle for the *ātman*'s experience in liberation.

This characterization of *rāga* as necessary for pre-liberation praxis and subsequently either integral or incompatible with the state of liberation will be explored here in detail through the previously discussed schematic lenses. This connection between *rāga* and liberation serves as a cornerstone in further exploring the relationship between the penultimate enlightened mental state and the experience of liberation, particularly through investigating desire's capacity to activate, shape, and sustain the state of liberation.

Classical Sanskrit aesthetic theory will provide an analogous framework for the

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<sup>5</sup> *Bhakti* from *bhaj*, meaning "to serve." Other synonyms for *bhakti* include "devotion," "attachment," and "worship." See Edwin Bryant 2017 pp. 3-7 for a more detailed discussion of this term and its applications.

experiential classifications of liberation as outlined above, utilizing *rasa* theory as instantiated by Bharata and then as transformed by key theorists Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, and Bhoja Raja. Most simply understood as the defining “taste” which characterizes the aesthetic experience of Sanskrit drama and/or literature, *rasa* takes on philosophical and theological significance across centuries of evolving and competing theories. Such theories concerning *rasa* can offer key philosophical insights, particularly in mirroring the metaphysical possibilities at the moment of liberation through *rasa* experiences of aesthetic rapture. This exploration of *rasa* theory will serve to highlight, in particular, the presence of *rāga* and its potential to play a role not only in attaining a penultimate enlightened mental state, but as a potential component in the experience of liberation itself. This study will culminate in an analysis of Kṛṣṇa theologian Rūpa Gosvāmi’s aesthetic-religious understanding of *rasa* which characterizes *rāga* as a necessary ingredient for pre-liberation *sādhana*, the penultimate enlightened mental state, and the ultimate state of liberation as well.

Chapter 1 will focus in particular on classifications of liberation in Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta - three schools which represent disparate philosophical positions on the relationship between the penultimate mental and ultimate liberated state. Chapter 2 will introduce Sanskrit *rasa* theory and chart its historical expansion beyond its initial dramatic scope in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata. This expansion will offer potential philosophical and theological connections and insights, which will then culminate in Chapter 3 in a focused analysis of the 16th century Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition and the *siddha-deha* model of liberation. The writings of Rūpa Gosvāmi will offer an opportunity to explore a model of liberation in which *rasa* is no longer simply an analogy for



liberation, but becomes synonymous with the state of liberation itself. This equivalency hinges on the unique role of devotional *rāga*. I will provide some concluding thoughts, in addition to ideas for further research. Throughout this paper, I will utilize Sanskrit primary text sources wherever possible, including the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, the *Nyāya-sūtra of Gautama*, the *Upadeśasāharsī of Śaṅkara*, and the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmi*. Secondary academic sources representing a range of recent scholarly perspectives will also be drawn into this project, which will adopt a philological and comparative philosophical methodology, along with references from the intellectual history of Sanskrit literary theory.

## Chapter 1: Classifying Liberation

### 1.1 The Relocation of Consciousness in Yoga

Yoga, one of the six classical *darśanas* of Indian Philosophy, utilizes the Sāṃkhyan metaphysics of *puruṣa* (self) and *prakṛti* (matter) as the basis of its worldview.<sup>6</sup> Its philosophy is formalized in the 3rd century *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, in which *mokṣa* is understood as *puruṣa* residing in its own individuated form of pure consciousness, eternally independent from *prakṛti* (*Yoga Sūtra* 1.3). *Sādhana* in the *Yoga Sūtras* hinges on the primary practice of meditation on one object, known as an *ālambana* (YS 1.32).

The word “*rāga*” is used three times in the *Yoga Sūtras*: twice in Chapter 2 as a *kleśa*, one of the obstacles to *yoga* practice, and once in Chapter 1 as the phrase “*vīta rāga*” or “without desire,” referring to a person who is free from desire and hence a suitable object for meditation (YS 1.37). Although the *Yoga Sūtras* ultimately states that a practitioner can choose any *ālambana*, *Īśvara*<sup>7</sup> as the mantra *om* is one particular prescription.<sup>8</sup> An object of meditation, once chosen and utilized, provides the means for a *yoga* practitioner to advance along stages of deepening mental meditative concentration, which culminates in *samādhi* or absorption. *Samādhi* then itself has seven stages, which progressively transcend all distinctions between self and mind; the highest, *asamprajñata samādhi*, corresponds to the state of liberation (YS 1.18).

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<sup>6</sup> As established in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa*.

<sup>7</sup> Literally defined as “master, “lord,” or “the supreme soul” per Monier-Williams, see specific characteristics of *Īśvara* in *Yoga Sūtras* 1.24-1.27.

<sup>8</sup> See *Yoga Sūtras* 1.27 and 1.37.

As a *kleśa*, *rāga* is a barrier to yoga practice, hinging on the first two *kleśas* previously established in Chapter 2: *avidyā* and *asmitā*. *Avidyā* is the foundational technical term for ignorance of the *puruṣa* combined with a misidentification with *prakṛti* (YS 2.5). *Asmitā* is then an individuated expression of *avidyā*, when a person's ego in the form of intellect and instrument of perception (*buddhi*) is specifically misidentified as the eternal self (YS 2.6). *Rāga* builds on this, as the desire or craving which comes from the memory of previous pleasurable sensory experiences (YS 2.7). In Yoga psychology, all memories are stored as latent *saṃskāras* or mental imprints, either from a current or previous lifetime. These then activate from the *buddhi* as *vṛttis* or mental fluctuations, which are always active. *Saṃskāras* are the origin point for all *rāgas*, connecting a similar pleasurable experience or object that came before with a current object of desire. This is the case even if the activating *saṃskāra* is latent or from a previous life, such that a person experiencing desire cannot always directly identify its origin point.<sup>9</sup>

However, *rāga* as the desire for liberation has a potential utility in *yoga* practice. Patañjali classifies *vṛttis* as either *kliṣṭa* (detrimental) or *akliṣṭa* (non-detrimental) to *yoga* practice, reflecting their relationship with the *kleśas* (YS 1.5). Primary classical commentator Vyāsa writes that the *kliṣṭa vṛttis* come directly from the *kleśas*, characterized by the *guṇas* (qualities) of *rajas* (action) and *tamas* (inertia).<sup>10</sup> The *akliṣṭa vṛttis*, contrarily, arise from the quality of *sattva* (luminosity) which is necessary for *yoga* practice and culminates in *viveka*, enlightened discriminative discernment. *Viveka* ignites

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<sup>9</sup> *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, Translated by Edwin F. Bryant, (New York, North Point Press, 2009), 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

the “light of knowledge”<sup>11</sup> and terminates in the *puruṣa* “residing in its own nature”<sup>12</sup> of pure and unobstructed consciousness, eternally separate from the material body and mind in the state of liberation.

If the *kliṣṭa vṛttis* arise from the *kleśas* such as *avidyā* (ignorance) and *rāga* (desire), then the oppositional *akliṣṭa vṛttis* must arise from their opposites, such as *vidyā* (knowledge) and *vairāgya* (dispassion).<sup>13</sup> This is supported by Patañjali’s prescription to cultivate *sattvic* oppositional thoughts in response to the presence of negative thoughts which are rooted in *rajas* and *tamas* (YS 2.34). Another way of conceptually categorizing the opposite of ordinary *rajasic* and *tamasic rāga* for pleasurable sensory experiences would be to posit that *akliṣṭa rāga*, in addition to indicating an absence of detrimental *rāgas*, also corresponds to the *sattvic* desire for liberation. This is synonymous with the previously discussed *mumukṣā*. As Vyāsa states in his Yoga Sūtra 1.5 commentary, a manifestation of the mind’s pure *sattvic* potential in the form of *akliṣṭa vṛttis* is analogous to the enlightened *puruṣa*, in that it is no longer distracted by *prakṛti*.<sup>14</sup> One who is fixed in the *rāga* for liberation is likewise not distracted by *prakṛti*.

However, even *sattvic akliṣṭa vṛttis*, including *mumukṣā*, can only assist in bringing a *yogi* to the enlightened mental state that precedes liberation. We can thus say that this penultimate state is *eliminative* in the Yoga school, in that an eradication of all mental activity, including *rāga*, both *kliṣṭa* or *akliṣṭa*, must necessarily occur between the penultimate *samprajñata samādhi* states and the ultimate *asamprajñata samādhi* experience of liberation. This is illustrated by the *virāma-pratyaya* or “terminating

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<sup>11</sup> Yoga Sūtra 2.28: *jñānadīptir*

<sup>12</sup> Yoga Sūtra 1.3: *svarūpe 'vasthānam*

<sup>13</sup> *Vai*, without; *rāga*, desire.

<sup>14</sup> *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, Translated by Edwin F. Bryant, 30.

cognition” which is the final form of cognitive activity in the *buddhi* prior to liberation and which eliminates all other thoughts (YS 1.18). It results in all *vṛttis* and *saṃskāras* becoming permanently latent, like a flame whose fuel has run out,<sup>15</sup> and which results in the mind being simultaneously completely and permanently emptied.

The state of liberation for the Yoga school is then *relocative*, in that the *puruṣa* no longer resides in the *sarūpyam* (state) of the *vṛttis* but in the eternal *avasthānam* (location) of its own *svarūpa* (form) (YS 1.3-4). Although there is a *revelative* element to this state of liberation in that the eternally pre-existent *ātman* is experientially revealed in liberation, it is also important to reaffirm the realism of both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* as irreducible ontological entities for the Yoga school (in contrast to Advaita Vedānta, considered below). This realist position underpins the preceding conjunction of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* which results from *avidyā*. Therefore, although the cognitive action of the *buddhi* (animated by *puruṣa*) leads to liberation, *prakṛti* is penultimately and definitively eliminated in the individuated experience of the liberated *puruṣa*. Thus, we will consider the Yoga school’s liberated state to be primarily *relocative*, in that the experience of consciousness in liberation occurs in an ontological location distinct from that which came before.

## 1.2 The Elimination of Consciousness in Nyāya

The *ātman* self in the Nyāya school is characterized by six inferential marks: “desire, aversion, effort, pleasure, pain, and knowledge” (*Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.10).<sup>16</sup> This is unlike the *puruṣa* of the Yoga school, which is characterized by eternal consciousness

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>16</sup> *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.10: *icchādvēṣaprayatnasukhaduḥkhaññānānyātmano liṅgamiti*

alone. The continuity of these six marks proves the existence of the self for Nyāya, as without an agent who comprehensively experiences all six, there would be no existent self. Considering the *kleśa rāga* as understood in the *Yoga Sūtras* as a desire which arises based on memory, we can similarly note the importance of memory in the Nyāya argument for these six marks of the self. In the case of desire, for instance, the agent who had a past experience of *rāga* is the same agent who experiences a current *rāga*. It is not that one agent develops a desire based on the previous experience of someone else. Instead, it is the “single perceiver”<sup>17</sup> of the self who alone experiences these common cognitions.

It is useful to point out that aside from the mark of consciousness, the remaining five marks exist not in the *puruṣa* self but rather in the *prakṛtic buddhi* for the Yoga school. Therefore, all marks but consciousness are eliminated for the Yoga school in liberation. Likewise for Nyāya, these marks are not eternally experientially existent for a liberated *ātman* but are conditional, in that “the self acts through and with these elements.”<sup>18</sup> Action and embodiment are therefore synonymous for Nyāya, and one cannot exist without the other. However, as for Patañjali Yoga, Nyāya is a realist school that does not deny the fundamental ontology of matter. In liberation, then, a distinction is drawn not in ontological reality but in its perception. The self’s wrong knowledge or “erroneous cognition”<sup>19</sup> of the body and the world is therefore the perpetuating cause of unliberated existence. As with other soteriological schools such as Yoga, liberation

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<sup>17</sup> *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*, Translated by Matthew Dasti and Stephen Phillips, (Indianapolis, Indiana, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2017), 76.

<sup>18</sup> Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation in Classical Indian Thought*, (New York, Palgrave, 2001), 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

results from an individuated self experientially detaching from this erroneous perception. This detachment occurs in the form of an “attitudinal change”<sup>20</sup> which accompanies the correct knowledge of reality.

Erroneous perception is thus perpetuated for Nyāya by an embodied being’s ongoing attachment to the body and world, accompanied by suffering.<sup>21</sup> Liberation then removes this attachment and offers freedom from suffering (NS 1.1.21-22). However, the state of liberation for Nyāya is not analogous to that of the conscious liberated *puruṣa* in the Yoga school. Liberation for Nyāya is unique in that the self itself must penultimately dissolve its own previously mentioned six inferential marks, including consciousness. As reasoned by *Nyāya-sūtra* commentator Vātsyāyana, the material body is the necessary vehicle for all types of experience, and so the post-mortem state of liberation cannot contain experience of any kind. Interestingly, Naiyāyika Uddhyotakara comments that only the existence of an eternal, post-mortem body could lead to the state of liberation having experiential contents. This possibility is synonymous with the later 16th century *siddha-deha* doctrine, as will be explored in Chapter 3 through the writings of Rūpa Gosvāmi. Commentator Uddhyotakara, however, concludes that considering the existence of a post-mortem body “would be absurd.”<sup>22</sup> This assertion of absurdity comes from Uddhyotakara’s understanding of embodiment as only possibly constructible with material ingredients. As all material ingredients are penultimately eliminated prior to liberation for Nyāya, as for the Yoga school, it must follow that there cannot be any experience which occurs in liberation for Nyāya. Certainly all *rāga* must be

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>21</sup> This is a generic presupposition accepted by other *mokṣa* schools.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 80.

penultimately eliminated as well, as desire would provoke the material attachment which is incompatible with liberation and would lead to the perpetuation of *samsāra*.

We can therefore consider the penultimate mental state prior to liberation in Nyāya to be *eliminative*, as in the Yoga school. *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.2 states that “when pain, rebirth, activity, vice, and wrong understanding are eliminated in reverse order, liberation occurs”<sup>23</sup> as a *sat* or existent state<sup>24</sup> which is likened by Nyāya-sūtra author Gautama to deep sleep.<sup>25</sup> This assertion that activity or action is incompatible with liberation leads to the interesting question as to how there can be an identifiable self who not only attains but meaningfully experiences a state of liberation if all actions, including experience and consciousness itself, are removed. Scholar Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad points out that the *Nyāya-sūtra* commentators never directly or definitively say that all awareness is removed in liberation. Therefore, it is possible that liberation is “cognitive by implication, although not by definition.”<sup>26</sup>

However, absent of consciousness, there is no question that liberation could be *revelative*, as it follows that there would be no conscious entity present in order to experience its truth. Thus, we can only consider liberation for Nyāya to be *relocative*, as it occurs in an ontological location distinct from that which came before. This liberated state is then merely *sat* or existent, and it is quite difficult to effectively characterize such a state any further.

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<sup>23</sup> *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.2: *duḥkhaśāntaṁ pravṛttidoṣaṁ mithyā jñānānām uttarottarāpāye tadāṁ nantarābhāvādapavargaḥ*

<sup>24</sup> Without *cit* (consciousness).

<sup>25</sup> Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.



### 1.3 The Revelation of *Brahman* in Advaita Vedānta

The ultimate ontological truth of reality for Advaita Vedānta is *brahman*.

*Brahman* can be understood as the singular entity of universal consciousness which exists not as an object, but only as reflexive consciousness itself, which is both “beginningless and without qualities.”<sup>27</sup> The material world experienced by the *jīva*, an embodied being with the psychophysical faculties of individuated body and mind, is therefore only conventionally real or *apparently* experiential in nature. Unlike the realist schools of Yoga and Nyāya, for Advaita Vedānta, the phenomenal existence of the world is not fundamentally irreducible but rather can be completely reduced into universal consciousness or *brahman*.<sup>28</sup> For Advaita Vedānta, then, all aspects of body and mind (including *rāga*) are *māyā* or illusion as well, since anything except *brahman* has only external and conventional identity.

*Avidyā*<sup>29</sup> or ignorance is the root of the erroneous superimposition of the conventional appearance of the world of names and forms onto the sole reality of *brahman*. This is illustrated in the famous Advaita example of a person who mistakes a rope for a snake and becomes frightened.<sup>30</sup> This distinction between appearance and reality, between snake and rope, is explained by the 9th century Advaita Vedāntin philosopher Śaṅkara as *adhyāsa*. This is the superimposition of error in which one thing is perceived as another thing which has been previously seen, based on memory.<sup>31</sup> *Avidyā*

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<sup>27</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.10.7: *anādīto nirguṇato*. See also *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.2.1, which references the “*neti neti*” descriptions of the *ātman* in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

<sup>28</sup> Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 174.

<sup>29</sup> We have already seen this term in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, and a similar meaning is intended here. A useful difference to note is that ignorance of the individuated *puruṣa* is intended by the Yoga school, whereas ignorance of the sole truth of *brahman* is intended by Advaita Vedānta.

<sup>30</sup> *The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śaṅkara*, Translated by Sengaku Mayeda, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>31</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 2.2.51

is responsible for the misidentification of the body, senses, ego, and *ātman* as self, as opposed to recognizing the only *apparently* individuated self as universal *brahman*. As for both the Nyāya and Yoga schools, this *aviveka* perpetuates *saṃsāra*. More specifically, the absence of the illuminating experiential knowledge of true reality results in the continuation of the ongoing cycle of rebirth. For all three schools, the lack of this type of knowledge is concurrent with ongoing attachment and *rāga* for the body and the material world. For the realist Nyāya and Yoga schools, however, even when a practitioner experientially detaches from the *prakṛtic* world in liberation, the objective ontology of *prakṛti* persists. For Advaita Vedānta, on the other hand, this experiential detachment reveals the illusory nature of the world, which does not have objective ontology. Instead, the world both is and has been only *māya* all along.

Therefore, for the experience of liberation to occur for Advaita Vedānta, this ultimate true cognition of *brahman* is required and the wrong knowledge of the *apparent* truth of conventional reality must be removed. This process can be likened to a bright light illuminating a dark room. The light does not ontologically change anything about the contents of the room; rather, the light simply allows those contents to be correctly perceived. Likewise, the penultimate enlightened mental state for Advaita Vedānta requires the elimination of all *māyā* until the “mind is pure like a mirror”<sup>32</sup> as a result of pre-liberation praxis.<sup>33</sup> Only then can the knowledge of *brahman* be effectively revealed and experientially realized. The example of the mind as a mirror also illustrates the important distinction between ordinary thought about *brahman* and a true cognition of the

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<sup>32</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.17.22: *cette hyādarśavadhyasmācchuddhe*

<sup>33</sup> Consisting of *yama* (abstention), *nitya* (often glossed as *nityakarman*, meaning constant act or duty), *yajña* (sacrifice), and *tapas* (austerity); See *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.17.22.

same, which results in liberation. A similar distinction was seen previously in the perceptual shift that is necessary for liberation in the *Nyāya-sūtra*, in addition to right knowledge. In Part 2 of *The Upadeśasāhasrī*, Śaṅkara characterizes a potential student as a person who has both faith and desire.<sup>34</sup> An inference can be made that Śaṅkara is referring here specifically to faith in the *śruti* scriptures<sup>35</sup> and to the desire for liberation,<sup>36</sup> and that both of these actions are necessary prerequisites to attaining true cognition of *brahman*. We may go one step further to note that Śaṅkara is perhaps concurrently implying the necessity of a receptive psychological disposition or “openness” which coincides with such faith and desire,<sup>37</sup> in order to attain this ultimate knowledge of *brahman*.

This psychological prerequisite then combines with further development “through inquiry and sustained contemplation.”<sup>38</sup> This further development is illustrated as The Four Cultivations, which build on one another, beginning with the ability to discriminate between *brahman* and non-eternal things.<sup>39</sup> This is followed by *virāga*, or indifference to all *rāgas* or desires; the six attainments, or excellences of mind;<sup>40</sup> and the desire for liberation (*mumukṣā*).<sup>41</sup> Desire for liberation, perhaps a tangible form of the previously mentioned psychological openness or receptivity, thus plays an integral role in a

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<sup>34</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 2.1.1

<sup>35</sup> This is a common theme in Śaṅkara’s writings. For example, see *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.17.8, 1.17.67, 1.18.216.

<sup>36</sup> Which is one of the previously discussed Four Cultivations, and is also referred to specifically in this verse: *atha mokṣasādhānopadeśavidhim vyākhyāsyāmo mumukṣūṇām sraddadhānānāmarthināmarthāya*.

<sup>37</sup> As would be accepted by the Vivaraṇa sub-school. See Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 197.

<sup>38</sup> Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 197.

<sup>39</sup> See the 15th century *Vedānta-sāra* by Sadānanda Yogīndra, verse 1.1.1.1.

<sup>40</sup> The six excellences of mind listed in *Upadeśasāhasrī* verse 1.1.1.18 are: *śama* (mental tranquility or equanimity), *dama* (taming or subduing [of the senses]), *aparati* (cessation [of the senses]), *titikṣā* (endurance), *samādhāna* (fixing the mind in contemplation), and *śraddha* (faith).

<sup>41</sup> *Vedānta-sāra* 1.1.1.18.

practitioner reaching the penultimate enlightened mental state. Only then can correct cognition of *brahman* experientially occur, such that the mind effectively eliminates itself permanently in the state of liberation.

Although this penultimate enlightened mental state characterized by true cognition of *brahman* may appear *eliminative* in nature, this does not fit with our earlier definition, as no ontological entities are in fact removed. All entities which are removed in the penultimate enlightened state - such as error, wrong knowledge, and the mind - are only conventionally real and yet ultimately *māyā*. This penultimate state for Advaita Vedānta can therefore be classified as *revelative*, in which the nondual truth of *brahman* is simply revealed. At the subsequent moment of liberation, then, no transformation or relocation actually occurs. This reflects Śaṅkara's assertion that although action is necessary for arrival at the penultimate mental state, action is incompatible with the ultimate knowledge of *brahman* in the state of liberation itself.<sup>42</sup> While action appears *eliminative* in that it dispels *māyā*, action is also itself *māyā* as well, as the nature of *brahman* is "immovable as the sky."<sup>43</sup> As Śaṅkara writes, "Higher knowledge is eternal and has no object; therefore, duality does not exist."<sup>44</sup> Therefore liberation for Advaita Vedānta can only be considered a *revelative* "epistemic continuity"<sup>45</sup> which experientially reveals the unified and eternal truth of *brahman*.

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<sup>42</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.19.20

<sup>43</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.10.9: *gaganam yathā 'calam*

<sup>44</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* 1.9.7: *nityam nirviṣayam jñānam tasmād dvaitam na vidyate*

<sup>45</sup> Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 164.

## Chapter 2: Experiential Analogies of Liberation in *Rasa* Theory

### 2.1 A Foundational Understanding of *Rasa*

The Sanskrit term *rasa*, which literally means “taste” or “flavor,” originates in a dramatological context, subsequently expands into a literary and poetic context, and is later appropriated into a devotional context by the 16th century Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* tradition of Caitanya. This divergent genealogy results in *rasa* taking on a range of meanings in aesthetic, philosophical, and theological frameworks. As an aesthetic principle, *rasa* has served as a defining feature of Sanskrit drama and/or literature for over a thousand years, beginning with Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*. *Nāṭyaśāstra* contains the earliest mention of *rasa* as an aesthetic principle, and this text establishes *rasa* as the defining feature of Sanskrit drama. For Bharata, *rasa* exists only in drama, and primarily refers to the experience of the actor himself, perpetually confined within the aesthetic object of the play.<sup>46</sup>

The location of *rasa* becomes a contested issue among later theorists, who redefine and reimagine the technical categories established by Bharata in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. However, Bharata’s foundational understanding of *rasa* is integral to understanding the divergent perspectives which subsequently emerge. An investigation of these later perspectives which follow Bharata will be confined in the current study to key *rasa* theorists Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, and Bhoja Raja. This study will then culminate in Chapter 3 with a detailed investigation of Rūpa Gosvāmi’s 16<sup>th</sup> century devotional understanding of *rasa*, in connection to its correlated *siddha-deha* theory of liberation. While the present study’s exploration of more than a thousand years

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<sup>46</sup> Pollock, Sheldon. *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2018, 48-49.

of *rasa* theory can certainly not be exhaustive in its scope, it will seek to continuously illuminate the relationship between *rāga* and liberation. This relationship is analogously expressed in the writings of various *rasa* theorists, who characterize the aesthetic “taste” of *rasa* as an experience which closely mirrors liberation in theory as well as in practice. This relationship between *rāga* and liberation reaches its apex in Rūpa Gosvāmi’s 16<sup>th</sup> century writings, which uniquely equate devotional *rāga*, *rasa*, and the state of liberation.

A baseline understanding of the production of *rasa* begins with Bharata’s hierarchical taxonomy of human emotions, in which he identifies eight *sthāyi-bhāvas* or foundational human emotions:<sup>47</sup> *rati* (love or passion), *hāsa* (humor), *krodha* (anger), *śoka* (grief), *utsaha* (effort), *vismaya* (astonishment), *jugupsā* (disgust), and *bhaya* (fear).<sup>48</sup> According to Bharata, these eight emotions are particularly notable in the sense that they each have a “dominant or durable effect on the human personality”<sup>49</sup> which transcends the type of effect experienced as a result of other emotions. These *sthāyi-bhāvas* are the psychological foundation from which one of eight correspondent *rasas* is then produced, in combination with specific technical elements. This combination is defined in Bharata’s famous *sūtra*: “*Rasa* is produced from the conjunction of *vibhāvas* (conditions), *anubhāvas* (indications), and *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* (transitory states).”<sup>50</sup>

In both definition and application, these three technical categories of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, and *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* can then be further broken down into a variety of sub-

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<sup>47</sup> Also translated variously as “dominant emotion,” “permanent state,” “permanent mood,” and “durable psychological states.” See *Nāṭyaśāstra* ed. Kumar 2010 p.286 and footnote 4 for further reference and explanation.

<sup>48</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.17: *ratirhāsaśca śokaśca krodhotsāhau bhayaṁ tathā | jugupsā vismayaśceti sthāyibhāvā prakīrtitāḥ ||*

<sup>49</sup> David L. Haberman. *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.32: *vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicāri-samyogād rasanīṣpattiḥ*

categories. What all three categories share is that they are the instruments which cause something to pervade or infuse (*bhāvayanti*).<sup>51</sup> In this case, a Sanskrit drama becomes pervaded by *rasa*.<sup>52</sup> *Vibhāvas* are established as twofold in later literary traditions, consisting of the characters (*ālambana*), such as Sīta or Rāma, and the setting (*uddīpana*), such as nighttime or during spring.<sup>53</sup> *Anubhāvas* are the words and gestures which make up the actions that the dramatic characters actively perform, such as speaking or crying.<sup>54</sup> The *vyabhicāi-bhāvas* are a peripheral category of emotions, such as envy, contentment, despair, numbness, sleep, agitation, and joy.<sup>55</sup> While the *vyabhicāi-bhāvas* are emotions by definition, they are grouped distinctively from the *sthāyi-bhāvas* and thus cannot be the foundation for the production of *rasa* in Bharata's view. Instead, they can merely offer additional support towards producing experiences of the various *rasas*.

While we will see these same categories in the writings of later *rasa* theorists, it is useful to reemphasize the point that for Bharata, *rasa* is located specifically in the actor of a drama, who skillfully produces *rasa* in *himself* by application of the above technical elements. Therefore, *rasa* for Bharata exists not only in a drama but most specifically within the experience of each character within that drama. Although one passage in *Nāṭyaśāstra* does refer to “discerning viewers” who “feel joy and the like”<sup>56</sup> in relishing the *sthāyi-bhāvas*, this is Bharata's only potential direct mention of the value of a

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<sup>51</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 7.3

<sup>52</sup> It is an arguable point whether *rasa* could be interpreted here to pervade the mind of the spectator in addition to the actor.

<sup>53</sup> See the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* by Viśvanātha Kavirāja 3.29

<sup>54</sup> See *Nāṭyaśāstra* Chapter 7.

<sup>55</sup> See *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.18-21 for the complete list, and 7.28-93 for a detailed exposition.

<sup>56</sup> See Pollock 2016 page 49 for a citation and mention that this quotation comes from a prose passage, while most of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is written in verse. Attributed to 1.282, which is not present in all translations of *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

viewer's experience. This points back to his continued emphasis and analytical focus on the *rasa* experience of the dramatic character.

The scope of the current project precludes a more detailed investigation into analyzing particular instances and applications of these technical categories. However, we can comprehensively understand Bharata's conception of *rasa* as the specific experience had by a character in a Sanskrit drama, which results when certain technical ingredients are artfully combined in the presence of a *sthāyi-bhāva*. Bharata compares this to the process of preparing cooked food, in which spices and other ingredients are thoughtfully combined in order to make one type of food or another.<sup>57</sup> As a person eating chocolate cake enjoys that cake's specific flavor, the person eating carrot cake enjoys a different flavor. Likewise, a dramatic actor relishes the specific flavor of a *rasa* experience.

The eight distinct *rasas* which can be experienced according to Bharata are: *śṛṅgāra* (amorous or erotic); *hāsyā* (amusement); *karuṇā* (compassionate or pathetic); *raudra* (wrathful or fierce); *vīra* (heroic); *bhayānaka* (terror); *bībhatsa* (disgusting); and *adbhuta* (astonishment or wonder).<sup>58</sup> For Bharata as for many later *rasa* theorists prior to both Bhoja Raja and Rūpa Gosvāmi, there is a specific correspondence between each *sthāyi-bhāva* and one correlated *rasa*. For instance, the *sthāyi-bhāva rati* (passion) only produces the *śṛṅgāra* (erotic) *rasa* for Bharata, while the *sthāyi-bhāva jugupsā* (disgust) only produces the *bībhatsa* (disgusting) *rasa*, and so on.<sup>59</sup> We can understand this through the analogy of a recipe. For instance, yogurt, sugar and spices combined in a

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<sup>57</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.32 and 6.37

<sup>58</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.10

<sup>59</sup> See *Nāṭyaśāstra* Chapter 6 for a detailed exposition.



certain way will make *lassi*, and not some other food. Different recipes will understandably produce a divergent variety of flavors and taste experiences.

The final ingredient necessary for Bharata in producing *rasa* is the actor's essential mental state of concentration,<sup>60</sup> characterized as *sattvic*. Without this necessary component an actor would not be able to transcend his own ordinary emotional states, characterized as individualized experiences of pleasure or pain. It is important to re-emphasize that the state of *rasa* must exist wholly apart from that actor's offstage identity outside of the play for Bharata. Therefore, the experience of *rasa* requires - in at least a limited way, for a limited while - that the actor transcends the individualistic experiential quality of his own mind. Bharata importantly notes in the same verse that *rasa* will not occur in an *anyamānas* or actor whose mind (*manas*) is anywhere else (*anya*).

This point in particular draws a direct connection between mental concentration and both the production and experience of *rasa*. While Bharata himself does not expand further on this point, it does set a necessary foundation for more significant aesthetic-theological *rasa* connections to be made at a later time, which are intimately connected to a practitioner's mental state and depth of absorption. We can accept that a person who is concentrating his mind must be doing so in line with some type of desire, as selecting any random object to focus on would be unlikely to hold the same caliber of attention or lead to such a state of meaningful mental absorption. We will see this point reinforced shortly in the writings of Bhoja Raja, who builds his *rasa* theory directly on the presupposition that a person's ego is synonymous with *rāga*. He views desire as the motivating force

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<sup>60</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 7.93: *samāhita manastvād*

which underlies all human action and experience, including thought. Therefore, for Bhoja Raja, *rāga* is the definitive foundation of all *rasa*.

Whether *rāga* and *rasa* can ever ultimately transcend the container of the material mind, as in the state of liberation, remains a point of ongoing debate and contention. However, this capacity for *rāga* and *rasa* to decidedly transcend body and mind is uniquely seen in the *siddha-deha* doctrine accepted by the Caitanya tradition, in which post-mortem and perfected *brahman* bodies are eternally characterized by eternal devotional *rāga* in the form of *rasa*.

It is relevant to note that all experiences of *rasa* exist outside of ordinary space and time for Bharata, as for all later theorists, in that an experience of *rasa* is never equivalent to an ordinary emotional state. Thus, while there is certainly a transcendental component to Bharata's understanding of *rasa*, the definitive framework of that experience remains the individual body and mind. For instance, an actor portraying Rāma may manifest and experience *śṛṅgāra rasa* in the presence of the actor playing Sītā, if the requisite technical elements and mental state are present. However, such an actor would not experience this *rasa* as a part of his ordinary emotional life, during times offstage when he is not acting as Rāma. However, it is still the actor's very same instruments – his ordinary body and ordinary mind - in which all experiences of *rasa* are manifested and experienced within the context of the drama. This is despite the fact that the actor's body and mind sometimes identifies with the emotions of Rāma (onstage) and at other times (offstage) does not. Therefore, at some times *rasa* is present in the actor's mind, and at other times it is not. We will circle back to this point in Chapter 3's discussion of the *siddha-deha* doctrine, in which *rasa* is not temporarily experienced but eternally existent

once present. We will also consider the question of whether an ordinary material body and mind can be pervaded by *rasa* prior to the manifestation of the perfected *siddha-deha* in the post-mortem state of liberation, which becomes an ongoing point of contestation.

Definitively locating *rasa*'s point of origin and locus of experience in the actor's mind, as per Bharata, is connected to a common *rasa* theory presupposition that all human emotions which can be experienced, including the *sthāyi-bhāvas*, are stored internally as *vāsanās*, the latent mental impressions from past lives.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, any person who has experienced the relevant emotions in previous lives has the innate capacity to experience all *rasas* in his or her current life. Furthermore, *vāsanās* are a key ingredient in a person's ability to develop the necessary mental concentration, also understood as a type of psychological sensitivity, which is needed in order to experience *rasa*. Bharata compares *rasa* to the fruits and flowers of the tree of *sthāyi-bhāva*, which sprouts from the seed of emotion or *bhāva*.<sup>62</sup> We can take this metaphor one step further to acknowledge that the soil of the *vāsanās* is the requisite grounding in which the seed of *bhāva* must first be planted, in order to effectively take root.

Therefore, although the experience of *rasa* does in some way transcend the reality of daily life for Bharata, the soil of the *vāsanās* (and therefore, ultimately, *rasa*) is inextricable from the overarching container of the mind. We can view this point of distinction between ordinary life and transcendental experience in comparison to the earlier discussion of classifications of liberation. In penultimately *eliminative* schools such as Yoga and Nyāya, an enlightened penultimate mental state must be not only transcended but discarded in order for the ultimate transcendental experience of liberation

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<sup>61</sup> See Haberman 1988 p.15. Also illustrated by later theorists e.g. the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* of Bhoja 1.4.

<sup>62</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.38

to occur. This requires a necessary disjunction from the locus of the mind, which cannot be analogously reflected in Bharata's understanding of *rasa*. For Bharata, there is no *rasa* outside of the container of the actor's mind, and *rasa* occurs only within the larger and necessary container of a Sanskrit drama.

## 2.2 *Rasa* from the Stage and Page to the Mind

Locating *rasa* within the context of an aesthetic object of a play or poem persisted historically until the 10th century writings of Kaśmiri Śaivite and Mīmāṃsā scholar Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. Although this location originated as drama for Bharata, by the 7th century, this category had been expanded to encompass *kāvya*<sup>63</sup> or Sanskrit literature as well. While much of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's writings have been lost,<sup>64</sup> the contents of his *rasa* theory persist. This is largely through the writings of those theorists who opposed him in their own work, such as the influential 11th century Abhinavagupta.<sup>65</sup>

What we do know is that Nāyaka revolutionized the understanding of *rasa* by shifting the boundary of experience away from the location of the play or poem and into the psychological experience of the viewer or reader. For preceding 9th century Kaśmiri theorist Ānandavardhana, *rasa* "manifests" first in the poet and then by extension in the poetry itself and the characters within it. However, for Nāyaka there is no *rasa* without the "actualization" of this aesthetic experience for the reader, analogized to the Vedic scriptural commandments which impel a reader to act in terms of carrying out those commandments, as explicated by Mīmāṃsā.<sup>66</sup> The specific word Nāyaka uses for this

<sup>63</sup> Sometimes translated simply as "poetry."

<sup>64</sup> Such limitations have prevented the inclusion of primary source material here.

<sup>65</sup> Ānandavardhana, *Dhvanyāloka*, Translated by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, 36.

<sup>66</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 146.

process is *bhāvāna*, a technical term borrowed directly from Mīmāṃsā and which means a specific manner of aesthetic production or potency. In other words, *bhāvāna* is the action that a person is compelled to perform as a result of the inherent power of a written (or spoken) verb. Nāyaka then correlates this Vedic concept<sup>67</sup> with the technical conditions of *rasa* as established by Bharata.

Specifically, Nāyaka theorizes that the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, and *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* must be applied to the *sthāyi-bhāvas* in order to generate a specific type of psychological action in the aesthetic experience of *rasa* for the viewer/reader. This can also be explained by the fact that some words produce one specific meaning when combined into a sentence, while different words (or words which are ordered differently) result in an entirely different meaning. Interestingly, the “action” of *rasa* which Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka considers is not connected to its process of production or manifestation, but specifically concerns only its experiential result, in the form of a particular experience of *rasa*. Much as for Bharata, *rasa* is not necessarily available to everyone. The person who experiences *rasa* must be in some way qualified, characterized by Nāyaka (via Abhinavagupta) as possessing a “special nature”<sup>68</sup> of aesthetic sensitivity, yet which is not characterized or explicated any further.

The inherently active experience of *rasa* is synonymous for Nāyaka with a state of absorption which wholly transcends the experience of waking life. This is based on the cathartic aesthetic experience which transcends one’s own individuated life, as we saw in

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<sup>67</sup> In the context of Vedic ritual, reciting the words of the Vedas leads to the performance of specific actions; for instance, offering oblations into a *yajña* or sacrificial fire. We may further extend this understanding to the idea that such Vedic recitation produced measurable effects, such as the *devas* (gods e.g. Indra) giving people specific things that they desired, such as rain, cows, and sons. This illustrates the Vedic idea that certain words possess inherent *śakti* or power, which necessarily produce a particular result.

<sup>68</sup> See Abhinavagupta’s commentary on *Dhvanyāloka* 1.4.

the writings of Bharata in his detailing of the *rasa* experience of the dramatic actor. It is important to note that the aesthetic experience of *rasa* for Nāyaka is always characterized as universal and generalized, experienced only as “impersonal joy” (*ānanda*). In this way *rasa* for Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka is experientially (but not ontologically) *eliminative* in which all characterizing elements have been necessarily removed. There is therefore no existence of an individuated identity within any experience of *rasa* for Nāyaka.

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka is also importantly the first classical *rasa* theorist to directly connect the aesthetic experience of *rasa* to the religious experience marked by encountering direct metaphysical truths. However, Nāyaka actually prioritizes an experience of *rasa* over the spiritual absorption of the Upaniṣadic sages who can only achieve an experience of *brahman* by means of great and sustained *yogic* efforts. By contrast, as written by Abhinavagupta in his commentary on *Dhvanyāloka* but likely ascribable to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka himself,<sup>69</sup> *rasa* is instead likened to a cow who freely offers milk to her thirsty calves and so is inherently superior, in that such *rasa* is attained without any direct or concerted effort. Several verses later, Nāyaka notes that a person can only experience *rasa* as an experiential end unto itself, and not “gain knowledge or come to be persuaded by some moral precept.”<sup>70</sup> Any knowledge or insight which may result from a *rasa* experience is only characterized by Nāyaka as at best “incidental,” and such a result is decidedly not a worthy goal to pursue in Nāyaka’s estimation.<sup>71</sup> We can thus clearly read Nāyaka as repeatedly prioritizing experience over effort. More

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<sup>69</sup> As argued by Sheldon Pollock.

<sup>70</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 149.

<sup>71</sup> Ānandavardhana, *Dhvanyāloka*, Translated by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, 36.

specifically, Nāyaka directly and definitively prioritizes the transcendent and inherently blissful experience of *rasa* over concerted *yogic* efforts to achieve *brahman*.

This hierarchy perhaps correlates to the idea that one who acts directly or makes a concerted effort is acting out of *rāga*, as noted earlier as the basis of Bhoja Raja's *rasa* theory. Any action can be typically understood to be motivated by the desire either for some material end (e.g. money, fame, power) or for *mokṣa*. In this light, Nāyaka seems to disparage even the desire for liberation, prioritizing experience instead simply for its own sake, free of all traces of *rāga* and their correspondent motivations. This is analogous to the necessity of discarding all *rāga* - even *mumuksā* - in penultimately *eliminative* schools such as Yoga and Nyāya. It follows that one's capacity to discard such *rāga* is in fact what results in one becoming qualified to experience the highest ontological truth.

There is an additional analogy which can be drawn between the impersonal understanding of the *rasa* experience according to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, and the experience of liberation as understood in the schools of Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta. For instance, although individuated *puruṣas* attain liberation in the Yoga school, no meaningful distinctions can be made between disparate *puruṣas* which are uniformly characterized by consciousness alone. So while such *puruṣas* can be understood as individuated, they are not personal in the sense of having distinct and divergent qualities which might notably differentiate such *puruṣas* from each other. Therefore, we can say that such *puruṣas* are impersonally uniform, absent of any and all meaningfully distinguishing characteristics. Likewise, the revelation of *brahman* in Advaita Vedānta reveals the impersonal and unified whole of *brahman*, which can only be revealed once the erroneous cognition of disparate or personal things has been fully and eternally

transcended. In these schools, then, there is an inherent relationship between an impersonal experience and liberation, also known as the highest ontological truth.

It is useful to note that this impersonal “universalizing” of the *rasa* experience for Nāyaka is directly connected to his theory of *bhāvēna* or aesthetic production. Unlike ordinary experience, a particular effect of this type of production means that *rasa* does not derive from memory.<sup>72</sup> This is a noted departure from other theorists who ground their understanding of *rasa* as originating in the *vāsanās*. The “melting, expansion, and radiance”<sup>73</sup> of the *rasa* experience, metaphorically similar to an experience of *brahman*, cannot even be said by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka to be directly perceived by the one who is experiencing it, since it transcends all traces of cognitive thought. This aligns again with Advaita Vedānta’s understanding that an experience of *brahman* necessarily transcends all contact with the mind, and therefore cannot be any kind of cognitive event. Despite his impersonal conclusion, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s theory opens the door for for Rūpa Gosvāmi’s later personalized understanding of *rasa* which ultimately transcends the mind completely, becoming equivalent to post-mortem liberation.

### 2.3 Suggesting An Experience of the *Ātman*

By the time of the 9th century Kaśmir Śaivite and *rasa* theorist Ānandavardhana, it was commonly established that words in Sanskrit poetry could have both primary (direct) and secondary (indirect) meanings.<sup>74</sup> This capacity for one poem to possess a range of divergent meanings sets the stage for Ānandavardhana’s development of his

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 46-47.



*dhvani* theory of poetic suggestiveness. According to this theory, the animating “soul of poetry” is *dhvani*, a type of technique which masterfully unveils a particular meaning which is never directly or overtly written or explained at any point in the poem.

Ānandavardhana establishes *rasa* as the ultimate goal of *dhvani*, and establishes further that *rasa* can only occur when *dhvani* is also present. Ānandavardhana equates the experience of *rasa* with a heightened or sharpened emotional state which is experienced by literary characters. Although *rasa* is understood to be at some point experienced by the mind of the poetic reader or listener, Ānandavardhana does not explain this process or show any particular interest in it. Ānandavardhana focuses instead on only the textual components which manifest *rasa* in the characters of *kāvya*. This is analogous to Bharata’s earlier focus on *rasa* in the characters of a Sanskrit drama.

It is important to note that Ānandavardhana accepts Bharata’s eight *rasas* but adds a ninth and ultimate: the *śānta* or peaceful *rasa*. This is the pinnacle of all *rasas* for Ānandavardhana, which he classifies as corresponding analogously to an experience of *mokṣa*. This relates to Ānandavardhana’s overarching idea that different *rasas* possess a unique correspondence to the *puruṣārthas* or four aims of human life,<sup>75</sup> which are *kāma* (lust), *artha* (wealth), *dharma* (duty), and *mokṣa*. For instance, Ānandavardhana categorizes *śṛṅgāra rasa* as correspondent to *kāma*. Although all four *puruṣārthas* are engaged in different stages of human life,<sup>76</sup> these stages simultaneously retain an inherent

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 31. Note that this idea of an analogy between *rasa* and the *puruṣārthas* can be first attributed to Bhāmaha in the 7th century, and is notably later upheld by Abhinavagupta.

<sup>76</sup> In the Vedic *puruṣārtha* system, *kāma* and *artha* are typically engaged during the *gṛhastha* or householder stage of life. This is preceded by life as a celibate student, and is followed by a midlife turn towards renunciation. In this way, people would ideally live according to their own specific dharmic constraints, often determined by caste and age. The midlife turn towards renunciation ideally coincides with a person distancing himself from *artha* and *kāma* and instead moving closer and closer to pursuing the attainment of *mokṣa*.

hierarchy which culminates in *mokṣa*, as reflected here in Ānandavardhana's *rasa* schema.

This analogy with the *puruṣārthas* additionally reveals an understanding of *rasa* which is based not only on the inherent pleasure of its experience, but on its ability to offer some type of instruction or knowledge. This stands in direct opposition to the preceding sentiments of the theorist Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, in which the experience of *rasa* is prized only as its own experiential reward. But even if *rasa* can offer a person some type of practical knowledge or instruction, correctly understanding the scope of this comparison is complicated. This is due to the fact that the specific connection between Vedānta and *rasa* remains difficult to accurately and comprehensively historically reconstruct. This is largely due to the fact that many potential sources are too fragmentary to offer much illumination. If it was indeed possible to attain direct knowledge as a result of *rasa*, then it would follow that the *śānta rasa* could offer instruction and knowledge about *mokṣa*, its correlated *puruṣārtha*. This would mean that an experience of the *śānta rasa* could function like a form of pre-liberation *sadhāna* or praxis, in which something like the ultimate truth of *mokṣa* is experienced. If possible, this type of experience could potentially ignite the requisite “psychological openness” within a person that is arguably required by Śaṅkara, in order for that person to advance in practical closeness to the liberated experience of ultimate truth. However, at the time of this writing, confirmation of such a possibility according to Ānandavardhana cannot be definitively concluded.

To further illustrate Ānandavardhana's prioritization of both textual process and the *śānta rasa*, let us consider how he uses the *Mahābhārata* as evidence of this claim of the *śānta rasa*'s supremacy. Ānandavardhana explains that while it is never directly

stated in the *Mahābhārata* that the author's aim is to evoke the *śānta rasa*, this supports the notion that any *rasa* can only be invoked by *dhvani*. Ānandavardhana gives many examples of specific verses which illustrate this invocation, such as *Mahābhārata* 1.1.193, which states “And the blessed Vāsudeva, / the everlasting, is here glorified.”<sup>77</sup> Ānandavardhana writes further that while the lives of the Pāṇḍava brothers and others are shown in the *Mahābhārata* to be repeatedly full of miseries, suffering, and war, this merely reflects the ultimate theological point that worldly illusion must be completely and utterly surpassed in order for ultimate truth to be directly experienced.

This ultimate truth as offered by Ānandavardhana is that of *brahman*, the impersonal truth which lies beyond the “intense devotion (bhakti)...[and] other truth that lies beyond all worldly life.”<sup>78</sup> This is the same ultimate truth seen earlier in the school of Advaita Vedānta as expounded by Śaṅkara, who would also agree with Ānandavardhana's characterization of the *śānta rasa* as “the happiness that derives from the cessation of desire”<sup>79</sup> as the ultimate goal of human life, synonymous with the revelation of *brahman*. As for Advaita Vedānta, this type of explanation characterizes liberation fundamentally as a process of *revelation*, in which the experience of the *ātman* self eventually culminates in the attainment of the *ānanda* of *brahman*. Following this underdeveloped yet present philosophical connection, all other *rasas* (and by extension, all other human goals) become fundamentally subordinate in Ānandavardhana's understanding, as all individual body parts are subordinate to - and only usable in concert with - their animating soul.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ānandavardhana, *Dhvanyāloka*, Translated by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, 692.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 692.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> *Dhvanyāloka* 1.1.

Thus, the *śānta rasa* provides the foundation for all other *rasas* by becoming equivalent to an experience of consciousness itself, which practically provides the foundation for all other types of experience. And yet Ānandavardhana does not at any point transfer this connection beyond the literary parameters of the text, never mentioning the necessity of a sensitive, qualified, or proficient reader. Ānandavardhana does not even directly explain what *rasa* is. These obvious philosophical connections are thus left dangling, to be picked up by his frequent commentator Abhinavagupta, who will further develop such implications of the experience of the *śānta rasa* in terms of the reader's direct experience.

## 2.4 The Experiential Transformation of Abhinavagupta

Both Ānandavardhana's understanding of the *śānta rasa* and his *dhvani* theory become transformed in the hands of the famous 11th century *rasa* theorist and Pratyabhijñā<sup>81</sup> philosopher Abhinavagupta, who is uniquely situated in the landscape of *rasa* theorists for his corpus of erudite philosophical work. While *rasa* remains confined to the aesthetic experiential realm for Abhinavagupta, and further confined to the category of secular literature, there is a profound conceptual reversal which now occurs in the locus of *rasa* itself. For Abhinavagupta, now *only* the reader becomes endowed with the ability to experience the *rasa*, while the author himself is not. Thus Ānandavardhana's theory of "manifestation" by *dhvani* relocates from the literary

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<sup>81</sup> Pratyabhijñā philosophy is "the fullest expression of Śaiva monism, systematically worked out into a rational theology of Śiva and philosophy of absolute consciousness with which He is identified." See Dyczkowski 1987 for more detailed analysis and explanation (above quote from p.17).

process to the inward experience of the psychological state, as seen earlier in the writings of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka.

Like Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta prioritizes the *śānta rasa* as both the pinnacle and foundation of all other *rasas*, “qualitatively different”<sup>82</sup> from the others. He establishes this by arguing that, unlike the correspondent *sthāyi-bhāvas* which ground Bharata’s eight *rasas*, the *sthāyi-bhāva* of the *śānta rasa* is knowledge of the truth, synonymous with knowledge of the *ātman*. This is analogous to the connection previously established between the true cognition of *brahman* and the experiential revelation of self as *brahman* for Śaṅkara. However, as in the case of Ānandavardhana, we can neither confirm nor deny the possibility of a direct equivalence here. In his *Locana* commentary on *Dhvanyāloka*, we can see that Abhinavagupta concurs with Ānandavardhana’s argument that the pursuit of *mokṣa* is the essence of the *Mahābhārata*, having shown the ultimate emptiness of pursuing *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma* as ends unto themselves, as they are all illustrated in the end by the *Mahābhārata* to be merely a “mirage.”<sup>83</sup> This “mirage” can also be likened to *Yoga Sūtra* 2.5 in which the *nitya* (eternal) *puruṣa* is mistaken to be the *anitya* (temporal) nonself or body and mind. The root of this *prakṛtic* mirage is the *kleśa avidyā*, which can only be dissolved in *viveka* (discernment) and which culminates in experiential knowledge of the *puruṣa*.

There is a direct and applicable correlation between *viveka*’s revelation of *vidyā* (right knowledge) and Abhinavagupta’s understanding of the capacity of the *śānta rasa* to provide a person with knowledge of the *ātman*. The technical term Abhinavagupta provides is *anuyavasāya*, glossed by him as the “tasting, savoring, rapture, relishing,

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<sup>82</sup> David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Ānandavardhana, *Dhvanyāloka*, Translated by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, 692.

absorption, ‘experience,’ and so on” which “consists of the light of the bliss that is one’s own pure consciousness.”<sup>84</sup> *Rasa* therefore is not an object to be had, but an experience, further characterized by some amount of action in its relishment, even in the inherently “impassive” or “dispassionate” state of the *śānta rasa*. This amount of action can be compared to a person who drinks *lassi* but who did not himself prepare the drink. Although the actions necessary for creating the *lassi* were done by someone else (adding spices and so on), the person drinking the *lassi* is the one who then performs the experiential action of tasting and who actively and directly relishes its flavor.

However, while the experience of the *śānta rasa* may be analogous or in some way “reflective” of the state of *mokṣa*, the two states cannot be equated completely. While *mokṣa* is a permanent state, *rasa* in Abhinavagupta’s understanding is not. This is because the *śānta rasa* is still occurring within the larger frame of an aesthetic literary experience, which unlike liberation, must at some point come to an end. Therefore, for Abhinavagupta, *rasa* becomes both an *eliminative* and *transformative* experience in his 11th century *The New Dramatic Art*. Although a cognitive emotional state precedes the *rasa* experience, *rasa* is experienced as “neither of production nor of cognition...because it is proven to exist by our reflexive consciousness”<sup>85</sup> alone. This reflects *rasa*’s “supermundane” status for Abhinavagupta, so characterized due to its experiential neutralization of the ordinary categories and constraints of space and time.<sup>86</sup> This correlation to an experience of consciousness itself reflects the previously discussed liberated experience in the Yoga school, which comes from the direct and unmediated

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<sup>84</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 190.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 191.

awareness of the liberated *puruṣa* situated in its own nature in Yoga Sūtra 1.3. However, as we have already established for Abhinavagupta, these states of *rasa* and liberation can only be regarded as similar, not synonymous. In this way, *rasa* for Abhinavagupta both transcends the mind and yet nonetheless depends on it foundationally as the ultimate container of *rasa* experience.

As already seen in the writings of both Bharata and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, an experience of *rasa* is not available to everyone. It is only available to a person who is receptive, sensitive, or otherwise “psychologically open” to such an experience of *rasa*. This results from the previously mentioned presence of corollary *vāsanās* from previous lives, which enable a person to experience the *rasas* which in turn arise from a variety of emotional states. There is in this way a metaphysical boundary which prevents the experiences of the *śānta rasa* from directly revealing an experience of spiritual truth, in that the origin point and locus of experience of *rasa* is always the mind. As long as any connection to the mind remains, as we have seen already in Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta, there is an inherent incompatibility with the state of liberation, characterized by the consciousness of that respective *puruṣa*, *ātman*, and *brahman* alone. While mental effort in terms of meditative practices must be undertaken in the Yoga school, liberation is necessarily mind-transcendent to the point that the mind is eliminated altogether. So even though the experience of the *śānta rasa* is most closely equivalent to the *mokṣa* state, *rasa*, dependent on the existence of *vāsanās*, can never exist in elimination from the mind and thus cannot equate to an experience of the *puruṣa* itself.

Whereas Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka views any instructive result of *rasa* as only incidental, Abhinavagupta prizes its morally and “spiritually instructive”<sup>87</sup> capacity. In this way, for Abhinavagupta, the experience of *rasa* is only completed when that experience has been cognized, analyzed, and assimilated in the form of knowledge into the mind. Therefore, *vāsanās* are the foundation of all *rasa*, and further *saṃskāras* stored in the mind are its necessary result.

Abhinavagupta further states that there can in fact be variety to the dispositions which are awakened by the *vāsanās*, reflecting not only the bliss and pleasure described by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, but displeasure as well.<sup>88</sup> This variety is then reflected in the different types and experiences of *rasa*. Any experience characterized by variety, however, can certainly not equate to the liberation of an eternal and unchanging *puruṣa*. This point additionally prevents such types of experiences from becoming equivalent with the attainment of *mokṣa*. However, this relationship between liberated self and mind will shortly be transformed in the 16th century Caitanya tradition. For theologian Rūpa Gosvāmi, the self in the state of liberation remains ontologically embodied. However, this ultimate and liberated form, the *siddha-deha*, is composed of *cit* (consciousness) and *ānanda* (bliss)<sup>89</sup> and exists in ontological distinction from the material, pre-liberation body. In such a liberated state, cognition is not only enabled, but required. As we will shortly see, an experience of *rasa* for Rūpa Gosvāmi thus begins in the pre-liberated state

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<sup>87</sup> Ānandavardhana, *Dhvanyāloka*, Translated by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, 233.

<sup>88</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 195. Note that sometimes Abhinavagupta writes that an experience of *rasa* is always pleasurable, and at other times that it is only sometimes pleasurable, or even displeasurable. This point illustrates just one of the many contradictions which can be found in Abhinavagupta’s writings, which complicate understanding his *rasa* theory. See Pollock 2016 and Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990 for further discussion.

<sup>89</sup> Holdrege, Barbara A. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015, 98.



but exists also in the post-mortem state of liberation itself. However, the causal process between these two states has not been definitively determined.

## 2.5 The Unified *Rāga* of Bhoja Raja

The prioritization of the impersonal experience of the *śānta rasa* by both Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta stands in direct contrast to Bhoja Raja's 1050 C.E. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* or Light on Passion. It has been argued that Bhoja Raja influenced Rūpa Gosvāmi more than any single other *rasa* theorist, even Abhinavagupta.<sup>90</sup> For Bhoja Raja, a Sāṃkhyan and Kaśmiri Śaivite scholar, the experience of *rasa* hinges on the underlying *rāga* which underpins the whole of human life. It is this same foundation of desire which then takes different objects, as seen in the pursuit of the *puruṣārthas*. For instance, the desire for wealth underpins *artha* and sexual desire underpins *kāma*, while the desire for liberation underpins *mokṣa*. All *rasa* for Bhoja Raja therefore "awakens in the form of desire,"<sup>91</sup> meaning that desire is the sole *sthāyi-bhāva* or foundational human emotion from which all *rasas* are then uniformly produced. Although Bhoja Raja uses the word *śṛṅgāra* to refer to both the general underlying *sthāyi-bhāva* of desire and to the particularized erotic *rasa*, it is clear that he draws an important distinction between these two different understandings of the word. It is generalized *śṛṅgāra*, which can be defined as passion<sup>92</sup> or desire, which Bhoja Raja equates to a person's sense of self or ego, understood as the previously discussed *kleśa asmitā* from the Yoga school. Bhoja Raja's understanding of self is therefore not equivalent to the pure consciousness of the *puruṣa*

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<sup>90</sup> As argued by Holdrege 2012 and Pollock 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 117.

<sup>92</sup> Following Pollock 2018.

or *ātman*, but rather to the material self which acts and interacts directly with the objects of the world.

Bhoja Raja does not build his *rasa* theory solely on a presupposition of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics. As in his Śaivite-Sāṃkhyan *Tattvapraṇāśa* or *Light on Fundamental Principles*, he utilizes divergent metaphysics and philosophical principles, making aspects of his work challenging to understand. Bhoja Raja characterizes ego as having three forms: “existential, agentive, and emotive,” which in turn have the three natures of “sensitive, volatile, or stolid,”<sup>93</sup> which corresponds to the Sāṃkhyan *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.<sup>94</sup> Only a person with natural sensitivity (a predominance of *sattva*) coming from the *vāsanās* of past lives<sup>95</sup> can experience *rasa* in Bhoja Raja’s estimation, thus sharing the perspective of other theorists that the experience of *rasa* is not only *not* accessible to all, but it cannot be either taught or learned.

It is also important to note that Bhoja Raja is only concerned with *rasa* as it is experienced by characters in the text. Although Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka had transformed the understanding of *rasa* theory to the psychological state of the reader more than a century earlier, Bhoja Raja was not aware of his writings, nor was there evidence in any of his own that he was interested in developing this understanding. A verse ascribed to Bhoja Raja, which is also stated in Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka*,<sup>96</sup> does state that the poet himself must be “filled with passion” in order to write poetry containing *rasa*. This, by its own statement, presupposes that a certain psychological state must exist as a necessary precursor to undertaking poetic composition. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, Bhoja

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>94</sup> *Sattva* (purity), *rajas* (action), and *tamas* (inertia).

<sup>95</sup> *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* 1.4.

<sup>96</sup> And perhaps attributable to Anandavardhana instead; see *A Rasa Reader* p.357, f.n 29.

Raja does not expound on this point nor further engage it as a point of interest. Rather, his focus remains narrowly confined to the text.

In his Introduction to *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, Bhoja Raja highlights desire as the foundation of all aspects of the self,<sup>97</sup> seemingly drawing in the Nyāya understanding of the previously discussed six marks of the self, in which *rāga* is located directly in the *ātman*. While such foundational desire is not active in every person, it exists at least in a latent state. In this state desire remains unawakened but presently existent nonetheless, following Sāṃkhyan *satkāryavāda* metaphysics.<sup>98</sup> The presence of *vāsanās* from past lives are also necessary for Bhoja Raja - first, in awakening this foundational *rāga* which underlies all other aspects of the self, and then also in the transformation of *rāga* into *rasa*. Thus for Bhoja Raja, *rāga* is not in any way a hindrance, but rather the necessary foundation, process, and goal, as well as we will shortly see in the writings of Rūpa Gosvāmi.

The mind permeated by the *sthāyi-bhāva* of *rāga* is thus the foundation for the existence of *rasa*. The experience of *rasa* then transcends the ordinary mental experience. In its transfigured form, it connects to a person's "very sense of self"<sup>99</sup> in that *rasas* are no longer subject to other emotional states such as greed, amusement, and determination, but rather with an ongoing experience of pleasure which Bhoja Raja equates to the experience of the self. This self is characterized as transcending dualities such as pleasure and pain, analogous to the *puruṣa* of *The Yoga Sūtras*. This is distinct from previous understandings of *sthāyi-bhāva* which acknowledge a range of potential foundational

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<sup>97</sup> *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* 1.4: *sarvātmasampad*

<sup>98</sup> Which states that a cause is found in its effect.

<sup>99</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 125.

emotions. Bhoja Raja has transformed this understanding by unifying all human emotions in this pleasurable foundational core of desire, which is the grounding of all human emotions. This unified identifier then evolves by application of the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *vyabhicāi-bhāvas* into an aesthetic experience of Bhoja Raja's sole *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

However, Bhoja Raja goes on to chart through three “stages” of *rasa*, the lowest characterized by ego, the second characterized by this application of technical elements, and the highest characterized by *prema* or love.<sup>100</sup> Love, synonymous for Bhoja Raja with desire, is *rasa*'s “highest resting point”<sup>101</sup> and results in *śṛṅgāra rasa* existing as both the foundation and apex of the experience of *rasa*. Bhoja Raja also qualifies that it is difficult to speak about *śṛṅgāra rasa* because it is available only by experience, and such an experience cannot be had by everyone, in concert with the necessity of *vāsanās* as previously discussed. Importantly, the experience of love necessarily takes an object, personalizing the state of the highest experience of *rasa* for Bhoja Raja, in opposition to the prioritization of the impersonal experience we have seen in the writings of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta.

This personal experience of *rasa* founded in a persistent core of pleasurable desire is a departure from the impersonal models of liberation that are established in the schools of Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta, in which all *rāga* must be ultimately discarded. Instead, it mirrors Rūpa Gosvāmi's 16th century exposition of liberation in accordance with the *siddha-deha* doctrine. In his model, devotional desire uniquely characterizes not only pre-liberation praxis and the penultimate enlightened mental state which precedes liberation, but also the ultimate state of liberation itself.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 134.

## Chapter 3: The *Rasa* of Liberation

### 3.1 Rūpa Gosvāmi's Foundation of *Rāga*

Prior to the writings of 16th century Kṛṣṇa theologian Rūpa Gosvāmi, *rasa* occurs as a unique set of transformative experiences, each with its own “flavor.” These experiences exist outside of ordinary space and time, yet occur within the mind. Although the list of *rasas* is amended by different preceding theorists, all existent *rasas* manifest only in the aesthetic object itself (play or poem) or in the container of the mind. For Rūpa Gosvāmi, however, *rasa* merely “appears to be manifested by the activity of the mind,”<sup>102</sup> yet remains ontologically distinct from it. In his nephew Jīva Gosvāmi's commentary on *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Jīva clarifies this distinction between the divinely-originating *rasa* and the mind as the relationship between fire and an iron rod. Although fire *appears* to permeate a heated iron rod, in reality the fire remains separate.<sup>103</sup> In this way, *rasa* is transcendent and emanates only from the divine.

Rūpa Gosvāmi is not the first to perceive an overlapping between the aesthetic, philosophical, soteriological, and theological realms. However, he is the first to equate *rasa* with liberation, characterized by an eternal, personal devotee-Kṛṣṇa relationship. The post-mortem liberated devotee is eternally embodied in the *siddha-deha*, a perfected *brahman* body composed of *cit* (consciousness) and *ānanda* (bliss).<sup>104</sup> While the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy of Rāmānujā allows a liberated *ātman* to take a *brahman*

<sup>102</sup> *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant 3.4.

<sup>103</sup> See Jīva Gosvāmi's commentary on *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant 2.295.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*, (Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2015), 98.

body,<sup>105</sup> the self remains ontologically distinct. By contrast, the *siddha-deha* doctrine equates selfhood with this eternal state of particularized embodiment.

This *siddha-deha* is defined by devotional *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa expressed as one of five types of *bhakti-rasa*: *śānta* (peaceful), *prīta* (respectful), *preyas* (friendship), *vatsala* (parental), or *madhura* (amorous).<sup>106</sup> The state of liberation is thus an eternal cosmic drama with Kṛṣṇa at its center, surrounded by his perfected devotees who play intimate dramatic roles such as friend or lover.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, consciousness, cognition and desire are all required to sustain these personal relationships in liberation. While mundane desire must be eliminated as in the Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta schools, desire for Kṛṣṇa is foundational in the Caitanya tradition's understanding of the eternal post-mortem relationship with God.

Departing from previous *rasa* theorists, Rūpa Gosvāmi recognizes only one *sthāyi-bhāva*: *Kṛṣṇa-rati*<sup>108</sup> defined as love for Kṛṣṇa, from which the sole foundational *rasa* of *bhakti-rasa* emerges, likewise defined as love for Kṛṣṇa.<sup>109</sup> Thus the *sthāyi-bhāva* *Kṛṣṇa-rati* and *bhakti-rasa* both have the foundation of *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa. *Rasa* is simply a heightened experience of this *sthāyi-bhāva*, divergently expressed as lover, friend, etc. like waves on the ocean. Rūpa Gosvāmi explains the particular form of *rasa* experienced by a devotee as determined by “the specific nature of the individual experiencing it, just as a reflected image of the sun is determined by the nature of the jewel through which it

<sup>105</sup> Martin Ganeri, “Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Rāmānuja,” from *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014), 252-3.

<sup>106</sup> *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant 5.115.

<sup>107</sup> Edwin F. Bryant, *Bhakti Yoga: Tales and Teachings from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, (New York, North Point Press, 2017), 73-74.

<sup>108</sup> *Rati* is synonymous with *rāga*.

<sup>109</sup> And even more specifically as the “sentiment of devotion,” *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant 1.5.

is being reflected.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, a devotee’s eternal *siddha-deha* identity must have an inherent nature connected to one expression of *rasa*. No information is given on the relationship between the pre-liberated mind and the nature of the *siddha-deha*, nor does Rūpa Gosvāmi establish how these variegated natures are determined. For instance, why is one *siddha-deha* characterized by *madhura-bhakti-rasa* and another by *vatsala-bhakti-rasa*? And how are these particularized endowments related to their correspondent pre-enlightened material minds, which are products of mundane desires? Nonetheless, it is clear that an *ātman* characterized by consciousness alone could not be capable of either action or cognition. Therefore, a *puruṣa* as understood in the *Yoga Sūtras* could neither possess such an inherent variegated nature nor experience such particularized *rasa* in liberation, once separated from the karmically-constructed body and mind.

*Vaidhi bhakti sādhana*, done with this pre-liberation body and mind or *sādhaka-deha*, is the initial process of *bhakti* based on the following of 64 scriptural injunctions.<sup>111</sup> This transforms a practitioner’s consciousness over time such that the *sthāyi-bhāva* of *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa develops, making one eligible to practice spontaneous *rāgānugā bhakti*, free of all scriptural injunctions. Only *rāgānugā bhakti* can culminate in *rasa* and the *siddha-deha* becoming manifest. The Caitanya tradition follows Sāṃkhya in that an eternal *ātman*<sup>112</sup> exists both before and during liberation. All previously studied soteriological schools agree that the *ātman* requires a body/mind complex in order for action to occur; they likewise agree that without such a body/mind complex, the *ātman*

<sup>110</sup> *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant 5.7.

<sup>111</sup> See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* pp.35-71 for the full list of injunctions.

<sup>112</sup> I use the terms *puruṣa* and *ātman* interchangeably here, although Sāṃkhya prefers the former and Nyāya the latter.

itself is not capable of cognition, action, and desire.<sup>113</sup> For instance, liberation in the Yoga school is a passive state of inaction. While Rūpa accepts this as an option, the ultimate liberated state is characterized by an active relationship with Kṛṣṇa. This too requires a body/mind complex, such as the *siddha-deha*, which can exist in the divine eternal realm and enables the *rāgā* for Kṛṣṇa to be productively expressed in liberation as dynamic loving exchange.

The continuity of desire as *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa is the link connecting *sādhana*, *sthāyī-bhāva*, *rasa*, realization of the *siddha-deha*, and liberation where Kṛṣṇa's *nitya līlā* or eternal pastimes take place.<sup>114</sup> While the divine world is not manifest on the material pre-liberation plane, it has attainable ontological existence for the perfected *sādhaka*. Although it remains unseen by unqualified human eyes, it becomes accessible through the practices of *bhakti* only to a liberated devotee.

### 3.2 Classifying The Siddha-Deha

The realization of the *siddha-deha* in the penultimate enlightened mental state may be either *revelative*, in which its preexisting ontological truth is recognized like *brahman* of Advaita Vedānta, or *transformative*, in which the *siddha-deha* becomes manifest as a divine endowment, depending on how one reads Rūpa Gosvāmi. If the *siddha-deha* is eternal like the *ātman*, then it can be neither created nor destroyed at any time. In this case, the *siddha-deha* cannot come into being at a knowable moment prior to

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<sup>113</sup> Even Nyāya, who accepts the six marks of the self (desire, aversion, effort, pleasure, pain, and knowledge), only accepts the manifestation of these in the presence of a body/mind complex. These marks cannot exist independently or absent of this necessary container.

<sup>114</sup> Kṛṣṇa's eternal *līlā* can be briefly defined as “loving relationship pastimes, with God in the transcendent eternal Goloka abode of Vraj.” See Edwin Bryant 2017 for a more detailed explanation (above quote from pp. 58-59).



liberation, as that would require it to possess a finite and measurable origin point. If the *siddha-deha* therefore pre-exists eternally and concurrently with the *ātman* and becomes known at the moment of liberation, liberation could be classified as a *revelative* experience. If on the other hand the *siddha-deha* is bestowed by Kṛṣṇa at liberation, then liberation could be classified as a *transformative* experience.

The only reference in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to a *siddha-deha* does not help resolve this issue. Verse 11.14.25 likens the relationship between the *siddha-deha* and the pre-liberation *sādhaka-deha* to gold which “when smelted in fire, gives up its impurities and returns to its pure brilliant state. Similarly, the spirit soul absorbed in the fire of *bhakti-yoga*, is purified of all contamination caused by previous fruitive activities.”<sup>115</sup> However, this verse cannot refer to the *ātman* as understood in the Patañjali Yoga school, since consciousness itself cannot ever “change” such that it becomes impure. Therefore, this verse must speak to the pre-liberation mind which must be purified of all *rāga* other than that for Kṛṣṇa, resulting in the manifestation of *rasa* and the *siddha-deha*. In this way, what is purified is the contamination of the illusion that one exists independently of Kṛṣṇa, much like Advaita Vedānta’s removal of *avidyā* results in the true cognition of self as *brahman*. By recognizing one’s identity and accompanying role as Kṛṣṇa’s eternal servant, then, the *svarūpa* form of the *siddha-deha* manifests. Contrary to Patañjali’s characterization of the *svarūpa* of the *puruṣa* as pure consciousness alone, the *svarūpa*

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<sup>115</sup> Satya Nārāyaṇa Dāsa and Kuṇḍalī Dāsa, *In Vaikuntha Not Even The Leaves Fall: A Treatise on the Bondage of the Jīva*, (New Delhi, Rekha Printers, 1994), 206. The verse has also been utilized by ISKCON scholars who sought to argue that the liberated state of the *siddha-deha* was pre-existent, followed by a “fall” from the spiritual realm, analogous to the Christian “fall” from the Garden of Eden. While this matter exceeds the scope of the current work, it is useful to note that multiple positions exist on this particular point. See Dāsa 1994 for further discussion.

here is the condensed *cit-ānanda brahman* body of the *siddha-deha*, characterized by *rāga*.

Rūpa Gosvāmi writes that one who desires *rasa* should practice “with both the practitioner’s body (*sādhaka-deha*) and the perfected body (*siddha-deha*).”<sup>116</sup> It is not clear from this verse whether a person should practice with the *sādhaka-deha*<sup>117</sup> followed by the *siddha-deha*, or practice with both bodies at the same time. The implication that both bodies can be practiced with simultaneously could imply that the *siddha-deha* is not something which is bestowed only upon the attainment of liberation, but is rather a metaphysical entity which is not only knowable but usable in the pre-liberated state. If this is the case, the *siddha-deha* must be eternally concurrent with the eternal *ātman*, unknown from beginningless time due to *avidyā*. Jīva Gosvāmi glosses the *siddha-deha* as “an inwardly conceived body that is useful for performing service to Kṛṣṇa in the manner one desires.”<sup>118</sup> This then raises a further question as to the origin of this desire or *rāga* - is it divinely predetermined and bestowed, or is it inherent in a pre-existent *siddha-deha* which is concurrent with the *ātman*? If the *siddha-deha* is bestowed, what role does the *prakṛtic* mind play in its creation, bestowal, and/or sustenance? If the *siddha-deha* is eternally concurrent with the *ātman*, what role does the *prakṛtic* mind play in sensing the latent experience of its *ātman*’s *siddha-deha* and becoming conscious of its specific nature?

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<sup>116</sup> *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant 2.295.

<sup>117</sup> The term *siddha-rūpa* is used by Rūpa Gosvāmi and *siddha-deha* by Jīva Gosvāmi. The two terms are arguably synonymous (*rūpa*, form; *deha*, body) and therefore only *siddha-deha* is used in this paper, for ease of reader comprehension.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, fn. 126.

In the preceding verse, Rūpa Gosvāmi writes that *vaidhi bhakti* practitioners should “dwell continually in Vraj,”<sup>119</sup> explained by Jīva Gosvāmi that a *sādhaka* should ideally dwell in Vraja physically, or otherwise reside there mentally. This mental residence can be understood as *smaraṇam*, one of the 64 practices outlined by Rūpa Gosvāmi, defined as “any kind of mental connection with the Lord,” which he parallels with Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga yoga*.<sup>120</sup> Jīva notes that this absorption could consist of either a mental visualization or direct divine vision of Kṛṣṇa’s *nitya līlā*, which manifests in the mind as a result of divine grace. The mind itself cannot be the origin point for such divine content. However, a divine vision of Kṛṣṇa’s *nitya līlā* may nonetheless ontologically manifest such that it is experienced by the mind, much as the previously mentioned iron rod which experiences the effects of fire while remaining distinct from it. However, even such a *līlā smaraṇam* experience of direct divine presence and glimpse of the liberated experience remains within the boundary of *vaidhi bhakti*. Therefore, it does not correlate to the experience of liberation itself. It is never directly stated in either *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* or *Bhakti Sandarbha*, however, whether such *smaraṇam* could or could not include the direct sight of a *sādhaka*’s inherent *siddha-deha* and thus perhaps support an argument for its ontological pre-existence. If so, this would point to a *revelative* penultimate mental experience reflecting the realization of the *siddha-deha*’s pre-existent nature.

This example of *līlā smaraṇam* also leads us into our second possibility of a *transformative* penultimate enlightened mental state, in which the *siddha-deha* manifests

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>120</sup> *Śrī Bhakti Sandarbha* Anuccheda 278. Jīva Gosvāmi expands this definition of *smaraṇam* to a five stage process which mirrors the meditative stages given in the *Yoga Sūtras* culminating in *samādhi*, defined here as complete absorption in Kṛṣṇa.

as a divine endowment. Although we have not found an analogous example of this classification in the schools of Yoga, Nyāya, or Advaita Vedānta so far, it may be pointed out that the *Bhagavad Gītā* suggests a similar possibility when Kṛṣṇa states in 8.5-7 that a person will attain the state remembered at the moment of death. The word used here to represent the penultimate mental state is also *smaraṇam*, and the word used twice for the experience of liberation is *bhāvanam* (“state” or “state of being”).<sup>121</sup> This suggests that the mental remembrance of something (in this case, Kṛṣṇa) has the potential to result in an ontologically distinct or *transformed* experience of liberation which goes beyond a relocation of ontological contents. The inherently divine nature of this potential transformation is simultaneously important to keep in mind.

It is both psychologically and theologically improbable that a *sādhaka*’s mind could itself prompt or enact the transformation into eternal *cit-ānanda siddha-deha*. If this mental construction were possible, it would open up a host of philosophical and theological issues as to how something eternal and perfected could have a temporal, imperfect mind as its origin point. The divine origin of the transformational nature of the *siddha-deha* is supported by *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.6.29 in which Nārada is “given a pure body” after having abandoned his body “belonging to the five elements.”<sup>122</sup>

Whether the penultimate enlightened mental state is *revelative* or *transformative*, the subsequent experience of liberation in the Caitanya tradition is then *relocative*, in which the *cit-ānanda siddha-deha* enters Kṛṣṇa’s *nitya līlā* absent of all connection to the psychological and physical faculties of the *sādhaka-deha*. In this way, at least for Rūpa

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<sup>121</sup> *The Bhagavad Gītā* 8.5-7.

<sup>122</sup> *prayujyamāne mayi tām śuddhām bhāgavatīm tanum ārabdhakarmanirvāṇo nyapatat pāñca-bhautikaḥ*

Gosvāmi, *rāga* alone carries a practitioner from *sādhana* to the penultimate enlightened mental state and finally into the eternal experience of liberation itself.

### 3.3 Concluding Thoughts

As we have seen, there are a various ways in which to conceptualize the relationship between liberation and desire. Classifying liberation in accordance with how it is understood in the Yoga, Nyāya, and Advaita Vedānta schools has illustrated a divergent range of potential soteriological possibilities. This range is illustrated first in the liberated state accepted by the Yoga school, in which an individuated *puruṣa* resides in a state of eternally passive and inactive consciousness. This understanding of liberation can then be contrasted with the *sat* liberated state accepted by Nyāya, in which all suffering is removed. The six marks of the self are simultaneously dissolved in liberation for Nyāya, notably including the marks of both consciousness and desire. Liberation according to Nyāya can therefore be described as merely existent, and such an experience is understandably difficult to describe much further.

The penultimate enlightened moment which directly precedes liberation can be classified as *eliminative* for both Yoga and Nyāya. In addition to all *rāga* being necessarily removed, all cognitive activity is likewise eliminated. The understanding of liberation which results is then *relocative* in the sense that it occurs in a ontological location which is distinct from that which came before. For instance, the liberated *puruṣa* of the Yoga school no longer resides in the *vr̥ttis* of the mind, but rather in its *sva-rūpa* (own form) of pure consciousness. This reflects the inherent realism of the Yoga and Nyāya schools, which accept the fundamental ontology of the world. This means that

both schools acknowledge that although the world of matter disappears experientially in an experience of liberation, it does not disappear ontologically.

The school of Advaita Vedānta, on the other hand, accepts only the fundamental ontology of *brahman*. The penultimate enlightened mental state is characterized by true cognition of this universal consciousness, which occurs only when all *māya* (illusion) has been removed. Such cognition leads to the liberated experience of *brahman*, absent of all cognition. However, we cannot consider such a shift to be *eliminative* in nature, as no ontological entities are in fact removed. Instead, the truth of the sole reality of *brahman* is revealed and experientially realized. It is this revelation which is synonymous with liberation for Advaita Vedānta. Therefore, such a state must be classified only as *revelative*.

The *siddha-deha* doctrine as explicated by Rūpa Gosvāmi uniquely offers an understanding of liberation which is not only eternally conscious but cognitive, further characterized by the presence of eternal desire. Unlike mundane desires, which may shift over time and take a variety of different objects, this devotional *rāga* is eternally directed towards Kṛṣṇa and is known as *rasa*. Rūpa Gosvāmi's understanding of *rasa* draws on centuries of preceding Sanskrit literary theory, beginning with the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, which explicates *rasa* as a transcendental aesthetic experience had by an actor in a Sanskrit drama. Theorist Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka helps to shift the locus of *rasa* away from the aesthetic object of a drama or poem and into the mind of the reader or watcher. Nāyaka further prioritizes the transcendental experience of *rasa* over any type of concerted yogic effort to achieve *mokṣa*. Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta's prioritization of the *śānta* *rasa* as reflective of an experience of *brahman* further establishes *rasa* theory as

analogous – if not equivalent – to an experience of liberation. An interesting question which remains is whether an experience of the *śānta rasa* could function as a form of *sādhana*, which could then bring a practitioner closer to the penultimate enlightened moment and eventually, to liberation.

Bhoja Raja's *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* establishes *rāga* as the basis of all human actions and experiences, and also as the sole foundation of *rasa*. Bhoja's theory arguably provides the greatest influence to Rūpa Gosvāmi, who characterizes the penultimate enlightened mental state as an awakening of devotional *rasa*, which is based on desire for Kṛṣṇa. This *rasa* then persists in the state of liberation, in which an *ātman* resides in a perfected *brahman* body/mind complex known as the *siddha-deha*. The ontology of the *siddha-deha*, however, remains inconclusively determined. One option considers the *siddha-deha* to be concurrently and eternally present alongside the *ātman*. In this case, liberation could be classified as a *revelative* and *relocative* experience. Once the truth of the divine realm and the *siddha-deha*'s place within that truth has been experientially revealed, liberation is then not only *revelative* but *relocative*. It is *relocative* in that consciousness relocates permanently from the material world to Kṛṣṇa's *nitya līlā*. A second option considers that the *siddha-deha* may be divinely bestowed at the moment of liberation. In this case, liberation could be classified as both *transformative* and *relocative*, reflecting the fundamental ontological shift which would necessarily occur.

Both possible classifications of the *siddha-deha* raise interesting questions about the nature of devotional desire. If the *siddha-deha* is eternally present alongside the *ātman*, then this suggests that a person may be arbitrarily predestined to possess one particular flavor of devotional desire or another. Or, if the *siddha-deha* manifests at

liberation, then what is the origin and nature of pre-liberation devotional desire? Is any layer of such desire constructed or determined by the karmically-bound material mind, or is all devotional desire divinely bestowed? If divinely bestowed, how then can the difference between mentally constructed and divinely bestowed *rāga* be effectively discerned? Furthermore, the question as to how one particular devotional *rasa* is “assigned” remains unanswerable. Continued research into the Sanskrit commentaries of Jīva Gosvāmi, Rūpa Gosvāmi, and subsequent Vaiṣṇava commentators may reveal additional insight into comprehensively conceptualizing the fascinating relationship between pre-liberation *sādhana* and eternal devotional *rāga* in the liberated post-mortem state.



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