

A RASA SENSIBILITY FOR ECOLOGICAL AESTHETICS AS A CHALLENGE TO THE ANTHROPOCENE

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MISHRA, A.: A *Rasa* Sensibility for Ecological Aesthetics as a Challenge to the Anthropocene
FILOZOFIA, 78, Supplement, 2023, pp. 149 – 163

Based on the premise that an aesthetic experience is inevitably a human one, this paper considers a non-anthropocentric ecological aesthetic experience through the lens of Indian aesthetics. It does so by problematizing the beautiful in the aesthetic. *Rasa* in Indian aesthetics refers to the essence of emotion felt in an aesthetic experience. The *adbhuta rasa* refers to the experience of wonder through astonishment. I argue that what we might find amazing in nature is not only the picturesque, but rather the ecological interconnectedness of nature. Through Indian aesthetics, we recognize in this paper, the criterion for a sensitive, receptive and responsive subject presenting themselves to an engulfment, as important for a non-othered ecological aesthetic experience. It is recognized that there might be an aesthetic allowance in ecological design, realized by placing importance on a sensory immersion in the natural world that allows an engulfment in it. While not neglecting a cognitive reflexive analysis of such a relishing of the *adbhuta*, we conceive of an experience that finds aesthetic value and appreciation beyond the instrumental and commodified value placed on natural environments. The paper concludes with key questions that a *rasa anubhuti* raises for emerging eco-aesthetic theories and a summary of the unique hermeneutical and epistemological contributions this approach could make to the field.

Keywords: *Rasa* – *Rasika* – *Adbhuta* – Indian aesthetics – Ecological aesthetics – Anthropocene

Introduction

The field of ecological aesthetics can be credited for revitalizing the importance of an aesthetic experience that goes beyond that which might be referred to as art experience, and rejecting dualisms entrenched in the examining of an aesthetic experience. Xiangzhan Cheng's key overview of this field recognizes four keystones crucial to

This paper is based on my MPhil Thesis submitted to the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, titled "The Aesthetics of Climate Change: An Indian Aesthetic and Buddhist Environmental Perspective."

ecological aesthetics (Cheng 2013). We juxtapose an Indian ecological aesthetic with two keystones of his overview: The first on the question of ecological knowledge as a pre-requisite for an ecological conscience and aesthetic appreciation; the second, the experience being predicated on an ecological ethics. There is then a possibility of an ecologically attuned aesthetic appreciation without attaching a primacy to ecological knowledge, while recognizing the moral implication of such an experience seen as key to the field. We argue for this through the *rasa* theory from Indian aesthetics, the details of which this paper shall go into after making clear the position this approach shall occupy in contemporary debates of this field.

I. Navigating the Cognitive and Non-Cognitive in Ecological Aesthetics?

What is worth clarifying first is where our approach might fit in the divide in the broader field of environmental aesthetics between what are cognitive and non-cognitive approaches. The former prioritizes the importance of scientific knowledge for aesthetic appreciation, while the latter finds sense perception key to the aesthetic experience. Arnold Berleant, a key figure in environmental aesthetics, has thus proposed models of “sensory immersion” and an “aesthetics of engagement.” As he wrote, the aesthetic environment “is sensed through my feet, in the kinesthetic sensations of my moving body, in the feel of the sun and wind on my skin, in the tug of branches on my clothing, in the sounds from every direction that attract my attention” (Berleant 1992, 27). It is such prioritization of sense experience that I find myself agreeing with. Ecological aesthetics though, quite possibly finds itself on another side of this divide. As it prioritizes at least basic ecological knowledge as crucial to an eco-aesthetic experience, it attaches a certain primacy to knowledge (Cheng 2013).

What I shall argue is that *rasa* theory will show us a conception of aesthetics that will allow one to attach primacy to sense perception, but not at the cost of abandoning reflexive thinking or cognitive knowledge. Berleant writes of ecological aesthetics: “Such efforts are misguided when they turn away from the primacy of the phenomena of aesthetic experience by subsuming them under a scientific model” (Berleant 2016, 126). I agree with his highlighting of the idea that such models of thinking and cognition we might rely on are aesthetically relevant only if they affect our perception. However, maintaining such a distinction might be easier said than done. Our reliance in this paper on ecological thinking is to highlight a lack of perceptual awareness of the interconnected underpinnings of the natural world and thus an alienation from what we might be able to perceive in the first place.

Becoming aware of the ecological functioning of nature is not perceptive at first glance to the untrained eye. Everything that a forest ecologist might observe with

a single look, a city-dwelling rookie hiker (like me) might need multiple glances and some training. Yet when considering a non-anthropocentric ecological aesthetic theory, we must attempt to be as inclusive as possible, and argue for an experience that is accessible to anyone who can present themselves in such a context. For there is a process of becoming aware of what you are experiencing that is manifested in nature. One might not know they need to just look around for a moment longer to realize the wonderfully complex web of relations that are playing out above them. Ecological aesthetics accommodates for this interconnected web that makes available to our senses much more to perceive. It also ties back to a natural progression that might stem from Berleant's "Aesthetics of Engagement," a movement from a disinterested approach to aesthetic experiences to a more immersive one (Berleant 1992). His focus on sensory perception can be understood, if we were to wonder how one might be able to accurately explain what a forest is without walking through a forest of some kind. Such experiences stimulate all the senses one has access to – if one cannot see, then they might hear a forest, if they cannot hear, they might smell it. They could feel the forest by tripping on the carpet of vines that the trees lay out for them. It does not have to be a forest, for it certainly is not the most accessible of spaces. The key idea here is that a form of tangible experience is essential to formulating our conception of an ecological aesthetic, and it is this that we shall elaborate upon through Indian aesthetics.

II. Introducing an Indian Aesthetics Approach

This paper draws inspiration primarily from the works of two historical thinkers, Bhatta Nayaka and Abhinavagupta and two more contemporary thinkers, Prof. M. Hiriyanna and Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, both of whom wrote in the 20th Century. The *rasa* theory stems from the *Natya-śāstra*, a *Treatise on Drama* authored by the legendary Bharatamuni. *Rasa*, as understood from one of the most often quoted passages in the *Natya-śāstra*, is stated to be realized "from the combination of excitant determinants (*vibhāva*), expressive consequents (*anubhāva*) and transient feelings (*vyabhicāri*), the relishable juice (*rasa*) is realized (*rasa-nisīpattihī*)" (Ghosh 1934, 105). The factors or determinants, *vibhāva*, are "the aesthetic problem, plot, or theme"; the reactions or consequents, *anubhāva*, are the "deliberate manifestations of feeling, as gestures, etc." (Coomaraswamy 1918, 31). The initial, and most literal translation of *rasa* was "taste" and *rasa* theory thus became taste theory (Chaudhury 1965). Yet the implied simplicity and subjectivity of such a translation could be highly misleading (Pollock 2016, 5). We adopt K. C. Bhattacharya's account of the two direct meanings *rasa* could have, namely, "essence" and "what it means to be tasted" to argue that "The aesthetic conception of *rasa* combines the two senses and signifies the essence of a feeling" (Bhattacharyya 1930, 195).

What does this imply about the meaning of what might consist as an aesthetic experience? R. Gnoli in his introduction to Abhinavagupta, writes “Aesthetic experience marks a definite break with samsara, which is dominated and conditioned by the law of cause and effect” (Gnoli 1956, xxi). Abhinavagupta and Bhatta Nayaka thus identify an aesthetic consciousness, where “Rasa is not a thing in itself...but the consciousness itself...which, freed from external interference and all practical desire, becomes Rasa or aesthetic consciousness” (Gnoli 1956, xxii).¹ We shall here refer to the experience of *rasa* as *rasa anubhuti*, *anubhuti* implying experience. There are eight *rasas* as recognized in the *Natya-śāstra*, with Abhinavagupta adding a ninth *rasa*. This paper shall focus more on the hermeneutical insights that *rasa* theory can offer for ecological aesthetics, and starts with the *adbhuta rasa*.

III. *Adbhuta*, the *Rasa* of Wonder

The *adbhuta rasa* in most accounts is translated as “wonder” or “the fantastic.” However, it is also mostly defined in the realm of literature, art and theatre. The *Natya-śāstra* does not acknowledge *rasa anubhuti* outside the domain of theatre. Abhinavagupta is perhaps even more stringent, drawing a clear distinction between the experience through poetry and drama in theatre, and the experience of the “real,” or the world outside that space (Masson – Patwardhan 1970, 54). In this context, the *adbhuta rasa* has been said to be of two kinds: That which is divine, and that which is born from joy. The divine (*adbhutarasa*) arises from seeing heavenly sights, and the *adbhutarasa* which is born from joy comes from delight (i.e., the fulfilment of one’s desires) (Masson – Patwardhan 1970, 57).

Then there is the *sthāyibhāva* of the *adbhuta rasa*, which is *vismaya*, amazement, from which arises the *rasa* of wonder (*adbhuta*) (Chandran – Sreenath, 2021). K. C. Pandey defines the *sthāyibhāva* as “a basic state of mind which binds together in an organic whole” (Pandey 1959). Abhinava writes, that “the Determinants (*vibhava*) are the cause of the birth of the mental movement (*cittavritti*) which constitutes the permanent Mental State (*sthāyibhāva*)” (Gnoli 1956, 30).

It is necessary to understand the factors that are employed, to examine the creation of *rasa*. The initial development of *rasa* theory focused on the creation of *rasa* in a performer, specifically in the context of dramatic performances. While it would be reductive to propose the progression of *rasa* theory as strictly linear, one can see a gradual shift in the focus of *rasa* in two key ways: firstly, in being located

¹ There might be recognized a tension between how *rasa* has been defined and perhaps depicted, and the connotations we derive from it but also attach to it. *Rasa* might be viewed as consciousness itself, yet it may also emerge within an actively engaged subject in the world. This tension I believe is in keeping with how Indian aesthetics has developed and the myriad approaches it entails.

in forms of art other than drama or theatre, namely, poetry, prose and literature, and secondly, in the turning of enquiry by Bhatta Nayaka from *rasa* in the character to *rasa* in the “reader” (or in our case *rasa* as experienced by the subject), prompting “him to rethink both the ontology and the epistemology of *rasa*, the question of how and where *rasa* exists to how and where *rasa* is made known” (Pollock 2016, 16). This ontological shift becomes crucial as a justificatory principle in this paper’s endeavors of locating *rasa* in an aesthetic experience of the natural environment. It shows us that the very nature of *rasa*’s movement has been expansive, though not a reckless expansion. It is thus in keeping with the tradition of Indian aesthetics that this paper’s undertaking is embarked upon.

Can one argue for a universal experience of wonder in nature? It is difficult, to make a statement such as “Everyone finds something wonderful in nature.” Yet let us turn to Elizabeth Kolbert’s Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. In a chapter, entitled “The Forest and the Trees,” she writes of how, as they went deeper into the forests, they crossed through tunnels formed by trees, so dark that they needed headlamps, making her feel like she had “entered a very grim fairy tale” (Kolbert 2014, 154). Such an aesthetic contrasts with how she described “crawling” out of her tent that morning to see the sunrise, “Overnight, clouds had rolled in from the Amazon basin, and we watched them from above as they turned first pink and then flaming orange” (Kolbert 2014, 154). Our closest star never seemed to go unappreciated by her, as in the very beginning she describes her vantage point:

We were standing in eastern Peru, at the edge of the Andes, on top of a twelve-thousand-foot-high mountain, where, in fact, there were no trees, just scrub and, somewhat incongruously, a dozen or so cows, eyeing us suspiciously. The sun was sinking, and with it the temperature, but the view, in the orange glow of evening, was extraordinary (Kolbert 2014, 148).

What Kolbert depicts is what I would interpret to be an *adbhuta* experience in nature, or at the very least an experience capable of being wonderful, with its *sthāyibhāva* of amazement certainly noticeable in her descriptions. It is similar to what I felt in my favorite hike in Hong Kong, which has an expansive view of the ocean on my right, with not a single skyscraper in sight, a view though not uncommon, but much harder to come by in the concrete jungle that Hong Kong can feel like. It is the *adbhuta* that I almost taste, when I walk by the water on an island two hours away from the city center, before I am pulled back by the need to return to a clockwork-like schedule. In this relishing of the *adbhuta*, there is a *vibhāva*, the wind, the ocean, the seashore; the *vyabhicāribhāva*, a fleeting moment of joyful yet pensive happiness; the *anubhāva*, me visibly catching my breath as I stare into the horizon, or at a neighboring island.

These parallels should not be interpreted as me transposing categories from the domain of art and drama into a “real” world experience. It is rather to make clearer what the hermeneutical implications of locating a *rasa* sensibility in an ecologically aesthetic experience might look like, and it is certainly useful for locating a *rasa anubhuti*. When I confront such beauty in nature, my mind wanders through all that it stands for, sparking in me reflections about my role within nature. What I recount might not scale up to Kolbert standing at the edge of the Andes, yet the reflexive process it triggers is not dissimilar. Furthermore, in my recollection as well as Kolbert’s depictions, what is obvious at a glance is that this experience can signify a break from regularity, the same break characteristic of an aesthetic experience in Indian aesthetics. The break is not necessarily from the mundane, and labelling it as such would be limiting the potential that I argue aesthetic experiences carry in challenging the Anthropocene. It is a break in our “being,” that is, giving us a moment to realize what being is, catapulted into an engulfment by nature. It can arise and float away multiple times, and it can be worth more than a moment. What it certainly is though is a break along the lines of how Prof. Hiriyanna would describe an experience of beauty, which is “anything that brings about a break in the routine life and serves as a point of departure towards the realization of delight” (Hiriyanna 1954, 9). It might be easier to admit then that one is certainly capable of having such *adbhuta* experiences in nature, with this break being a mark of such an experience.² The question worth answering now becomes what having such an experience entails; we do this in the section that follows.

IV. The Sensitive, Receptive, and Responsive Subject

An aspect of Indian aesthetics that cannot be ignored, is how it talks of the subject in the case of *rasa anubhuti*, and what the thinkers have depicted as a *rasika*. Pollock in his recent exposition describes them as “he who, or that which, has or tastes or experiences *rasa*” (Pollock 2016, xvii). Coomaraswamy writes of it as “one who enjoys *rasa*, a connoisseur or lover” (Coomaraswamy 1918, 31); and he further claims, “the capacity and genius necessary for appreciation are partly native (‘ancient’) and partly cultivated (‘contemporary’): but cultivation alone is useless, and if the poet is born, so too is the *rasika*, and criticism is akin to genius” (Coomaraswamy 1918, 33).

² The phenomenological nature of the break which is a mark of aesthetic experience for Hiriyanna might certainly be different from the nature of a break in the reality that we speak of in the context of environmental aesthetics. However, hermeneutically, in viewing environmental aesthetic experience through the anatomy of how Hiriyanna views an aesthetic experience, I believe there might be merit for a break, in our mundane and mediated experience of the world, to be the connecting principle between a “real world” experience and the aesthetic experience delineated through *rasa anubhuti*, leading to ontological consequences for our approach.

In the context of an ecological aesthetic, I shall not make the argument that a *rasika* can only be born and focus rather on how they might be cultivated. I shun the former, especially in the context of the “modern, colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal world” (Grosfoguel – Mielants, 2006) that the subject is born into, one which is mediated and dualistic. Today, the experience of engagement with nature must more often than not be actively sought than become generally available to one. I focus then on how the thinkers write about a *rasika* and consider what that might entail for an ecological aesthetic experience.

These are recurring qualifications, which emerge from reading Indian aestheticians, are of the following kind-“the receptive reader/viewer” (*sahrdaya*) (Masson – Patwardhan 1969, 65), “the sensitive reader/viewer,” and “the responsive reader/viewer” (*sacetāh*) (Pollock 2016, 331). Who is this *rasika* then, and what conditions go into the existence of one? We could imagine there being a requirement of knowing *rasa* in some form and way, though without being a full-fledged scholar of poetics to fall under these criteria. What is more relevant though, is to consider locating a similarly placed subject in their experience with nature, which is a sensitive, receptive, and responsive subject. While these qualifications might be used at times interchangeably in Indian aesthetics, we introduce subtle variations, an entering of the subject as sensitive, a being of the subject as receptive, and an emerging of the subject as responsive. It is a sensitive subject that must enter nature, sensitive to that which is unfurling around them, the ecological balance of things, the *being* of everything that is not them. Through this acknowledging of what is around them, they continue as receptive subjects, welcoming and accepting the experience they are going through, processing through the previously acknowledged ecological framework the significance of a butterfly crossing their path as well as the poisonous spider hovering above their heads on a hike; the corals they see on a dive as well as the jellyfish that might sting them in a moment of absent-mindedness. In this process they thus become responsive subjects, imploring them to engage with what they encounter, moving towards a temporary experiencing of unity with nature, in the space they find themselves in. If the subject is mundane and nonchalant, the pervasion of *rasa* shall become substantially difficult, for they are neither open to nor accepting of what they are capable of encountering.

Considering then the aesthetic experience of the *rasika*, Abhinava wrote, “The audience members too are captivated first by the apprehension of *rasa*, and only afterward, by an act of analytical understanding, come to apprehend the various aesthetic elements” (Pollock 2016, 212).

He thus assigned priority to sense perception before any form of reflexive understanding might begin to be formulated. It is the same for the sensitive subject as

they enter nature, where they are first captivated by nature before processing what they are going through. Abhinava's argument about analytical understanding emerging only after an initial "immersion," substantiates our position which navigates between cognitivists placing primacy on scientific knowledge, of which analytical understanding is formative. We thus acknowledge the importance of analytical understanding on the part of the *rasika*, but not by neglecting sensory experience. He, however, also recognized a strong element of moral instruction in aesthetic experience, as one of its purposes (Pollock 2016, 192). This would be in contrast to theories of aesthetics where beauty is experienced only for the sake for beauty. It closely aligns though with the initially discussed keystone of ecological aesthetics being predicated on ecological ethics. Taking the question of moral instruction from Abhinava, we examine further how such instruction is retained in an Indian aesthetic approach for this field.

V. The Ecological *Rasa Anubhuti* as Instructional

There are two important challenges to acknowledge in our Indian aesthetic approach, in terms of the thinkers we choose to examine in its crafting, emerging from what they saw to be the goal of an aesthetic experience. Bhatta Nayaka argued that pleasure was an indispensable aspect of *rasa anubhuti*. Abhinava, by contrast, stated that a morally instructive element was an end of *rasa anubhuti* (Pollock 2016, 33; Masson – Patwardhan 1970, 53). I find it problematic to appropriate both into an existing framework of ecological aesthetics for two reasons. First, it would be reductive to do so, if not directly contradictory to some of the cornerstones the field has set for itself. The second is that it would limit our enquiry into the true meaning of the goals that both thinkers set for aesthetics. Rather, a deeper look into them shows more resonance with the goals of ecological aesthetics rather than a strict dissonance. Ecological aesthetics recognizes an ethical premise to its experiences, in how one understands nature as well as what the ecological motivates one towards (Cheng 2013). The path of the sensitive subject in a *rasa anubhuti* thus also leads to a non-intentionally instructional realizing of ecological interconnectedness, one within nature rather than of nature, showing an expected moral relation emerging.

Here though, we delve further into the instructive potential that an ecological *rasa anubhuti* might hold. In art, while an instructive element is purposive and intentional, in nature such potential must be realized by the subject in what I term an "aesthetic allowance" available to them. It cannot be simply conveyed, nor intentionally crafted or manufactured to be experienced the same way a movie (with varying degrees of explicitness) conveys. It is a necessary level of engagement from the subject which might thus be called upon for an Indian ecological aesthetic sensibility. In drama, we

know that such an experience is generated through the coming together of the three elements: *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabharibhāvas*. While not directly equating this to the real world, we locate parallels of similar consequence. A source could be the typhoon that has hit your city. As you sit in the safety of your balcony taking it in, a strong gust of wind makes you worried, just as a streak of lightning shows you the trees on the nearby hill dancing to the wind, it dawns on you the fearsome yet wondrous nature of nature.

Abhinava argued that it was acting that made aesthetic experience in drama possible, separating it from reality (Pollock 2016, 211). There is, though, no acting in nature. But we can find, in every experience in nature, the scope for a tripartite breakdown into the factors of *rasa anubhuti* listed before, and at the very least the *sthāyibhāva* of *rasa*. Is this enough to term it a *rasa anubhuti*? Our argument becomes as follows: In the absence of acting, and an absence thus of emotions distinct from that in the “real” world, an aesthetic experience of nature can still be understood as a *rasa anubhuti* as primarily an Indian aesthetic hermeneutical approach to ecological aesthetics. We see empirically as well as anecdotally that many of the emotions generated through *rasa* can be experienced in nature too. The two ends identified for such experience, pleasure and moral instructiveness, can be found being reached in the aesthetic experience of nature too.

Can we then completely ignore the importance of acting in Indian aesthetics? We cannot, and we need not. While *rasa* was recognized in the domain of the “as if” in classical aesthetic literature, Bhatta Nayaka attributed real-world consequences to them, arguing that “And though in this way they remain mere appearance, they can become a means of understanding the true ends of man” (Pollock, 2016 148). While not leaving the domain of theatre, the following is attributed to him:

I pay my homage to Siva the poet (also the omniscient one, *kavi*) who has created all the three worlds and thanks to whom (*yatah*) (sensitive) people are able to attain aesthetic bliss by watching the spectacle (*prayoga*) of the play that is our life in this world (Masson – Patwardhan 1969, 23).

Bhatta Nayaka thus allows a scope of enquiry into aesthetic experience beyond the strict boundaries of what theatre might consist of, opening the possibility for a mediated way of being in the world.³

³ There are others too who are expansive in their enquiry, notable among them Rupa Goswami along with his nephew Jiva Goswami who think of *rasa* as manifesting as devotion for God. Their thought paved the way for the recognition of religious and devotional *rasa* in the real world (Wilke 2018).

We then consider this question ontologically, in the theory of reality juxtaposed against acting, what role does nature actually occupy? There is an aspect of an othered being that has crept into our experience of nature. In reifying our understanding of nature into the categories of the Anthropocene, economic, social, political, etc., we have created a certain barrier. With the existence of this barrier comes a dualistic and alienated perception. Hence, in our experience of nature in modernity, there is not always a direct perception of reality overcoming these categories; and while there is no acting, our experience with nature is enacted through the mentioned categories. Hence, the experience of nature is not always *a priori* and is a non-real and mediated experience of nature, with the generative potential of experiencing reality. It is a culturally and scientifically shaped consciousness that experiences nature. If we are to acknowledge the categorized and reified conceptual understanding of nature that rests within us as we look to indulge in sensory immersion, we understand that it is not an *a priori* reality that we simply enter into to experience. It is rather a space layered time and again through various epistemologies. What we may witness though, is a gradual dismantling of reified categories, should one be an approximation of the crafted subject that we have laid out before.

The nature of instruction is thus through what we recognize as ecological design, i.e., the realization of an interconnectedness that is not othered by the human subject, and with no aesthetic intentionality to it in the traditional sense of the term “aesthetic” with its connotations of “beauty.” Design ought not to imply that such a system is crafted, but rather that multiple factors have a purpose. Our argument is for an aesthetic allowance in nature, where *rasa anubhuti* is treated not only as an experience of beauty or ugliness, but rather as an experience opening us to the engulfment of nature, to immerse ourselves in all that it has to offer. It is an offering not *for* us but an experience *of* its existence and functioning where we co-exist and have a role to play. Once we treat aesthetic experience as such a pathway, we might then encounter the categories of beauty and ugliness, pleasure and annoyance, as rooted in the Anthropocene but encountered as openings rather than reified fixities.

V. Is *Rasa* Rooted in the Anthropocene?

Another challenge to being able to recognize an idea of immersion within nature is its prevalent instrumental use in the Anthropocene. The idea of instrumental value has been dealt with by Emily Brady, an important figure in this field. In her work on environmental aesthetics and climate change, she takes the position of a moderate autonomist, arguing that aesthetic value can be derived and enjoyed independent of moral concerns, but moral concerns will exist too, although they are not capable of eliminating or overtaking aesthetic appreciation (Brady 2018). Arguments which

critique such commodification of nature by depriving it of capitalist value, pit such valuing against the recognition of an intrinsic, non-anthropocentric value of nature. I agree with the need to employ similarly positioned value theories that can look beyond anthropocentric concerns. Such an agreement though, begs the question of our position, where there is an emphasis on the importance of a human experience of wonderment in nature (amongst other experiences). It could be argued that our position is certainly one steeped in the Anthropocene.⁴ The critic could interpret us as arguing for nature conservation and climate action only because we want to continue to enjoy an *adbhuta anubhuti* in nature. Such a critique of a *rasa* sensibility might be further strengthened by the problem of eco-tourism, where, by simply commodifying the value humans place on enjoying scenic nature, entire ecosystems have been irreversibly affected (Duffy 2002).

Such a critique would stand, if not for us delinking the idea of aesthetic valuing being intrinsically connected to the idea of anthropocentric beauty in nature. By arguing instead for an aesthetic allowance emerging from an experience and recognition of ecological design, we rely on an aesthetic valuing different from the instrumental valuing that could be attributed to our position. We do still refer to the scenic and the beautiful, but not as absolute concepts. By reverting to how we understand aesthetic experience through an aesthetic allowance in nature, and admitting to ideas of beauty as harmony in ecological design, we try to establish a non-anthropocentric basis for the human aesthetic experience. This makes it possible to conceive of a non-anthropocentric value theory where the human subject remains a focus of our argument, but the experience does not center around them. We address this also by problematizing the dualism that would embolden the Anthropocene critique of our position, such a dualism of the subject and nature is indeed reified in our ordinary conceptions of reality. It is an overcoming of that reification that is a possibility through the *rasa anubhuti* of nature, through the sensitive subject giving in to the engulfing of nature. This giving in would be non-existent should the sensibility that is argued for be rooted in the categories of the Anthropocene.

In discussing *rasa* and the Anthropocene, we might consolidate here a problematic touched upon throughout this entry, namely, that of the relation of beauty and pleasure, or rather contextually examine if all that is beautiful has to be pleasurable. For instance, it is difficult to argue that childbirth is pleasurable. Would any parent say that oh yes,

⁴ The Kantian sublime of nature has also been examined as an anthropocentric argument, and in so far as it prioritizes human experience, it could be said to have such a concern. However, Kant prioritizes the admiration of nature as non-instrumental, and its aesthetic experience as non-reductive to moral concerns (Brady 2018). In that appreciation of nature for itself, his view has aided contemporary thinking in being non-anthropocentric.

the tearing apart of my body for my child to come wailing and kicking into this world was the most pleasurable moment of their life? Yet, the times that follow of the parents holding the baby for the first time and realizing that they have created life, is something that might be claimed to be beautiful. Happiness and beauty are thus not grounded *only* in pleasure. Famed novelist Manik Bandhopadhyay's short story of love between a gangrene criminal and a beggar with leprosy might not be anthropocentrically beautiful (Chakrabarti 2016). Yet it is beautiful, and pleasurable too. In short, the linkage of beauty and pleasure is anything but straightforward, especially with the reifications they are accompanied by. The sensibility we propose looks beyond the Anthropocene reifications in understanding beauty, while not essentializing it into a *rasa anubhuti*. Where Prof. Hiriyanna argued that the truth of art experience is trumped by the truth of an aesthetic experience of "nature" (Hiriyanna 1954, 10), we argue that the truth of a non-anthropocentric, transcendental pleasure might be ascribed a similar position over the conventional ideas of pleasure used in a modern, colonial, capitalist and patriarchal world. We can thus begin to conclude by considering what such a sensibility is going to imply for ecological aesthetics.

VI. The Implications of *Rasa* for Ecological Aesthetics

Returning to Elizabeth Kolbert's journey to the Peruvian rainforest, it is interesting to pay attention to how Miles Silman, her forest ecologist friend, introduces trees to her—as if they have individual personalities “the way other people speak about movie stars” is how she describes his thinking (Kolbert 2014, 163). He would describe one as “charismatic,” another as “crazy,” another as “amazing” and so on (Kolbert 2014, 163). Silman's gaze sounds akin to how I, with next to no knowledge of trees, try to perceive them when I go hiking. There is aesthetic value in this gaze, for it is not an instrumental one. I am not concerned about the furniture it might be good for, or if it will burn well as fuel, without too much smoke. Further, a forest ecologist adopting such descriptions sheds light on how a non-cognitive aesthetic experience and description must go hand-in-hand with cognitive sources if an ecological understanding of forest communities is to be achieved, and in our case if the *adbhuta* is to lead to an ecological *rasa* experience.

It is here that we might problematize the essential role ecological knowledge plays in ecological aesthetics. While agreeing that ecological knowledge can enhance aesthetic appreciation, finding that deep aesthetic appreciation is possible in its absence as well. This is argued for through the primacy of sense perception and the importance of a willingness for such experience. For importantly, Indian aesthetics generally does not argue for an experience of beauty for which the basis is superficial pleasure. While there certainly is an aspect of pleasure, it is recognized through multiple “positive” as well as “negative” feelings. Manik Bandhopadya's story best

summed this up, with Arindam Chakrabarti using it in his chapter “Toward Indian Aesthetics of the Ugly and the Disgusting” (Chakrabarti 2016, 149 – 164).

The problem though would lie in the aesthetic appreciation of a magnificently expansive desert, yet formed because of anthropogenic desertification with socio-economic consequences (Burrell – Evans – De Kauwe 2020). Without acknowledging a need for knowing this, one’s appreciation might be morally tainted. While the moral nature of aesthetic appreciation has been debated, we align ourselves in this regard more closely with the ethical approach of ecological aesthetics and agree that such knowledge shall become important, but its presence is not key to appreciation and an *adbhuta anubhuti*. The problem for me with knowledge is its predominantly inflexible nature, with hegemonic determinations of what actually counts as knowledge. Knowledge must mean more than only Western scientific knowledge. As seen in the Niyamgiri tribal led movement against the Vedanta, cultural and traditional beliefs, for instance, are intertwined with aesthetic living and appreciation, with tangible consequences of climate activism as seen in the movement (Padel 2014). Vandana Shiva writes of the devastating discounting of agrarian epistemologies that have happened in India by Western enterprises (Shiva 2016). Making scientific knowledge of environments defined only by epistemologies embodying values of the capitalist world, into a prerequisite for aesthetic appreciation, would feed into the same narrative. It is this criterion of knowledge and what it means that I see effectively challenged through a *rasa* sensibility, a reorienting focus where one is sensitive, receptive and responsive within nature. Shiva was also responsible for a series of ecological movements now termed “*bija satyagraha*” inspired by Gandhian philosophy (Shiva 2014). Yuriko Saito, a significant figure in this field, has also recognized the importance of cultural narratives amidst others (Saito 1998). Such alternatives are also consolidated in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, where the authors document various “relational ways of being.” They recognize a politics of care converging with “*buen vivir*, *ubuntu*, and *swaraj*” culminating as an alternative relational epistemology (Kothari et al. 2019). Ashish Kothari, one of the authors and a key figure in the Indian Environmental Movement, documents through Vikalp Sangam such alternative praxis, for instance, how a revival of millets in Odisha (a province on the East coast of India) is improving the lives of tribespeople (Singh 2022).

This account has thus begun an addition of a different epistemic approach to the ever-expanding field of ecological aesthetics. There remain multiple further questions and linkages, unanswered and unmade, which this paper lays the ground for. Indian aesthetics is a vast field, where the consequences of an aesthetic experience are far-reaching, and drawing hermeneutic inspiration from such ontological thinking shall continue to expand the scope of ecological aesthetics, as this paper has attempted to show.

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This article was created with the support of “The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology UGC Research Travel Grant.”

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