

Designing the Digital *Sahridaya*: Mitigating *Vighna* in HCI and Reimagining Media Literacy through *Rasa* Theory

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Abstract

The digital ecosystem which uses algorithms to deliver content to users without any operational obstacles needs an improvement in understanding human emotions. The online communication platform remains divided and hostile because Western Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) systems prioritize usability and user engagement while Media Literacy education centres on teaching students how to think critically. The research paper introduces a new research direction that combines the traditional Indian *Natyashastra* framework with present-day digital design and educational methods. The research study uses *Vighna* which represents mental barriers to investigate digital dissonance and introduces *Reflective Friction* as a design element which helps users develop *Sahridaya* because it promotes empathic understanding. The approach of Media Literacy needs development because it needs to expand from "critical analysis" toward "*Rasa Literacy*" which teaches emotional development through aesthetic understanding.

Keywords: *Natyashastra, Human -Computer Interaction (HCI), Vighna, Digital Dissonance, Media Literacy, Rasa Theory, Sahridaya.*

1. Introduction

The internet was supposed to create a "global village" (McLuhan, 1964) but modern digital environments now function as separate combat areas. The increasing number of connected devices causes users to experience greater psychological distance from each other. The paradox shows that our digital platforms and educational programs for online citizens have not achieved their intended purpose of creating human connections through technological systems. Western countries dominate the present methods used to address this emergency situation. The user interface design field (UI/UX) studies design methods which create "frictionless" user experiences (Norman 2013) together with "persuasive technology" (Fogg 2003) which enable fast user interactions while keeping users engaged. Media and Information Literacy (MIL) education in school settings teaches students to apply "critical thinking" and "fact-checking" skills (Hobbs 2010) because these skills help them develop as cognitive detectives. The presented methods establish their legitimacy but they fail to recognize how people communicate through their emotional states and their spiritual beliefs. This paper shows that digital toxicity arises from two main issues because basic connection needs security through digital security measures and mental barriers need to be removed for people to reach their full potential. The study uses Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra* to create its framework through *Rasa* (aesthetic relish) and *Sahridaya* (empathic receiver) theories.

1.1The Crisis of Frictionless Design

Modern communication theory has long grappled with the "dark side" of digital connectivity. As algorithms are optimized for seamless delivery, the removal of operational obstacles has inadvertently stripped away the cognitive pauses necessary for emotional regulation. This "frictionless" environment facilitates what we term **Digital Dissonance**, where the speed of interaction outpaces the user's capacity for empathetic resonance.

The current impasse exists between two Western-centric pillars:

1. **HCI Systems:** Primarily driven by efficiency and engagement metrics (Duarte, 2021).
2. **Media Literacy:** Focused on deconstructing misinformation through cold logic, often ignoring the "affective turn" in communication (Papacharissi, 2015).

2. Theoretical Framework: The *Natyashastra* in the Digital Age

To bridge this gap, we look to the *Natyashastra* (attributed to Bharata Muni, c. 200 BCE – 200 CE). Unlike Western dramatic theory, which often emphasizes Aristotelian catharsis, the *Natyashastra* focuses on the production of *Rasa*—the "relish" or essence of an emotion that leads to spiritual and intellectual expansion.

2.1 Understanding *Vighna* (The Barriers)

In the *Natyashastra*, the performance is protected from *Vighnas*—obstacles that prevent the audience from achieving a state of aesthetic immersion. In a digital context, we redefine *Vighna* not as technical bugs, but as **cognitive and affective barriers** (e.g., echo chambers, algorithmic bias, and anonymous hostility) that prevent the user from seeing the "other" as a human subject.

2.2 The *Sahridaya*: The Attuned User

The ultimate goal of this framework is the cultivation of the *Sahridaya*. A *Sahridaya* is literally one of "similar heart"—a person who possesses the aesthetic sensitivity to receive the intended emotion of a performance. In our model, digital citizenship is redefined as the capacity to be a *Sahridaya* in a mediated space.

2.3 The Western HCI Paradigm: Usability vs. Empathy

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) has always focused on establishing two main goals. The two design frameworks developed by Nielsen in 1994 and Norman in 2013 through "Don't make me think" establish design interfaces which reduce the mental effort required from users. The researchers Bakker in 2016 and Pchelintsev in 2021 demonstrate that design which offers "frictionless" experiences leads to users developing instant reactions which psychologists call "System 1" responses (Kahneman 2011). The design process establishes paths which enable users to abuse systems and conduct trolling activities. The current studies in "Empathic Design" (Wright & McCarthy, 2008) attempt to solve this problem yet they use empathy mainly as a research method for understanding users instead of treating empathy as an outcome that results from user interactions. The concept of "Dark Patterns" (Brignull 2010) shows how designers can use their work to take advantage of human psychological weaknesses but there exists a research gap about design methods which promote either spiritual growth or emotional development.

2.4 Media Literacy: The Cognitive Bias

The "Protectionist" and "Empowerment" paradigms form the foundation of Western Media Literacy according to Potter (2004). The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines literacy as the ability to "access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act." The process requires cognitive skills which enable learners to detect bias and determine ownership rights and assess truthfulness of information. Democracy requires critical analysis yet Boyd (2014) shows that "critical thinking" methods can lead to disbelief in authorities and development of conspiracy beliefs which state "trust no one". Indian aesthetics provides the necessary solution to the existing need for frameworks which teach students how to handle their emotional responses to media content.

3. The Indian Framework: *Vighna* and the *Sahridaya*

The Natyashastra which dates back to approximately 200 BCE provides an advanced understanding of how people communicate through their psychological processes. The Sahridaya serves as the central concept because it enables ideal messengers to understand their messages through their ability to empathize with others (Tewari 1992 Patnaik 2011). Abhinavagupta (10th Century CE) discovered that seven Vighnas (obstacles) block people from establishing this connection. The most relevant for digital media are: Nijasukhadukhadasa which shows how people become completely absorbed in their personal egotistical thoughts and emotional experiences. Pratipattavayogyata describes how people fail to understand meaning because they lack essential cultural and contextual knowledge. Sfutatvabhava describes the absence of definite shape or transparent existence. Contemporary media research which Yadava (1998) and Patil (2021) conducted has introduced these concepts but researchers have not yet developed specific design standards or instructional materials.

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Mapping *Vighna* to Digital Discord

To design solutions, we must first map the ancient obstacles to modern problems.

Ancient Concept (Vighna)	Sanskrit Definition	Modern Digital Manifestation
Nijasukhadukhadasa	Absorption in personal ego/pain. Inability to transcend the "Self."	The Echo Chamber / Trolling. Users project their own biases onto content. The "Reply Guy" phenomenon

Ancient Concept (Vighna)	Sanskrit Definition	Modern Digital Manifestation
		where reaction precedes understanding.
Sfutatvabhava	Absence of clarity/distinctness.	Context Collapse. A tweet or video clip stripped of its original context, leading to ambiguity and misinformation.
Pratipattavayogyata	Incapacity of the receiver (lack of training/sensibility).	Digital Illiteracy. Not just technical inability, but <i>emotional</i> inability to process nuance or satire (Poe's Law).
Visheya Graha	Distraction by technical defects.	UX Frustration / Dark Patterns. Pop-ups, lag, or manipulative ads that break the immersion and create hostility.

3.2 The Sahṛdaya and the Non-Dual User

"The idea of Sahṛdaya, literally 'one of identical heart,' specifies the ideal critic as an empathizer, not merely as an observer" (Adhikary, N. M. 2010). In Rasa aesthetics, the artistic process cannot be complete without the responsive heart of the Sahṛdaya, who also has the same 'recreative' imagination as that of the artist. This also relates to modern neuro-aesthetic

research into mirror neurons, in which the sight of a performer activates the same neural pathways in the observer. In HCI, this corresponds to a state of 'Tanmayībhāva' or 'total identification,' in which the duality of user and interface is transcended.

3.3 The Vighnas: Obstacles to Immersion

Seven kinds of Vighnas, or obstacles, are identified by Abhinavagupta, which do not allow Rasa to be attained. These include Sambhāvanā-viraha, or lack of probability, to Sphuṭatvābhāva, or lack of clarity. These obstacles are directly related to

4. Conceptual Framework: The Digital Saṃdaya

4.1 Mapping Vighnas to User Experience

One of the main objectives of "Rasa-driven" design is the mitigation of Vighnas to achieve a flow or Alaukika.

Sambhāvanā-viraha (Lack of Probability): It is manifested by technical lag, reduction in the frame rate, and the uncanny valley in VR. It is mitigated by the use of "Virtual Anchors" in the form of ritualistic transition signals, such as the benedictions employed in the VRasa project, to mark the beginning of the sacred digital space.

- Pratīty-upāya-vaikalya (Inadequacy of Means): It is manifested by the poor user interface, which is disorganized. It is mitigated by the use of universal design patterns to minimize the cognitive load of learning new systems.
- Apradhānatā (Secondary Importance): It is manifested by the prominence of certain elements over the main content, such as the use of "dark patterns" and advertising.

4.2 Dhvani and Suggestive Interaction

The theory of Dhvani (suggestion) suggests that the most powerful meanings are not explicitly stated, but rather suggested. This is the difference between a "statement" (e.g., a pop-up notification) and a "suggestion" (e.g., a micro-interaction). A suggestive interface honors the user's agency and maximizes the "charm" of the experience by engaging the user in an imaginative process of "filling in the gaps".

5. Application: Designing for the Navarasas

5.1 Aesthetic Appropriateness (Aucitya)

Aucitya, or the principle of appropriateness, functions as a regulator of aesthetic design. Aucitya guarantees that the 'body' of the interface, or the visual components, are in harmony with the intended 'soul' of the user experience. For example, the ZenTara design system utilizes appropriate 'color palettes' such as terracotta, sage green, and saffron, as well as specific typography, such as 'Playfair Display' for traditional settings and 'Inter' for modern settings, to create a 'soulful' user experience that resonates with Indian culture and sensibilities.

5.2 Cognitive Load and Yoga of the Heart

Sahhrdaya, or the cultivation of heart, requires a 'yoga of the heart,' or a systematic approach to 'polish the mirror' of consciousness. In HCI, this can be achieved by reducing extraneous cognitive loads, thus allowing the user to 'shift from mental effort to aesthetic rapture.'

6. Designing for the Sahridaya: Operationalizing Empathy in HCI

The digital architecture needs Vighna which represents psychological barriers that hinder empathy to be designed with the capacity to destroy these barriers. The HCI philosophy needs

to change from its current state of "frictionless transmission" to the new concept of "Reflective Friction." The traditional usability process seeks to create a direct link between user intent and their resulting actions while empathic design needs to establish planned breaks which will enable System 2 cognitive processing to take control from System 1 impulsive responses that create ego-absorption (Nijasukhadukhadasa) (Kahneman 2011).

6.1 Protocol 1: Reflective Friction (Countering Nijasukhadukhadasa) Nijasukhadukhadasa exists as an obstruction that prevents users from recognizing other people's existence because they become completely focused on their current emotional reaction which typically involves either anger or self-righteousness. The present-day interfaces have created a situation where users can instantly respond by using the "reply" feature and share content through the "share" button which transforms this situation into a weaponized obstacle. Design Proposal: The Sentiment Circuit-Breaker The interface needs to identify high-speed inputs which demonstrate extreme negative sentiment through capital letter typing and slur usage and rapid tapping. When the system detects such behavior it will create friction instead of using censorship to control the situation.

A. The Pause requires users to wait between 5 and 10 seconds before they can access the "Post" button.

B. The Prompt needs users to reflect on two specific aspects which derive from Nonviolent Communication (NVC) principles without creating any form of judgment. The statement "This post is intense" needs your evaluation to determine whether it shows your true intentions or only reflects your present emotional state. The design intervention creates a separation between Vibhava as the stimulus and Anubhava as the response which establishes the psychological distance required to replace raw Bhava with Rasa.

6.2 Protocol 2: Contextual Restoration (Countering Sfatatvabhava) Sfatatvabhava denotes the state where people cannot comprehend something because they need more information which leads to total confusion.

The design of a space creates an atmosphere that the educational process uses to mold its participants. Western media literacy establishes a requirement for cognitive critical analysis that assesses content creators and truthfulness. The program develops critical thinking skills but fails to teach students how to endure challenges. The "Rasa Literacy" approach needs to be used as a teaching method which features Emotional Cultivation through Chitta Shuddhi practice.

6.3 Shifting the Framework : The "Feel-Check" The "Fact-Check" serves as the basic element which defines Western literacy. The "Feel-Check" should function as the foundational element which establishes Indian literacy. Students must learn how to identify the moments when Vibhavas from algorithms control their emotional responses. The students who study viral content through curricular exercises will develop their cognitive abilities while they explore aesthetic aspects.

(i). What dominant Rasa is this content trying to evoke in me? (Is it Fear/Bhayanaka? Anger/Raudra?)

(ii) Is my reaction a raw Bhava (personal trigger) or a reflective Rasa (universalized understanding)?

(iii). The creator functions as an artist who wants to share his work with others or as a manipulator who wants to control their reactions. The process teaches people to understand their emotional states which serves as the first step towards developing empathy.

7. The Diet of the Mind: Sattvic Consumption

We need to teach people "Impressional Literacy" which exists as a cognitive skill based on the Yogic principle of Samskaras. We teach students about nutritional literacy because it helps them fight obesity. The psychological effects of media content on human consciousness (Chitta) serves as the basis for students to classify media according to its different categories which go beyond basic genre classification.

- Tamasic Media: Content that induces lethargy, confusion, cynicism, or darkness (e.g., mindless doom-scrolling, chaotic violence).
- The Rajasic Media category includes content which causes viewers to experience passionate emotions and anxiety and desire for various things.
- Sattvic Media contains content which helps people achieve mental clarity and emotional equilibrium while developing their understanding of others and their capacity to think deeply.

The purpose of this system requires students to learn about content which leads to Rajasic behaviour because such behaviour creates mental states that prevent them from becoming Sahridaya.

7.1 The Pedagogy of Identification (Tanmayibhavana)

Western critical thinking requires scholars to maintain their distance from the subject matter which they study. Indian aesthetics encourages Tanmayibhavana—total immersion or identification with the object of contemplation. Curricular Exercise: Radical Empathy Simulation The traditional debate format requires students to defend their assigned position. The Rasa-based exercise requires students to fully assume the identity of another person. The students will conduct research to create a presentation that defends their most hated viewpoint because they want to show the audience Rasa which that viewpoint produces. The students must acquire such extensive knowledge about the "other" person that they can successfully express their fundamental emotional beliefs. The assignment exposes the Vighna of egoism through its execution.

8. Conclusion

Designing the Digital Sahṛdaya is all about making technology more human, more soulful. Working with the seven Vighnas using "Virtual Anchors" and "Suggestive Interaction" – that's what we call Dhvani – makes the digital environment feel different. We experience these wonderful moments – Alaukika – where something special happens, and the entire concept makes us a "Kindred Heart" as we navigate the digital environment. Media literacy is no longer about understanding the technology; it's about becoming an "Emotional Athlete." Now, in this Metaverse and generative AI world, if we stick to the principles of Nāṭyaveda and Rasa, the machine is in its place – a tool that lifts up human consciousness, rather than one that confines and limits it.

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