Florida International University
University Graduate School

Master's Thesis Defense

Abstract

Neuroscience and Hindu Aesthetics:
A Critical Analysis of V.S. Ramachandran's "Science of Art"

by

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Neuroaesthetics is the study of the brain's response to artistic stimuli. The neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran contends that art is primarily "caricature" or "exaggeration." Exaggerated forms hyperactivate neurons in viewers' brains, which in turn produce specific, "universal" responses. Ramachandran identifies a precursor for his theory in the concept of rasa (literally "juice") from classical Hindu aesthetics, which he associates with "exaggeration." The canonical Sanskrit texts of Bharata Muni's Natya Shastra and Abhinavagupta's Abhinavabharati, however, do not support Ramachandran's conclusions. They present audiences as dynamic co-creators, not passive recipients. I believe we could more accurately model the neurology of Hindu aesthetic experiences if we took indigenous rasa theory more seriously as qualitative data that could inform future research.

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Department: Religious Studies
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