
Reading an Indian Poem using Different Literary Traditions

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Article Received: 02/04/2025**Article Accepted:** 04/05/2025**Published Online:** 06/05/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.05.43

Abstract: The focus of the paper is to read an Indian poem, written in the Sangam Age, using three literary different traditions existing in the world, namely; the concept of 'rasa' and 'bhava' as enumerated in Natyashastra, the form of Ghazal as in the Persio-Arabic tradition and the theory of Poetics as propounded by Aristotle, and evaluate the possibilities and impossibilities of the same.

Keywords: Sangam Age, Literary Traditions, Natyashastra, Ghazal, Persio-Arabic Tradition, Poetics, Plurality of Existence.

Introduction

Acknowledging the existence of diverse entities in the world and the mutual relations present among them, this paper tries to discuss a literary piece of work with respect to three different traditions existing in the world, namely; the concept of 'rasa' and 'bhava' as enumerated in Natyashastra, the form of Ghazal as in the Persio-Arabic tradition and the theory of Poetics as propounded by Aristotle.

Natyashastra

Natyashastra is an ancient Sanskrit treatise on performance arts and the work is attributed to Saint Bharatamuni. He is believed to have composed the work between 200CCE and 200 CE. The treatise include a complex compilation of thirty six chapters with a total of 6000 verses.

The work deals with innumerable number of concepts related to performance arts. Some of the major concepts dealt in the work includes the stage and the setting of the place where thebolay is performed, the qualities necessary for being an actor, the elements of sound and lighting as used during the performance, costumes befitting the actors, different types of music and musical instruments, detailing of the art of 'natya' and the evocation of sentiments and bhavas in the audience. Bharatamuni details through the treatise that the ultimate aim of

performance arts is to transport the audience to the inner recesses of their unconscious mind. Keeping aside the part of entertainment, he considers the evocation of rasas and bhavas in the minds of audience to be inevitable and of utmost importance. Thus, he considers the genre of drama to detail his concept.

According to Natyashastra, no meaning arise from a speech without a sentiment. The rasa is said to be produced by a combination of determinants (Vibhava), consequants (Anubhava) and transitory states (Vyabhicari Bhava). Rasa is further described as rasa because it possess the quality of being relished or tasted. Bharatamuni uses the metaphor of cooked food to describe the process of evocation of rasa. He says, "just as a well disposed person enjoys the well cooked food that is mixed with various spices" (Bharatamuni, 1, 32-23), a good hearted audience will enjoy the drama presented before them with an aesthetic sense that is inherent in the play. Here, he connects the quality of 'tasting' to rasas. Bharatamuni further adds, "the cultured people taste the dominant states" while the play is being presented with a mixture of "words, gestures and temperament" and that they receive satisfaction from it. He calls this state of dominant state as rasas or sentiments.

What she said

Bigger than earth, certainly,

Higher than the sky,

More unfathomable than the waters

Is this love for this man

Of the mountain slopes

Where bees makes rich honey

From the flowers of the kurinci

That has such black stalks

Tevakulattom, Kuruntokai 3.(Ramanujan 1967)

According to Bharata's Natyashastra, Rasa is the cumulative result of Vibhava (stimulus), Anubhava (involuntary reactions) and Vyabhicari Bhava (voluntary reaction). Rasa can be defined as a dynamic experience between the artist, expression and those who receive it.

“Vibhavanubhavsamyograsanisattih”

Rasa refers to the emotional flavours that is crafted into the work by the writer and relished by the spectator or sahrdaya, literally one who has heart and can connect to the work with emotion, without any dryness.

Connecting the concept of 'sahrdaya' or sensitive speaker to that of a reader in the method of comparative literature, it can be inferred that a reader is someone who reads the work in the full sense of the term without any predetermined sociological psychological or historical prejudices. Reading, becomes an event that takes place between the reader and the

text. A text is a methodological field that is open to interpretations by the reader.

After reading the poem ‘What she said’, I felt the poem is in relation with the Sringara Rasa, the emotion of love. The unnamed lady in the poem details her love for her lover by comparing it with the vastness of the Universe.

According to Bharata, Sringara Rasa is based on the Sthayi bhava of Rati (love). Whatever is pure, holy and resplendent is referred to as Sringara by him.

“Sringara rasa is produced by seasonal flowers and ornaments by enjoying the company of beloved persons, music and poetry and by diversions like going to a park. This should be acted by graceful looks and words and sweet specific and smile and by pleasing and attracting gestures”.

“Rasa is produced on achievement of desire; to be acted sweetly and gracefully”.

Natyashastra further details two kinds of Sringara; Sambhoga (fulfilment) and Vipralamba (non-fulfilment). The concerned poem deals with the Sambhoga Sringara Rasa, the emotion of fulfilment of love.

According to Bharata, the Sambhoga Sringara rasa is stimulated by season (spring), garlands, scent (anointment), ornament and experience or by listening to or seeing desired company, beautiful surroundings, which are the vibhavas or the causes involved and living looks, lifting eye brows, side glances, graceful steps and gestures which are all anubhavas or involuntary, natural actions. Along with vibhavas and anubhavas, vyabhicari bhavas too add to the evocation of rasa.

The poem is divided into two sections of four lines each. The first section deals with the description of her love to her man. The unnamed lady is seen comparing her love with the vastness of the Universe. The second section deals with the fruitful union of their love and there by comparing it with the blooming of the flower ‘kurinci’.

In the poem under study, the element of desire as depicted through the description represent the Vibhava and the description of the love by the lover by means of language represent the Anubhavas. Vibhavas refers to the actions that stimulate rasa whereas Anubhavas refers to how emotions are manifested. Here, the process of describing her love is the stimulus and the use of language results in the manifestation of the Sringara Rasa.

The poem evokes the emotion of Sringara in the reader by its use of the beautiful surroundings or the scenic landscapes as described in it. The use of ‘kurinci’, a seasonal plant that grows only once in a year with full potential further points to the fulfilment of their love. The lovers are united by means of their love (rati) that is produced as a result of their desire towards each other. The first stanza describes various landscapes that includes “sky”, ‘kurinci’, “water”, “earth” and “mountain slopes” the use of such pure, resplendent emotions lead to the evocation of Sringara rasa in the readers. Further, the use of ‘kurinci’ and ‘bee’ works as metaphors that heightens the aesthetic essence of the poem.

The 'bee' functions as the lover and the 'kurinci' acts as the lady who describes her feelings for her man.

“Where bees make rich honey
From the flowers of the kurinci”

The above line brings out the element of Sambhoga or fulfillment in the reader. Just as a bee helps in pollinating kurinci flower, thereby resulting in their union, helps the reader attain the notion of love. The words 'bees' and 'kurinci' has only one literal meaning. But depending on the context in which it is used it takes the form of an extended metaphor of lovers. Moreover, the whole concept of Sringara is also made evident through the use of 'kurinci' whose colour is blue. According to Natyashastra, blue colour is associated with the concept of Sringara Rasa.

Persio-Arabic Traditions

Urdu is a language that is marked for its cultural and linguistic complexity. It reflects the position of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. Urdu is distinguished by the high proportion of Persio Arabic elements in it. It is also noted for its person arabic script. Urdu evolved mainly in the medieval ages as a local dialect of Delhi which got influenced by the Persian spoken by the Muslim invaders from other countries. During the period of Delhi Sultanate, Persian was the language of the courts. Thus it was with the degeneration of the Sultanate period that Urdu flourished as the language of literature and poetry. It encompasses a wide variety of literary forms like Ghazal, Qasida, Maznavi and Rekhta. Each variant is used for denoting different themes are written in different occasions.

What she said

Bigger than earth, certainly,
higher than the sky,
more unfathomable than the waters
is this love for this man

Of the mountain slopes,
where bees make rich honey
from the flowers of kurinji
that has such black stalks.

Tevakulattar, Kuruntokai 3.(Ramanujan 1967)

To the ghazal poet, nature in particular is full of analogies to his experiences in love. Earthly love is a complex of acts, relationships and emotions which cannot be expressed in plain words but requires the help of the poetic imagination to deal with such intangibles. Even a purely physical topic like the beautiful appearance of the beloved person cannot be described without having recourse to figurative language and poetic imagery, because only in that way can the lover show how this beauty affects his soul.

In the poem concerned, the unnamed narrator details her love for her man, by comparing her love with the vastness of the universe. The images related to nature is used to evoke the feelings of love in the reader. The use of the images “bigger than the earth”, “higher than the sky”, “unfathomable than the waters”, “bees make rich honey” all contribute to the feeling of love to be stated in the poem. Moreover, by comparing her lover with nature images, a complete picture of the universe emerges, in which all the layers of being distinguished by the medieval view of the world are represented. This cosmos of poetic imagery mirrors not merely the perfect beauty of the beloved, but also the exalted feelings evoked by love itself.

The animal kingdom provided an equally rich representation in ghazal poetry. The use of “bees” attribute to the meaning of ‘lover’, when used in the poem. The idealization of the world is seen in the poem, more akin to the visualization of paradise, as it is in the Koran.

In most of the ghazal poems, the speaking voice usually distinguishes itself from the poet by addressing him or talking about him as if he was an absent third form. An introspective division is made within the speaking person when he turns to his own heart, which is the seat of emotions produced by love.

The second actor, the beloved, is the person who is either described or addressed by the lover. The person remains anonymous and is indicated only by means of pronouns of the second or third person.

In the poem also, the speaking voice is rendered anonymous and is distinguished from the poet by means of an absent third person narrative. The beloved, in this case, ‘man’ is described as such, as “man”, and does not provide further details on the lover.

The description of a lover’s infatuation with the earthly beloved loses its objectionable features when the higher perspective of the love for the eternal, imperishable love is brought into play. Moreover, the aspect of love can be singled out as an entity in its own right ?? just like ghazal poetry that deals with the element of love, the psychology of a love relationship, whereby, magnifies the qualities of the beloved to non-earthly proportions is elaborated in a great deal in this poem.

Regarding the structure of ghazal: it consists of at least five, but often more than fifteen twelve lined stanzas; each stanza should be independent, but should tie together with the whole. The first two lines end with the same refrain. This refrain is repeated at the end of each stanza. The final stanza is of significance, where the author can use his name to seal the poem, often called Maqta. The lines should be of similar length and rhythm.

However, concerning the present poem, it does not fit into the structure of ghazal poetry as it is a four lined, two stanza poem, and there is a lack of refrain, called Radif. Moreover, the lines are of different metre, unlike the concept of Beher, which must have

same metre throughout the lines. The poem doesn't contain Kaafiyaa, which are the rhyming pattern of the words that precede each Radif.

The structure of the poem under consideration, fits into Rubaiyah, a form of Persian poetry. It consists of stanzas of four lines, where the rhyme scheme is aaba ccda, and so on.

Thus, it can be said that the poem 'What she said' doesn't fit fully into the category of Ghazal nor to that of Rubaiyat. It partly fits into the category of Ghazal based on its content and partly fits into the category of Rubaiyat based on its structure of using stanzas of four lines. Other than these features, the poem under study doesn't share any features similar to that of Ghazal and Rubaiyat, which are important forms of Persio Arabic Poetry.

Poetics

Poetics by Aristotle, is one of the oldest surviving treatise on the dramatic art and is considered the first philosophical treatise about literary theory. Aristotle mainly deals with the concept of poetry in this work. The term is a collective that includes verse drama, comedy, tragedy, lyric poetry and epic poetry. It deals with the making of a poetry and thus the title.

What she said

Bigger than earth, certainly,
higher than the sky,
more unfathomable than the waters
is this love for this man

Of the mountain slopes,
where bees make rich honey
from the flowers of kurinci
that has such black stalks.

Tevakulattar, Kuruntokai 3.(Ramanujan 1967)

According to Aristotle, poetry is distinguished as the mimetic art that uses language, rhythm and harmony to imitate real life, language obviously being the most important component. Poetry imitates by means of language alone, either in prose or verse, may either combine different metres or consists of but one kind but this has been hitherto been without a name.

Poetry is the imitation of reality through language. By reality, it means the things of substance. Either it could be static like objects, or non-static like human beings. The medium remains the same, language.

The method of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. The other basic imitation in human beings is 'harmony' and 'rhythm', metre being manifestly sections of rhythm. The improvisations made upon by this ability gave rise to poetry.

Aristotle further makes it clear that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but may happen- what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. Poetry tends to express the universal.

The poem ‘What She Said’ presents a lady love’s love for her lover. Here, the unnamed narrator’s love is expressed using nature images. The vastness of the universe is compared with the depth of her love. The poem can be described as an imitation of reality, whereby the reality lies in the abstract thought of love that the lover feels towards another. It depicts situations that may happen and is universal. The universally acknowledged emotion of love is brought through the poem by use of the extra conceptual nature of the language. The artistic sense of a reader is what is essential to bring out the inner meaning of the poem. The use of lucid but precise imagery has added to the beauty of the poem, as well as in evoking emotions in the reader.

However, comparing it with the genre of epic poetry in ‘Poetics’, it can be figured that the poem does not fit into the category of ‘epic poetry’, in the full sense of the term.

According to Aristotle, the ‘mimesis’ of epic poetry is in verse told in a narrative form. It must maintain the unity of plot and thus should focus on particular story that remains an organic whole. Furthermore, an epic poetry can last as long as a whole series of tragedies, provided it can be presented in one hearing. Moreover, it can jump back and forth between events happening at the same time in different places. Moreover, the subject matter should be grand in subject and written in heroic hexameter.

The poem under consideration maintains unity of plot whereby it follows that the first stanza depicts the description of the narrator’s love for her lover, and the second stanza presents the fulfillment of their love. The lovers unite by the end of the poem. There are no serious distractions in the poem that deviates us from pursuing their form of love towards each other.

However, it works by the use of metaphors related to nature that helps in connecting the poem. The words ‘bees’ and ‘kurinci’ acts as metaphors according to the third type of metaphors as described in Poetics, where there is a transformation from species to species. The ‘bees’ are used to represent male lover and ‘kurinci’ to represent the female lover. They convey their importance only when taken as a whole. It metaphorically expresses a sentiment based on a universal notion of experience.

Moreover, metaphor generates meaning directly because it gathers the scientific phenomenon originally into view. The word ‘scientific’ is used in the sense that the word has a particular meaning. Once metaphor has brought truths into view, the dialectic is able to define them. This is likely what Aristotle had in mind when he wrote that metaphor “is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others. It cannot be learned because it is the underlying condition of all learning”.

Regarding the length of the poem, the concerned poem does not fit into its definition, as it is a short poem of two stanzas with four lines each, and the metre of the poem is not heroic hexa metre. The poem consist of four lines with first, second and fourth line of four feet and the penultimate line with three feet. Moreover, the poem does not follow the rules of different parts of an epic that is to include plot, character, thought, diction and spectacle.

The poem works purely on the basis of the one directional tool of language. The extra conceptuality of the language helps in evoking different interpretations of the poem.

Thus, it can be said that the concerned poem works on the basis of the extra conceptuality of language alone, and it does not adhere to the concept of Aristotle's epic poetry in terms of its structure and concept. However, it works on the process of imitation of 'reality', whereby the universal abstract concept of love is dealt with.

Conclusion

There are diverse forms of entities in this universe. The entities are innumerable in its number and diversity that it is not possible to include each and every entity or thing of existence into separate well defined categories. On categorizing, some of them may fall back from categorization because of the lack of certain specific features or due to the presence of additional features in it. Thus, the ultimate and efficient way to mark the existence of different entities is to acknowledge the existence of them rather than fixing them to particular definite categories.

Diverse cultural, geographical and political influences produce diverse types of literary works in the world. Innumerable number of literary works is produced around the world locating themselves in particular time and space. Literature works on the basic principle of extra conceptuality. It is the system by which a word can get multiple interpretations, in contrast to the concept of conceptuality, whereby a specific word is attributed to an abstract concept by means of shared convention. Linguistic boundaries had become irrelevant as every language is formed or is part of or is influenced by several other languages of the world. It's apt to say that Linguistic boundaries doesn't exist. For example, the language Urdu is a mix of Hindi, Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Moreover, a particular language itself may consist of several dialects as well. For example, the Language Urdu spoken in India can be distinguished into many dialects like Dakhni of South India and Khariboli of Punjab region.

Some of the conclusions drawn from the paper includes: When the poem 'What she said' under concern was read with respect to Natyashastra , it was found to fit into one particular rasa. However, the Vibhavas and Anubhavas that were the stimuli and the manifestation respectively were not able to be pin pointed in the poem because it was a poetic work and not a dramatic one. The Natyashastra was composed keeping in mind the concept of dramatic performance and that's the reason why it gives emphasis on factors like acting

and

emotions. Whereas in poetic works which is solely constructed out of the one dimensional tool of language, emotions are evoked with respect to the extra conceptual nature of language.

During the second reading of the poem which was done with regard to the Persio-Arabic poetry tradition, the form of Ghazal and Rubaiyat were chosen to be dealt with. After the process of reading, it's clear that the poem 'What she said' fit in to the Ghazal form based on its content but not into its structural form. Further, the poem I chose was a two stanza poem with four lines each and thus the form of poetry was fit into the Rubaiyat poetry which is also four line stanza poetry but with specific rhyming scheme.

The third reading of the poem was done with respect to the Poetics theory of Aristotle. The elements of imitation and epic poetry was chosen for reading and it was found that the poem dealt with the Universal theme of Love and thereby it imitates reality through language. However, it differed from epic poetry with respect to its content and form.

Thus, through the process of literary reading done in the poem 'What she said', written by the poet Tevakulattar and translated by Ramanujan, with respect to three major literary traditions namely; Natyashastra, Persio-Arabia poetry and Poetics, it is clear that not every literary work can be classified into separate categories nor a work be made part of the existing categories by adhering to all the formulations prescribed as per the tradition. Every literary work is unique and has an individual existence on its own. As said earlier, the best way to mark its existence is to acknowledge the 'Other' and to "enjoy the nature of being in difference with the Other".

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Citation:

Gopika Nair UI. " Reading an Indian Poem using Different Literary Traditions." *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 5, 2025, pp. 35–43. DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.05.43.