

The Futuristic Undertones: Rasadhvani in Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

The paper entitled The Futuristic Undertones: Rasadhvani in Advertisements is an attempt to subject Indian television commercials to critical study by employing the oriental theory of Rasadhvani propounded by Abhinavagupta to gain understanding of the futuristic underpinnings behind the advertisements. The paper proves and solidifies the validity and universality of Indian theories. The use of indigenous theory of Rasadhvani as the critical basis for modern mass communication highlights the need for cultural integration of ancient and modern perspectives. The paper brings to notice the hidden ideologies silently propagated through suggesting emotions rather than the literal expression of facts. Creation and transmission of emotions immortalise the product in the mind of the spectator, thus shaping the spectator's consciousness in the way they like. Advertisements generate dissatisfaction, frustration, confusion, insecurity and competition in addition to promoting materialism and undermining human values. The indiscriminate obsession for speed is a form of bigotry towards anything that is traditional and slow. It diminishes the human capacity to endure. It instils in him an inordinate urge to accomplish anything and everything in the wink of an eye, which is literally impossible.

Keywords: futurism, rasadhvani, bigotry, vyanjana, ideology, propaganda, psyche.

The paper attempts to shed light on the silent advocacy of excessive fascination for speed portrayed in advertisements by employing the oriental theory of Rasadhvani proposed by Abhinavagupta. The paper calls into question the modernist urge for acceleration exhibited in television commercials, which is in itself a form of bigotry towards anything that is slow or normal.

The aesthetics of a country is the quintessence of its culture and civilisation. Indian aesthetics is marked by a striking breadth of outlook that testifies to its unflinching devotion to the quest of the ennobling aesthetic pleasure. There are eight schools of criticism in Indian aesthetics. They are not mutually conflicting entities but complementary streams, each of which is dealing with a particular poetical component aimed at the development of the soul of poetry or rasa. The eight schools of Indian aesthetics are the Rasa school of Bharatha, the Alamkara school of Bhamaha, the Guna school of Acharya Dandin, the Riti school of Vamana, the Dhvani school of Anandavardhana, the Vakrokti school of Kuntaka, the Anumana school of Mahimabhata and the Auchitya school of Ksemendra. Though the different schools of Indian criticism present a diversity of views, the stamp of mutual

interdependence is discernible in all of them. Rasa is the core of Indian aesthetics and all other qualities revolve round this concept.

The Dhvani theory could be traced back to the findings of Dhvanikara who derived impetus from the works of early grammarians and was founded on the analogy of the quasi-grammatical theory of sphota proposed by Bhartrhari.

The *sphota*, which has been likened to the neo-platonic *logos* is often translated by the terms ‘expression’, ‘concept’ or ‘idea’...it may be explained as the sound of a word as a whole, and as conveying a meaning apart from its component letters (varnas)...The sounds of a word as a whole, therefore, and apart from those of the constituent letters, reveal the sphota. (Kumar 456-7)

Earlier grammarians maintained the view that works of literature possessed latent meanings and believed in the existence of the ideal word. Vacaka-s(expressive symbols) along with the bodhaka-s (indicative symbols) like gestures, stress, intonation, form part of language.

Dhvani siddanta, rooted in Anandhavardhana’s treatise *Dhvanyaloka*, is considered as an extension of the rasa theory into the realm of poetry. Dhvani thrusts its focus upon the method of treatment while rasa concentrates on the ultimate effect obtained out of a work of art. He maintains that suggestion is the soul of poetry. “He(Anandhavardhana) has the distinction of introducing in Sanskrit poetics the semantics of poetic language; ...turning the focus of critical discussion from the outward linguistic style and poetic embellishments to the more complex issue of linguistic structure in poetry”(Devy 31).

The theories of rasa and Dhvani were combined by Abhinavagupta as rasabhadhvani siddhanta. “Abhinavagupta says *rasah dhvanih eva*”(Barlingay 324). Emotions cannot be expressed directly by words, it can only be suggested. That is, rasa is realised through suggestion.

In Abhinavagupta’s words, there are different psychological steps in the realisation of rasa which include the recognition of the formal elements, idealisation of things by the power of imagination and then the appeal to awaken the sthayibhava of the reader or spectator. “...the relish of rasa is manifested as a unity in the heart, leaving no trace of the constituent elements; and this is why the *rasa dhvani* is called *asamlakshyakrama-vyangya* or the suggested sense with imperceptible stages”(Raja 289).

Abhinavagupta puts forward the three levels of meaning- abhidha, laksana and vyanjana. Abhidha(the denotative function) refers to the literal meaning of a word, sentence or a speech while laksana(the indicative function) denotes the contextual meaning. The third level of meaning, vyanjana(the suggestive meaning), deals with the latent sense and involves the socio-cultural readings. When the primary meaning fails to provide the full significance of a sentence, the man of taste(sahridaya) proceeds to the secondary level of meaning.

Hence, the three essential requisites of the laksana are the incompatibility (or exhaustion) of the primary sense, the connexion of the indicated sense with the primary sense, and the reason or motive (prayojana) for resorting to it. As the denotation is dependent on wordily convention (*vyavaharika samketa*), so is the indication (as Mammata points out) upon the special convention based on these three requisites. (Kumar 460)

Indian philosophers classify poetry into three broad categories, namely, the *citra-kavya*, *gunibhutavyangya-kavya* and *Dhvani-kavya*. *Citra-kavya* or pictorial poetry is the lowest in quality since it lacks suggestion. Anandhavardhana considers *citra-kavya* as *vag-vikalpa* and *kavyanukarah*, a mere imitation. *Gunibhutavyangya-kavya* possesses charm but has no *Dhvani* and the suggested sense is made subservient to the expressed sense. Hence, *Dhvani-kavya*, by virtue of its possession of *Dhvani*, is the highest type of poetry. *Dhvani-kavya* is defined by Dhvanikara: “the learned call that particular kinds of poetry *dhvani* in which the (expressed) word and sense subordinating themselves, manifest that (other suggested) sense” (Kumar 470).

But Anadhavardhana opines that the real function of facts and figures of speech in poetry is to ultimately lead the spectator to the relishing of *rasa*. *Vastu-dhvani* and *alamkara-dhvani* ultimately terminate in the development of *rasa*.

Even though the primary sense of a word is definite and fixed, it can suggest various other ideas through factors such as the peculiar character of the speaker, or the person addressed, the sentence, the presence of another person, the expressed meaning, the occasion, the place, the time, the intonation or the gestures. The idea or the figure of speech suggested could be either feasible in itself (*svatahsambhavi*) or invented by the imagination of the poet (*kavipraudhoktinispanna*). (Raja 311)

Advertisement, an audio-visual form of marketing communication in the postmodern times functions by suggesting both meanings and emotions. In the opinion of John J. Burnett, “advertising is the non-personal communication of marketing related information to a target audience, usually paid for by the advertiser, and delivered through mass media in order to reach the specific objectives of the sponsor” (Nair and Mathew 9). The word advertising is derived from the Latin word ‘advertere’ which means ‘to turn’; thus, advertising is the turning of attention to something. Advertisement, apt means of mass communication, benefits the producer, educates the consumer, and supports the salesman. Even though it is not delivered by an actual person or addressed to a specific person, it is efficient in quickly covering a huge number of customers scattered over a wide area.

The advertisers employ varied types of appeals to catch the attention of customers, like emotional appeal, rational appeal, moral appeal, humour appeal, beauty appeal, scarcity appeal, fear appeal, masculine-feminine appeal, etc. Advertising copy, the written or spoken message that the advertiser intends to transmit to the audience, can be expressed in words, figures, voices, visuals, pictures, paintings, etc. Advertisement exercises tremendous influence on the tastes, beliefs, customs, practices and behaviour of the society. John O’ Toole describes advertising as “it is not related to studies, but it educates. It is not a journalist but gives all information. And it is not an entertaining device but entertains everyone” (Nair and Mathew 103).

Advertisements provide a wide canvass for critical analysis, since they knowingly or unknowingly propagate various ideologies. *Rasadhvani*, propounded by Abhinavagupta, offers effective tools for the analysis of propagandas latent in advertisements. Advertisements work by suggesting emotions rather than the literal expression of facts. Creation and transmission of emotions immortalise the products in the minds of the spectators and also shape their consciousness in the way they like.

The most noteworthy feature of Indian theories is their flexibility. When these indigenous theories are used as the critical basis for modern mass communication, they could be modified and revised in the light of modern critical precepts and practices. This can lead to a cultural integration between ancient and modern perspectives on the nature of poetic experience, the process of poetic creation and the aesthetic enjoyment by the spectators..

The real aim of this study is to make an objective study of the theory of rasa-dhvani so as to prove that it can be applied to any genre of art. It would highlight the validity of the Oriental theories, if a modern means of mass communication is studied in the light of the fundamental aesthetic theory of the East i.e. the theory of rasa-dhvani. An attempt has been made in this dissertation to study Indian television commercials in Malayalam channels in fresh light by employing the theory of Rasa-dhvani proposed by Abhinavagupta.

Modern world is characterised by the unending and unreasonable fascination that human beings hold for speed, which gets reflected in the television advertisements of today. It seems as if modern man is in a chase to catch something before it slips from his hands. "Increasing mobility meant people moved away from their parents and communities, shifted jobs and employer-loyalties, thus rendering them far more unstable, without moorings or strong local ties"(Nayar 90). Humans take little notice of what gets trampled underfoot in the mad pursuit for speed, technology, luxury and happiness.

In modern times, everything is expected to be done quickly. We adore the fastest race cars, fastest aeroplanes, the fastest swimmer, fastest spinter while the slowest is disregarded and is held in contempt. The love for acceleration makes the blood pressure to rise instantly when the leg of the driver is on the accelerator. By engaging in such sorts of adventures, people tend to risk their own as well as others' lives. Speed in itself cannot be a bad thing, certainly but an excess of it can have very serious repercussions.

Speed, Aldous Huxley noted, was the only experience unique to the twentieth century. Even flight had been known to mythology's Icarus and the Montgolfier brothers in the eighteenth century. Contracting time and space with the help of sophisticated machinery was a fundamental part of the modernist project. (Bayley 1)

Futurism, a very short-lived avant-garde modernist movement, puts its thrust on speed and technology and on such objects as car and aeroplane. This movement in European art and literature was "launched in 1909 by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in the first of many Futurist manifestos"(Baldick 108). The movement which was intended to smash everything traditional, was announced in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. It rejected artistic traditions and conventions to embrace the dynamism and speed of the twentieth century machine age. This paper analyses the subtle promotion of fascination for 'over speed' in television advertisements. Edward Albert in his *History of English Literature* talks about the haste exposed by people during the inter-war period.

In the inter-War years life generally was lived in an atmosphere of hustle and restlessness never before known. At work and at play the demand was for more and faster action, stronger and more violent stimulus, and the general atmosphere thus created was by its very nature inimical to the cultivation of literary pursuits, which necessarily demand a degree of calmness of spirit and leisure of mind. (509)

Christopher Butler quotes from Moholy-Nagy's essay titled "Constructivism and the proletariat" in his work *Modernism A Very Short Introduction*: "The reality of our century is technology: the invention, construction, and maintenance of machines. To be a user of machines is to be of the spirit of this century. It has replaced the transcendental spiritualism of past eras"(119).

The advertisements of motorbikes advocate speed beyond measure but always warns the audience that high risk is involved in the adventurous performance shown in the advertisement and that none, especially, children should imitate them. Even though they verbally advise the viewers to avoid breakneck speed and take caution, they wish the youngster to adopt swiftness and to use their brand. This silent approval, rather the promotion of the love for speed can be understood when we look for the vyanjana of the advertisement. These advertisements do operate by the suggestion of the art emotion 'vira'. The evoking of the life emotion(sthayibhava) 'utsaha' in the spectator compels him to buy the bike.

The advertisement of 'Nerolac Express' painting hints at the modern man's impatience and the passion for speed. The advertisement shows the mess associated with the painting of a house and asks the viewers to dial a toll free number to avail the service of Nerolac express painting. The advertisement promotes the idea that there is value only for speed and it is interesting to note that no time is given for the first coat to dry so that the second one can be applied. This love for speed highlighted in this advertisement induces a false belief that slow is boring and everything can be gained in the wink of an eye. The hollowness of this argument becomes clear when we contrast it with the working of government offices in India.

The advertisement of 'MTS' is noteworthy since it beautifully captures a new born babe's urge to acquire high speed internet. The baby as soon as it comes out of his mother's womb, searches in Google to know how to cut the umbilical cord, with no emotions cuts it by himself, leaps out of the bed, takes a selfie with the nurse, and uploads it. This overwrought presentation of redundant yearning for rapidity indicates the society's impatience.

In the song in the advertisement of 'Amulya dairy whitener', there are subtle hints of a liking for excessive speed. The lyrics which goes "njodi edayil puthu swad unarthum" is self-evident. There has been a lot of processes behind the making of Amulya and it seems like it has emerged all of a sudden and that it provides new taste suddenly. Another example which progresses in the very same fashion is the advertisement of 'Bru Instant'. The very naming of the product underlines its underlying motive. The song which narrates the making of the coffee as simple and quick as pouring milk into the cup containing coffee powder. It creates a false impression that the process of making a cup of coffee can be accomplished in a single second.

The advertisement of 'Volini', the balm for reducing the pain, comes with the caption "vedanayil ninnu udan adi aaswasam". It is shown that the second the product is applied, the woman shown in the advertisement is able to jump up from bed and can do any sort of work. The advertisement of 'Moov' also travels along the same line and the wife who was suffering from a sudden attack of pain in her back, is able to throw herself up and dance with her husband, at the very moment of applying the balm. This reduces the capacity of humans to endure pain which is unavoidable in the course of life.

The advertisement of ‘Chakson Rice Cooker’ which comes with the caption “samaya labham, indhana labam”, which can be translated as “time conservation, fuel conservation”. The advertisement convinces the audience, especially the mothers of school going children that, it is so easy to cook rice so that the mother can sleep peacefully as long as she wishes for, with no need to rise up early in the morning to send their children to school, with lunch.

The advertisement of the cookie, ‘Dark Fantasy’ has the caption “can’t wait, won’t wait”. The advertisement promotes an air of restlessness and a dislike for patient waiting, a common theme associated with romantic literature. The toffee ‘Kopiko’ is described as “pocket coffee” in its advertisement which apprises the instantaneity, the modern world largely long for.

The demonstration of obsession for speed gets exaggerated in the advertisements of cooking products like palappam mix, idiyappam mix, appam mix, puttu podi, etc. The greatest worry of women of any era is the kitchen work. These advertisements give the feeling that kitchen work does not take any time. This is untrue, since kitchen work cannot be completed with such speed as it is portrayed in the advertisement, even when these products are used instead of the traditional ways of cooking.

The advertisement of ‘Double Horse Palappam Mix’, starred by the famed cine artist Shobana, also becomes the mouth piece of high speed. The mother-in-law who goes on grumbling about the time she has to wait to have the palappam is shocked to see the palappam getting ready just after she finishes narrating the processes involved in the preparation of palappam in the traditional way.

The advertisement of ‘Nirapara Easy Palappam Mix’ is also having a similar structure which promotes briskness over sluggishness. The actress Kavya Madhavan finds it very easy to receive guests since she has nirapara easy palappam mix ready at her house. The advertisement promotes that easiness can only be caused by acceleration rather than crawling.

‘Double Horse Payasam Mix’, another product whose advertisement aggrandizes the enthrallment of speed, crosses all boundaries. Shobana prepares payasam within the time she takes to count up to ten. The advertisement says “aareyum kothippikkunna swad njodi edayil” This is indubitably an overstatement and shows the perpetual affinity for speed.

The advertisements of health drinks like ‘Horlicks’, ‘Complan’, etc. claim that those children who drink these products grow faster than the rest of the children. Everyone knows that the growth of children take time but mothers get easily persuaded to buy them when they see these advertisements. These advertisements again inculcate in the spectator, the unnecessary obsession for speed.

Another exemplification of the passion for fastness are the advertisements of internet service providers like Airtel, Idea, Vodafone, etc. which enforces the conviction of the modern times that speed is the most essential feature of internet service that one has to look for. The advertisement of ‘hotstar’ advises the audience implicitly that having low data is the worst thing that can happen to humans and that it is better to download the favourite shows and programmes when the Wi-Fi connection is made available. Most video viewing sites like YouTube offer features like watch it later. It is like we need not wait and we should not wait.

The advertisement of ‘Vodafone 4G’ has an aged couple making the maximum use of high speed internet made available by Vodafone. The couple can access Google maps from

remote places, go live on Facebook, make video call and upload photos and videos in a crowded place like railway station. The advertisement of 'Idea 4G' claims that the whole of India has been hooked up since internet services can be availed at high speed. This advertisement totally neglects the major chunk of the population of India, who cannot find a square meal a day, while creating a feeling among the audience that high speed internet was the thing that India needed the most. The advertisement of 'Airtel 4G' even arranges a competition to see who has the greatest speed in accessing various sites.

The advertisement of 'Siso Hair Colour Shampoo' claims that it will take only five minutes to finish dying the hair, again subtle promotion of agility. The advertisement of 'Good Night Fast Card' instigates the idea that everything must be carried out in the fraction of a second. It becomes unambiguous when the boy says "tappennu kazhinju". The advertisement of 'Vim', which is accompanied by the caption, "nooru cherunarangayude sakti", is again a reminder of the people's unconditional love for legerity. In the advertisement, the one-hour which was dedicated for the cleansing of utensils is saved by the quick action of Vim.

The advertisement of 'Glucovitta Bolts' even exaggerates the mad passion humans have for the exorbitant acceleration. A naughty boy does everything to make a dog which stood near to the boy, angry. When the dog runs after him, he consumes one glucovitta bolt and is not seen, as it gives him instant energy to run fast. The mother is not seen as advising her child not to irritate dogs. Instead, she puts a pack of glucovita bolts in her son's pocket, thus inculcating in the boy, a glamour for enormous speed.

Advertisements related to diseases and medicine also follow the same hidden ideology of a passion for speed which crosses all bounds. The advertisement of 'life bouy' pledges that it will remove ninety nine percent of germs within ten seconds and mocks the other guy who argues that one minute must be spent in washing the hands so as to remove all the dirt. Since seconds and minutes are such a short span of time, the advertisement is promoting a craving for high speed. The advertisement of 'Vicks Vaporub' also promotes the idea that only those medicines that provide fast relief is effective, thereby, educating the audience that everything must be achieved in a second without winking the eye.

The analysis of these advertisements reveals the fact that 'speed' is extolled over anything. This mad pursuit for speed is the result of rapid industrialisation and mechanisation. It paved the way for consumerism and a dislike for all that is traditional. Modern man is caught between an urge to explore modern technologies and a fear of losing his roots in tradition.

The nostalgia for what-was-once-modern-and-radical-but-has-now-been-displaced by the generation of 'moderns' refers to the continuous process of modernization itself, a process that goes with ghettoization. The antagonism that such a ghettoization engenders is also marked by the creation of desire for the mobility from the 'poor' to the 'posh', a desire that is closely aligned, in contemporary Indian cities, with the culture of consumption. (Nayar 90)

Advertisements, which consume the lion share of the time spent in watching television, has an indispensable influence on its viewers. It is one of the effective media for the propagation of varied ideologies. In the guise of marketing a product, the advertiser plays a crucial role in supporting the status-quo and does not aim at overthrowing the agencies that

possess power. Advertisements embrace the very spirit of modernism-‘an ardent desire to fly and not to walk’. But the love for velocity exceeds the limit when it promotes an air of restlessness, an indirect effect of mechanisation, urbanization and modernisation. The advertisements of ‘MTS’ which presents the unimaginable growth of a new born baby and the advertisements of internet service providers flatters speed beyond measure. This craving for excessive agility wipes away from humans, their capacity to endure pain, to wait patiently or to act after giving a thought to things. “Advertisements have the capability to construct, reinforce and disseminate social representations. The persistent screening of advertisements replete with assurances, subtly or overtly, influences values and beliefs and thus behavior of the target viewer segment”(Jha 11).

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