

APPLICATION OF RASA THEORY ON
MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POETRY 'THE FORSAKEN MERMAN'

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ABSTRACT

The Rasa theory is the outstanding contribution of our Sanskrit literature to the world of poetics. The earlier exponent of the Rasa School is the 'Natyashastra' of Bharat. It is considered to be an encyclopedia of theorizing on drama, music, acting, dance, prosody and poetry. Rasa is the soul of the poetry. Bharat Muni considers Rasa as "Prana"(soul) of natya. A Rasa study is primarily concern on the effect of the theme on the spectator. One can accept its meaning as 'the emotional experience of beauty in poetry and drama'. For the Rasa primarily means 'taste', such as sweetness. This paper explores these ideas by applying Rasa theory.

Key Words: *Natyashatra, Rasa, taste, theory...*

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Before applying the Rasa theory to the poem, let us have a brief idea about Mathew Arnold's poem 'The Forsaken Merman'.

This poem is, on the surface, about a merman who has lost his wife, a human. The merman loves his wife very much, but she has left him and their children to return to life among the humans. He attempted to call her back but he failed, for she had chosen religion over love. There are three intrinsic messages within this poem. The first is the power of love. Even though the mermaid has acted so heartless in leaving her loving family, her husband still cares for her, and he longs to have her back. Secondly, the lack of civilization. Arnold describes the land above the surface of the water as a somewhat unruly land, a place with only religious structure. Outside of the church, the "*horses foam and fret*" and the "*cold blowing airs*" whip through the trees. However, inside the church and under the waves, life is calm and tranquil. Hours in the church are spent praying, while underwater, time is spent enjoying life as a family. The last major idea in this poem is the conflict between religion and emotion. It would seem that this woman gave up her entire life to be with the man she loves, even if he is a merman who lives in the ocean. But gradually, as it turns out, she is not quite willing to leave her religion behind. On Easter, she is granted permission to go back on land to attend the church service. However, after the service, she continues to sit by the door of the church, and she does not return to her family

when they call for her. In this way, Arnold is expressing his belief that emotion (such as love) cannot coexist with religion. The title of the poem is *'The Forsaken Merman'* here merman is symbolized as poet's wife. The title itself indicates the major Rasa of this poem and that is Karun Rasa.

In the chapter called Rasadhyaya (Chapter - 6) of *'Natyashastra'* Bharat Muni says, **"Na hi rasadrate kascid arthah pravartate"** (Without Rasa prevails no meaning) which means every activity is aimed at the creation or generation of Rasa. Bharat Muni immediately after this statement sets forth his famous rasasutra:

"Vibhav anumbhava Vyabhicari Samyogad rasanispattih"

(Rasa is born out of the combination of Vibhavas (determinants), Anubhavas (consequents) and Vyabhicaribhavas (transitory feelings)

In *'The Forsaken Merman'* every expression helps to evoke Rasa.

For example...

*Come, dear children, let us away;
Down and away below!
Now my brother call from the bay,
Now the great wind shore ward blow;
Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray
Children dear, let us away!
This way, this way!*

- **Vibhavas**

Vibhavas are the objective condition producing an emotion. They are causes of Rasa. There are two kinds of Vibhavas – Alambanbhava and Uddipanvibhava.

- **Alambanbhava :**

This Vibhava means a person or persons with reference to whom the emotion is manifested. Here in this poem, poet's wife is referring to emotion and so one can consider her as Alamban Vibhava of the Karun Rasa. For example...

In a voice that she will know;

Margaret! Margaret!

Children's voices should be dear

(Call one more) to a mother's ear;

Children's voices, wild with pain-

Surely she will come again!

Call her once and come away;

This way, this way!

'Mother dear, we can not stay!'

The wild white horse foam and fret!

Margaret! Margaret

Come, dear children, come away down;

Call no more!

One last look at the white-walled town,

And the little grey church on the windy shore;

Then come down!

She will not come though you call all day;

Come away, come away!

These lines arouse Alambanbhava. Sudden death of lady is the Alamban Vibhava of poet's wonder that one can find in these lines...

*She sate by the pillar, we saw her clear;
Margaret, hist! Come quick, we are here!
Dear heart; I said, 'we are long alone;
The sea grows stormy the little ones moan'
But, ah, she gave me never a look.*

➤ **Uddipan Vibhava:**

Uddipan Vibhava means the circumstances or environmental factors that excite an emotion. Here sea and gray church windy shore and other natural factors are Uddipan Vibhava. For example...

*One last look at the white-walled town
And the little gray church on the windy shore;
'The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan;
Long prayers', I said, 'in the world they say;
Come', I said; and we rose through the surf in the bay
We went up the beach, by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-walled town;
Through the narrow paved streets, where all was still,
To the little grey church on the windy hill.
From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers,
But we stood without in the cold blowing airs.
We climbed on the graves, on the stones worn with rains,
And we gazed up the aisle through the small leaded panes.*

Further in the poem...

*Where the winds are all asleep;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
Where the sea-beast, ranged all-round,
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground;
Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
Dry their mail and bask in the brine;*

These stanzas arouse Uddipanbhava. Here in this poem one could find the Vibhava which supports Karun Rasa.

- **Anubhava**

Anubhava is physical aspects that result from an emotion which is possible in visual (dramas) only.

- **Vyabhicaribhava:**

Vyabhicaribhava is transitory mental states that accompany and help to intensify the dominant emotion. Her Visda and Smrti are Vyabhicaribhava of loss soka which evoke Karun Rasa, here Karun Rasa is angirasa (main rasa) and angrasa (sub ordinary rasa) is Adbhut Rasa.

Here one can find that sea and storm are the Uddipan Vibhava of Adbhut Rasa. And result of this emotion is poet's thought about his wife and imaginative activities. He says

*She sits at her wheel in the humming town,
Singing most joyfully*

Other lines like...

*She will start from her slumber,
When gusts shake the door;
She will hear the winds howling
Will hear the waves roar*

Indignation is Vyabharibhava of Adbhuta Rasa and wonder/vismay is the Sthayibhava of Adbhut Rasa.

Conclusion:

In nutshell, the poem discloses the intense emotions of merman and his wife. Merman's longing for his love arouses the pain. Thus, through the Rasa theory one can observe that the poem 'The Forsaken Merman' arouses Karun Rasa as main (angi) rasa and Adbhuta Rasa as subordinate (anga) rasa. Karun Rasa is always most effective and appealing to the reader's heart therefore this poem is more close to the reader's emotion.

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