

Rasa in Theory: Text and Context

For wherever the hand moves, there the glances follow;

Where the glances go, the mind follows;

Where the mind goes, the mood follows;

Where the mood goes, there is the flavour (rasa).

—Nandikeshvara, *Abhinaya Darpana*

translated by Ananda Coomaraswamy in *The Mirror of Gesture*, 17

ETYMOLOGICAL INGREDIENTS

The Sanskrit word *rasa* (Tamil *irasam*), according to R. S. Khare, may refer “to very sweet fruit juices, as well as to the peppery water which flavors most Tamil meals.” *Rasa* can also be “a mixture, concoction, essence of various products.”¹ On yet another level it refers to an element that was utilized in Indian alchemy, specifically mercury as a curative agent. The magical qualities of “quicksilver” were believed by alchemists from China to Western Europe to promote physical and spiritual transformation. Mercury is a poison when ingested; the alchemists used it in a variety of ways and were well aware of its deadly qualities. The proper name itself, of course, refers to Greek mythology: Mercury is the Latin for the Greek deity Hermes, the guide of souls and divine messenger. The South Asian equivalent of quicksilver was known as *rajarasam*, the king or lord of drugs, for its many mysterious attributes.² Saskia Kersenboom has observed that like the practice of alchemy, “the practice of culture can be seen as an Alchemy of Presence in which the human body forms the central instrument, norm and medium.”³ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the performing arts of India.

As a flavorful “essence,” *rasa* is that compilation of essential qualities underlying all food. Food is required not only for the sustenance of the

human body but also, in Hindu tradition, as an offering to sustain the divine or macrocosmic body. Most devotional ritual in Indian tradition involves the offering of specially prepared food items, and it is understood that nourishing the divine body is the prerequisite for all life, even as what remains after such ritual offering is then passed among the worshippers as a material expression of a more metaphysical reality. Food must contain the proper balance of *rasa* as flavor (both heating and cooling, sweet and spicy, etc.) in order to promote well-being on both the divine and human levels,⁴ and in South Asia, as opposed to other Asian locations and the West, for example, everything must be cooked through—the contributing elements must be fully transformed. Food is understood as fuel, and it must sustain the inner fire of the digestive elements in order for life to continue. Ayurvedic medicine names *rasa* as one of the seven essences that “maintain the integrity of the organism.”⁵ Briefly, then, all food contains *rasa*; properly prepared food offered to the divine and to the human is a blending and a balance of various forms of *rasa* into a transformed whole. It is then further transformed as the digestive process further “cooks” the food, producing a more refined form of *rasa* that can then nourish the body, contributing variously to the physical constituents of the human form.⁶

Donna M. Wulff selects the following from among the thirty-plus definitions of *rasa* in V. S. Apte’s *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*: juice, liquid extract, essence, flavor, and delight. These are meanings that

are important constituents of its specialized poetic meaning, a relishable “sentiment” or “mood” awakened in the reader or spectator through the combination of elements in a given poem or drama. The standard analogy is that of a blend of a basic food, such as yoghurt, with a number of spices; the resulting substance has a unique flavor (*rasa*) which is not identical with any of the single elements comprising it. *Rasa* is so important to Indian literary critics that it has been termed the soul of poetry, and no criticism of a work of art is considered so devastating as the allegation that it is devoid of *rasa*. (“Religion in a New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India,” 674)

The crucial elements of *rasa* as they pertain to food are the process of refinement, the balance of qualities, the blend of characteristics, the hidden or underlying basic elements (as stock is to soup), the particular and specific ways in which foods create physical life, and how food produces the transformation of the physical and the metaphysical at once. Rather than thinking of flavoring as an enhancing additive, Indian traditions view flavor as an essential, defining quality of food. One does not add herbs and spices as a separate and intriguing supplement but as part of the process of creation. Indian dishes are named according to the nature of their cooking process and the categories of spices included in that process. Tandoori chicken, for example, is named for the clay oven in which it is cooked and the accompanying spices that give it a particular appearance and taste. Knowing this helps us make sense of the ways in which the term is then applied to the performing arts. In Lee Siegel's words:

Rasa is at once an inner and outer quality as the object of taste, the taste of the object, the capacity of the taster to taste that taste and enjoy it, the enjoyment, the tasting of the taste. The psychophysiological experience of tasting provided a basis for a theory of aesthetic experience which in turn provided a basis for a systemization of a religious experience. (*Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions*, 43)

The senses, taste among them, are acknowledged in Hindu thought as fallible, and responsible in large part for supporting the illusion (*maya*) of the world. In this theory, however, the very senses responsible for the deception may be utilized to surmount it. Far from rejecting the body for its fallibility, Indian aesthetics celebrates its potential to express the transformative ability of its underlying divine nature. Artistic experience *through* the body may enable the attainment of the highest spiritual goals. The relationship of body and mind, spirit and substance, affect and effect are brought together in the Hindu attempt to collapse all of these perceived distinctions, a prerequisite to enlightenment.

Farley P. Richmond has written:

If we equate the theatre experience described in the *Natyashastra* to that of an expert dining on haute cuisine, we may more easily follow the basic aspects of the theory. The spectators are like the connoisseurs of cooked food (called *bhaktas*, literally the "devotees of God") and the performers may be equated both with the chef and the meal. The actors, musicians, dancers, playwrights, and other functionaries are all expected to prepare and train themselves according to the rules and conventions, for the moment when they will offer their lavish feast for the spectators to savor. ("Characteristics of Sanskrit Theatre and Drama," in Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli, *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance*, 81)

A divine and movable feast is offered; the guests are invited to experience, each to his own ability, the alignment of presence and transcendence in the moment of performance. The artists provide access, opportunity, and substance, embodying the potential of the moment quite physically. A particular understanding of divinity is required to approach these lofty goals.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

The nature of the divine in Hinduism is understood on many levels. First, as a complex and ancient religious tradition, it possesses the ability to be monotheistic, polytheistic, and henotheistic⁷ at once. There is one ultimate divine essence, *Brahman* (monotheism); this essence appears in an endless number of divine forms that may be worshipped and invoked in combination (polytheism); or these may be worshipped one at a time, including several over a single lifetime (henotheism). The eternal, formless, and all-pervading Brahman is capable of generating an infinite number of forms and does so for a variety of purposes, including the manifestation of the world itself. In drama, an actor searches for a character's motivation in order to produce it on stage or film; the actor then "plays" a role. In Hinduism, the motivation underlying this process of infinite manifestation is partly to realize *lila*, divine play.⁸ The implications of this are considerable, for it suggests that the divine is inherently "playful," and the term here includes not

only a mysterious form of ludic activity but also its inherently dramatic nature. Divine playfulness is not only, or even primarily, a diversionary activity. Rather, it is the means by which the gods create, sustain, and destroy the world. Gods' play is instrumental; it is the origin of all there is. To aspire to participate in *lila* is to seek to participate in that process. This fact also suggests that Shakespeare's intuition, "all the world's a stage and we but players in it," would have found resonance in South Asia. The concept is known as *maya* in Indian philosophy, and the term is often defined as "illusion." The world as we know it, according to Hindu philosophy, is a dream, a play, an artful construction devised by the divine realm. It is both comedy and tragedy, often simultaneously, and it is ultimately unreal. On the other hand, it is the only reality most humans can know. The divine generates *maya* by way of *lila*, providing a variety of paths to true knowledge of what is ultimately real for those who choose to follow them. One of those paths is to study and practice *lila*, and in so doing, participate in this divine form of creation. The performing arts in India, therefore, offer artists and their audiences this possibility. The end result may include enlightenment, that is, understanding of the ultimate reality, however fleeting. To achieve that goal permanently would be to achieve *moksha*, release from reincarnation, union with Brahman, at once eternal life in bliss and death of the individual ego. Both are reflected in the aesthetic goals of the performing arts.

The Indian understanding of time is another product of Hindu cosmology that has had enormous impact on the design of the performing arts, where it can truly be said that "timing is everything." Time is perceived as circular, an infinite and eternal round of cycles within cycles. The sheer scope of the philosophical exegesis of the nature and duration of time challenges our human ability to absorb it. The four major *yugas*—*krita*, *treta*, *dvapara*, and *kali*—take their names from the four throws of the Indian dice game, itself a form of play. They represent declining amounts of *dharmā*, righteous or moral behavior and wisdom, in the world. At the beginning of each cycle, the creation is perfect; by its end, *Sanātana Dharma*, eternal and holy order, is gone. At this point, one of the many possible mythological end-time scenarios is engaged, and all returns to a primordial state. The grand total of human years that equals one such cycle, by some calculations, is 4,320,000. But after a period of

quiescence, it all begins again. The endless cycles of the macrocosmic calendar echo through all of creation, and every human life is constituted of circuitous patterns that lead repeatedly to death and reincarnation. The only way to break free of this structure is to reach ultimate enlightenment, to understand all this as it truly is: to achieve moksha. But those who may attain it in any given lifetime are few indeed. The performing arts provide one important path toward that goal, in part by emphasizing precisely this circularity inherent in all things. So it is that the dances and the music utilize their own particular languages to underscore circularity. Lewis Rowell has noted that "among the most powerful pressures on the arts of India have been cultural preferences for the circular disposition of space and the cyclical disposition of time," for "temporality in music is understood as a manifestation of the cosmic process of continuous creation" and, of course, of destruction as well.⁹ The influence of religious ritual upon the performing arts in ancient times is a major factor, but we may here confront a chicken-and-egg issue: is it a culture's worldview that shapes its ritual or the other way around? Practitioners within a tradition tend not to worry about these kinds of questions; what is really important is that the themes of primary significance be consistently affirmed and their content probed for meaning. This is certainly the case where the circular theory of time is concerned in India. India has consistently looked to her performing arts for this affirmation, and she has not been disappointed.

A WRITTEN RECIPE FOR THE ARTS

Aesthetic theory in India certainly predates the *Natyashastra*, but this text is the earliest extant document that we have. It is part theatrical manual, part philosophy of aesthetics, part mythological history, part theology. Its goals include providing a precise description of stage construction and equally precise guidelines for the movements, facial expressions, and *mudras* (often used synonymously with the term *hastas*) or hand gestures to be used in performance. All of these are contextualized in a larger understanding of the goals of performance, the nature of the performance space, and performers. For Bharata, who committed these guidelines to the written word, the dra-

matic arts included the categories of what we would recognize as drama/theater, poetry, dance, and music. Beyond these, his guidelines apply to representation of these arts in sculpture, and the location and creation of these arts in architecture, both as performance and as architectural enhancement on friezes and iconography. In short, the *Natyashastra* is an exhaustive, encyclopedic dissertation on the arts, with an emphasis on performing arts as its central feature. It is also full of invocations to deities, acknowledging the divine origins of the arts and the central role performance plays in achieving divine goals. It is clear that in Bharata's text, and in the tradition that uses it as a primary resource, *rasa* and those arts that attempt to achieve it hold transcendence of the microcosmic reality as their ultimate purpose. The story of the text's origins leaves no question as to its divine source, Brahma, and it is often called the Fifth Veda.

For Bharata, and the many commentators and aestheticians who followed him, the issues of performance, therefore, were not primarily issues of entertainment as it is normally understood today. It was rather a matter of how performance might be the means to a very different experience. The components of performance art were precisely defined and structured, not to inhibit creativity but to enable it. Individual creativity and self-expression were irrelevant: divine creativity and the expression of ultimate reality were the goals. Today, when we study these texts on aesthetics, our tendency is to marvel at the strict guidelines for dancers, poets, dramatists, musicians, architects, and sculptors, and wonder how creativity could flourish under such precise formulations. But we are using the wrong paradigms altogether. Moreover, one might argue that these artists, working within these parameters, had to develop an extremely subtle form of creativity. In truth, Indian arts allow for enormous innovation, but it often must exist "between the lines," and may only be recognized by those trained to discern it. It could be argued that *rasa* can only occur when an artist is mature and expert enough to create within the interstices of the rules.

The first book of the *Natyashastra* describes the origins of drama and attributes both the activity and the contents of the text to the creator deity Brahma. The practice of the dramatic arts is praised as a comprehensive aid to the learning of virtue, proper behavior, ethical and moral fortitude, courage, love, and adoration of the divine realm. The enjoyment and pleas-

ure that result from such practices are encouraged as conducive to an appreciation of all the branches of learning. By the end of the *Natyashastra* its contents are praised as promoting worldly and otherworldly goals as significant as those attained by the practice of formal religious ritual. Like the elaborate rituals described in the Vedic texts, the theater offers in microcosm a representation of the greater, macrocosmic realities, and in so doing, allows those prepared to understand a path to transcendence. Later commentaries develop this theme in increasingly abstract and often esoteric terms.

The great contemporary Indian scholar and commentator Kapila Vatsyayan has written that the worldview of the *Natyashastra* is organic and dynamic. It proceeds through paradox: impersonality and intensity;¹⁰ the specific and the universal; the inner and the outer; the *bindu* (point) and its projection into infinite variety; stillness and movement; the physical body and its transcendence; the crucial nature of form, its development into a multitude of forms, and its final movement beyond form. "The artistic experience is acausal and whole, a state of beatitude and bliss in the mind of the experiencer, the creator."¹¹ *Rasa* is "the highly charged state of momentary freedom and emancipation which motivates, inspires creation . . . [and] this experience . . . facilitates an abstraction of life into its primary emotions and sentiments."¹² When the *Natyashastra* provides explicit instructions for the performance area as "sacralized cosmic space," the author is "consecrating space which would prepare actors, performers and audience to be transported to the world of the imagination and simultaneously to the divine and heavenly."¹³ When he describes the location of the drama in time, he simultaneously describes "physical duration" and "a conceptual time where gods and humans meet." He views "the goal of artistic creation as a tool to evoke a *rasa* . . . and not to look at or imitate actuality," for "the search for 'totality' and 'wholeness' . . . is primary." To achieve this goal, "eschewing of the particular 'I' is a primary demand."¹⁴ The result is "sensual and spiritual at once."¹⁵ These qualities make "the work of art have the potential to rise above pain and pleasure, desire or suffering. The artistic work embodies and, in turn, stimulates, a state of awareness and consciousness which is akin to the experience of Brahman."¹⁶ Because it is fleeting, this state is not identical with the final and ultimate goal of spiritual discipline; it is, however, a momentary glimpse of that transformative achievement.

Book 6, lines 42–45 of the *Natyashastra* describes eight *rasas*, and identifies them as associated with both colors and deities. The details and characteristics of Bharata's scheme of classification have continued to influence performance traditions over the centuries.

<i>Rasa</i>	Color	Deity
<i>shringara</i> (love in union and separation)	<i>shyama</i> (green)	Vishnu
<i>hasya</i> (humor)	<i>sita</i> (white)	Pramatha
<i>karuna</i> (pathos, sorrow)	<i>kapota</i> (dove-colored)	Yama
<i>raudra</i> (anger, wrath)	<i>rakta</i> (red)	Rudra (later Shiva)
<i>vira</i> (heroism)	<i>gaura</i> (wheat brown)	Mahendra
<i>bhayanaka</i> (fear/panic)	<i>krishna</i> (black)	Kala
<i>bibhatsa</i> (distaste/recoil/disgust)	<i>nila</i> (blue)	Mahakala
<i>abdhuta</i> (wonderment/surprise)	<i>pita</i> (yellow)	Brahma

A ninth *rasa*, *shanta*, normally defined as peace/tranquility/enlightened repose, was added in the eighth century of the Common Era and has been accepted as an essential component of the schema. These *rasas* are described as consisting of precise performative postures, characteristic qualities of movement, facial expressions, and mudras or hand gestures.

Several aspects of this system are notable. First, each *rasa* response may be generated by a number of different emotive stimuli (or determinants): the *bhavas*, the particular and basic emotions or moods. *Rasa* "has the same relation to the bhava as wine has to the grapes, sugar and herbs which compose it and which dissolve and blend completely in an intoxicant of entirely different character."¹⁷ For example, the *rasa hasya* (humor) may be a result of impudence, physical exaggeration or clowning, or laughter at oneself or at others. *Karuna* (pathos) may result from separation, death, physical impediment, and so forth. According to the text, there are forty-nine *bhavas* that interact to influence *rasa* response, and one cannot exist without the other: "There is no *Rasa* devoid of *Bhava* nor *Bhava* devoid of *Rasa*."¹⁸ And although the *rasas* may be understood as sentiments, they are *never* achieved by sentimentality. They may appear to

result from emotion, but to be emotional is to lose any possibility of attaining the goal. One *must* distinguish between any personal ego-oriented function and the actual, transpersonal, transcendent purpose. To fail is to embrace mediocrity, to be seduced and entrapped by maya.

It is also notable that although exact dating of the text is problematic, certain details remind us that the tradition has been constantly evolving, for here, Shiva is not named, but his earlier and less imposing persona, Rudra ("the howler"), is featured. This may indicate a location of the text in time or a perspective born of geographical location, for different deities have been worshipped differently in the diverse cultures of South Asia over time. Similarly, although "*krishna*" is used as a color designation, there is no mention of Krishna as deity. Most likely both chronology and location are involved. The deities highlighted as associated with the *rasas* are Vedic, and the text hearkens to the Vedic corpus frequently. This fact confirms the Sanskrit/North Indian origins of the *Natyashastra*. But the text permeated the subcontinent thoroughly, and has been applied to performing arts north and south.

The fact that Bharata indicates colors in association with these emotive archetypes is not surprising in South Asia, where even the caste system is called *varna*, a system of color designation. Indians are extremely sensitive to color, as are most cultures born of tropical and subtropical climates. The richness of the color palette is one of the defining qualities of Indian life. Traditional performing arts utilize guidelines for color to express emotive states in costuming and make-up, as visual cues, to this day. Bharata's guidelines are like a menu from which the flavors may be used in endless combination to produce the requisite balance of aesthetic tastes. These cues are internalized by performers and audiences alike within South Asian cultures from an early age, and response becomes instinctive.

INFLUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

Just as a rich flavor leaves an aftertaste and a flash of light and color leaves an afterimage in our perception, the *Natyashastra* was followed by many centuries of commentary and development. The effect was a deepening

and expansion of Bharata's treatise. By the tenth or eleventh century of the Common Era, one of the greatest commentators on the *Natyashastra*, Abhinavagupta, appeared. For this aesthetician, "the aesthetic experience is *ananda* . . . it is self-luminous and self-conscious, devoid of all duality and multiplicity."¹⁹ A Kashmiri Shaivite philosopher, he theorized that "in art the purified state of undifferentiated experience was *rasa* or *ananda*."²⁰ Thus *rasa* becomes "a state of consciousness"²¹ akin to the bliss (*ananda*) of the enlightened, liberated soul. Study of the corpus of the primary text and its centuries of commentary have led Kapila Vatsyayan to state that Indian art is not "religious in the ordinary sense, nor is there a theology of aesthetics, but the two fields interpenetrate because they share the basic world-view in general and the specific goal of *moksha* and liberation in particular."²²

For Abhinavagupta, the term *rasa* "is of central importance for interpreting religious experience."²³ "Situations portrayed in drama or poetry are shorn of their particularity. . . . Abhinava speaks of *rasa* as transcending the time and space of both the original character and the actor." "One transcends all desires and limited, ego-bound perceptions,"²⁴ fulfilling the aspiration of all the major spiritual disciplines of India whose goal is *moksha*. Writing about poetry, but clearly referring to the aesthetic goal in general, Abhinava asserts:

Once a *rasa* has been thus realized, its enjoyment (is possible), an enjoyment which is different from the apprehensions derived from memory or direct experience and which takes the form of melting, expansion, and radiance. This enjoyment is like the bliss that comes from realizing (one's identity) with the highest Brahman, for it consists of repose in the bliss which is the true nature of one's own self. (*Locana*, 2.4, in Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, *The Dhvanyaloka of Anandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta*, 222)

Theories regarding Sanskrit poetics parallel, and reflect their kinship with, the dramatic arts consistently over time. Book 17 of the *Natyashastra* is wholly devoted to the characteristics of poetry, for the spoken word was

central to traditional theater. To the same extent as movement and music, the poetry of performance was understood as essential in creating and supporting the goals of the dramatic arts. Sushil K. De has observed that the

blissful condition reproduced . . . by the idealized creation of poetry is given as almost equivalent to the philosophical *ananda*. In explaining that it affords an escape from the natural world by replacing it with an imaginative world, Sanskrit theorists rightly emphasize that, even from the reader's point of view, the function of art is that of the deliverer. (*Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetic*, 69)

Poetry in recitation, as it was used in Sanskrit dramatic performance and is still used to this day across India in constantly evolving traditions of live performance, shares with written poetry the potential to provide the experience of *rasa*. That is, it offers the potential for transformation.

The continuing tradition of further explication is exemplified by the publication of a text entitled the *Abhinaya Darpana* of Nandikeshvara in 1874. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), the renowned art historian, whose extensive, extraordinary, and scholarly opus is an invaluable resource, translated the work into English as *The Mirror of Gesture*. In his introduction to this text, he observes:

The arts are not for our instruction, but for our delight, and this delight is something more than pleasure, it is the godlike ecstasy of liberation from the restless activity of the mind and the senses, which are the veils of all reality, transparent only when we are at peace with ourselves. (*The Mirror of Gesture*, 9)

This relatively small treatise is an encyclopedia of gesture. Coomaraswamy included in his translation examples of the gestures described therein by providing plates from ancient sculpture and statuary, as well as portrayals by a human in photographs. The evidence is clear, as are the implications: this language of gesture has existed in the performing arts as well as in the static arts in India, each mirroring the other, each reinforcing and supporting the other, for millennia. The concept of *rasa* has provided the par-

adigm, the purpose, and the performative premise throughout a process of evolution that has characterized both the performing arts and the commentaries on them.

One major source of influence whose importance cannot be overstated is the religious movement identified as *Bhakti*. While the term appears in the Vedic sources, often in reference to devotional poetry, *Bhakti* as a religious movement seems to have flowered first in Tamil Nadu in the far south of the subcontinent, during the seventh to ninth centuries.²⁵ It spread throughout much of the subcontinent in medieval India. And while the term is often translated simply as a category of activity performed in devotion to a deity, most often Krishna or Shiva, its implications for religious life are more complex than that definition suggests. This form of devotion requires an active engagement in service of a deity, often with elements of mythology associated with that deity: that is, an enactment, a performance, a celebration, including music and dance. Out of the love and longing associated with *shringara rasa*, a new *rasa* was generated by devotees, namely, *bhakti rasa*. It shares with the *rasas* enumerated by Bharata its genesis in *bhava*, emotion; the challenge is to use that emotion to achieve an impersonal state of heightened awareness, building toward the ultimate goal of transformation. The means to this end are, however, quite different from the sort of performance Bharata had in mind. These songs and dances are performed by amateurs, in nontheatrical venues, and therefore in much less formal and structured contexts.

In the Bengali Vaishnava cult as described by David Kinsley, devotees celebrate the mythology of Krishna according to their own particular understanding of which *bhavas* are appropriate to the story and will provide the most intimate encounter with the deity. Relationships the deity had during his incarnation in this world are highlighted, especially the love affair between Krishna and the woman Radha, immortalized in the poetry of the *Gita Govinda* and other texts, both written and oral. The participant seeks to achieve the transpersonal state that *rasa* implies.

He is required, as is the aesthetic connoisseur, to lose himself in the mood of the drama, to resist involving his own personal desires and emotions. Before he can soar to the heights of all-consuming love

for Krishna he must forget himself, disassociate himself from those particular circumstances and feelings that make him unique.²⁶

Some of the methodologies known from acting are utilized to assist participants in achieving this goal. In practice, these performances are noted for their ability to inspire ecstatic fervor. As is true in the more classical traditions, then, bhakti *rasa* provides a bodily experience of a transcendent reality. But the context is entirely different.

From the etymological point of view, it is fascinating (and perhaps confusing!) to note that another Sanskrit term, *raasa* (*raas* in Hindi), is used to identify the singing and especially the circle dancing performed in devotion to Krishna, as well as Shiva. *Raas lila*, the play/performance associated with ecstatic worship of these deities, is a well-known component of religious practice during festivals throughout India; "raas" is often used more generally to refer to a variety of circular dances. "*Rasa*" and "*raasa*" are completely different words that refer to different forms of expressive action. But certainly they share the larger sensibility that pervades performance in the complex of cultures that have informed India's traditions. Performance, in both cases, offers the possibility of presence and transcendence, a path through bodily experience toward ultimate and religiously defined transformation, whether that is understood as ecstatic worldly union with a deity (*raasa*) or a taste (*rasa*) of liberation from the *maya* of existence.

Performing the Divine in India

Rasa

by H. Daniel Smith, with gratitude

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