



DRAMATURGICAL CONSTELLATION IN ANITA NAIR'S NINE FACES OF BEING

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Abstract

Bharata Muni very emphatically states in the Rasadhayaya of Natyashastras that “no meaningful idea is conveyed if the “Rasa” is not evoked”. Rasa can be explained as the aesthetic relish of the emotional tone in the suitably cultivated audience. Bharata puts it in a single line as which is relished is Rasa.

Human being can experience life through inculcation of nine rasas. Rasas enable a human being to experience and emphatically express the nuances of life in all its multifacetedness. The embedding of these devices and the most effective as well as appropriate use of them will help the playwright to penetrate, pierce and please the minds and hearts of the readers cum audience. Sensing this power, Anita Nair, a renowned Indian writer has transformed her own verbal fiction *Mistress* into the performing art by getting it enacted as *Nine Faces of Being*.

Every dramatic presentation was aimed at evoking in the minds of the audience a particular kind of aesthetic experience which is described as rasa. Nair weaves the tale of love, longing, betrayal and envy against the backdrop of kathakali dance form with nine rasas/ expressions as *Sringaaram* (love), *Hassyam* (laughter), *Karunam*(sorrow) , *Raudram* (anger), *Veeram* (valour), *Bhayaaknam* (fear), *Bheebalsam*(disgust),*Adbhutam* (wonder) and *Shaantam* (peace) in her play. She succinctly exemplifies these rasas with the events of her play and succeeds in generating aesthetic experience. The present paper discusses the effective exemplification of nine rasas by the writer in her play and their influence in creating lasting impressions on the audience through the eventful manifestation.

Aesthetic pleasure fills one's mind and heart on seeing or hearing various artistic works like sculptures, painting, music and drama. It is the artists' ardent devotion and undying passion that get the shape of such exquisite works of art; it was the aesthetic urge that is behind every work of art and the outcome is a rendering dedicated to their successive generation. Every visual art exhibits a unique emotion which could be categorised under the ‘Rasa’ concept.

Bharata Muni, hailed to be a legendary author of the *Natyashastra*. This is the first Sanskrit work on dramaturgy. Bharata was the one who popularized the *Natyaveda* or fifth veda. Acting, dance, music and rasa (aesthetic sentiment) are the main constituents that occupy major part in the *Natyashastra*, where rasa is the central subject and the previous three being the tools or means to experiment successfully rasa. In the *Natyashastra*, rasa (aesthetic sentiment) has been elevated to a full-fledged theory called *rasa siddhanta*. Rasa, according to the Indian aesthetics, is an essence of performing art. It is not only felt by the actors/ performers/writers but is also transmitted by them to the sensitive spectators/readers, who after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the performers through their words, countenance, body language and gestures experience the aesthetic. The following factors form the constituents of rasa. They are *Sthayi bhavas* (basic mental states), *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* (voluntary gestures), *Sattvikas* (Involuntary gestures) and *Vyabicharibhavas* (transient emotions). Bharata considers eight rasas to which three more rasas have been added by *Udabhata* and *Abhinavagupta*.

Human being can experience the multiple facets and tenets life through imbibing the nine rasas. Rasas enable a human being to experience and emphatically express the nuances of life in all its multifacetedness. Every dramatic presentation was aimed at evoking in the minds of the audience a particular kind of aesthetic experience which is described as rasa. Anita Nair's adaptation of her own novel, *Mistress*, into dramatic form entitled *Nine Faces of Being* deals with a story of every day situation. A story of love and forbidden passion and art, the play explores the universality of human emotion. Nair sets the play in the midst of a family of Kathakali dancer, the ancient traditional form of the dance deftly woven into contemporary drama. This play directed by one of the most seasoned Bangalore theatre artistes, *Arundhati Raja*, depicts each of the *Navarasas* as the nine stages of a human being's life, in the nine scenes that the play journeys through. Nair blends *navarasas* along with rasa theory and knits efficiently with her tale of artistry and adultery. The forbidden fruit tastes good, likewise *Radha*, one of the central charactes of the play sweeps along with passion and moves towards *Chris*, a foreign traveller cum writer. Her husband helplessly watches her in the arms of disaster. Nair segregates of the play scenes as with the following nine rasas:



Sanskrit Term	Principal Meaning	Further Meanings & related emotions
Shringara	Love	Beauty, devotion
Hasya	Joy	Humor, sarcasm
Adbhuta	Wonder	Curiosity, mystery
Veera	Courage	Pride, confidence
Shanta	Peace	Calmness, relaxation
Karuna	Sadness	Compassion, pity, sympathy
Raudra	Anger	Irritation, stress
Bhayanaka	Fear	Anxiety, worry
Bibhatsa	Disgust	Depression, self-pity

As customary with most other Indian classical dance forms, the structure and stylization of Kathakali too is informed by the Rasa theory of Indian aesthetics. In the play, the nine rasas of Bharata's Natyashastra become more than just aesthetic emotions to be performed by the Kathakali dancer on stage. Through the perfect blend of the nine rasas with the context the writer depicts not just the context within which Radha's adultery begins to take shape, but also ultimately foregrounds her point of view.

The first rasa is sringaaram or love. One can sense that Shyam's stoic inexpressiveness and overt desirelessness resulted in creating an emotionally vacuum space in Radha. The absence of expression of love and desire on the part of the husband, consequently pushed Radha forward towards Chris, the American traveller writer. Through Radha's eyes, the writer portrays Shyam as a materialistic businessman who understands neither art nor aesthetics, who constantly embarrasses Radha by exhibiting sheer carelessness that is so typical of him and who in her words "wasn't just a sham, he was an uncouth boor, this husband of mine" (Nair 9). Chris understands Radha's yearnings for music and poetry, her oblique references to Yeats. Under his attractive and attentive gaze, Radha's discontentment begins to seep away, and slides towards Chris. Radha's uncle Koman says in despair: "Her face is radiant. Her eyes throw him a sidelong glance. Chris turns to her. His smile gathers her in his arms. I think of Nala and Damayanti. Of lovers in Kathakali who embrace without actually doing so . . . Chris, I see, desires Radha. And she, him" (29).

The next rasa, Haasyam or joy or sarcastic expression traces Radha's desire for Chris despite her legal binding with her husband Shyam. Ironically, she feels that it is Shyam who holds her in contempt and treats her, his wife of eight years, as a lifeless object and a possession to be inherited. He seems to regard her: "a kept woman, a bloody mistress to fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights" (73). Radha's desire for Chris grows, her contempt turns inwards, making her hate herself and she tries to get away from him to stick to the established and cherished morality. She irresistibly and hopelessly falls in the hands of Chris. Feeling sorrowful or remorse at her failed marriage, the rasa Haasyam then paved way to karunam.



The following rasa is raudram or fury; here one can see Radha's mute fury when her husband Shyam, on being refused involves in marital rape. She slips into guise in order to deprive him the pleasure of having broken her spirit. The humiliation of rape becomes the final justification she needs in order to step out of the bounds of conventional morality and indulge in adultery. The fury of her rage at Shyam gives way to her fierce passion for Chris. This desire gives her veeram, courage to believe that nothing can come between them. She proclaims: "Shyam, the parallel worlds we inhabit, guilt. Nothing matters. What feels so right can't be wrong" (216).

Instigated by desire, she involved in an immoral action which creates a kind of fear or bhayaknam. Radha stands like a cat on the wall unable to determine a suitable path. This dilemma induces a fear grow within her and she starts to play the game of deceit with Shyam. This act of deceit fills her beebhalsam or disgust, where she falls into a state of pandemonium and unable to decide the course of the journey of life. She abnegates, denounces herself and ruminates: "I feel disgust for what I am doing. Can anything be worth this repugnance? How much longer can I do this? This cheating, lying and pretence" (290).

The subsequent rasa is wonder or adbhutam, is unique in its nature of suddenness and surprised emotion elevated within everyone. Likewise Radha senses wonder on knowing her pregnancy but bewildered by its parentage as herself and Chris. The last rasa depicted is shaantam or peace where the action reaches to its extreme and falls into the origin state of being stable. Radha's knowledge of her present status of being mistress, a lover to Chris and wife to Shyam makes her feel repulsive. She finally admits her guilt and holds the responsibility for her deed which at least fills her with little peace.





Life itself is invariably an amalgamation of various and numerous moods and emotions. Every event has the ability to evoke various emotions simultaneously among the participants of the event. The writer, with her great and compassionate comprehension of the human nature and emotions, has dexterously combined the nine rasas one after the other delineating one as the consequential effect of the other. The inevitability of the nine rasas and their indelible impressions through the judicious juxtaposition of the persons and the rasas are exemplified by the writer. Since a picture is worth thousand words, the writer makes her reader/ audience feel and believes that every rasa is worth many experiences. The successful, skilful appropriate and dexterous craftsmanship has empowered the writer not merely to experiment or only to delineate but also to attach extraordinary tinge of shade to the ordinary, mundane happenings. The writer's expressive ability is well proven the ways the permutation combination of the form and content are handled.

References

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