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VYABHICĀRIBHĀVAS AND CITTAVṚTTS IN CLASSICAL INDIAN THOUGHT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Classical Indian thought presents a highly sophisticated understanding of emotional and cognitive processes through diverse *śāstric* traditions. This paper undertakes a comparative study of *Vyabhicāribhāvas* (transitory emotional states) from Bharata Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *cittavṛttis* (mental modifications) from Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, with interpretative support from *Kāvyaprakāśa* of Mammaṭa, *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Viśvanātha, and the commentaries of Vyāsa and Vijñānabhikṣu. While *Vyabhicāribhāvas* represent dynamic affective fluctuations contributing to aesthetic realization (*rasa*), *cittavṛttis* denote the cognitive-affective operations governing consciousness. The study argues that these two frameworks together constitute a comprehensive model of emotional behavior, integrating expression, cognition, and regulation. This synthesis reveals striking parallels with modern behavioral psychology, particularly in the domains of emotional modulation, cognitive appraisal, and self-regulation.

Keywords: *Vyabhicāribhāva, Cittavṛtti, Nāṭyaśāstra, Yoga Sūtra, Indian aesthetics, behavioral psychology*

Introduction

Indian philosophical and aesthetic traditions provide an integrated framework for understanding emotional and cognitive life. Bharata Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra* explains the emergence of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) through a dynamic interplay of factors:

विभावानुभावव्यभिचारिसंयोगाद्रसनिष्पत्तिः।
vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisaṃyogād rasaniṣpattiḥ
(*Nāṭyaśāstra* VI.33)

This formulation recognizes emotional experience as a **constructed and dynamic phenomenon**, shaped by stimuli, expression, and transient states.

Patañjali, in contrast, approaches the mind from a regulatory perspective:

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योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः।
yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ
(*Yoga Sūtra* I.2)

Thus, while Bharata's framework describes **emotional manifestation**, Patañjali's system explains **mental control and transformation**. This paper examines how these two systems intersect to form a unified theory of emotional behavior.

Vyabhicāribhāvas: The Dynamics of Emotional Experience

Bharata defines *Vyabhicāribhāvas* as transient states that support the dominant emotion:

ये तु स्थायिनं भावमनुवर्तन्ते ते व्यभिचारिणः।
ye tu sthāyinaṃ bhāvam anuvartante te vyabhicāriṇaḥ
(*Nāṭyaśāstra* VI.24)

These 33 *bhāvas*—including *śaṅkā* (apprehension), *āvega* (agitation), *smṛti* (memory), *moha* (delusion), and *cintā* (anxiety)—represent **moment-to-moment emotional fluctuations**.

Abhinavagupta deepens this understanding:

तरङ्गा इव चित्ते भावाः सञ्चरन्ति।
taraṅgā iva citte bhāvāḥ sañcaranti

He compares them to waves in consciousness, emphasizing their **fluid and dynamic nature**. Without these fluctuations, emotional experience would lack richness and continuity.

Cittavṛttis: The Cognitive Structure of Mind

Patañjali categorizes mental modifications as follows:

वृत्तयः पञ्चतय्यः क्लिष्टाऽक्लिष्टाः॥
vṛttayaḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭā'kliṣṭāḥ (YS I.5)

प्रमाणविपर्ययविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः॥
pramāṇaviparyayavikalpanidrāsmṛtayaḥ (YS I.6)

These include cognition (*pramāṇa*), error (*viparyaya*), imagination (*vikalpa*), sleep (*nidrā*), and memory (*smṛti*).

Vyāsa explains that these *vṛttis* are:

"चित्तस्य धर्माः"—functional states of consciousness

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Vijñānabhikṣu further clarifies that these mental modifications are responsible for **both cognition and emotional experience**, thereby directly influencing behavior.

Comparative Framework :

Aspect	Vyabhicāribhāvas	Cittavṛttis	Behavioral Implication
Nature	Emotional	Cognitive-affective	Integrated mind behavior
Duration	Transient	Continuous	Dynamic fluctuation
Function	Support dominant emotion	Shape mental perception	Emotional-cognitive interaction
Example	*Śaṅkā*, *Moha*	*Viparyaya*, *Smṛti*	Anxiety, misperception
Goal	Rasa realization	Vṛtti-nirodha	Expression vs regulation

Insights from Sanskrit Poetics

Mammaṭa – *Kāvyaprakāśa*

Mammaṭa emphasizes that poetic experience arises through cognitive suggestion (*dhvani*), where emotional states are not merely expressed but **internally realized**. The *Vyabhicāribhāvas* function as subtle enhancers of emotional cognition.

Viśvanātha – *Sāhityadarpaṇa*

Viśvanātha asserts:

न हि रसानुभवः व्यभिचारिभाववर्जितः।
na hi rasānubhavaḥ vyabhicāribhāva-varjitaḥ

Rasa cannot manifest without the interplay of transient emotional states. This highlights their essential role in shaping emotional behavior.

Philosophical Synthesis: Emotion and Cognition

The integration of *Vyabhicāribhāvas* and *cittavṛttis* reveals a two-layered model:

- **Inner layer:** cognitive processes (*cittavṛttis*)
- **Outer layer:** emotional expressions (*Vyabhicāribhāvas*)

For instance:

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- *Viparyaya* (misperception) → *Śaṅkā* (doubt)
- *Smṛti* functions as both cognitive memory and emotional recall

This anticipates modern **cognitive appraisal theory**, where perception determines emotional response.

Extended Discussion

1. Emotional Modulation and Behavioral Dynamics

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* recognizes that emotions are not static but **continuously modulated**. *Vyabhicāribhāvas* act as regulators of intensity, preventing emotional monotony and enabling adaptive behavior.

Modern psychology similarly identifies **micro-emotions** and **affective fluctuations** as crucial for emotional intelligence.

2. Cognitive Regulation and Yogic Psychology

Patañjali prescribes methods for controlling mental fluctuations:

अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः॥
abhyāsavairāgyābhyāṃ tan nirodhaḥ (YS I.12)

Practice (*abhyāsa*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) regulate mental activity, paralleling modern techniques such as **mindfulness** and **cognitive restructuring**.

3. Complementarity of Aesthetic and Yogic Models

Nāṭyaśāstra	**Yoga Sūtra**
Emotional expression	Mental regulation
Aesthetic bliss (*rasa*)	Spiritual liberation (*kaivalya*)

Thus, one system explains **how emotions arise**, while the other explains **how they are transcended**.

4. Consciousness and Emotional Stability

The *Bhagavad Gītā* synthesizes this understanding:

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः।
duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣu vigata-spṛhaḥ (Gītā 2.56)

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Emotional stability arises from awareness—not suppression—of fluctuating states. This reflects the integration of *bhāva* and *vṛtti* within consciousness.

5. Relevance to Behavioral Psychology

The combined framework anticipates modern theories:

- **Stimulus–response model** → *vibhāva–anubhāva*
- **Cognitive mediation** → *cittavṛtti*
- **Emotion regulation** → *nirodha*

Thus, classical Indian thought provides a **holistic psychology** integrating cognition, emotion, and behavior.

Conclusion

The comparative exploration of *Vyabhicāribhāvas* and *cittavṛttis* reveals a remarkably integrated and multilayered model of human emotional and cognitive behavior within classical Indian thought. Far from being isolated theoretical constructs, these two categories function as complementary dimensions of a unified psychological framework—one expressive (*bhāva*) and the other structural (*vṛtti*).

Vyabhicāribhāvas, as articulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, represent the dynamic, transient, and phenomenological aspect of emotional life. They capture the fluidity of human affect—its oscillations, intensifications, and contextual variations. These states demonstrate that emotional behavior is not static but emerges through continuous modulation. Their role in sustaining *sthāyī-bhāvas* and culminating in *rasa* underscores a profound insight: emotional fulfillment arises not from uniformity but from orchestrated diversity of affective states.

Conversely, *cittavṛttis* in the *Yoga Sūtra* provide a structural and functional account of the mind. They explain how cognition, perception, memory, and imagination generate the internal conditions that later manifest as emotional expressions. The Yogic emphasis on *nirodha* (regulation) does not negate emotional experience but seeks to refine and stabilize the underlying mental processes. Thus, while Bharata's system is **experiential and aesthetic**, Patañjali's is **regulative and introspective**.

When examined together, these two frameworks present a **complete cycle of emotional behaviour**:

- *Cittavṛttis* generate internal cognitive conditions
- These conditions manifest outwardly as *Vyabhicāribhāvas*
- These transient emotions interact with stable dispositions

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- The process culminates either in *rasa* (aesthetic realization) or *nirodha* (psychological equilibrium)

This cyclical model closely parallels modern behavioral psychology, particularly in its recognition of:

- **Cognitive appraisal** (interpretation shaping emotion),
- **Affective fluctuation** (moment-to-moment emotional variation),
- **Regulation mechanisms** (control and transformation of mental states), and
- **Meta-awareness** (observing one's own mental processes).

Furthermore, the integration of insights from *Kāvyaprakāśa* and *Sāhityadarpaṇa* reinforces that emotional experience is not merely reactive but **cognitively mediated and aesthetically refined**. The role of suggestion (*dhvani*) indicates that subtle mental processes shape emotional depth, anticipating modern theories of implicit cognition and nonverbal emotional processing.

At a deeper philosophical level, both systems converge in recognizing the role of consciousness (*cit*) as the substratum of all mental and emotional activity. The fluctuations of *bhāvas* and *vṛttis* are ultimately modifications within consciousness, not its essence. This insight aligns with the Yogic and Vedāntic notion of the *sākṣī* (witness-consciousness), which observes emotional changes without identification. Such a perspective anticipates contemporary therapeutic approaches like mindfulness, where awareness of emotional fluctuation leads to psychological resilience.

The following classical insight encapsulates this equilibrium:

प्रशान्तवाहितास्थितिः
praśānta-vāhitā sthitiḥ
(*Yoga tradition – state of tranquil flow*)

This state represents not the absence of emotional activity, but its harmonious regulation.

In conclusion, the comparative study demonstrates that classical Indian *śāstras* offer a **holistic and sophisticated psychology of behavior**, where emotion and cognition are not separate domains but interdependent processes. *Vyabhicāribhāvas* illuminate the richness and variability of emotional expression, while *cittavṛttis* explain the underlying mechanisms and pathways of regulation. Together, they provide a timeless framework that not only enriches aesthetic theory but also contributes meaningfully to contemporary discussions in behavioral psychology, emotional intelligence, and consciousness studies.

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