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# Atmosphären

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SONDERDRUCK



# ATMOSPHEREN

herausgegeben von Mădălina Diaconu & Zhuofei Wang

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SRISRIVIDHIYA KALYANASUNDARAM & SANDHIYA KALYANASUNDARAM

## Elemental Play (Līla)

Atmospherics of Perception through consciousness, emotions, senses and the body

### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an innovative aesthetic-ecological-consciousness model rooted in Indian traditional knowledge systems, particularly the *Pañcamahābhūta* (five elements). It aims to construct a novel framework for understanding the atmosphere, encompassing both theory and practice. It expands the notion of the 'body' as an interaction of elemental materialities and interprets atmosphere as a complex interplay of aesthetic emotions. Through the concept of *rasa* (the juice of aesthetic experience), it explores deep states of aesthetic experience, offering insights into imagination, creativity, and intuition for artists and aesthetes alike. Drawing from ancient Hindu thought, by examining oneness, duality, and multiplicity of consciousness states, it uncovers the potential for emerging multimodal atmospheric experiences, with implications for contemporary artistic practice and living.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rasa* is a term in Indian aesthetics that literally means juice, essence or taste and refers to the aesthetic flavor of an artistic work, that evokes a deep emotional resonance in a sensitive aesthete. While *rasa* is coded by the artist into their work, it also rises from one's state of mind, and consciousness. The concept of *rasa* in Indian aesthetics dates to 500BCE–500CE, with a dedicated section in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, an ancient text on the arts.

### KEYWORDS

elements;  
porous consciousness;  
*rasa*;  
multimodal perception;  
interior–exterior correspondence;  
paradoxical play

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An Indian theory of atmospherics might best be located in the elemental framework of *Pañcamahābhūta* (the five elements: Space, Wind, Water, Fire, Earth) and its interweaving with layers of being and existence. Developing an integrated and cohesive framework of how this all-pervasive concept relates to consciousness, the senses, the essence of emotion (*rasa*), and the body could provide the ground for an eco-aesthetic theory of atmospherics rooted in Indian thought. The ontology, epistemology and axiology that emerge from the central concept of *Pañcamahābhūta* lead to aesthetic experiences that are suffused into the natural world. This paper offers an innovative model of aesthetic, ecological consciousness that dynamically intertwines body and mind with affective atmospheres using traditional Indian knowledge systems. It first expands the notion of the ›body‹ as a kinetic interaction of the elements that constitute the materialities of air, water, earth, fire and space. It then develops a reading of the atmosphere as a sensate set of incessantly unfolding and intersecting pulsations at the confluence of aesthetic emotions. Finally, it brings together the body and the atmosphere as a philosophy of aesthetic ecological consciousness, proposing these new positions for understanding of the atmospherics in aesthetic perception.

Drawing upon ideas from ancient Hindu thought and its adaptation in creative practices, this paper seeks to reveal the architectonics of complex, layered perception as an aesthetic capacity, proposing that the concept of *rasa* as a deep state of perceptive beingness, allows for interpretive and layered possibilities of atmosphere. This has clear implications for imagination, creativity, intuition and creative practice for the artist, as well as for the sympathetic aesthete, *sahr̥daya*. This paper explores oneness, duality and multiplicity of states of consciousness as grounds for emerging multimodal atmospheric experiences and their potential relevance for contemporary practice and living.

The ideas examined here originate from the Vedic period of the Indian subcontinent, focusing on their influence on various philosophical, aesthetic,

and creative systems. Although rooted in Hinduism, these ideas are considered pan-Indian due to the cultural diversity within Hinduism and the permeation of concepts throughout Indian artistic expressions. Traditional Indian aesthetic principles, themselves philosophical traditions, have commonalities across faiths. The theory of atmospherics proposed here stems from classical Indian aesthetics and traditional Hindu thought. However, colonialism, rapid economic changes, and globalization have disrupted the continuity of these ideas, fragmenting their application and diminishing their presence in everyday consciousness. Nevertheless, pockets of traditional and contemporary artists continue to embody this intuitive tradition. Drawing on concepts from the Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and Trika philosophical schools, we synthesize a consciousness-based approach to atmospherics.

We build the argument by first establishing the correspondences and correlations between the exterior and the interior by unpacking the relationship between the elements, senses, body, breath and emotional states. These are further elaborated in the nature of the relationships between self and the other viewed through the lenses of unity, duality and multiplicity. The crucial turning point in Indian thought emerges through the deeper philosophical inquiry into existence as an illusory play of perception. Therefore the world of creative play and of forms, matter and materiality emerges in the intersection between these theatrical illusions and the direct insight that takes us beyond them. By establishing these connections, the paper then synthesises the potential that emerges in this intertwined space for the emergence of new perceptions and new states of consciousness, leading to the creation of diverse possibilities for different types of atmospherics. Finally, by locating atmospherics within the framework of an aesthetic-ecological model of consciousness, the importance of training consciousness to develop perceptual modes of experience is highlighted in the concluding sections.

1. The elemental theory of the *Pañcamahābhūtas* – establishes continuity between gross and subtle

- matter, allowing for continuous transmutations between the two.
2. The concept of the senses/*indriya* – extends the idea of sensory experience as a multifaceted phenomenon and emphasises the notion of training and attunement of the senses.
  3. The alchemy of experience locates the central power of the *rasa* theory and how the emotional states become key in building the relationship between elements and senses to provide the ground for creating and perceiving atmospheres.
  4. The imagination of the body and breath/life-force – In a fascinating mathematical permutation of twenty seven possible conceptualizations where mind and body are not separated, the flow of *Prāna* (life-force, vitality and breath) is the mediator of the dynamic dance between matter and energy in the various conceptualizations of the body.
  5. Elemental Play – With the correspondences between interiority and exteriority as the central key, the paper discusses the nature of perception that allows for fluid dynamics in the creation of diverse atmospheric possibilities.

Having proposed these new positions for understanding atmospherics in aesthetic perception, we conclude our argument by showing how in Indian thought, atmosphere and atmospherics are best located as a theory of elemental aesthetic consciousness, and how cultivating such a consciousness leads to new modes of perceptual experience that are multi-sensorial, multimodal and multi-dimensional.

## 2. APPROACH TO ATMOSPHERE AND ATMOSPHERICS

In traditional Indian thought, atmosphere and atmospherics are intricate concepts encompassing the interconnectedness of the cosmic, terrestrial, and personal realms. This holistic perspective transcends linear and spatial constraints, allowing for a rich engagement with reality. Atmosphere emerges as a tripartite reality, blurring subject-object differentiation into a multimodal and multidimensional play with beingness. Through the dissolution of subject-object dichotomy,

the individual cultivates a permeable consciousness capable of experiencing multiple layers of reality. Atmospheric in traditional Indian thought is not just the outer reality, it is a suffusion of exteriority into interior and interiority mapped back to exteriority, seamlessly flowing through multiple levels and layers of reality in the cosmic, terrestrial and personal realms.

Paradox and creativity are fundamental, facilitating a layered engagement with the world and revealing infinite possibilities of perception. This interplay between the individual and the universal, facilitated by cosmic elemental forces, generates a cyclical nature of time-space and a consciousness dwelling in non-linear, non-spatial perceptivity. This dynamic framework, bound to a cosmic law of harmony (*rta*), integrates cosmological and ecological dimensions into artistic expression and daily life. The body, as a complex field intersecting cosmic elemental connections, becomes a receptive and generative medium for plural atmospheres through creative play.

This creative formulation of the body-mind-intellect-senses and consciousness complex with a porous engagement with the world, allows for an Indian theory of atmospherics that is dynamic, plural, alogical, cosmological, and infinitely open-ended.

## 3. THE FIVE ELEMENTS AND THE COSMOLOGICAL BEING IN EXPERIENCE

The core principles of Indian thought (ritual, medicine, art...) emerge from the notion of the five elements, *pañcamābhūtas* – fire, wind, water, earth and space, representing both the macrocosm and the microcosm. The traditional cosmocentric vision of the human world locates itself in a cosmic order that governs all reality and frames the evolution of culture, ensuring balance and equilibrium in both nature and culture<sup>1</sup>.

Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat points out that there is a continuity between the ideas of gross matter and living beings, and that the *bhūtas* are sentient beings with the capacity to control both the gross material body and

1 Vatsyayan and Bäumer (ed.): *Pervasive Terms – Vyāpti*, 8

the subtle body of all life, in which there is a cycle of relationships between the gross and the subtle<sup>2</sup>.

The *Mahabhūtas* are considered to be the central principles of reality, or *tattvas*. There are twenty-five *tattvas* in *Sāṃkhya*, one of the schools of philosophy and thirty-six in *Trika* philosophy. According to Bäumer, the conceptualization of »The system of the *tattvas* presents a perfect ecological balance.« She points out how, in this system, ecology is integrated with the mental and spiritual dimensions, as the five elements cannot be separated from the subtle realities of the senses and the self and consciousness<sup>3</sup>.

This integrated approach to seeing the natural world as an indivisible whole with the individual human self is what distinguishes the way atmospheres can be imagined. By locating the heart of artistic practice in the elements and a cosmology that supports the equivalences between the outer and inner worlds, creating and perceiving atmospheres becomes a unique proposition in traditional Indian thought. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Bäumer postulate that the arts, embedded in their materiality in human life, are actually a transformation of the elements<sup>3,4</sup>.

In this approach, elements and humans are intertwined, permeable, inseparable and capable of multiple transformations and mutations. Atmospheres thus become dynamic possibilities that can be created in a multitude of layers, qualities and materials, with the transformation and transmutation of elements at their core. Every form of art and the inherent grammar of the form are in a constant state of being and becoming, in a constant state of flux in relationships that are dynamic and transformative with everything else. A subtle change in the materiality, quality or layer of an element can entirely shift the axis of form as well as the mood and atmosphere in which it is located. And this dynamism of the transforming element happens in the environment as much as it is directed and produced by the observer or the aesthete. Both have im-

mense power in their beingness to shift and transform the other.

#### 4. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ELEMENTS THROUGH THE SENSES-EMOTIONS-BODY-LIFE FORCE COMPLEX

##### 4.1 THE SENSES

In the conceptualization of senses as *indriyas* in *Sāṃkhya* Philosophy<sup>5</sup>, a multi-layered approach integrates the gross realms of the material body and its subtle sensorial capacities with subtler realms of cognitive awareness and self-reflexive consciousness<sup>6</sup>. It also layers these with embodied transformative experiences in the subtlest atomic layers of the cells entwined with the five elements that simultaneously act in the gross, subtle, and subtlest spaces of reality, establishing a rich and complex ecosystem for deep experiences.

In Indian traditions senses are not denied and sensuousness is celebrated with a thoughtful attitude and »chiselled refinement« of senses allows for deepening and expanding perception and perceptive nature of aesthetic experience<sup>7</sup>.

The capacity of the senses to move outwards and then inwards, in both celebration, life affirmation as well as harnessing of their energies inwardly in *yoga* (restraint) and *sadhana* (practice) are central ideas across Indian traditions, including artistic endeavours. Harnessing this multi-layered approach to senses enables a different ontology of creating and experiencing atmospheres through a interlinked ecology of the human and the elements.

According to master practitioner, architect and sculptor V. Ganapati Sthapati, the artist's role is not

5 While other philosophical systems and traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism differ in the articulation of the number of senses, or principles of reality, within the scope of this article, we look at the approach used in the *Sāṃkhya* school of thought that has a pan-Indian application in everyday life.

6 Vatsyayan: *Nature Tradition and Originality*, 20–72.

7 Vatsyayan: *Nature Tradition and Originality*, 21.

2 Filliozat: *Bhūta-Mahabhūta*, 49–100

3 Bäumer: *Agamic tradition and the arts*.

4 Coomarasamy: *The Transformation of Nature in Art*.



to replicate the sensorial experience in the form of artifacts, but the sensory experience, through its transformation in the inner landscape of the artist, in meditatively comprehending the underlying unity of all things that becomes the subject of the artwork<sup>8</sup>.

The artist in effect creates an atmosphere rather than a specific object of art through suggestion, essence and spirit allowing for dynamic interpretations and aesthetic experiences depending on the training and consciousness of the viewer.

#### 4.2 THE ALCHEMY OF EXPERIENCE:

##### RASĀNUBHAVA

Nine core emotions or qualities of being are defined in traditional Indian thought:

»The nine *rasas* of Indian fine arts have their ultimate derivation from the three different basic primary attributes (*guṇās*) that according to Indian thought enter into the making of the human personality, *sattva* or purity, i. e., universality and impersonality whose expressions are silence (*Śānta*) and compassion (*karuna*); *rajas*, i. e., dynamic creativity whose expressions are love (*Śṛṅgāra*), valor (*vīra*), and laughter (*hāsyā*); and *tamas* or ignorance, unbalance, and inertia, whose expressions are wonder (*adbhuta*), fury (*raudra*), loathsomeness (*bibhatsa*), and awesomeness (*bhayan-kara*)«<sup>9</sup>.

Heightening of the sensate experiences leads to *rasa*. Míśra and Misra describe the momentous instant of experiencing *rasa* as a state of communion rather than communication<sup>10</sup>.

The capacity to feel the *rasas*, allow them to flow through us, and find resonance with life's essence is considered to the alchemy of aesthetic experience, the very purpose of aesthetic pursuits in traditional Indian thought.

#### 4.3 THE BODY

At the heart of interpreting experience, lies interpretation of the body. The body in Indian thought is not a singular entity, but a complex layered and dynamic phenomenon. Body and breath are important concepts to be considered in the light of how atmosphere is emerged in perception. The body is seen as gross, subtle and transcendental in its layers. These layers further can be impacted by the qualities of *rajas* (passion, vitality & dynamism), *tamas* (chaos, inertia and darkness) and *sattva* (balance, peace & harmony). The body is also not an isolated entity and has its beingness in three worlds/dimensions (Cosmic, Terrestrial and Personal). Such a body then has the capacity to expand or contract its perceptual field depending on the dimensions and layers it chooses to activate.

How we think about the body, opens up how we experience the world. In Indian thinking, the body's layers of meaning allow it to be perceived as organic, structural, sentient through the *ātman* that acts through it, transient and composed of the elements<sup>11</sup>. It is also transcendental and made of the intelligent principle, Brahman and inseparable from the *ātman*. Thus the very conceptualization of the body allows an inbuilt set of paradoxes, dual/triad aspects in each dimension of its existence. They reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of existence, highlighting the interplay between contrasting states and dimensions within the conceptual framework of the body<sup>12</sup>.

It is this paradoxical multi-layered approach to body that allows for a sensuous acceptance and exploration of the macrocosm through the microcosm in the Indian arts. The biological body is celebrated for its existence and also as a conduit for the symbolic and the spiritual, for the abstract, subtle and transcendental. Given the envisioning of the body in duality/multiple aspects of different dimensions, it becomes possible for a fluid imagination of the body's functions, interactions, experiences and relationships with everything around it and with itself. *Līlā* (play) and

8 Kailasam: *A Shilpi Speaks*, Film.

9 Mukherjee: »Rasas« as *Springs of Art in Indian Aesthetics*, 92.

10 Míśra and Misra, *Foundations of Indian Aesthetics*, 144.

11 Vatsyayan and Bäumer: *Pervasive Terms – Vyāpti*, 89–90.

12 Vatsyayan and Bäumer (ed.): *Pervasive Terms – Vyāpti*, 93.

*Māyā* (creativity/paradox) become critical categories to understand manifestation and creation of the body/form.

The concept of cosmic life-breath, *Prāṇa* is entwined with the body and speak of deep interconnectedness across beings, the cosmos and the individual<sup>13</sup>.

##### 5. ELEMENTAL PLAY: A SYNTHESIS OF SENSES, CONSCIOUSNESS, BODY AND BEINGNESS

The senses play the critical bridging role between the world of elements and the world of consciousness (experiential, intellectual and emotional), thereby becoming the ground of art and aesthetic possibilities. *Rasas* or essential states of emotional beingness open up permutation combinations of experiential possibilities. Sensory possibilities blended and turned through the juices of emotional tuning become fertile ground for imaginative and creative play. Sensuousness is richly celebrated as a means to bring these worlds together and a range of symbols, motifs, metaphors and suggestive elements have been created in traditional Indian art to build the internal capacity of a human being to experience a layered multimodal, multidimensional sensual experience, where perception becomes direct insight, *Prakāśa* or self-illumination, self-reflexive nature of consciousness. Atmospheres in this approach emerges in this deep sensual appreciation of the world, through a highly developed emotional vocabulary and sensitivity. At the same time, the atmosphere is dependent on consciousness in its self-reflexive state to manifest itself. The unmanifest atmosphere pregnant with meaning also remains in a prepared state for play. Hence atmospheres become possible in different dimensions as visible and invisible, manifest and unmanifest, abstract and real, order and chaos, gross and subtle, and these categories fluidly move between each other in different states of self-reflexive consciousness producing infinite play, multiplicity and the paradox of all that is hidden and unhidden. The purpose of creating art lies in this middle-space, the interior sky of consciousness where worlds are created, sus-

tained and dissolved. Herein, atmospheres are simultaneously and in continuum created across the inner world of the individual, the terrestrial world and the cosmological divine world. Atmospheres are dynamic moving forces where forms and beings traverse in-between spaces collapsing hard boundaries and creating porous ones. These journeys create a cascading range of atmospheres in the mind of the viewer from gross to subtle to transcendent, seamlessly allowing celebration of the essence of life in and through form. The luminosity of self-reflection that makes the atmospheric cascades in the mind-heart-consciousness space of the viewer than moves between time and timeless in natural ease. This is a state of *ānanda*, blissful joy that transcends the gross and the subtle worlds. *Rasānubhava*, the experience that emerges from experiencing the universalised emotional states leads to this extraordinary experiential state of *ānanda*, opening up the heart-mind-intellect-body-consciousness complex into timeless-spaceless atmospheres. The seamless flow of atmospheric possibilities that can happen through states of *rasa*, power of metaphor and symbolism and suggestion, and the light of self-reflexivity is created in the realm of the *Mahābhūtas*, and their gross and subtle manifestations as well as their presence as beings in their own right.

In essence in traditional Indian thought Consciousness is seen as creative play. Abhinavagupta whose commentaries and expansion on Bharata's *rasa* theory continue to hold the most powerful ideas of Indian aesthetics roots his work in the Trika philosophy and his entire aesthetic metaphysics is based on play (*krīḍā*)<sup>14</sup>.

In play, body, breath, senses, intellect, consciousness, beingness can dissolve into oneness, be present in duality or transform itself into multiplicity of forms. In self-reflexivity they become aware and dwell in luminosity. This quality of light and reflection are essential characteristics of atmosphere to enter new states of being that transcend known human boundaries. And all of this becomes possible because

13 Vatsyayan and Bäumer (ed.): *Pervasive Terms – Vyāpti*, 125

14 Bäumer: *The Lord of the Heart*, 231.





of the simple equation that binds the interior and the exterior.

## 6. INTERIORITY-EXTERIORITY: NEW ATMOSPHERIC POSSIBILITIES

»*Sarvaṃ Sarvātmakam* – Everything is related to the whole«<sup>15</sup> is a fundamental principle that governs ancient Indian thought from the Vedic period reflected in philosophy, arts, cosmology and medicine.

The deep rooted conviction of this idea and notion of reality has been expressed through the dictum »The microcosm is the macrocosm« in many of the major Indian languages: *Yat pinḍe tat brahmāṇḍe* (Sanskrit). The resonance between the cosmos, the earthly, and the personal (*ādhidhaivika*, *ādhibhautika* and *ādhyāt-mika*) as tripartite realities that coalesce into a singular reality or unity of oneness, pervades the pan-Indian imagination.

The interesting aspect that concerns us in the perception that arises from this conceptualization of the universe and ourselves is its distinct potential in allowing for a fluid dynamics in creating diverse atmospheric possibilities. Hiriyanā, in his attempt to trace the history of Indian aesthetic thought and its evolution traces a crucial turning point to doctrine of self (*ātman*) in which the entire essence of life resides in its greatest clarity within the inner self rather than in the external world. The philosophical shift in perspective, led to emphasizing absolute kinship between nature and humanity. According to Hiriyanā, the real breakthrough is in the clear emergence of the idea that what is commonly perceived as real is only a semblance of the ultimate reality and yet it is possible to experience the underlying unity of reality within oneself using the limited world of senses and thought<sup>16</sup>.

Hiriyanā's insightful unraveling of the ground of Indian aesthetics provides us the key to elaborating the landscape in which creativity pans in the traditional Indian artist. While the essence of life is conceived

as residing within oneself, it is also proposed that reality itself is one, there is no duality to it. This rather perplexing discovery provides a unique and creative stage to the individual observer. A cosmic expanse within oneself; a scaled, proportionate expanded self, an immensely creative potential to take form, a deep awareness that any form is a state of illusion. There are then four very remarkable atmospheric possibilities that emerge

THE ATMOSPHERICS OF ABSTRACTION, FORM-LESSNESS AND BEYOND FORM – A singular whole, all pervasive essence and unity, abstract and formless. *Arūpa* or *pararūpa* allows for cosmic elemental play where void, fullness, emptiness, the unheard sound, the unspoken word, the unmanifest potential are richly present in a totality of beingness. This is beyond emotions. Bliss or *Ānanda* is an emotion that is in its unwitnessed state. The potential sound, the potential word, the pregnant meaning, everything remains in their unmanifest, undifferentiated whole, the creative energy immeasurable. It is timeless and void.

THE ATMOSPHERICS OF DUALITY, WITNESSING AND THE WITNESSED – The whole that can split into two and can paradoxically take pleasure in observing itself in its capacity to witness the duality.

This allow for relationships and intimacy, observing and being observed, being in love, in devotion, in presence and absence and the cosmic elements become participants, witnesses, and create the world in which duality can reside. Time and space is particular, contained, defined.

THE ATMOSPHERICS OF MULTIPLICITY – The whole that can multiply and thoroughly enjoy the play and the multiplicity of its own creative possibilities of form. This allows for a creative vivacity of forms to burst forth, the elements are beings, alive, creating innumerable forms- creation, balance and destruction are a cyclical force, forever playing out the drama of life and death. Creative effulgence, dynamic sustenance and continuous dissolution: *Sṛṣṭi-Sthiti-Saṃhāra* of forms are a layered unfolding of the cosmic essence in its most playful state. All emotions play out, the elements become dynamic and the three

15 Vatsyayan and Bäumer (ed.): *Primal Elements – Mahābhūta*, XI.

16 Hiriyanā: *Art Experience*, 2–3.

qualities of *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva* combine with the five *pañchamahābhūtas* and take shape into infinite forms and emotions. Time and space is plural, infinite, uncontained, expansive.

THE ATMOSPHERICS OF ILLUSION – All three states of being play out in the stage of the inner self. The fourth emerges in a space when there is a realisation that any state of existence is illusory if the deeper state of unity is forgotten. Hence consciousness becomes the key perceptive force to unlock the possibilities of aesthetic experience. *Līlā* (Play), *Māyā* (Illusive, paradoxical play) are both central concepts in Indian thought that enable the unmanifest universal consciousness to manifest in oneness, duality or a multiplicity of forms. While illusion offers an individual self, multiple options to dissociate from the unified field of experience, the true aesthetic and philosophical goal of the culture provides constant reminders that illusion in itself is yet another layer of atmospherics which one must look beyond. Hence a fascinating play between the atmospherics of illusion and the atmospherics of unity, duality and multiplicity become the grammar, technique and formal approaches of the varied art forms: visual, sculptural, poetic, performative as well as architectural. This continuous paradoxical play becomes the hidden key to unlock atmospherics in ancient Indian art as well as thought.

#### 7. THE UNIVERSAL IN BEINGNESS: ATMOSPHERICS AS AESTHETIC ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In Indian aesthetics, while stories emerge in the narratives of individual characters, the process of impersonalization, allows for the emphasis to be placed on enduring and abiding emotions that transcend these individual narratives or personal experiences. The aesthete encounters the creative work in a realm where they transcend their own everyday lives and the mundane emotions they are familiar with, by experiencing the emotions in an aesthetic plane that is supra mundane<sup>17</sup>. In this aesthetic state one does not

feel fleeting and accidental or reactionary emotions, but is in a mindful state of responsive emotions to experiences that are beyond limitations of time, space, context or personhood and become universal. Here both the artist and aesthete are in an active state of creating atmospheres that are at the intersection of the personal and the impersonal. Therefore atmosphere is not bound by subject-object divide or intersubjective possibilities. Atmosphere is created as part of a universalization process. Through depth studies of emotional states, sensory states and consciousness states, the Indian aesthetic theories arrive at a point of impersonalization and multiplicity. Creating a shared space of resonance guides this process. The imagination of the artist and the aesthete meet in a fluid space when the underlying unity and deeper truth of life is revealed through all the plural possibilities. This transition from the individual narrative to its deeper cosmological truth becomes a shared atmosphere created in subtle and transcendent realms even as the seeming material reality unfolds in the gross layers. The ability for developing this multi-layered perception of atmosphere is central to training and developing an innate gift of aesthetic potential.

The quality of *Sattva* or pure mind, is a state of beingness where there is a capacity to be free of the grip of one's own everyday emotions while being able to rejoice in the sensual pleasure and knowledge of emotions through one's lived experiences. In its *Sattvic* nature, the mind is no more constantly generating reactionary responses, but remains in an alert state of listening, observation and mindful participation. In this state, both artists and aesthetes can engage in the universalization of experiences, while appreciating plurality and revelling in the underlying essence of life.

At the same time, reality is simultaneously one and many and can be experienced only in the heart-consciousness, where *rasa* can unfold. *Rasa* therefore becomes the creator of atmospheric possibilities in this interior space. Using heightened intensity is a key principle, Bäumer points out how the senses provide a conduit for communing with the Divine, serving as a bridge between ordinary perception and the realiza-

17 Mukherjee: »Rasas« *As Springs of Art in Indian Aesthetics*, 92.



tion of profound consciousness through the aesthetic refinement and sublimation of sensory experiences<sup>18</sup>.

While aesthetic experience is considered different from everyday experience due to the universalization of emotions, everyday experiences too become coloured by aesthetic possibilities depending on the consciousness and training of the individual. For a trained individual, it becomes possible to parse everyday reality through the constructs of the aesthetic ecological consciousness, by providing a certain deliberation and reflection of the experience rather than getting mired in it. Through dedicated practice and training of the senses, emotions, body and breath as life-force, individuals can develop heightened sensitivity to aesthetic nuances in everyday life. This allows them to perceive the inherent complexity and harmony in ordinary experiences, transforming them into aesthetic encounters. Through refining their consciousness, individuals develop a deeper appreciation for aesthetic subtleties as their potential to experience, transform and create atmospheres emerges. In this light, the potential of expanding atmospherics as aesthetic ecological consciousness through the traditional approaches has much to offer to modern living. When subtlety and deep self-reflexiveness guide everyday experiences, then how we perceive our own needs in relation to the cosmic harmony begins to shift towards creating an atmospherics of interconnectedness, balance and responsible stewardship. This mindful engagement with everyday life not only enhances personal well-being but also fosters a deeper sense of connection to the larger tapestry of existence.

## 8. PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE:

### MULTI-SENSORIAL, MULTIMODAL AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MEETING POINTS

The atmosphere in traditional Indian thought is a total perceptual experience. A total perceptual experience emerges at the capacity to fully use all of the senses simultaneously, to create a whole vision of that which is to be perceived, and to use multimodality as a tech-

nique to deepen, heighten and allow the senses to be active with awareness and alertness. Each mode of awakening a sense, layering it with another sense, entwining the senses into a newer whole where perception is vivid is a moment when the time-lag between sensorial grasp of an experience is shortened and happens in very quick succession or at such great speed that it is literally a direct insight, a direct perception emerging in intuition. This allows for a multi-dimensional engagement with an experience or rather the experience reveals itself in a multi-dimensional, seamless time-space, the *Cidākāśa*- inner sky, where the outer and inner meet into an infinite unfurling of life-essence. This kind of perception creates an atmosphere that is real in dimensions that can emerge only where the body-mind-intellect-senses and consciousness complex converge into a time-space field of great intensity. This state of beingness is considered to be the blossoming of *rasa*, which, creates an intensely unified atmosphere where the subject-object differentiation collapses, and a transcendent experience is felt. The meditative practice of beingness that leads to such perceptivity resides in training one's inner axis to align with the natural order of the cosmos. This connecting of the inner and outer is a fascinating and critically important aspect of Indian thought, that allows for aesthetic perception to occur in porosity. Here then, the atmosphere is no more external, nor is it only internal, the idea of duality is collapsed by drawing it on one end into multiplicity and on the other end into unity. This seamless transfer that allows for unity, duality and multiplicity to co-occur at any point of experience, creates rich dynamics of atmosphere for the experienter, the artist and the aesthete.

As Böhme and Thibaud emphasize: »The aesthetics of atmospheres shifts attention away from the ›what‹ something represents, to the ›how‹ something is present. In this way, sensory perception as opposed to judgment is rehabilitated in aesthetics and the term ›aesthetic‹ is restored to its original meaning, namely the theory of perception.«<sup>19</sup>

18 Bäumer: *The Lord of the Heart*, 228.

19 Böhme and Thibaud: *The Aesthetics of Atmosphere*, 47.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The synthesis we have developed and the interconnections across diverse concepts of Hindu philosophies and aesthetic traditions offer a consciousness based approach to atmospherics in Indian tradition. The inner and the outer are suffused into unity, duality and multiplicity, allowing for perceptive dimensions that are layered, multimodal, individual, universal and plural. Such perceptivity allows for varied atmospheres to be created in imagination as well as representation through the language of metaphor, symbol and iconography, as well as the distinct techniques and grammar that emerge in the context of each art form or creative expression. All that is capable of life stems from, is balanced by and dissolves into the five great elements, thereby making them central to the creation of any atmosphere in human vision, perception, creative acts, or ways of being. The elements themselves are alive, they are beings with their own phenomenal and physical existence completely collapsing the boundaries between subject and object, living and non-living.

Within the intricate cycle of life and death, humans are not passive observers but active participants, intricately intertwined with the atmosphere. They both shape and are shaped by it, undergoing processes of being, becoming, and dissolving as integral components of the atmospheric continuum. This viewpoint underscores the profound interconnectedness between humans and their environment, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between beings and the atmosphere in the ongoing flux of existence. This great porosity of life and death provides a unique vision that is cosmotheandric where the cosmic and terrestrial

worlds meet in the individual self, in unity, and atmospherics is played out in interiority, in the *Cidākāśa*, inner heart-sky.

The individual capacity to experience this multimodal perception of atmosphere is trained, an aesthetic skill. The following attitudes and ways of being that may open one's own innate potential to be a *sahridaya*, a resonant aesthete or a *Hṛdaya-samvāda*, one with the key to surrender and experience the essence of life,

- › The willingness to forego a singular definition of reality,
- › The openness to a layered reality where beingness is sensate aliveness of the elements, *bhūta*;
- › The strength to be vulnerable to one's own sensorial possibilities while residing in sattvic consciousness;
- › The imagination to remain porous and allow life to flow through one's self;
- › The willingness to converse through the heart recognising unity in duality and multiplicity.

Such states of consciousness open the gateway to multimodal perceptivity and hence to a deeper engagement with atmospheres - in creating them, meaning-making with them, savoring them, co-creating them or just perceiving them as direct insight in self-reflexive luminosity.

At a time of ecological crisis, when we seek to find new ways to engage with the natural world and ourselves, expanding the concepts and theories of aesthetics of atmosphere through traditional Indian approaches offers new directions to human consciousness at large and a greater versatility to how we imagine, create and experience atmospheres.



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