

## PRE Curriculum

### Teacher Resource 7.6.1a: “The Ramayana as an Expression of Bhakti”

#### Navarasas (The Nine Rasaa)

Human life is a rich fabric that is given colour and texture by the many happenings that shape it. The mundane actions that characterize every day as well as the extraordinary happenings that make and keep our lives interesting are all threads that get woven together to form this tapestry. The one thing that is common to all these threads is the fact that they evoke feelings in us, we respond to them with our emotions before they can become a part of our internal life. Indeed, life can be thought of as a continuous sequence of emotions that arise in various contexts and circumstances. These emotions, or rasas, are what give life different hues, shades and colours.

Thus it is not surprising that most performing art, which tries to present to the viewer a slice of human life focuses precisely on these rasas, or emotions in order to appeal to the audience. That rasas are the mainstay of performing art, or natya, is a fact that has been well-recognised for centuries now. The Natya Shastra is an ancient Indian text dated between 2nd century BC and 2nd century AD which analyses all aspects of performing art. It is often called the fifth Veda because of its importance. In it one finds a thorough exposition on the rasas, or emotions that characterise Life as well as Art. The Natya Shastra describes nine rasas or NavaRasas that are the basis of all human emotion. Each is commented upon in detail. It is useful to keep in mind that a rasa encompasses not just the emotion, but also the various things that cause that emotion. These two things go hand in hand and are impossible to treat separately. This duality is part of every rasa to varying degrees. Today we try to bring to you a flavour of each of these nine rasas, explaining what each one means and presenting it to you through some Indian art form.

#### **Please note:**

Chaitanya Vaishnavism adds three more rasas to give a total of twelve. The three extras are:

- Dasya (servitorship)
- Sakhya (friendship)
- Vatsalya (parenthood)

**For more details please consult: <PRE Resource 7.6.1a 'The Twelve Rasas'>**

## **Shringara**

Shringara means love and beauty. This is the emotion used to represent that which appeals to the human mind, that which one finds beautiful, that which evokes love. This is indeed the king of all rasas and the one that finds the most frequent portrayal in art. It can be used for the love between friends, the love between a mother and her child, the love for god or the love between a teacher and his disciples. But the Shringara or love between a man and a woman is easily the most popular form of this rasa. Rich imagery is associated with this love and it gets portrayed at many different intensities esp in Classical Indian dance. The sweet anticipation of a woman as she waits for her lover is as much Shringara as the passion she feels for her first love, a passion that so heightens her sensitivity that even the moonbeams scorch her skin. In Indian music too this rasa finds wide portrayal through beautiful melodies.

## **Hasya**

Hasya is the rasa used to express joy or mirth. It can be used to depict simple light-heartedness or riotous laughter and everything in between. Teasing and laughing with a friend, being amused and carefree or simply feeling frivolous and naughty -- these are all facets of hasya. Lord Krishna's childhood, when he was the darling of all Gokul is filled with many stories of his naughty activities. This mirth, which endeared him to all, is one of the common sources of hasya in all ancient Indian art forms. Clearly, where there is hasya, all is well with the world, there is joy all around and all are of good cheer.

## **Bhibatsya**

Bhibatsya is disgust. The emotion evoked by anything that nauseates us, that revolts or sickens us is Bhibatsya. When something comes to our notice that is coarse and graceless, beneath human dignity, something which revolts or sickens us it is Bhibatsya that we feel. When Prince Siddhartha, as a young nobleman, saw for the first time sickness, old age and death, he was moved to disgust which later metamorphosed into sorrow, deep introspection and peace, as he transformed into Gautama, the Buddha -- or the Enlightened one. Not surprisingly, this emotion is usually represented fleetingly. It usually acts as a catalyst for higher and more pleasant emotions.

## **Rowdra**

Rowdra is anger and all its forms. The self-righteous wrath of kings, outrage over audacious behaviour and disobedience, the fury caused by an offense, the rage evoked by disrespect and anger over injustice are all forms of Rowdra, probably the most violent of rasas. Rowdra also encompasses divine fury and the fury of nature which is used to explain unexpected calamities and natural disasters. In Indian mythology, Lord Shiva, the Destroyer, is thought of as the master of all disharmony and discord. Shiva performing the tandav -- a violent dance -- is what creates havoc in the three worlds namely the sky, the earth and the nether world.

## **Shanta**

Shanta is serenity and peace. It represents the state of calm and unruffled repose that is marked simply by the lack of all other rasas. Because all emotions are absent in Shanta there is controversy whether it is a rasa at all. According to Bharata, the author of NatyaShastra, the other eight rasas are as proposed originally by Brahma, and the ninth, Shanta, is his contribution. Shanta is what the Buddha felt when he was enlightened, when he reached the higher spiritual plane that led him to salvation or nirvana and freed him from the cycle of life and death. Shanta represents complete harmony between the mind, body and the universe. Sages in India meditate for entire lifetimes to attain this state. In music it is often represented through a steady and slow tempo. Shanta is a clear and cloudless state. Shanta is untroubled steadiness. Shanta is the key to eternity.

## **Veera**

Veera is heroism. It represents bravery and self-confidence. Manliness and valiance are the trademarks of a Veer or a fearless person. Courage and intrepidity in the face of daunting odds is heroism. Boldness in battle, the attitude with which martyrs go to war, and the valour with which they die are all aspects of heroism. Rama, the hero of the Ramayan, is typically the model for this Rasa. His confidence and heroism while facing the mighty ten-headed demon king Ravana is part of Indian legend, folklore and mythology. A somewhat different type of heroism is displayed by characters like Abhimanyu, who went to war knowing fully that he would be severely outnumbered and almost certainly die and yet fought so bravely as to earn accolades even from his enemies. In Indian music this rasa is represented by a lively tempo and percussive sounds.

## **Bhaya**

Bhaya is fear. The subtle and nameless anxiety caused by a presentiment of evil, the feelings of helplessness evoked by a mighty and cruel ruler, and the terror felt while facing certain death are all aspects of bhaya. The fear for one's well being and safety is supposed to be the most primitive feeling known to man. Bhaya is the feeling evoked while facing something that is far bigger and more powerful than oneself and which is dead set on one's destruction. Bhaya is the feeling of being overwhelmed and helpless. Dread, cowardice, agitation, discomposure, panic and timidity are all aspects of the emotion of fear. Bhaya is also used to characterize that which causes fear. People and circumstances that cause others to cower in terror before them are as central to portrayal of this rasa as those feeling the fear.

## **Karuna**

Karuna is grief and compassion. The feelings of unspeakable tragedy and despair, utter hopelessness and heartbreak, the sorrow caused by parting with a lover, the anguish caused by the death of a loved one are all Karuna. So also, the compassion and empathy aroused by seeing someone wretched and afflicted is Karuna. The sympathy and fellow feeling that sorrow engenders in the viewer is also karuna. Karuna can be of a personal nature as when one finds oneself depressed, melancholy and distressed. More impersonal sorrows relate to the despair regarding the human condition in general, the feeling that all human life is grief and suffering. It is Karuna of this sort that the Buddha was trying to overcome on his path to salvation.

## **Adbhuta**

Adbhuta is wonder and curiosity. The awe that one feels when one comes across something divine and supernatural, some power or beauty that is remarkable and never seen or imagined before is Adbhuta. Adbhuta is the curiosity of man regarding the creation of the world and all its wonders, the astonishment caused by seeing something unusual and magical. The appreciation of a marvel that goes beyond the routine and the mundane is Adbhuta. The glory of a king returning from a successful battle, the magical feats of a god are both adbhuta to a common man. Adbhuta is when divinity makes a surprise appearance in the world of men.