

Identifying Coordinates for Intercultural Rhetoric: India's Nyāya and Sadharanikaran as Alternate Models of Rhetorical Delivery

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The preliminary studies of “comparative” rhetoricians Robert Oliver and George Kennedy welcomed Indian rhetoric to the field of modern rhetorical studies, but their work mostly applied Western terminologies and perspectives to traditional Indian texts. Lipson and Binkley’s collection *Non-Western Rhetoric* included two similar chapters on Indian rhetoric, also with approaches divorced from a broad view of Indian rhetorical traditions. Rhetorical scholars assumed that though persuasion and argumentation is common across the planet, no other cultures elevated the study of them in such an articulated manner as the Greeks, and comparative rhetoric focused upon Indian rhetorical practices interpreted through a predominantly Greek lens.

LuMing Mao and others suggest instead that we seek cultural rhetorics, theories and traditions of persuasive communication inherent to non-Western cultures identified using native terminologies and concepts. India, in particular, developed two traditions related to persuasive communication—*nyāya* and *sadharanikaran*, neither of which was identified by Kennedy, Oliver, or the others. The *nyāya* school of thought, dating from the 550s BCE and one of six orthodox Hindu schools, developed a five-part model of argumentation that bears some resemblance to Aristotle’s enthymeme and example (Lloyd *Rhetorica*), but differs from the whole Western rhetorical canon in terms of approach, motives, and rhetorical goals. Where in Western rhetoric the speaker utilizes language to move the audience toward the rhetor’s ends, in *Nyāya* both rhetor and audience enter into a status-neutral search for practical, sharable truth based in commonly held analogies. In the West, similar ideas concerning the roles of rhetor and respondent did not emerge until Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (1958).

Sadharanikaran, a Sanskrit term meaning “simplification,” (2nd Century BCE) is an approach to communication where persuasive gestures and language spark emotional responses in the audience, leading a higher level of connection. Persuasion is used to connect humans to one another with speaker and audience to the point where both sender and receiver enter the same elevated experience. Such a conception of rhetoric did not emerge in the West until Kenneth Burke’s notion of “consubstantiality.”

As Bimal Krishna Matilal notes that, “Indian philosophic tradition was never directly or indirectly influenced by either Aristotle’s writings or Aristotelianism” (*Logic Language and Reality* 1), but nonetheless, “study and understanding of the one is bound to illuminate understanding of the other” (8). For this reason, this essay elaborates both the Indian concepts in contrast to Aristotelian rhetoric and offers some comparative examples. The conclusion briefly touches on efforts in contemporary Western rhetoric to express ideas similar to Indian rhetoric, comparing some perspectives from Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, Burke, and Crosswhite. The essay as a whole suggests that though ancient and modern Western Rhetoric addresses similar ideas, Indian approaches are best understood *on* and *in* their own terms.

The inter-relation of Indian and Greek concepts of persuasion provides a much broader framework for understanding the concept than either tradition alone. European rhetoric is undoubtedly unique, but so are the traditions of “other” cultures. Understanding each culture’s rhetorics clearly directs the way to an informed rhetoric of intercultural communication.

Overview of an Indian Rhetorical Tradition: Nyāya and Sadharanikaran

Similar to Aristotle, Hindus conceptualized persuasion as part of both oral and dramatic traditions. As he remarked in his *Rhetoric*, “When the principles of delivery have been worked out, they will produce the same effect as on the stage” (Rhetoric III 1 1413). Formalization of

oral reasoning in India is traditionally thought to have been begun by the philosopher Gotama (550 BCE), and his philosophical system of reasoning came to be known as *Nyāya*. Early Buddhists probably originated the approach, and it was refined in Buddhist and Hindu inter- and intra-school debates. Jaina, Carvaka, and later Muslims adopted its methods, spreading to the whole culture. The term means “just” or “true,” as in a plumb line. *Nyāya* arguments gradually became codified into a five-part “method” (Matilal) that defines arguments in terms of claims, reasons, and analogies (Lloyd “Culture,” “Rethinking,” “Rhetorical” “Learning”). The rhetor makes observations and links them to audience-shared analogies to create shared truth.

As Wimal Dissanayake, in *Foundations of Indian Verbal Communication and Phenomenology* observes, “While Western thinkers fashioned language into an instrument to explore and comprehend reality, the Hindus... avoided logical and discursive language and made use of analogies and metaphors” (43). Using such analogies, *Nyāya* arguers enter into fruitful dialogue (*vāda*) when they agree to seek truth as equal searchers for truth.

Of course, verbal persuasion must take physical form. Another (dramatic) tradition, called *Sadharanikaran* (Sanskrit “simplification”), based in the theories concerning *Natya* (drama) and *Nrtya* (dance), emerged from the perspectives of Bharat Muni (2nd century B.C.E.) (Yadava 165). As J.S. Yadava notes, whereas in Aristotelian rhetoric speakers persuade “through dialogue and debate,” in *Sadharanikaran* the actor utilizes “speech, gestures, and other visuals” (167). The relation of speaker and audience takes the form in *Sadharanikaran* that of *guru/śiṣya* (teacher/student). The sender encodes an idea or emotion so that the receiver “not only accepts the message willingly but in the process derives genuine satisfaction and pleasure or *Ananda*” (167). The main goal of this exchange is that “the difference between the ‘I’ and ‘Others’ diminishes in his heart” (167). *Nyāya* brings interlocutors together through shared

analogy and common truth; *Sadharanikaran* expresses the joy inherent in such exchanges—we realize that we are in essence one with other human beings, even all of life.

Persuasion in Aristotelian, *Nyāya* and *Sadharanikaran* Traditions

Both *Nyāya* and *Sadharanikaran* emphasize spiritual liberation through persuasion. This section describes the Indian concepts in greater detail, contrasting them with some of Aristotle’s more familiar ideas, and then it offers some historical and current Indian arguments to illustrate rhetorical delivery shaped by *Nyāya* and *Sadharanikaran*, a glimpse into the concept of persuasion within a rich non-Western tradition.

Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric* encourages speakers to make arguments without embellishment, but he admits that they must also, due to “defects in the hearers” (τοῦ ἀκροατοῦ μοχθηρία), try and please audiences. He relegates this need to “charm” the audience to the need to move them: “The arts of language cannot help having a small but real importance, whatever it is we have to expound to others: the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. Not, however, so much importance as people think. All such arts are fanciful and meant to charm the hearer” (ἅπαντα φαντασία ταῦτ’ ἐστὶ, καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἀκροατὴν) (*Rhetoric* III 1 1409-12). Preferring the more hallowed contexts of philosophical dialectic, he cynically notes that “the whole business of rhetoric [is] concerned with appearances” (τῆς περὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν οὐχ ὡς ὁρθῶς ἔχοντος ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀναγκαίου τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιητέον). The message, however, must not get lost, so Aristotle suggests a compromise—do not annoy and do not delight the listeners (μὴ τε λυπεῖν μὴ τ’ εὐφραίνειν) (*Rhetoric* III 1 1405; 1406).

Indian reasoners also employed claims and reasons, but persuasion was about shared truth, not “appearances.” Audiences, rather than being “defective,” may suffer from defective interpretations of their experience that persuasion may ameliorate. “Delighting” the interlocutors,

in an elevated sense, became one of the goals (Lloyd “Rethinking,” “Rhetorical”). For these reasons, Indian reasoning was “markedly different from Aristotelian logic” (Dissanayake 45).

For instance, in the *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta* by Krishna Das Kaviraja (b1496), the guru laments the uselessness of words to describe the god *Krishna*:

*Ananta avatāra kṛsnera, nāhika ganana
śākhā candra nyāya kari dig-darśana* (Madhya 20.248)

"The incarnations of Kṛṣṇa are without number, and it is impossible to count them. We can simply indicate them by offering the analogy of the moon and the branches of a tree."

The argument of the passage reflects *Nyāya*'s three part pattern:

Hypothesis (*pratijñā*): **We can only indicate** (*pakṣa*) **the incarnations of Krishna** (*sādhya*)

Reason (*hetu*): **Because they are without number** (*hetu*)

Examples (*dṛṣṭānta*): **Like the moon and the branches of a tree** (*sāpakṣa*)

Though Western scholarship cannot fully agree as to what enthymemes are (see Poster), as Grimaldi, Green, and Emmel point out, quite often they consist of a claim and reason. *Nyāya* then appears to bring together Aristotle's *enthymeme* and *paradigm* (Lloyd “Culture”), making them a type of rhetorical syllogism. However, Aristotle's examples are instances of the argument, not analogies parallel to it.

Nyāya differs in two respects. First, it has no hidden third premise. Aristotle remarks that speakers may omit this premise if their audience is familiar with it (Rhetoric I. 2. 1357a line 23, p. 28; Burnyeat 100), but it still implicitly undergirds the argument. Second, for Aristotle, the *paradigma* (examples) fill mostly supportive roles (Rhetoric II. 20. 1394a 9-13, p. 134-135), while *Nyāya*'s example functions as an analogy expressing the gist of the whole argument. In the

passage above, the word *Nyāya* is best translated as “analogy,” revealing how central this element is to this type of argument.

Uma Krishnan, a Hindu from India, uses arguments that express this relationship between claim, reason, and example. She once offered, “You and I were meant to have this conversation, because life has brought us together, like two strangers on a train; we may have different destinations, but nonetheless been fated to share the same car for some limited time.”

Krishnan’s approach reflects an Indian method of persuasion where her example, instead of an instance related to one of the premises, is an analogy that joins the two premises. It reflects what Matilal calls the “*Nyāya* Method,” shown in full below:

Hypothesis (*pratijñā*): ***The hill (pakṣa) is on fire (sādhya)***
Reason (*hetu*): ***Because there is smoke (hetu)***
Examples (*dṛṣṭānta*): ***Like in a kitchen (sāpakṣa)*** [Positive example]
Unlike a lake (vipakṣa) [Negative example]
Re-Affirmation (*upanaya*): ***This is the case***
Conclusion (*nigamāna*): ***The hill is on fire.***

The first three parts of the method are used for both private and public reasoning (Ingalls. Lloyd, “Rethinking,” “Culture”). The last two elements (Sanskrit *avāyava*, “limbs” or “members”) reflect the debate process, the first three being discussed until the interlocutors jointly re-affirm the observations and conclusions. Krishnan’s argument reflects the first three steps, the shape *Nyāya*-influenced arguments take in informal contexts.

In contrast, an Aristotelian formulation of the traditional model of the *Nyāya* method would read like this:

Where there is smoke there is fire.
There is smoke on the hill.

The hill is on fire.

The *Nyāya* formulation begins with testing the Aristotelian conclusion. Both share a common premise, the “reason” (the Indian *hetu*, the second Aristotelian premise). The initial Aristotelian premise is missing in *Nyāya* (Lloyd “Rethinking”).

According to Aristotle, the rhetor’s enthymemes should start with opinions “accepted by our judges or by those whose authority they recognize” (Rhetoric II.22.1395-6a p.141).

Similarly, Gotama, in the *Nyāya Sūtra*, acknowledges the importance of shared perspectives:

“What is adopted [by the rhetoric] is analyzed in terms of the five members [the *Nyāya* method]... while its opposite is assailed by confutation, without deviation from the established tenets” (NS I II 42 p. 19). The link between rhetor and respondent, in the Indian case, rests not

only on shared tenets, but also on the shared analogy (*dr̥ṣṭānta*) (Lloyd ‘Rethinking,’

“Rhetorical”). Similarly, in her argument, Krishnan states her claim and reason, “We are meant to have this conversation because life has brought us together,” followed by her *dr̥ṣṭānta*, “like two strangers on a train.”

In the light of these observations, consider this paraphrase of Krishnan’s argument:

Pratijñā: You and I were fated to converse

Hetu: because life brought us together

Dr̥ṣṭānta: like passengers on a train.

She makes no mention of a major premise about people and conversations, as would be in

Aristotelian formulation:

[People whom life brings together are fated to converse.]

You and I have been brought together by life (like the examples of...)

You and I are fated to converse

Since her argument includes only a claim and reason tied with a train analogy, it clearly reflects a *Nyāya* pattern, and it is convincing only if the analogy and the comparison share enough characteristics (Ganeri 31, 33, Lloyd, “Rethinking,” “Rhetorical”). This is not to say that enthymemes based in analogies are foreign to the West; of course they occur here as well. The point is, however, that the analogical example is *foundational* to the Indian pattern noted here.

Krishnan’s argument differs from Aristotle’s in two other ways. First, though she speaks as teacher to student, she relates to the listener as an equal searcher for truth. She is not just dressing up the facts for a defective audience, she is seeking a bridge to a shared understanding of a shared reality. Second, her words themselves reveal that she is enacting this relationship so that speaker and respondent may enter the *joy (ānanda)* of dialogue together resembling an enlightening conversation between persons sharing a car on a train.

This joy in sharing is reflected in the idea of *Sadharanikaran*, which Nirmata Mani Adhikary describes in terms of communication theory’s sender and receiver: The *Sadridaya*, inspired by a mood, thought, emotion or idea (*bhavas*), encodes it (*abhiyanjana*) into a message (*sandasha*) recognizable to the senses using a channel (*sarami*) which the receiver decodes (*rasawadana*). The root of this term, “*rasa*,” literally means “taste,” which represents the deep sensory work involved in what Westerners call decoding. In the Indian context, the respondent is not just reading code; she or he is “tasting” the message. If this tasting process is successful and the *bhava* conveyed, and if the respondent enters into a similar state of inspiration and the joy of the shared experience (“*rasa*”), then the receiver also is *Sadridaya*. Muni describes *rasa* thusly: “bhavas-s are the source of expression of the rasa-s of poetry. The rasa-s are produced when these come into contact with the qualities common (to human mind)” In *Nyāya* fashion, he references an analogy found in a traditional verse: “A meaning which touches the heart creates

rasa; the entire body feels the rasa like fire consuming a dry stick” (*Nāṭyaśāstra* VII.6). Here we witness a *Nyāya*-like claim and analogy argument used to describe what was later termed *Sadharanikaran*.

This process is more complicated than the following diagram implies, but *Figure 1* enables us to visualize the process of *Sadharanikaran*, as identified by Adhikary, in basic form. The English terms used here, as the difference between decoding and rasa described earlier implies, are inadequate, but they help us orient ourselves to the basic process.

Sender inspiration encoding message channel decoding receiver
Sadridaya → *Bhavas* → *abhiyanjana* → *sandeha* → *sarami* → *rasawadana* → *Sadridaya*

Figure 1 *Sadharanikaran* Model (simplified)

Note that if the process is successful and decoding becomes the intimate act sharing, “*rasawadana*,” the respondent becomes so much one with the speaker that both are *Sadridaya*.

The author of the *Nyāyasūtra* describes the final goal of argumentation similarly to *Sadharanikaran*. In *Nyāya*, the primary goal of rhetorical interaction is release from the cycle of rebirth and reincarnation: “Pain, birth, activity, faults, and misapprehension—on the successive annihilation of these in reverse order, there follows release” (*mokṣa*) (*NS* I. 1. 2. p. 2). The processes of *Nyāya* help the practitioner to remove misapprehension (*mithâ-jñāna*), as well as the “faults” (*doṣa*) in perception and inference it entails, enabling the person to correctly interpret the illusions about life they cause—that life is nothing but activity, endless rebirth, and pain that stems from desire. For *Nyāya*, the overarching goal of argumentation is to see through to the truth that all beings are from one source, that our humanity is common, our goals the similar, and our notions of our separate and selfish lives are nothing but illusions. Through this

process we can end the cycle of desire, rebirth and pain, and truly experience the unity with God (Brahman) that is the basis of our existence in the first place, a state of joy—*ānanda*.

In short, the goals of both *Sadharanikaran* and *Nyāya* are to remove the distance between I and Other because that distance is in itself an illusion caused by misunderstanding our common existential position. In *Sadharanikaran*, “the complex concepts and ideas are simplified by the speaker (source) with illustrations and idioms appropriate to the understanding of the listeners (receiver of messages)” (Yadava 169). Likewise, in the *Nyāya* method, the *dr̥ṣṭānta* or analogy, defined by Gautama as a “thing about which an ordinary man and an expert entertain the same opinion” (NS I.1. 25 p. 11) is connected to a reason “the means for establishing what is to be established by the homogenous or affirmative character of the reason” (NS I.1.34 p.14). Like *Sadharanikaran*’s illustrations and idioms, the *dr̥ṣṭānta* exemplifies and makes clear the argumentative connections. Thus, using similar methods, drama, dance, and rhetoric, three key cultural forms of communication, are all to serve, in Hindu thinking, the greater goal of removing the obstacles to self-understanding and to bring us to a state of comprehension of and joy in our fundamental unity.

Significance and Conclusions

Greek influenced rhetoric places the most emphasis on the rhetor as the one who chooses the best available means of persuasion to suit an audience. Since audiences are “defective,” rhetors must find a way to intrigue them while convincing them. According to Aristotle, speakers use enthymemes and/or examples to move the audience to the speaker’s point of view, and to act and/or think accordingly.

Ideally, *Nyāya* posits a safe space where interlocutors are relative equals; it is designed for both formal and informal debate and idea presentation. Interlocutors agree to seek answers

together through *vada* (“fruitful and fair discussion”) using the method’s claim, reason and analogy to find sharable truth. Historically, it was used for dialogues between religious leaders and rulers and debates among schools of thought (Lloyd “Learning”). The goal is *mokṣa*, the release of the interlocutors from ignorance, doubt, and illusion, that ultimately leads to liberation from cycles of death and rebirth.

Sadharanikaran developed from a teacher/student model, including speakers, actors, and poets in the teacher’s role. It encompasses all modes of communication—gesture, costume, dance, bodily movements, staging, etc. The goal is *rasa*, a bodily and spiritual sharing of the speaker’s message. The goal is for both rhetor and audience to enter a state of joy and communal experience. Speakers would of course use both methods to communicate.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s in their book, *The New Rhetoric*, began to align Western rhetoric with perspectives on argumentation similar to the Indian approaches outlined here. They wrote: “To agree to discussion means readiness to see things from the viewpoint of the interlocutor, to restrict oneself to what he admits, and to give effect to one’s own beliefs only to the extent that the person one is trying to persuade is willing to give assent to them” (55). Having lived the realities of world war, the writers, rather than dismiss rhetoric as a tool of propaganda, resurrect it for peaceful purposes: “The use of argumentation implies that one has renounced resorting to violence alone, that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one’s interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion, and that one is not regarding him as an object, but appealing to his free judgment” (55). Their emphasis, however, continues to be on the rhetor’s primary role.

Kenneth Burke’s notion of rhetoric’s role in creating “consubstantiation” among interlocutors also hearkens to the Indian approaches (Lloyd “Rethinking”). However, where the

Indian approaches use persuasion to remind us of our fundamental unity and enable *mokṣa* or *rasa*, he places rhetoric in the gap of our fundamental isolation (22). In this view, consubstantiation implies only a temporary unification of our purposes to meet some common goal (275). *Nyāya*'s *vāda* and *Sadharanikaran*'s *rasa* both imply fulfillment and removal of the obstacles to actualized and sustained consubstantiation and *commune*-ication.

James Crosswhite's *Deep Rhetoric* also indicates some desire from Western rhetoricians to find spaces similar to those within Indian traditions. He describes Olbrect-Tyteca's notion of "*le contact des esprits*" as a "different kind of contact" than the common translation a "meeting of *minds*." For him, their phrase implies what he terms "transcendence," an "ability to go out of ourselves and meet each other in language of some kind... in any symbolic action or medium that is capable of sustaining communicative meeting" (61). His remarks express impulses similar to India's *Nyaya* and *Sadharanikaran*. However, he explains later that "[i]f we think of the contact of *esprits* here as the meeting of lives, in their capacity to lead and be led, we will avoid reifying it, or objectifying it, or spiritualizing it" (61). As a Western rhetorician, he indicates a desire for something like *vāda* or *rasa*, but seems moored to the notion that rhetoric is a tool for unification rather than an expression of it.

For these reasons, the Indian approaches to persuasion described here should be studied and acquired in and on their own terms. Though they overlap with some common ideas and impulses, their expression is unique. As we learn and teach these approaches our perspective on what it means to argue enlarges. At some point we can ask others to *vāda* with us; at some point we may find *rasa* when we do.

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