

RHYTHMICITY: ONTOLOGY, DIALECTIC AND ETHICS

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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by

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled **Rhythmicity: Ontology, Dialectic and Ethics** being submitted by **Mr. Latheesh Mohan** to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in **Humanities and Social Sciences (Philosophy)** is a record of original bonafide research work carried out by him under my supervision. The work presented in this thesis has reached the requisite standard and has not been submitted elsewhere either in part or in full for the award of any other degree or diploma.



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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, presented to obtain PhD in Philosophy from Humanities and Social Sciences Department of IIT Delhi, is composed by myself. The work contained herein is my own and is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever quotations from others are involved, every effort has been made to indicate this clearly with due reference to the literature. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Latheesh Mohan

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to understand rhythm in a manner that befits the nature of this concept. Rhythm has been defined mainly as flow and form. It could be argued that these two major definitions of rhythm in a way determine two major ways of philosophical understanding: Dialectic and Ontology. In the movement based systems, rhythm is understood as the point-of-balance that enables movement. For example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define rhythm as the point between two intermilieus that constantly slips away (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 346). (non) Doctrines based on fundamental Ontology tend to understand rhythm as form. As an example, Martin Heidegger defines rhythm as 'what is at rest' (*On the Way to Language*, p. 149). The attempt here is to navigate both these traditions (definitions) to show the coupled or hyphenated nature of rhythm.

Rig Veda and Atharva Veda are examined in order to dig out the original meaning of the ancient Indian concept rita/m. It is interesting to note that ritam as a concept has always been represented by coupled god-heads (Mitra-Varuna).

सार

यह अध्ययन एक तरह से लय को समझने का एक प्रयास है जो इस अवधारणा की प्रकृति को प्रभावित करता है। लय को मुख्य रूप से प्रवाह और रूप के रूप में परिभाषित किया गया है। यह तर्क दिया जा सकता है कि एक तरह से लय की ये दो प्रमुख परिभाषाएं दार्शनिक समझ के दो प्रमुख तरीके निर्धारित करती हैं: द्वंद्वत्मक और भाषाविज्ञान। आंदोलन आधारित प्रणालियों में, लय को बिंदु-संतुलन के रूप में समझा जाता है जो आंदोलन को सक्षम करता है। उदाहरण के लिए, गिलेस डेलेज़ और फेलिक्स गुआतारी ने दो इंटरमिलियस के बीच के बिंदु को लय को परिभाषित किया है जो लगातार फिसल जाता है (ए थाउज़ेंड प्लैटियस, पृष्ठ 346)। (गैर) मौलिक ओंटोलॉजी पर आधारित सिद्धांत रूप के रूप में लय को समझते हैं। एक उदाहरण के रूप में, मार्टिन हाइडेगर ने ताल को 'आराम पर है' के रूप में परिभाषित किया है (ऑन द वे टू लैंग्वेज, पृष्ठ 149)। यहाँ प्रयास यह है कि इन दोनों परम्पराओं (परिभाषाओं) को लयबद्ध या उच्चरित प्रकृति को दिखाने के लिए नेविगेट किया जाए।

प्राचीन भारतीय अवधारणा रीता / म का मूल अर्थ खोदने के लिए ऋग्वेद और अथर्ववेद की जांच की जाती है। यह ध्यान रखना दिलचस्प है कि एक अवधारणा के रूप में रितम को हमेशा युग्मित देव-प्रमुखों (मित्रा-वरुण) द्वारा दर्शाया गया है।

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Preface/Synopsis

This study is an attempt to understand rhythm in a manner that befits the nature of this concept. Rhythm has been defined mainly as flow and form. It could be argued that these two major definitions of rhythm in a way determine two major ways of philosophical understanding: Dialectic and Ontology. In the Dialectical¹ systems, rhythm is understood as the point-of-balance that enables movement. For example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define rhythm as the point between two intermilieus that constantly slips away (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 346). (non) Doctrines based on fundamental Ontology tend to understand rhythm as form. As an example, Martin Heidegger defines rhythm as 'what is at rest' (*On the Way to Language*, p. 149). The attempt here is to navigate both these traditions (definitions) to show the coupled or hyphenated nature of rhythm and its singular-plural status.

In order to solve the tension between form and flow this study uses the phrase 'Onto-Dialectic'. Onto-Dialectic understands the priority of rhythmicity and it makes a detailed argument against the idea of harmony in favor of rhythm.

The treatment here follows a two section-pattern: first section looks into the philosophical discussions around rhythm and tries to interrelate these traditions into a moving-and-resting organism. Second section tries to figure out the ethical implications of the findings in the first section. This section uses B R Ambedkar and

¹ This study understands Dialectic as the essence of movement.

Narayana Guru as case studies to figure out the trail of rhythm in social scenarios.

This work on rhythm begins by introducing the history of rhythm studies. This indirect introduction posits the question of rhythm in the intellectual history of the now and tries to answer the question ‘why study rhythm now’. The argument here tries to show that we are going through a phase where the intellectual activity focuses mainly on the body and the singular. In a way it blinds us towards the unrelenting activity of the spirit. Arguments against reason are readily available everywhere and that somehow sets the stage up for the old-school anarchist mystics to make a comeback. But sadly, even that did not happen, mostly because of the everything-is-body (performance) rhetoric. The situation is somewhat confusing but also suited for creation. That is why rhythm acquires prominence. Because rhythm has been appropriated by both the measure school and the measure-less school, it has potential for a complete inter-penetration. Or it in itself is the potential for a complete inter-penetration.

The relationship between rhythm and measure has always been controversial. It is obvious, even to a casual observer, that the issue of rhythm has been plagued by the issue of measure. Henri Lefebvre, in his book *Rhythmanalysis*, says that there is no rhythm without measure. This statement is troublesome as it leaves out the possibility of the open-ended event.

Martin Heidegger understands rhythm strictly as form. In his book *On The Way to Language*, he argues: “Rhythm, *rhusmos*, does not mean flux and flowing, but rather

form. Rhythm is what is at rest, what forms the movement of dance and song, and lets it rest within itself. Rhythm bestows rest”. It is interesting to note that he says, before his *thesis*, that “rhythm does not mean flux and flowing”.

A similar situation can be spotted in Deleuze and Guattari when they argue in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that ‘rhythm is not meter or cadence’. It has to be noted that this tendency to enter through the negative is a ‘normal’ phenomenon in the discourse related to rhythm. This compulsion to enter through the negative opens up a series of possibilities such as the theory of misinterpretation or the possibility of rhythm being singular and even the chance of rhythm getting defined as not-being.

In the beginning itself it is almost obvious that the question of rhythm faces the tension between flow and form and the issue between change and stability. Because the issue of the double is present everywhere in the rhythm discourse, in order to reach to the core meaning of what is denoted by the word rhythm, it is necessary to reach the level of the third concept. Because it takes part in both form and flow, the meaning of the sign in question has to exist-with both form and flux. This implies that anything that has the make-up of a necessary third concept could reveal something about rhythm.

It is striking to note that the ancient Indian concept *rita/m* has also been haunted by the issue of the double. *Rita/m* in popular understanding means *satyam* (truth). But it is important to show that this is a misconception as the original source of this word (*Rig Veda*) does not offer any evidence to back up that argument.

The argument here tries to show that ritam and satyam are not same or essentially correlated. These two words appear many times in a same line in the Rig Veda. This, without doubt, rules out the possibility of the words ritam and satyam carrying the same meaning. While ritam is associated with only Mitra and Varuna, satyam appears with many gods.

Section two of this study begins with two long monographs on B R Ambedkar and Narayana Guru. This is absolutely necessary as we are obtaining dictums from the anti-caste movement using these two great men's lives and their afterlife image as case studies. Anti-caste movement has been selected as the area of study considering the relationship rhythm shares with the rebel. In the context of India, anti-caste movement is the biggest rebel phenomenon that is still very much in action.

Guru and Ambedkar were, in the context of the anti-caste movement, rhythm in themselves, for they managed to stay singular and realised the plural in the singular itself. One could argue that both Guru and Ambedkar used the dictum: 'I' am plural. It is important to note that whenever someone asked about his strategy in volatile situations (the Mahad Satyagraha, for example), Ambedkar kept on answering that "it would depend on the other group's intention". Narayana Guru on the other hand always wanted people to plan their actions in a way that would bring pleasure to the other too. The ethics that guided Ambedkar and Guru were rhythmic in nature rather than formal.

The example of Ambedkar and Guru shows the other-specific nature of the concept rhythm and this nature of rhythm has a direct connection with the relationship I (individual subject) shares with We (collective subject). Here one has to explore three main questions as an introductory engagement with the question regarding the ontology of the singular and the collective subject: 1. I and We one or two? 2. Is it really a problem of priority? 3. Where should one start: With the Individual? Collective? Or in the middle?

The long route through rhythm shows that I (individual) and We (collective) are not two concrete domains. They cannot be abstracted absolutely out of each other as one cannot imagine I without We or We without I. I comes out of We and becomes We, We in turn modifies and extends the I. What makes the situation complicated and not-only-singular and singular-plural for the I and We is the presence of the other.

The argument for onto-dialectic begins as a corollary of this insight.