



Banabhatta's *Kadambari* as an Aesthetic Amalgamation of *Sringar* and *Veer Rasa*

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.14.2.233](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.14.2.233)



Article info

Article Received: 16/04/2026
Article Accepted: 20/05/2026
Published online: 29/05/2026

Abstract

Aesthetics is the voluminous term for a standardized discovery of beauty, and by elongation, the philosophy of art in ancient Indian tradition, mainly in Hindu tradition. An Amalgamation of human emotional enlightenment and sentiment, *Kadambari* reflects the understanding of Banabhatta's own spiritual faith and aesthetic understanding. The fathomless universe with various beings on Earth like human beings, animals and birds amalgamate with each-other in perfect harmony to create the perfect fusion of ethereal beauty, infinite emotion of love and Indian philosophy. In an in-depth and divine manifestations of the flora and fauna of Ancient India, there is an interconnection of art, ethics and spirituality in the infinite light and hope through the sun, the moon and the stars, the giant mountains and dense forests, the city of Ujjayini and the hermitage of sage Agastya, illuminate Bana's firm conviction in the cognitive sensitivity through the amalgamation of rasas and bhavas. Bana, with his poetic approach makes natural world come alive with his vivid descriptions.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Enlightenment, Indian philosophy, Interconnection, Cognitive sensitivity.

1. Introduction

Aesthetics is the voluminous term for a standardized discovery of beauty, and by elongation, the philosophy of art. As a generic term, aesthetics provides an enlarged and endless study which originated in the West with a great convention of discourse on the science of beauty and the pleasure through the senses. In the West, multifarious theorists emphasized on the magical and sensational aesthetic pleasure,

including Plato, Immanuel Kant, Ruskin, Tolstoy and Thomas Munro. Immanuel Kant points out, "Judgements on pure beauty initiates the appreciator into the moral point of view. Thus, beauty becomes the symbol of morality." (Ami Upadhyay, p.3) The focus was shifted by Baumgarten in 1735 towards the aesthetic appeal in the work of art. Baumgarten became the chief exponent to coin the term 'aesthetics' in Europe.

The study of the science of beauty was a matter of concern for multifarious ancient Greek philosophers. Pythagoras and his people recognized aesthetics as a major segment of philosophy that furnished to coeval an impression of the cosmos as it was. In the words of Avadhesh Kumar Singh "Human predilections and tastes are as varied and relative as they themselves are. It is subject to change according to time and space. Plato is said to have remarked, 'Everyone chooses his love out of the objects of beauty according to his taste.'" (Avadhesh Kr Singh, p.24) On the other side, Aristotle associated aesthetics with poetics and focussed on the idea of beauty through a perfect piece of work.

Broadly speaking, in ancient Indian tradition, mainly in Hindu tradition, nothing is contemplated to be revered or sacrilegious like truth (sat) does not eliminate non-truth (asat). The Vedic psalm also proclaims that truth is inbred from non-truth. Each element, despite its diversified nature, is equated with it, the "views of art in India grow out of an unresolved conflict within Hinduism regarding the reality and value of human life in the physical world". (Troy Organ, 25) Multifarious drives, procedures and substantiation of life, identical and divergent, synchronize in it, as one uncovers the analogy of Shiva's Tandava which is a combination of Dance (nritya) and Death (mrityu) as one synchronic joviality of dance and death. For an Indian scholar, the journey of the soul ends in salvation from meaninglessness to meaning, a journey from the outside fascinating sphere to the dark inner sphere, from the bondage of the body to the immortal and eternal soul.

The philosopher king Bhartrhari's *Srngarasataka* and *Nitisataka* deal with 'sringar' and 'niti' both is transcendental works. Bhoja wrote *Saundarya Prakasa* where he advocates the idea of beauty in art but unable to provide a detailed account of his belief. During the 5th century, Mahakavi Kalidas, with his initiation on the Indian literary front, provided an extensive understanding on Aesthetics.

Kalidasa is world-wide acclaimed as a playwright for his famous plays like *Kumarsambhavam* and *Abhigyansakuntalam*. In the plays of Kalidasa's all the elements of nature work in harmony with the human world of emotions. Another noteworthy writer Tulsidas referred a part of his famous epic *Ramacaritamanasa* as 'Sundara-Kanda' which is chanted by the admirers as an invocation to Lord Hanuman, as it is appraised as a convergence of spiritual beauty. Indian concept of beauty aligns itself in the purification of the mind and connecting one's self with the divine as the way towards salvation.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the 6th century, prose started to take its place in the expressions of literary artists. Prose was the simplest way for the ancient scribblers to convey the deepest concerns about society. The *Brihat-samhita*, by the astronomer Varahmihira is the dominating work of Kavya form in the middle of the sixth century. Among the most famous Sanskrit prose writers, the names of Subandhu, Banabhatta and Dandi (Dandin), got immense popularity for the new way of expression.

Among all the popular scribblers of the late 6th and early 7th century, the name of Banabhatta was also recognized for his balanced and visionary style. He was the finest and the wisest Indian prose writers of his time. Bana's wisdom was recognized by King Harshvardhan who after being mesmerized by his eloquent style and appointed him as his court poet. A 7th-century Sanskrit scribbler and a man of letter of India, Banabhatta is a distinguished author of the famous works *Kadambari* and *Harshacharita*. Bana's *Harshcharita* was the first historical work to delineate the biographical details of the life of the great King Harshvardhan, in an astonishing Sanskrit style *The Life of Harsha*.

Bana's reputation was known to the entire country through his first work the *Life of Harsha*. Banabhatta received immediate success and appreciation and the support and wealth

from the King. His next composition *Kadambari*, a gem of a prose-romance enshrined him as the uncrowned king of poetic-prose. Bana's religious influence is clearly visible from the images of Lord Shiva, as he himself has also been regarded a firm follower of Lord Shiva, the destroyer. His invocatory verse to Shiva in the *Life of Harsha*, is recited at the beginning of numerous epigraphs, even in the distant South. There is another work of similar nature composed by Banabhatta, *Banagadya*, written in poetic style to recite the divine verses in the appreciation of Shiva. As a writer, Banabhatta was not limited to his own religion but due to his travel far off, he made himself acquainted with the other religion and their culture also. His works appreciate not only Hindu or Vedic Gods and Goddesses but the Gods of Jainism and Buddhism also.

Bana's mastery over the style can be easily accessed through his masterpiece *Kadambari*. *Kadambari* was the first ever Indian novel written in an ornate style of Banabhatta and its impression on the average Western scholar was one of repulsive richness. An Amalgamation of love, beauty, nobility and heroism, *Kadambari* reflects the understanding of Banabhatta's spiritual faith. *Kadambari* was inspired technically from the 'katha' form of Gunadhya's *Brihatkatha*, the novel transcends the boundary of time and space, of mortal existence towards immortality and moves through birth, death and re-birth till the deep and passionate love finally attains its desired fulfilment. It was substantially composed by Banabhatta in the first half of the 7th century, who did not survive to see it through completion. The novel was completed by his son Bhushanabhatta, according to the plan laid out by his late father. It is conventionally divided into *Purvabhaga* (earlier part) written by Banabhatta, and *Uttarabhaga* (latter part) by Bhushanabhatta.

3. *Sringar rasa: Kadambari's Divine Beauty and Sensuality*

In Indian aesthetics, *Sringar rasa* is the *rasa* of love and beauty. Bharatmuni in *Natyashastra* referred it as the king of all the other sentiments and acknowledged it as 'Rasaraja.' *Sringar* gives rise to various other emotions as compassion, anger, jealousy, laughter etc. As love is the primary source in all human relations, Bharatmuni described two types of love, love in union (*samyoga*) and love in separation (*vipralambha*). *Sringar* also implies that there is inherent beauty everywhere and that everything can be loved. Banabhatta very well forges the ascetic purity and romantic passion of *Sringar* in the sensuous portrayal of the semi-divine *Kadambari* and *Mahashveta*, the leading female characters of the novel. *Kadambari* and *Mahashveta* manifest the sentiment of love in both its form i.e. love in separation by witnessing the death of their lover *Chandrapida* and *Pundarika* and waiting for the reunion with them in the form of re-birth, "rasa, according to the Indian aesthetics, is an essence of performative art. It is not only felt by the actors/performers but is also conveyed by them to the sensitive spectators, who after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through their words, expressions and gestures feel the pleasure." (Alisha Ibkar, p. 82)

There are numerous references in *Kadambari* of Bana's creative and artistic perfection. *Chandrapida* who is himself the moon is struck by the rare charm of *Kadambari* at his first sight of her. Similarly, *Pundarika* who is the son of Goddess *Laxmi* and divine sage *Shvetketu*, descends from heaven down to earth to visit the holy lake *Acchoda* and falls in love with *Mahashveta* at his first sight of her. Banabhatta describes the alluring charms of the semi-divine *Kadambari* and *Mahashveta* in rich poetics of *Sringar rasa*. In the words of Seema Sarkar, "Pundarika decorated *Mahashveta* with the flowers in her ear. At the touch of *Mahashveta's* cheeks in process, his rosary fell

down. Mahashweta took it up and adorned her neck with it". (Seema Sarkar, p.293) Bana, with his poetic approach makes natural world come alive with his vivid descriptions. K. Krishnamurthy points out that "the rich qualities of Bana's head and heart are evident in almost every page of his writings. What strikes us most is the perfection of style which every verse or sentence of Bana reveals."

The story is put in the mouth of a 'suka' (parrot) who is Vaisampayana and Pundarika (the subordinate hero) in the previous birth. Amalgamation of the tale within a tale becomes a hallmark of that era of Indian literature. King Shudraka brings forth the parrot narrating its own tale which spurs the tales of the distinguished Sage Jabali and then Chandrapida and Vaishampayana intersperse their wedge of tale. The machination of the story is abundantly convoluted and most of the characters are portrayed in their second or third birth, so the entire story is entangled in a profound enigma where the reality is revealed only at the end.

Bana, in his enchanted tale, fascinates the readers with graphic imagery and mysterious natural world. According to Dr Poonam, "Sringar Rasa stands supreme among the eight rasas like sweet flavour among the six tastes. This emotion permeates all human beings and more than that even the flora and fauna. The poetry in its absence is of an inferior order, and therefore, it demands special effort on the poet." (Dr Poonam, p. 76) Sringar rasa in Indian Aesthetics is regarded as the supreme cause of human relationships and therefore termed as the 'king of the sentiments (rasaraja); as the lord of all sentiments (rasapati).

The Mystical, Enchanted and Erotic World of Banabhatta

The enchanted supernatural cosmos of *Kadambari*, stimulate the extreme emotions of wonder and astonishment. The entire cosmos is abundant with tales associated with the lives and struggles of the semi divine characters. The ancient Indian tradition with the holy sages,

exercise their ascetic powers to control and manage the natural, supernatural mystical world, reflect Bana's projection of Adbhuta Rasa, "The waters of the pampa are never placid. The *shabara* women who keep plunging into the lake disturbs them with the bounce of their well-rounded breasts. The countless creatures living in the lake agitate the waters, as do the myriad diving birds." (Banabhatta, p.74)

Perhaps, none other than Kalidasa can nudge Bana in his embellished and magnificent rendition of various rivers and lakes like 'Acchoda', 'Godavari' and 'Pampa' 'sarovar', the sound of ascetics filling water to their 'Kamandalus', Blue, white lilies and lotuses, 'Vindhya' mountain -as the girdle of the earth, 'Shalmali', 'shala' and 'Rakta Chandana' trees, serene sunset and sunrise, 'Blue and white lilies' and 'lotuses', Magnificent temples of the city 'Ujjayini', purity of the hermitage of Sage Agastya and the foothills of 'Kailasa'. Shruthi K R and Rajani Jairam delineate that "the Pampa Lake is never placid, but because of Shabara women who bounce their well-rounded breasts while plunging into the lake it gets disturbed. The countless creatures and myriad diving birds agitate the waters, and the sound of the ripples is heard constantly, and the windy rain tosses up the waves and creates cold spays. Blue and white lilies and lotuses grow in the lake as forest." (P. 70) Banabhatta's portrayal of the women in the woods is also enthralling. The beauty and sensuous charms of Mahashweta as an ascetic and Kadambari as a daughter of Gandharv King are rare and captivating, "the women were in need of no external cosmetic aids to their beauty. Their own lustre streaming down their cheeks washed their faces. The lily-eyes that stretched up to their very ears did duty as earrings." (188)

Bana's specification of Chandrapida's fascination towards Kadambari's sensuality presents the most appropriate example of Sringar Rasa: "How I wish I could have Brahma change all my senses into sight alone. How fortunate my eyes are to have the uninterrupted

pleasure of gazing at this girl. Where, I wonder, did Brahma come upon the matter for creating this extraordinarily lovely form? I am quite sure that all the fragrant flowers of the world, the lilies and the lotuses came into existence out of the tear drops falling from the eyes of this beautiful form when she wept with distress at the touch of Brahma's hands when he fashioned her." (194) Chandrapida chasing the semi-divine beauty hence becomes the *rasika*. The love itself is extrapolated in an extraordinary fashion with tremendously magnified delineation of the uncontrollable, overwhelming passion.

Chandrapida As Undefeatable Prince and Incarnation of Moon on Earth:

A Nayak or Neta of the play, according to Natyashastra, must be a man of great wisdom and nobility. He should be of renowned ancestry and furnished with superior gallantry and wisdom; he is the 'dhirodatta' nayaka, the valiant-exalted hero. If he has an admirable side to his personality that displays sensitivity to beauty of all types, then he is a brave and noble hero, 'dhiralalita' nayaka. In writing a poetic prose, Banabhatta applies the principles of Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* in portraying the character of his hero Chandrapida. Chandrapida has been portrayed as an undefeatable warrior whose capabilities and glory are known to the entire world. Banabhatta's nayak is acquainted with all the branches of knowledge. He gained proficiency in 'pada', 'vakya' i.e., the 'mimamsa' philosophy, correct reasoning, i.e., the 'nayayasdstra', in 'dharmastra', i.e the law i.e., in the various branches of political science. During that period, the prince had to learn the different systems of gymnastics also, Chandrapida had to acquire the knowledge of the different weapons such as the bow, the quoit, the shield, sword, the javelin, the spear, the axe etc.

Chandrapida as a mighty warrior is equally sensitive towards the aesthetic pleasure. As a man of superior intellect, Chandrapida is

fascinated to observe the ethereal beauty of the 'Acchoda' Lake and its surroundings. He gets captivated by the harmonious and melodious sound of the music played by Mahashveta. As a 'dhirodatta-dhiralalita' nayaka, Chandrapida is well versed in his understanding of the fine musical notes which floats over the 'Acchoda' Lake. Chandrapida is the re-incarnation of Moon on Earth, as the son of King Tarapida, the King of Ujjayini. So, Chandrapida possesses all the qualities of a brave, pure, wise, articulative, determined and noble-minded hero. Chandrapida and Vaishampayana represent two types of heroes in the novel. Chandrapida is a warrior hero and Vaishampayana is a saint and ascetic hero. Similar to Chandrapida's birth, Vaishampayana is also the re-incarnation of Pundarika, the son of great sage Shvetketu and Goddess Laxmi. He came on Earth to experience the ethereal beauty of 'Acchoda' Lake and met Mahashveta. Pundarika was mesmerized to see the divine beauty of Mahashveta and fell in love with her at first sight. Pundarika was overwhelmed in his love passions so much that he died.

Vira rasa manifests Nayak's infinite exuberance and unflinching courage of various feats to face the life's challenges. The author portrays his Nayak's emotional expressions as steadfast, fearless and broad minded both in case of Chandrapida and Pundarika. Chandrapida is to be an ideal prince and a future ideal King, the ruler of men, the bringer of law, peace and good government into his world so he is portrayed as a Dhirodatta Nayak. A Nayak who is accounted to be an intrepid moral strength if he demonstrates a zest of forbearance, earnestness, unpretentiousness, Resoluteness, warm, cordial and agreeable but at the same time assertive. *Kadambari*, justifies these characteristics in the victorious and noble heroes in Chandrapida and Pundarika, delineates the sensuality and rare charm of the young heroine Kadambari and Mahashveta. Chandrapida personifies the attributes of the noble and triumphant hero—courage, dignity,

perseverance, and devotion – thereby embodying the core of Vira Rasa. Concurrently, Kadambari is depicted with divine beauty, elegance, intensity of emotion, and alluring persona, stimulates the finesse and fervor of Srīngar Rasa.

A true amalgamation of the manifestations of love and is clearly portrayed by Bana through the trials and tribulations and finally the re-union of the lovers. This fusion of Srīngar and Veer rasa dominate all the other emotions in the story. The love transcends not only the boundaries of time and space but also the bar of death. The author masterfully entwines Srīngar and Veer rasas through the lovers' passionate quest characterized by birth, trials, death, re-birth and reunion. Chandrapida and Pundarika's steadfast determination and resilience in tribulation strengthen their love, while their bond itself becomes the stimulating force behind heroic action. Thus, love acquires grandeur through valor, and heroism gains tenderness through affection. The novel, therefore, stands as a true synthesis of Śrīngāra and Vira Rasas, where passion and courage complement each other to create profound aesthetic and emotional harmony.

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