

Abstract

This thesis examines how storytelling evokes emotional engagement by comparing Western three-act and Indian five-act narrative structures through the lens of *Rasa* theory. While narrative emotion has been studied in both literary and aesthetic traditions, there remains a valuable opportunity to bring Western literary, narratological, and psychological models into sustained dialogue with Indian aesthetic philosophy—particularly in understanding how narrative structure shapes emotional experience. Western approaches, grounded in Aristotelian poetics and cognitive narratology, emphasize empathy, immersion, and catharsis, treating emotion largely as an internal, subjective response. In contrast, *Rasa* theory, rooted in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, conceptualizes emotion as a shared, contemplative aesthetic experience, universalized through *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* and realized through aesthetic savoring (*āsvāda*), with deeper metaphysical and ontological dimensions. Both the Western three-act and the Indian five-stage narrative (*pañca-avasthā*) outline emotional progression from beginning to resolution and may be adapted beyond drama to short fiction. This study investigates how these structural models influence emotional engagement and whether *Rasa* theory can serve as a meaningful analytical framework for interpreting reader responses. A mixed-method approach combines conceptual and hermeneutic analysis with empirical inquiry. The empirical component includes three reader-response studies using short stories adapted into different structures, measuring emotional reactions via Likert scales and statistical tools (ANOVA, t-test). Findings indicate that narrative structure does affect emotional engagement, but its impact varies by genre, sequence, and emotion type. Reflective emotions such as wonder, love, and enthusiasm were more sensitive to structural variation, especially in the five-act format. This thesis positions *Rasa* theory as a culturally grounded yet globally relevant framework for analyzing emotional engagement across narrative, performance and various art forms. By framing emotion as both culturally embedded and aesthetically mediated, it contributes to narrative theory, cross-cultural aesthetics, and media studies, offering new pathways for future research in storytelling and emotional design.

Keywords: Storytelling, Narrative Structure, Emotional Engagement, *Rasa* theory, Reader Response, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Aristotelian poetics, Comparative Aesthetics