

# A Comparative Analysis of Rasa and Dhavani Theory in the Artworks of Male and Female Artists

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## ABSTRACT

The philosophy of Rasa was presented by Bharata in his renowned *Natyashastra*, a work of ancient Indian literature. With the exception of dramaturgy, these *rasas* have been associated with delight or pleasure in practically all forms of art. The Dhvani theory, which was developed by Abhinava Gupta and is known as the Rasa theory in semantic terms. The primary proponent of further exploring the Dhvani theory through structures is regarded as Anandavardhana. Through their painting techniques, topics they chose, the physical characteristics of the figures, the use of colour, the use of space and background, as well as other relevant aspects of representation, the representation of women in their paintings has been assessed. To lay the groundwork for the following comparison, the bodies of work of Raja Ravi Varma and Sher-Gil have been briefly explored in the first section using some of their well-known paintings. The portrayal of women in the works of Francis Newton Souza and Gogi Saroj Pal has then been examined. The debate of the artist's works has also included certain Western and Indian aesthetical perspectives. Among the artists that used this cliché of feminine iconography in their works are Francis Newton Souza and Gogi Saroj Pal.

**Keywords:** .

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## INTRODUCTION

In Ancient Indian literary writings, Bharata has given the theory of Rasa in his famous *Natyashastra*. These *rasas* have been known as delight or pleasure in almost all kind of arts but Dramaturgy in particular. Abhinava Gupta is known for developing the theory of Rasa in semantic ways, which is called Dhvani theory. Anandavardhana is considered the main exponent who further explored the Dhvani theory through structures. These poetic theories of rasa and dhvani can be applied to almost all kind of fine arts including painting. There are nine *rasas* which are considered the chief components of any produced artworks. An accomplished artwork has such emotional relish or rasa which can move the mind of its spectators. The artwork usually produces a desire or different moods in the mind of its onlookers. The very theory of rasa is based on what the artist suggest not what he expressed through the production. These ways of suggestions have been properly described by the theory of dhvani theory of Anandavardhana. The quality of performing such suggestions has been judged by the rasa theory. As per these theories, an artist should be equipped to give the artwork this universal bliss of moods and sentiments, which can reach the heart of its onlookers. The dhvani style

has been observed through three major aspects i.e. *abhidha* (the literal meaning of the expression), *laksana* an (external quality of the expression) and *vyanjana* (the suggestive approach of the expression or what has been suggested). In this ways, if we observe the paintings of the taken artists, we can assume all their paintings have a majority of particular delights or *rasas* and suggestions of the artists are also manipulating the very same through *abhidha*, *laksana*, and *vyanjana*. Every *rasa* is related with a particular *sthayi bhava*. In the paintings of Varma, we can usually feel the sentiments of love, attractiveness which is called *shringara* (erotic) *rasa* (sentiments) and its *sthayi bhava* (emotions) is *rati* (delight). In the paintings of Varma, a woman has been particularly depicted in this a particular emotion which creates the feeling of love and attractiveness. The painting of Varma titled “A Nair Lady adorning her hair with a Garland of Jasmine is creating the sentiment of delight with erotic feelings. As the title of the painting and subject suggests, the lady is adorning herself. Numerous paintings of women were created by Ravi Varma, and his aesthetic blended western academic techniques with themes from Indian mythology (Ramachandran 2003). Ravi Varma's depictions of women in his paintings are rife with sensual exhibition and temptation for observers (Varma, 2003). The suggestive theory by the artist is to depict a picture of a woman as involved in beautification for her lover. She is beautiful and depicted as staring in the eyes of its onlookers as she is conscious and aware that she is being looked at by someone. The literal meaning and external quality of the expression of the woman are also suggesting the same to make her as an object of onlooker’s desire. The *vibhavas* or determinants which have been suggested or inherited by the artist is the emotions of the woman named as *alambana-vibhava*. The surroundings of the surface or *uddipan-vibhava* have been the created through the adjustment of background and details as she has been depicted alone in her chamber. Her privacy has been exposed to the onlookers and after viewing her privately, the onlookers feel delighted to have a look at such a situation. The settlement of *uddipan-vibhava* or environmental causes is a major phenomenon in the creation of aesthetic delight or juice for the senses. Additionally, the two major reactions in the way of delight are physical reactions or *anubhavas* and mental reactions *vvabhichari bhavas* are also suggesting the same feeling of erotic sense.



*Fig.1. A Nair Lady*



*Fig.2. Nude Group*

Fig. 1 A Nair Lady adorning her hair with a Garland of Jasmine, Ravi Varma, Oil on Canvas 1873, Source:

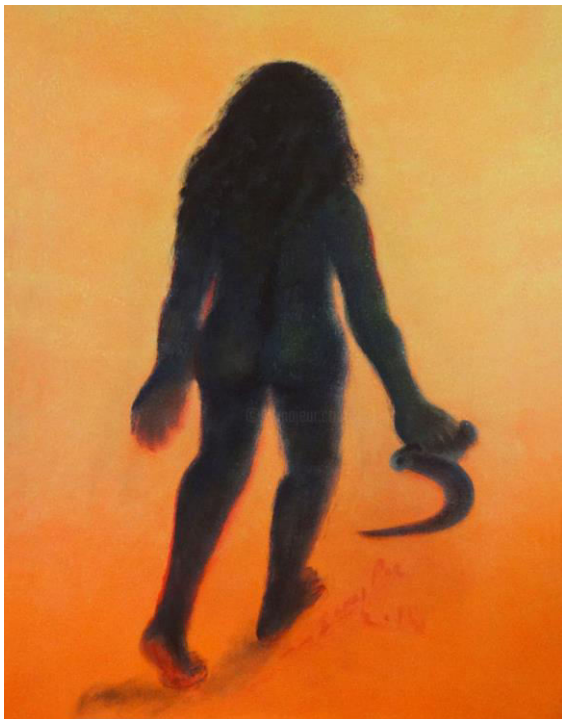
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nair\\_Lady\\_Adorning\\_Her\\_Hair\\_\(Varma\)#/media/File:Nair\\_Lady\\_Adorning\\_Her\\_Hair.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nair_Lady_Adorning_Her_Hair_(Varma)#/media/File:Nair_Lady_Adorning_Her_Hair.jpg)

Fig.2. Nude Group, Amrita Sher-Gil, Oil on Canvas, 1935, 81x 115.5 cm. Image Courtesy NGMA New Delhi

The very first aspect of *dhvani* is which *abhidha* or the literal meaning of the painting displaying the same concept to show a woman as engaged in her beatification with flowers. The external characters of the painting or *laksana* are indicating towards a reverse approach as she is not only engaged in adornment but she is offering herself towards the onlookers in her private movement. In this way, the suggestive approach or *laksana* of the painting are projecting woman as an object to be displayed as pretending to be alone. She is not alone as she is waiting or preparing for the male lover to meet with. Moreover, the onlookers can also imagine her to be waiting for them which has been suggested by the artist. These all adjustment are creating a strong feeling of enchanting and erotic desire in the eyes of its observers. The onlookers feel pleasure to look a woman in a state of waiting or adorning herself in privacy. The female body has been rendered as the focus point of Sher-paintings, Gil's with the surrounding left empty (Dalmia 2014). The male presence is also celebrated through the components of external objects like flowers, the arrangement of light and grace in the painting. As per the *Dhawani* theory or the theory of suggestions, the paintings indicate the same with the adjustment of positive and negative space, background detailing and other supportive gestures. Varma was a master in the creation of *rasa*, apart from erotic delight we can see there are other prominent *rasas* in his paintings but all subjects have been taken specifically by him. He attempted to use the new techniques in the Indian environment, but what he produced was not even close to being a painting from Europe (Mitra 1965). For instance, he has executed religious theme so he tried to depict *Shanta rasa*, but if a subject is related with a female, he just gave priority to generate or suggest, the erotic feelings and sensuousness. In the paintings of Sher-Gil, we can find the plenty of *Karuna* *rasa* with its *shoka bhawa* or the feeling of compassion as she used to capture the sadness of the life of women. She painted the dark side of womanhood in the form of simplicity and peacefulness. Moreover, her paintings, suggest multiple emotions of wonder and pity too at the same time. The painting, *Nude Group* (Fig.1) displays a group of three women where one figure is depicted in the center of the painting and the remaining two have been placed in a secondary position. The painting as per the *rasa* theory develops a feeling of sadness which evokes *Karuna rasa* with the tragic settlement of the subject. Unlike Varma, Sher-Gil has removed the component of materialist beauty first, then she has given priority to the inner quest of the state of the nude woman. The woman who is sitting in the same private place but not adorning herself. She is not making an eye-contact with the onlookers as if she is not aware at all that is being looked at. Moreover, she does not bother if she is looking at someone as she is involved in a deeper thought. The suggestive theory is quite opposite with that of Varma, the suggestion has been given to the sadness of life of the woman than the erotic settlement. The literal meaning of the painting is juxtaposing the theme which has been given as a nude group. The nudity has been overlooked in a

very different way. The uncovered body in the painting (fig.2) is very neutral and direct in their approach of realistic projection than the semi-covered body of Varma's painting (fig.1). The darkness has been projected through the dark color scheme which is again suggesting the tension and uneasiness so the environmental or surroundings have been settled to create the feeling of grief or sadness which is *Karuna rasa*.

In the paintings of Souza, the majority of *Rudra* (terrible) *Bibhatsa* (Disgust) *Bhayānaka* or fearful (horror) and *Adbhuta* (wondrous) *rasas* through can be seen through multiple suggestions. These multiple impulsive components are also similar to the notion of catharsis as well. The painting, *Nude Queen* has been portrayed by Souza in a very strange manner. It is appearing that he has torn apart the normal human body into many pieces and then recollected them on his canvass. The woman with her naked body with so many scars and marks on her body is having an absurd posture and projecting her genitals parts as placing her hands near them. The hips and pudendum have been shown as placed at one point which is indicating the progressive attitude of the figure. The painting is indicating towards multiple strange feelings and then ending as a permanent mood of *Bibhatsa* (disgust) and *Bhayankar* (horror) at the same time. The body of the woman has been projected as a vulnerable object what the artist has suggested is to give a shock to the onlookers after deforming the very body. The literal meaning of a painting is to project an image of a nude queen but after seeing the painting it is very difficult to guess the suggestive title and the meaning. The meaning is quite strange and horrifying which hit the very idea of the imagery of the queen as the queen usually depicted as having a beautiful body with ornamentation. If she is depicted nude then she has the graceful body with the possession which a queen should have. The surroundings or background of the painting, the color scheme and the gesture of the woman is also supporting the same deconstruction and deformation.



*Fig.2. Altar for Nirbhaya*



*Fig.3. Nude Queen*

Fig.2. Altar for Nirbhaya, 2015, Acrylic on Paper Board (10x2x13.5 cm), Image Curtsy, Gogi Saroj Pal

Fig.3. Nude Queen, 1962, Oil on canvas, 57.25 x 47.25 in (145.3 x 119.9 cm. Source:

<https://www.saffronart.com/auctions/PostWork.aspx?l=2452>

In the painting of Pal, a deep sense of *Shringar*, *Raudra*, *Veera* (heroic), *Adbhuta* (wondrous) and *Shanta* (peaceful) *rasas* can be observed in various themes. In her latest series, known as Altar for Nirbhaya, Pal has depicted a protagonist who is stepping forward with a sickle in her hand. The suggestive approach of the artist is to project the need of the society in which women have been raped and suffered due to crime and gender politics. The painting creates the permanent mood of *Rudra* (terrible) *rasa* and the very components of emotions are indicating the same approach through the help of color application and empty background.

The painting of Varma, by all means, denotes a relishing fest for the onlookers in regards to aesthetical pleasure. On the contrary, the execution of woman is only serving for creating the beautiful art objects as living beings. The forms which have been presented by Varma on the surface, are projecting the complexity of desire, which is indicating towards the satisfaction of visual pleasure only. They are fine instances of beautiful art but in the case of reality, they are nothing but a fake imagery of an imaginative world. It is mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures that the truth or reality is the only beauty i.e. Satyam (truth) Shivam (good) Sundaram (beauty). This very sentence is also known as the foundation of Indian aesthetics. In this way, the aim of the artist is not only executed beautiful and eye-pleasing art but to execute meaningful art as well. The paintings of Sher-Gil represent a larger insight of the reality rather than the imaginative or spiritual world. She somehow managed to create the opposition of beauty through her artworks but the real beauty, not the imaginary one. If the painting is observed on the bases of onlookers, the *rasanubhuti* can varies as per the gender of them, for instance, the painting which is erotic to the male viewer can be offensive or vulgar too for the female viewers. In the *rasa-dhavni* theory, the male artists are going towards the projection of sexuality and erotic desires while female artists are going towards the deeper reality of the life of the woman. In the age of post-modernism where the norms of aesthetics have changed into beautiful projection to realistic and anti-aesthetic norms, the gender is somehow directing their manipulations in a symbolic or non-symbolic way.

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