

Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction

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Language and the politics of emotion

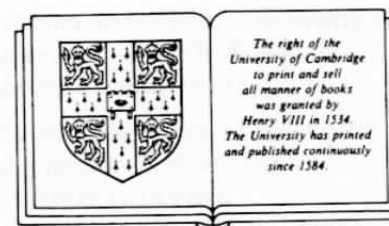
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5. Topographies of the self: praise and emotion in Hindu India

ARJUN APPADURAI

Topographies of the self

This chapter explores a specific modality of verbal interaction in Hindu India – praise – in order to construct an argument about the variability of the relationship between language, feelings, and the topography of the self in human societies. In contemplating emotional life in any culturally specific setting, it seems important to note that emotions have a linguistic life and a public and political status that frequently engender formulaic modes of expression. Yet, it also seems that emotions, unlike other phenomena, appear to have a basis in embodied experience, thus inclining us to see them as rooted in some elementary biophysical repertoire that is both limited and universal. To ignore completely this second aspect of emotion is to run the risk of deconstructing emotion altogether as a distinctive phenomenon to be investigated. In the argument that follows, I will try to show that praise in Hindu India is a form governed by the regularities in performance of a culture-specific and conventional activity, like many other linguistic activities. But I will also try to show that praise in Hindu India is, in Bourdieu's sense, a regulated, improvisatory practice (Bourdieu 1977), which depends on a particular *topography of the self* that underlies its public expressions.

This topography, properly understood, leads us to a second issue. Much recent discussion, several chapters in this volume, and my own previous work (Appadurai 1985) take the view that our current common sense about intention and expression, about "real feelings" as opposed to "voiced sentiments," about superficial statements that conceal "real" and "inner" emotional states is, as is so often the case, merely *our* embodied *doxa* misrepresented as general theories about the relationship between affect and expression (Abu-Lughod 1986; Lutz 1988). Such ideas are not only part of emotion talk in the contemporary Anglophone world

but are also anchored in the New Testament, where, for the first time in Western history, a major normative claim was made about the separability of act and actor, intention and action, "inner states" and "outer forms." Although these Christian ideas have undergone many changes and spawned many conflicting intellectual offspring, Western discourse has continued to build on this normative break. What has gradually evolved is a complicated repertoire of discourses about the "individual," the "self," and "personality," with the last term serving as the most recent, and most technical, bridge between the first two.

An exploration of this Judeo-Christian story and its many twists and turns over the last two millennia is beyond the scope of this chapter. It does, however, seem possible to identify an elementary Western topography of the "person" (a relatively neutral term for the anthropologist) in which the biologically anterior "self" (where the intertwined processes of ontogeny and phylogeny play themselves out), through the vicissitudes of the trajectory of "personality development," becomes a recognizable though idiosyncratic moral unit, the "individual." This view is a kind of master trope within which more specialized discourses (religious, therapeutic, and legal) contest each other on matters of detail.

This topography is anchored in a spatial image of layers, of which the affective bedrock is seen as simultaneously the simplest, the most general, and the most directly tied to the somatic side of personality. Thus, most Western metatheories of personality are doomed to remain parochial, since they ask cross-cultural questions without any consciousness that their constraining master image itself needs to be interrogated before serious comparative questions can be asked (Lutz, this volume).

I would suggest that such topographies of the self, whether or not they are articulated in elaborate cultural discourses (and metadiscourses), are variable cultural phenomena. We need to deepen our understanding of *this* variation if we are to retain the force of the insight (exemplified throughout this volume) that emotions are discursive public forms whose special power does indeed draw on embodied experience, without implying any parsimoniously describable universal biological substrate. But this demonstration cannot, at least for the anthropologist, be primarily experimental or deductive. It has to be ethnographic, and anchor itself in interpretations of existing forms of performance in particular cultural settings, as a way of exemplifying alternative topographies of the self. In analyzing the pragmatics of praise in Hindu India, I seek to sketch the outlines of one such culturally specific topography. In particular, I shall argue that praise is *not* a matter of *direct*

communication between the "inner" states of the relevant persons, but involves the public negotiation of certain gestures and responses. When such negotiation is successful, it creates a "community of sentiment" involving the emotional participation of the praiser, the one who is praised, and the audience of the act of praise. Praise is therefore that set of regulated, improvisatory practices that is one route to the creation of communities of sentiment in Hindu India.

The genealogy of praise in the Indic context

As is the case in Christianity and Islam, so in the Hindu world the paradigmatic or prototypic act of praise is the praise of the divine. In the Hindu case, as opposed to that of Islam and Christianity, there is a combination of subordination and intimacy, which Babb (1986) has recently called "hierarchical intimacy." The praise of the many incarnated forms of divinity in Hinduism is a central, highly developed part of the ritual process. *Stōtra* (a term whose linguistic features I shall discuss shortly) refers to a ritualized and usually textualized recitation of praise. It is a major part of the relationship of devotee to divinity in all the major traditions of Hinduism. In some contemporary contexts where Sanskrit has left a strong imprint on the regional languages, the technical, ritual concept of *stōtra* imbues more everyday usages. Thus an everyday Tamil word for praise is *stōttiram*.

Although this is not the place for an extended history of the concept and practice of *stōtra* in Hinduism, four things are worth noting about its cultural construction. First, it makes praise a ritual offering. Second, it puts praise into a formulaic and an aesthetic framework. Third, its main device is description (often through hyperbole) of the positive qualities of the god or goddess in question. Fourth, praise in the *stōtra* is associated with the public expression of the emotional bonds of devotee and deity. *Stōtra* thus is a mode of praise that is ritual, aesthetic, hyperbolic, and emotional. This ritual mode underlies a very large part of the corpus of devotional (*bhakti*) poetry in both North and South India. What is important about this cultural paradigm is that it involves both *interaction* and *assessment*: Thus praise involves intimacy between the subject and the object of praise, while also implying a certain distance. I now turn to some further implications of the involvement of praise with the attitude of a devotee to divinity.

As with other ritual and rhetorical forms in Hindu India, there is in praise a logical concatenation of attitudes to divinity and to royalty, the

latter being seen as mortal vessels of universal sovereignty. The praise of kings thus is a perfectly acceptable and highly developed cultural mode and is to be seen in various types of panegyric and eulogy, starting with the earliest literatures. Such praise, which also tends to the formulaic and the hyperbolic, can sometimes take the form of an extended opening portion of inscriptions recording a royal act of generosity.

These written prefaces (Sanskrit: *praśāsti*) have not been extensively studied, since historians have generally been more interested in the acts or events recorded in the main body of the inscriptions.¹ The rhetoric of these praise texts is complex and is historically and regionally variable, but some general points can be made. In most of these "praise prefaces" the central objective is to identify and glorify the reigning sovereign and, when not the same as the sovereign, the donor whose act is being recorded. The identification is usually done through genealogical and chronological statements, often involving chains of names, that stretch back to divine ancestors. The genealogical claims are themselves a form of glorification. A typical strategy is to present an extended series of names, some of which are titles (*viruṭu*). The Dravidian word *viruṭu*, which in historical contexts generally means 'title' or 'emblem', has the more general etymological connotations of honor, pedigree, panegyric, and praise. All these names, many of which have identifiable meanings, are themselves expressions of positive qualities, potencies, or achievements.

Of course, there are many cultures in which praise is an onomastic principle. In South India, royal names or titles, often self-conferred, are complex words or sets of words that refer to specific recent acts of valor, generosity, or piety. These complex, self-conferred titles are both records and advertisements of royal achievements. When the donor whose action is being recorded in an inscription is the same as the king who is being praised, these *praśāsti* constitute a culturally appropriate formula for self-praise for those who rule. Even here it is possible that there are sacred models, such as the self-celebrating epiphany at the end of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which Krishna stages an enormous spectacle of his powers and forms to Arjuna.

These *praśāsti* forms tell us that the pragmatics of praise in the Indic context has something to do with boasting, boosting, competing, elevating, and inflating. In the Indo-Aryan languages, there is a semantic distinction between those forms deriving from the Sanskrit root *stu* (whose Vedic context places it explicitly in a ritual and hymnal context) and those forms (such as the Hindi and Gujarati *praśansa*) deriving from the

Sanskrit *śansa*, which has the far more secular connotations of commendation, applause, fame, and glory. In the standard dictionary of the Dravidian languages, of the twenty-one relevant entries, five are semantically neutral, but of the remainder, twelve have very secular overtones (again having to do with flattery, boasting, elevating, and publicizing), and only four are clearly linked to adoration, worship, prayer, and so forth (Burrow and Emeneau 1961).

It is, of course, dangerous to infer contemporary semantic realities from such etymological patterns, especially given the complicated lexical histories compressed into various dictionary entries. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to argue that, at least in the Indo-Aryan languages, there are *two* clusters of meaning surrounding acts of praise: a primary cluster derived from Vedic ritual and hymnal practice and a secondary cluster pertaining to praise in everyday life. In the Dravidian case, the relative priority of these two clusters is less clear, and it is conceivable that the ritual or worship-oriented sense of praise is a product of interaction with North Indian traditions and practices, and that the earlier, classical Tamil universe is oriented to praise as panegyric rather than to praise as worship.

But it is also clear, in both the Indo-Aryan and the Dravidian cases, that there is no sharp break between the two semantic clusters and that each derives some of its pragmatic force from the other. The two subfields converge in the praise (or self-praise) of kings, where the pragmatic lines between praise as adoration, praise as honor, praise as worship, praise as flattery, and praise as naming are difficult to draw (Bharati 1970).² This pragmatic sense of praise could be extended from kings to all *patrons*, as in the following typical benediction appearing at the conclusion of each section of an eleventh-century Jaina text from Delhi, in which the poet praises his patron, a Jaina merchant (Cohen 1979:1.21.18): "May Sri Nattala, whose fame, appearing like the moon, shines on the earth; because of whom bards have become seekers of the wish-fulfilling tree; by whom speech is uttered free from error; who is beloved of the people, illustrious, pious, and incomparable, be victorious!"

The patron (*yajamāna*) of any ritualized or aesthetic activity is the situational incarnation of the god-king. Thus, the ideological and rhetorical forms associated with the praise of patrons (which we have from a huge variety of paintings, texts, sculptures, and inscriptions associated with Hindu "art") can be seen as paradigmatic of the attitudes expected from inferiors toward their superiors in all domains of life. But in making the

move from highly stylized, fixed forms of expression to everyday ones, we enter a cultural field of greater ambiguity.

Praise and dependence

One consequence of the resilience of the value placed on the formulaic praise of superiors is that flattery is a prominent part of everyday public behavior in India. In this respect, praise (or, more exactly, flattery) is one of the standard means not simply to mark hierarchy but to mark dependence. Flattery is typically part of the rhetoric surrounding a "big man," whether the big man is a politician, a film star, a business magnate, a village headman, or a charismatic religious leader. Of course, such a rhetorical stance occurs in many societies, but it has a particular flavor and structure in Hindu India.

Earlier, I observed that the *stōtra* combines the texture of ritual, aesthetic, hyperbolic, and emotional modes of expression. Public flattery is perhaps most easily seen in the politics of contemporary India. The praise heaped upon Indira Gandhi by her followers, themselves often leaders of substance in their own regions and contexts, frequently shocked outside observers. Such flattery was an important part of public demonstrations of dependence and adoration (touching her feet, asking her blessings on various enterprises, anticipating her moods, and so forth) that could easily be construed as simple, self-interested groveling. But in India, these demonstrations are an important part of a tradition of adoration of and interaction with the glory of the superior.

What we see in political behavior can also be seen in less formal contexts involving superiors and their clienteles, where flattery takes on immense proportions. Today, given how far removed many of these contexts are from the authority of ritual and the splendor of the court, Indians themselves have developed a certain ambivalence about public flattery and the forms of dependence that it implies. One sign of this ambivalence is the colloquial Hindustani term *chamcha* (literally, 'spoon'),³ which is applied in a derogatory way to those dependents of any celebrity who specialize in echoing, praising, and transmitting his or her views without any whiff of critical independence. Yet, such hangers-on, whose sole function is to provide a continuous flow of praise, are an integral part of most groups surrounding celebrities in India. It may appear at first sight that this "groupie" phenomenon is an accompaniment of stardom and power in many cultural settings. But I would argue that its

special diacritic in Hindu India is its unconscious anchoring in the living logic of worship.

For those who lack the privilege of constant contact with a superior, there is another, less direct mode of praise. This mode involves praising the good deeds, capabilities, powers, and reputation of the superior to somebody else, outside the physical presence of the superior. Although not, therefore, a direct act of adoration, it is not flattery either. Again, it applies to major rulers, deities, saints, patrons, and "stars" of every sort. It involves singing their praises, not so much in the form of names and qualities as in narrative forms, focusing on specific achievements of the superior to which the speaker is able to testify. It is a form of reputation building (for both the speaker and the big person spoken of) whose cultural logic has hardly been explored.

In this indirect form of praise, too, there is a special bond between the speaker and the object of praise, for its narratives frequently put the speaker in a privileged relationship to the superior. This privilege takes two forms. The first involves the action worthy of praise, which marks the speaker as a worthy recipient of the superior's favor. Stories about the miracles worked by a saint, the gifts given by a philanthropist, the boon granted by a specific deity, the financial help given at a time of crisis by a politician, the secret lifesaving act by a filmstar – all these usually involve the speaker as a direct beneficiary. The second form of privilege is epistemological: It marks the speaker as someone who knows something special and who has the privilege of passing it on. Witness and transmission, insofar as they underlie such indirect forms of praise of a superior, are fundamental parts of the cultural construction of reputation in contemporary India. In this process, praise, witness, rumor, and narrative come together. This configuration, which today applies to all sorts of celebrities, stars, and big men and women in the making, relies on spontaneous narratives of praise that continue (as in the past) to generate texts: stories, poems, songs, and prayers of praise. The mode of praise here is not direct flattery but publicizing, which is directed not to the emotional satisfaction of the superior but to the increment of his or her following.

Sometimes, in the making of such reputations, the teller of the story (if you will, the publicist) tells it in the full knowledge that word of his or her acts will eventually return to the superior who is the object of such praise. Such strategies of circumlocution are typical of small communities (families, neighborhoods, devotional groups, offices, work groups and so forth) where circles of communication are finite, and acts

of reputation building have an excellent chance of benefiting the transmitter as much as the subject of the act. Also true of such small communities of interaction is the distortion of messages that occurs, and credit for a reputation-building act for the publicist may not be registered appropriately. But the hope that your superior will hear of your praise, and thus think better of you, is not crudely manipulative (as with alternative topographies of the self, which permit both acts and judgments of hypocrisy),⁴ but a mixture of adoration and expectation of reward that characterizes Hindu ritual generally. Praise of the superior is, therefore, part of a complex series of acts of mutual benefit that characterize the ethos of Hindu worship itself.

But how do superiors construe their own capability to praise their inferiors and dependents? In general, direct praise of inferiors and dependents is as uncommon as the praise of superiors is common. There are stories in the Hindu tradition in which deities express their admiration for particularly remarkable devotees and acts of devotion. But in everyday life, it is not in good taste for the superior to sing the praises of dependents directly. But here we need to discriminate among several situations.

In the domestic situation of most Hindu households, parents do not praise their children directly, for this would be seen as inviting the free-floating malevolence of the "evil eye," a topic on which I shall shortly have more to say. But although it is considered important for parents to deprecate the virtues and abilities of their children to outsiders, such outsiders are certainly not prevented from seeing or hearing the children demonstrate their skills or accomplishments in drawing, singing, schoolwork, or domestic arts. Such demonstrations raise difficult dilemmas for guests or observers, who have to calculate their responses carefully. To withhold all praise is tantamount to an insult. To praise too directly and in too fulsome a manner raises the specter of the evil eye. The solution generally is to separate the act from the actor and to praise the accomplishment as if it were distinct from the actor. Thus, praising the product or performance (the painting, the cooked dish, the song, the dance) rather than the performer is perfectly appropriate. This stricture applies only in the physical presence of the object of praise, where the dangers of the evil eye are greatest. When the child is physically not present, there is greater latitude, although even here the problem of the evil eye is not entirely absent.

From the point of view of the guest or visitor in a domestic setting, relatively loose constraints on the praise of children are much more

stringent in regard to wives, and women more generally. Especially for adult males who are not regularly involved with the household, praise of women, whether direct or indirect, whether of person or of performance, must be extremely muted. Even thanks for hospitality, which is in any case complicated (Appadurai 1985), are rendered to the male host rather than to the female hostess and cook. If praise is ever directed to the women of the household, it has to be brief, casual, and product oriented, rather than oriented to the female or females of the house. In the latter case, not only is there the danger of the evil eye, but also there are the sexual implications of praise, which endanger conventions of modesty in the South and of honor, reinforced by the impact of Islam, in the North. Women are generally expected to be invisible providers of good things and good works, for which they cannot easily be praised.

The evil eye, which I have now mentioned several times, generally applies to vulnerable creatures, who are dependent on the nurturance and protection of superiors. The best examples of this category are children and domestic animals such as cattle. When such vulnerable creatures are especially beautiful, innocent, weak, or fortunate, they are seen as natural magnets of envy, desire, and ill will, with fuzzy boundaries between these sentiments. Beautiful children, healthy cattle, attractive daughters, and devoted sons are typical targets of these emotions. But the evil eye is invoked largely in those situations where the phenomenology of emotions is ambiguous, where acclaim might mask envy, gratitude might disguise desire, and congratulation might conceal ill will. There is no explicit indigenous theory about the relationship between emotional ambiguity and the evil eye, but it seems to be a plausible interpretive link.

David Pocock has noted, in a West Indian rural setting, that the evil eye is a culturally organized interpretation of envy and that, sociologically, it is most likely to be imputed in those situations where "those who should be equal are not so in fact" (1973:39). Pocock also suggests that *najar* (the evil gaze) is not to be feared, in a hierarchical society, between those whose status is different and clearly defined. But there is reason to suppose that this view cannot be generalized, and that the link between emotional ambiguity and the evil eye is a more subtle one. To make this case, it is worthwhile to examine begging as a social phenomenon in India.

Begging, like many other activities in India, is an organized occupational activity. Although it is increasingly a phenomenon of pauperization and proletarianization in urban India, there is a recognized cultural

place for it and a recognized cultural idiom for its practice. Begging is a legitimate (even if devalued) activity for two reasons. First, it partakes of the emotional and ritual ethos of worship, with the beggar playing the role of the worshipper. Second, in its open admission of the radical dependence of the beggar on the goodwill of others for his subsistence, it carries some of the moral authority of asceticism, and in many cases "beggars" and "ascetics" are not clearly distinct categories. The widespread fear of both beggars and ascetics is tied up with the magical power of words, in which blessing and cursing are two sides of the same coin (Peter van der Veer, personal communication).

Although there is a great deal of regional and situational variation in how begging is practiced and perceived, the central verbal tactic of beggars is to *bless* and *praise* their human targets while asking for food or for money. This practice could be labeled "coercive subordination," for in blessing and praising their (potential) benefactors, beggars seek to trap them in the cultural implications of their roles as superiors, that is, in the obligation to be generous. The coercive element is also expressed in the *open* way in which beggars reveal their desire to benefit from the greater good fortune of their fellows. In India, when desire is so open, can malice be far behind? Indeed, in crowded public situations, beggars can often be seen (and heard) to express their resentment of rebuffs by mumbling abuses and curses (the inverse of praise and blessings), particularly when they have been rebuffed in a cruel or insulting manner.

Begging is an exaggerated and intensified enactment of forms of dependence and types of interaction that are widely institutionalized in Indian society. The parallels between benefactors and gods, the coercive and reciprocal implications of praise, the link between praise and the desire for the good things in life, the fine line between desire and envy, the hidden threat of abuse beneath the external profession of praise, are all factors on which beggars depend to exploit the emotional ambiguity that links praise – through envy – to the evil eye. The ambiguity lies in the fact that praise can be a celebration of dependence *or* a subtle (and coercive) complaint about it. Beggars, who rightly see themselves as having little (transactionally) to lose, given the speed, number, and impersonality of their encounters, frequently rely on this ambiguity in their practices. Thus, some beggars look threatening while they utter paeans of praise; or they exaggerate the mechanical and impersonal formalities of their verbal routines; or they violate canons of physical contact by touching their targets on their arms or thighs rather than on their feet or not at all. In playing with this gestural and verbal repertoire while utter-

ing formulas of praise, beggars *deliberately* enact the ambiguity of their emotional relations to their potential benefactors. Thus their performance underlines the fact that praise is not a matter of *direct* communication between the inner emotional states of the parties involved but of a publicly understood *code* for the negotiation of expectations and obligations. This public play of affect involves a distinct topography of the self, and a related aesthetics of transaction, that can best be appreciated by considering two further arenas in India: the world of appraisal and the world of appreciation.

But before going on to discuss these two arenas, it is worth remarking that there are many contexts in which praise is not seen as a vehicle for the sentiments of the evil eye: The praise of superiors, the praise of inanimate objects, and the praise of nonintimate inferiors are examples of such contexts. Thus, if you praise as a good worker a farm laborer who works for another man, you might do so in a patronizing way, and this is not regarded as endangering the worker. We might conclude that when objects or persons are seen as relatively invulnerable to envy, desire, or ill will, or when the emotions appropriate to them are seen as relatively unambiguous, the evil eye is not thought of as a likely accompaniment of acts of praise. But the praise of objects brings us to the distinction between praise as *adoration* and praise as *appraisal*.

Appraisal and the world of things

I have so far discussed *praise as interaction* in two modalities: one that is ritual in orientation and whose paradigm is the worship of the divinity; and one that has to do with applause, publicity, and reputation, and seems typical of the followers of leaders, big men, and big women. But there is another axis of discrimination in regard to praise, and here we must distinguish praise as a mode of interaction from praise as a mode of assessment. By looking at praise between putative equals (especially in the context of marriage) and between unequals, I shall show that praise reveals some of the ambiguities inherent in all public codifications of affect.⁵

In India, praise as assessment is most often seen in the relationship between equals. It arises in contexts where praise as adoration and praise as applause are equally out of place. It is also prone to be expressed especially in regard to things. Praise as assessment is likely to occur in contexts with a commercial component, either generically, as in the contexts of shops, bazaars, and markets, where buyers and sellers are equals

(even if their larger social identities are disparate); or when contractual arrangements are being negotiated; or, most revealingly, in the transactions and negotiations that accompany marriage. I shall use this last context to explore the link between praise, assessment, and the world of things.

Marriage negotiations in Hindu India, especially among upper-caste groups that have elaborate dowry practices and other related gift transactions tied up with affinity, belong to a class of events that I have elsewhere called "tournaments of value" (Appadurai 1986). They are agonistic encounters, outside the sphere of normal economic practice, where negotiations take place over objects of prime value, with subtle and long-term implications for day-to-day economic well-being. In the particular tournament of value constituted by Brahman Hindu marriage in Tamil South India, praise is an important rhetorical component of the status contests that characterize both the negotiations that precede marriage (May 1986) and the marriage itself (Appadurai 1981). Praise has special political overtones in the context of marriage because marriage always involves the effort of bride givers (in India, by definition, of lower status) to dignify their temporary deference to the bride-receiving family. Both the gifts that accompany marriage and the individuals involved in the marriage are subject to very complicated mutual assessment.

In the first place, a subtle battle of assessment is involved on the very first occasion when members of the prospective groom's family visit the home of the potential bride. On these delicate occasions, the entire rhetorical posture of the bridegroom's party can be summed up as appraisal (or evaluation, or assessment). The home of the bride's family is assessed, as are the things on display within it, including furniture, wall decorations, and utensils. More personal possessions, especially jewelry and clothing worn by the female members of the household, are also on display for assessment. Last but not least, the prospective bride and her accomplishments are displayed for assessment. The exchange of words on such occasions is a very subtle commentary on this traffic in things, images, and sense impressions.

For the potential bride's family, there is usually a maximum effort to let their house, their possessions, and their carefully decorated daughter speak for themselves. When they themselves speak, they tread a thin line between humility (which is expected of them as prospective bride givers) and self-advertisement. The latter is accomplished subtly by referring to well-placed relatives, influential friends, and their own economic stability. More important, they make comments from time to time

that allude to the culinary (or musical or housekeeping) skills of their daughter or of the women of the family in general. On the bridegroom's side, there is a greater sense of command and assurance and a more brazen tendency to assess their environment, including the human beings in it. Questions about material possessions set the stage for later, hard-nosed negotiations about what the bride's parents will do for their daughter. Even those positive comments made by the bridegroom's party in praise of the material lives of their hosts are meant to be acts of appraisal, signs of evaluation.

At the marriage itself, a good deal turns on the material display of the dower: the utensils, the jewelry, and the clothing provided by the bride's family for the couple and especially for their own daughter. Here assessment becomes an instrument of status politics in the most direct manner. Members of the bridegroom's family often do not hesitate to assess openly the possible weight of the metal in utensils, the heaviness of silk saris, and the possible cost of specific pieces of jewelry. These actions, and the often deprecatory verbal accompaniments to them, are the negative side of praise as assessment and are frequently the starting point of bitterness between the two families, which can result in long-term discord and sometimes in the abuse or death of the bride.⁶ Such public, detailed, and intensive assessment of material objects, as part of the social reproduction of groups, has other general implications (see Breckenridge 1986) that lie outside the scope of this chapter.

It is sufficient to note that praise as assessment of material possessions is most intense in the context of dowry-centered marriages, but it can also be seen in a wide range of social interactions between persons who are, roughly speaking, in the same social class. Thus, whenever families and social groups reach the economic level where part of their household inventory of possessions is clearly for display and not simply for subsistence, their social interaction acquires the dimension of appraisal. More than elsewhere in the world, in Hindu South Asia it is culturally acceptable to scrutinize, and preferably to handle physically, the special possessions of the person you are visiting; to inquire after the "cultural biographies" (Kopytoff 1986) of their possessions; and, if possible, to ascertain their original cost. There is also an equally acceptable set of devices to fend off such questions, to give vague replies, and to avoid offering information to the questioner. But the form of the negotiation is culturally sanctioned, and neither side can easily take offense. Here too praise plays an active role, for statements of admiration and encom-

ium can, and often do, precede more pointed evaluative inquiries. Here praise is a gentle, polite way of introducing potentially impolite queries.

It is worth noting that the more "personal" the things in question, the more careful the acts of praise and assessment must be. What can easily be said or asked about a radio, a car, a bicycle, or a cigarette lighter can less easily be said or asked about a piece of jewelry, a piece of clothing, or a utensil in active use. In these latter cases, acts of praise begin to approach praise of the owner and to raise the possibility of envy or desire directed at this person. This marks the boundary at which acts of praise cannot lightly be made or construed. Yet, praise of any thing or possession (whether made as a grudging act of appraisal or as a display of genuine enthusiasm) is preferable to direct praise of a person, unless the person is an obvious superior. With superiors, praising their possessions would most likely be taken amiss, since it implies an inappropriate evaluative stance on the part of the inferior. By extension, the positive assessment of the material possessions of an inferior would be regarded either as patronizing or as sarcastic, but in either case as not in very good taste.

In general, the praise of things exemplifies one mode of praise, which is evaluative, whereas the praise of persons exemplifies another mode, which is interactive. But since persons and things have qualities that link them, every act of evaluation has something interactive about it, just as every interactive act of praise is the product of some sort of appraisal. This situation both resembles and contrasts with that of more egalitarian societies, where there may be explicit sanctions against creating emotions of awe or envy in others by showing them one's possessions (Catherine Lutz, personal communication). In both cases, what is important to note is that praise is governed by regularities of discourse and embodied strategies of interaction that do not assume anything critical about the "inner" states of the actors. What the relationship then *is* between expressions and emotions can best be seen by turning to the domain of aesthetics and performance.

Appreciation and performance

Throughout this chapter, I have noted that praise, in both formalized and everyday settings in India, has something of the formulaic and the hyperbolic about it. To the observer-analyst, it often appears exaggerated, formal, and unrelated to the emotional interior of the person who

praises. This problem of the emotional authenticity of praise (see also Irvine, this volume) is best tackled by looking at the major area where Indians have reflected on emotion and appreciation: the emotional and aesthetic theory of *rasa*, the master theory of aesthetics in Hindu thought.

As every student of Indian poetics and aesthetics is aware, *rasa* is a peculiarly elusive concept, partly because its assumptions are very different from those of Western common sense regarding the relationship between feeling, gesture, and performance. Yet the theory of *rasa* contains clues not just to Indian ethnopoetics but also to praise in everyday life and the topography of self that underlies it. Before I use the concept of *rasa* to illuminate the pragmatics of praise, I will outline its elements in the Indian learned tradition.

Indian aestheticians have singled out eight feelings (*bhāva*) that all persons experience in their lives: love, mirth, grief, energy, terror, disgust, anger, and wonder (see Brenneis, this volume). In the poetic context, each of these is transformed into a corresponding mood (*rasa*), a generalized, impersonal feeling capable of being understood by other persons in similar states. In drama, these moods are expressed in a publicly understood set of gestures, and both the dramatic performance and its critical analysis involve the appraisal of these gestures. The consequences of this appraisal for dramatic performance are neatly captured by A. K. Ramanujan (1974:117–18):

The actor, as in a Stanislavsky school, must study the physical stances and expressions that are functions and reflections of the mood, even glandular secretions of tears and contractions of the solar plexus: one feels grief because he weeps, joy because his face glows and his eyes dilate. It is a form of physical imagining, as in the story of the village idiot who found the missing donkey by imagining where he would go if he were a donkey. The emotion produces tears and gestures; cannot the gestures reproduce the emotion? And the reader and the spectator in his turn goes through the incipient gestures and tensions in himself: the mood creates a condition in which the reader or spectator reconstitutes his own analogous private, incommunicable, and forgotten feelings into this impersonal expression. They are transmuted into the mood. This he enjoys, and thus he can enjoy, for example, grief.

Let me gloss this discussion of the portrayal of emotion in Indian poetics by noting that it has a special set of pragmatic assumptions. The key assumption is that the actor evokes certain feelings in the viewer by

exteriorizing his or her own emotions in a particular formulaic, publicly understood, and impersonal way. The object is to create a chain of communications in feeling, not by unmediated empathy between the emotional "interiors" of specific individuals but by recourse to a shared, and relatively fixed set, of public gestures. The creation of shared emotions is thus unyoked from the emotional authenticity of any particular person's feelings. Praise in Hindu India partakes of this set of assumptions concerning performance and feeling. Praise is measured by the "community of sentiment" it evokes and creates, and not by the authenticity of the link between the private (or idiosyncratic) emotions of the praiser and the object of his or her praise.

In the classical theory of *rasa*, particularly as formulated by the eleventh-century Kashmiri Saiva theorist Abhinavagupta, the relation between emotion and aesthetics takes an elaborate form and is expressed in interesting ethnopsychological terms (Gerow 1974:220–1). The theory is based on intuition, on the generalization of character, of event, and of response, and has been described by Edwin Gerow as a statement of radical antirealism. In Abhinavagupta's formulation, *rasa* is a transcendent mode of apprehending the work of art, to which normal modes of awareness are obstacles. Gerow (1974:224) has this to say about the "inversion of emotion" in Abhinavagupta's view of the aesthetic response:

The entire drama has now been translated from the theater to the audience; the theater is no longer "object," but pretext for the interior play whose success is nothing but a state of mind, cleverly evoked through suggestion, realized as those latent aspects of the audience's emotional being that are the common and recurrent heritage of mankind. These aspects are implied by and present in every emotional circumstance, every concrete emotional situation, but are never, in ordinary life, grasped in themselves, apart from their specific determinants. It is the function of the play, of linguistic art, so to free the very conditions of emotional life; and it is precisely in this sense that the *rasa* is not a concrete emotion (*bhāva*), but rather the inversion of an emotion; the specific determinants of the emotion (place, time, circumstance, etc.) are so cast as to appear themselves as function of the latent emotional state, and are generalized.

Gerow also points out that the theory of *rasa*, which posits a state of consciousness more real than the work of art itself, has clear philosophical links to the theory of levels of reality contained in the philosophy of

Advaita Vedanta. *Rasa* may be said to anticipate and prefigure *mōkṣa* (spiritual liberation). But later in the history of Hindu devotionism, particularly in the writings of the Bengali Vaisnavas of the sixteenth century, a curious reversal occurs whereby *mōkṣa* "has not only become an ideal open to all men, recast as the perfection of the most human of relations, love, but this new 'emotional' transcendence, *bhakti*, has become the essence of *rasa*" (Gerow 1974:226).

Gerow's statement of both the classical theory of *rasa* and the inversion of emotion on which it is founded – and the reversal of the theory in Bengali Vaisnavism, where *mōkṣa* itself is seen as an emotional state, an eternal version of the experience of *rasa* in art – provides the basis for making a plausible interpretive link between the vagaries of *rasa* theory in Indian history and the significance of praise in Hindu life. To substantiate this intuition, I will return to the topic of begging, which was discussed earlier in relation to the evil eye. This large interpretive leap from *rasa* theory to the cultural logic of begging in India is justified because begging is a highly organized performance and, in its most common forms, has a large audience. Beggars are often consummate actors who have developed their own style – composed of verbal, gestural, and kinesthetic elements – for approaching their potential benefactors. Although the benefactors are not always willing participants in these small performances, both positive and negative responses to beggars have acceptable cultural forms. Since the "interaction rituals" (Goffman 1967) involved in begging are public and highly orchestrated, they are not completely removed from the arena of aesthetic performance. The second justification for using begging as an everyday extension of the underlying logic of *rasa* theory is that begging, too, involves the public negotiation of emotional expressions.

The beggar's praise is no more intended to represent his "inner" feelings to his audience than are the gestures of the actor on the classical stage. As in *rasa* theory, what beggars do, by drawing on a publicly negotiable set of expressions, is to draw the audience (and their potential benefactor, who is sometimes the *sole* member of the audience) into a "community of sentiment" whose pragmatic consequence (if the performance is skillful) is that the benefactor bestows some favor on the beggar. Why can we not simply say that the beggar is a flatterer who plays upon the ego of his target? Because begging in India usually involves not only a tale of woe (this is hardly a unique feature of begging in India) but also a fairly elaborate performance of "coercive subordination." Such coercive subordination, when it does work, does so partly

because it is rooted in the general understanding of praise as a key to reciprocity between superiors and inferiors; partly because of the hidden threat of the evil eye; and partly because "communities of sentiment" can be created in India by the skillful orchestration of specific gestural elements without reference to the "inner feelings" of the actors. The fact that both the beggar's performance and his audience's response appear mechanical and unsentimental does not disprove my interpretation, any more than the ritualized collective wailing accompanying death in many societies suggests that the participants are in no way sentimentally involved. In fact, the more deeply shared the ethos and the code, the more matter-of-fact, or "mechanical," the performance can afford to be.

In the creation of "communities of sentiment," standardized verbal and gestural forms are used, and there is no assumption of any correspondence between the words and gestures and the internal emotional world of the "actor." What matters are the emotional *effects* of praise, which, when it is properly "performed," creates a generalized mood of adoration or admiration or wonder that unites the one who praises, the object of this praise, and the audience, if there is one. At the same time (and here the *bhakti* connection is relevant), a special emotional bond is created with the object of praise itself. But the emotional landscape implied by such acts of praise is not built on the idiosyncratic, biographical, experiential, "inner" feelings of Western common sense. It is constituted of the emotional effects created by the public negotiation of the words and gestures of praise.

Of course, the verbal and gestural forms of praise in everyday life do not have the aesthetic rigor or the ritual predictability of art or worship. Thus, the emotional impact of specific acts of praise in ordinary life can often be weak, ambiguous, or, for lack of a clear frame, unfocused. Still, when praise is directed at a benevolent superior, something of the aesthetic and emotional communion implied by the concept of *rasa* is, I suspect, present. To the extent that formulaic public praise of superiors is considered credible and pleasurable, it is probably due to this cultural conception of the construction of emotional and aesthetic satisfaction.

Praise in Hindu India is one aspect of the critical evaluation of texts, persons, and deeds, and it is an important part. Such criticism is intended to deepen, rather than to abort, the social bonds between the subject and the object of criticism. It suggests an idea of emotional and aesthetic communion between audience, artifact, and ultimate reality, which differs from those assumed and created by most varieties of post-Renaissance Western critical theory. A great deal more accounts for the

Indian attitude toward traditional objects, whether human or textual, than can be discussed here. Ideas about originality and authorship, commentary versus criticism, and the inherent prestige of the past all would need to be carefully worked out to account for the Indian "critical" temper. The idea that praise is a complex devotional, evaluative, and interactive act should be an important aspect of such an account.

Still, it is important to recall that praise in ordinary life is not always a matter of communion, devotion, appreciation, and adoration. We have seen already that praise can, in relations with equals and inferiors, be a more ambiguous rhetorical device, reflecting envy, inappropriate desire, or anger. But even in these cases, it is still a form that is regarded as having effects on the extralinguistic world. Directed at the wrong object, or as a direct expression of inappropriate "personal" emotions, praise is dangerous, duplicitous, even damaging. But whether it makes or breaks the bonds between the speaker, the audience, and its referent, praise is never a neutral, descriptive act. It always has the ability to affect and create things in the world. The everyday challenge for Hindus is to assess correctly the meanings of the forms of praise they witness and to predict prudently the results of the forms of praise they produce.

Praise is thus not a matter of linking the emotional "interiors" of actors by breaking through the public veil of language, of gesture, and of communication. It is rather one of the varieties of improvisatory practice that, in Hindu India, can create sentimental bonds quite independent of the "real" feelings of the persons involved. Such bonds are part of the politics of everyday life, and such politics is cultural and not biological, since its messages and its media are publicly expressed, construed, and appraised.

Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Thomas Zwicker, who died in Ahmedabad on October 29, 1985. It was first delivered at a conference on the emotions in India, organized by Pauline Kolenda and Owen Lynch in December 1985. I am grateful to all the participants at that conference for their suggestions, and especially to Frederique Marglin, who served as commentator on this chapter. I am also grateful to Owen Lynch for his detailed critique of an earlier draft. Finally, I thank Lila Abu-Lughod, Richard Cohen, Dilip Gaonkar, Catherine Lutz, and Peter van der Veer for helping me to sharpen what was previously a rather diffuse argument.

1. The word *prāsāsti* is derived from the Sanskrit *śansa*, which in turn accounts for the term *prāsansa*, a standard lexeme for 'praise' in several modern Indo-Aryan languages, including Hindi, Gujarati, and Marathi. The praise (*prāsāsti*) portion of inscriptions is particularly elaborated in the royal inscrip-

tions of eighth- to sixteenth-century South India, parts of which were successively under Pallava, Chola, and Vijayanagara rule.

2. I am grateful to Kirin Narayan for drawing this source to my attention.
3. I have neither heard nor read anything about the etymology of this term. I suspect that it implies the idea of "feeding" praise to one's superior, as well as the derogatory, even polluting, identification of one human being with an instrument put into another human being's mouth.
4. The subject of hypocrisy, on which I am currently working, brings together a number of complicated cross-cultural issues involving the topography of the self, the problems of staging and representation, and the authenticity of public expressions, which cannot fully be engaged here.
5. The etymological roots of the English word "praise" are clearly economic and imply assessment in a framework that involves commerce, calculation, and exchange. This original sense of the English word "praise" has been lost in most contemporary uses, but there is a dimension of praise that is not unrelated to it, even in contemporary Western practice.
6. I refer here to the phenomenon of "bride burning," which, especially in North India, has drawn a great deal of attention both in the press and among feminist groups. It is widely agreed that these deaths are often the end point of a trajectory of abuse of women by their husband's families, fueled by the massive inflation of dowry demands in contemporary urban India.

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6. Shared and solitary sentiments: the discourse of friendship, play, and anger in Bhatgaon

DONALD BRENNEIS

This chapter is intended to complement – in a highly tentative way – current research on relationships between discourse and emotions. I have been guided to the perspective I will propose by the people with whom I have worked: rural, Hindi-speaking Fiji Indians. I will provide a brief ethnographic account of some of the notions through which they inform their own understandings of talk and sentiment. The methodological core of my approach is a consideration of a local rhetoric and aesthetics: In what terms do Bhatgaon villagers interpret, evaluate, and shape their experience, and how are such practices enacted through discourse? My discussion will draw primarily on village men's accounts and behavior. This is not, however, due solely to my being a male ethnographer in a somewhat sex-segregated community. Rather, as I will later argue, these local theories of emotion and experience – and the ways in which they take shape in ongoing discourse – are critical elements in the definition and politics of gender in Bhatgaon.

Before moving to a discussion of the Fiji Indian case and its possible implications, I want to highlight two areas in which recent ethnopsychological research and work in the study of language and emotion or affect have led to important reformulations that are particularly relevant to my argument. First, it has become increasingly evident that understandings of the locus and genesis of emotional experience vary considerably across cultures. In contrast to the usual Western notions of the locus of emotion being within the individual, for example, in much of the Pacific, "emotion words . . . [are] statements about the relationship between a person and an event" (Lutz 1982:113). As Myers (1979) and others have demonstrated, there is often a critical relational dimension in local theories of the emotions. Indeed, "feelings" often provide a social rather than an individual idiom, a way of commenting not so much on oneself as on oneself in relation to others.