

The Thematic and Structural Manifestation of Kathakalī in Anita Nair’s *Mistress*: A Study

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Introduction

Indian English Literature (IEL) began, as pointed out by M. K. Naik, as an “interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India.”¹ This encounter creates confusion among historians attempting to define its nature and scope as a body literature. There is ongoing debate as to whether the category should contain works written by anybody, including diasporic writers like Ruskin Bond or V.S Naipaul about Indian life and society, or only those born and brought up in India, writing in English language. After so much deliberation and argument, the genre is generally designated as Indo-Anglian literature, or Indian Writing in English (IWE). For instance, E. F. Oaten considers the poetry of Henry Derozio as part of ‘Anglo-Indian Literature’.² Thus we can define IWE as literature written originally in the English language by authors who are Indians by birth, ancestry or nationality. In tracing the history of IEL, it is clear that the emergence of ‘familial’ or domestic fiction brought about a paradigm shift in the category. This genre, initiated as works written by male writers like Tagore, Bankim Chatterjee and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, later saw further development by women writers as well. Significantly, when Indian authors entered the world of English writing, they experienced an internal conflict between the English education and representation of ‘Indianness’ in their work. Malashri Lal observes that, “The [Indian] English writer is perpetually

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¹ M. K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2009), p. 1.

² E. F. Oaten, *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1907).

poised on the threshold between the acquisition [of an] English education and the sociology of 'Indianness'."³

The presence of women writers in IEL has become very influential in post-colonial India. Anita Nair is one such author. Like her contemporaries, she also portrays an 'Indianness' in her novels that make them unique in nature. The novel *Mistress*, which has been selected for this study, is a unique specimen in IWE. It searches for an 'Indianness' in the background of the plot, its relationships, and its subsequent engagement with the community. *Mistress* chronicles the life of a veteran Kathakalī actor (a traditional form artistic dance in Kerala, a southern state in India), Koman, and his relatives and friends. Besides the thematic references to Kathakalī, the novel is structured in the form of this world-renowned art form and uses its various performance techniques as framing. The structure and techniques of Kathakalī are present in two ways. The first is the way the story is structured and unfolds, which is similar to the way a story is told in a Kathakalī play. Philip Zarrilli describes this structure: "The narrative sections of the text set in third person, usually composed in Sanskrit metrical verses known as *śloka* (or the slightly different form known as *dandaka*), and sung by the onstage vocalists."⁴ The second influence is the presence of the traditional Kathakalī modality of expressing emotions and feelings of characters, through the *navarasas* (nine emotions).

This article analyses how these structural and aesthetic characteristics of Kathakalī enhance the splendour of the novel. It also examines how these characteristics strengthen the narrative and characterisation of the novel. As the context is described in the form of a *śloka* in Kathakalī, every chapter in the novel begins with an introduction named after each *rasa* (aesthetic element), which gives an indication about the plot that unfolded in the respective chapter. The lives of the characters are recounted through various theatrical techniques like flashbacks, narration about the life of one character by another one, and soliloquy. Only then will the audience understand why a character behaves in a particular way.⁵

³ Malashri Lai, *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1995), p. 4.

⁴ Philip Zarrilli, B. *Kathakalī: Dance Drama* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 41.

⁵ Anita Nair, *Mistress* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2015), p. 57.

Rasa and Kathakali

The most fundamental concept regarding aesthetics in Indian thought is rasa. Rasa is the aesthetic perception and enjoyment of the beautiful, which was first deliberated by Bharata Muni through his magnum opus *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Rasa is the soul of poesy, kindled in the reader or speaker by the poet or playwright. Arindam Chakrabarti writes about the various aspects of rasa as “a fluid that tends to spill, a taste such as sour, sweet or salty, the soul or quintessence of something, a desire, a power, a chemical agent used in changing one metal into another, the life-giving sap in plants, and even poison!”⁶ Rasa is aroused by *vibhāvas* (the principal exciting and stimulating cause), manifested by *anubhāvas* (external behaviours such as sidelong glances or smiles), and intensified by *vyabhicāribhāva* (ever-changing, ever-rising and ever-setting minor collateral feelings of pleasure and pain). Bharata says that rasa is generated by the confluence of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāva* (*vibhāva* - *anubhāva* - *vyabhicāri samyogat rasa nispatih*).⁷ Jiwan Pani observes: “The most misunderstood is the *vyabhicāribhāva*. It is also called *sanchari bhava*. Both mean, the *bhāva* which is transitory. Its main aim is to heighten the taste of the *sthāyibhāva*. More appropriately, it may be called a visitant bhava.”⁸ *Vibhāva* creates the main sentiment in a work of art. There are two types of *vibhāva*: *ālabhanavibhāva* and *uddīpanavibhāva*. *Ālabhanavibhāva* refers to the hero or the heroine. *Uddīpanavibhāva* is the factor that intensifies the *rasa*, such as the moon, wind, birds, flowers etc. that arouses the emotion of love (*śṛṅgāra bhāva*). *Anubhāvas* are physical factors like a beloved’s glance, smile etc. that bring *sthāyibhāva*. Sheldon Pollock observes:

Rasa – and here is the common understanding - is produced when certain “stable” or primary emotions (*sthāyibhāva*) of ours are fully developed by stimulation from a suitable object (*ālabhanavibhāva*) under appropriate external conditions (*uddīpanavibhāva*), and nuanced by more evanescent feelings (*vyabhicāribhāva*) that are themselves made manifest by physical reactions (*anubhāva*). All this

⁶ Arindam Chakrabarti, ‘Disgust and the Ugly in Indian Aesthetics’, in *La Pluralita Estetica: Lasciti e irradiazioni oltre il Novecento Estetica: Lasciti e irradiazioni oltre il Novecento* (Torino: Trauben, 2002), p. 352.

⁷ Bharata Muni, *The Nāṭya Śāstra*, trans. Manomohan Ghosh (Calcutta: The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1951).

⁸ Jiwan Pani, ‘Experience of Rasa through Indian Art Dances’, in *Rasa: The Indian Performing Arts in the Last Twenty-Five Years*, eds. Bimal Mukherjee and Sunil Kothari (Calcutta: Anamika Kala Sangam Research and Publications, 1995), p. 156.

activates our own latent dispositions (vāsanās, samskāras) to respond sympathetically.⁹

The dominating emotion or permanent mood is known as sthāyibhāva. Bhāva is the pervasion of mind by a predominant feeling, the most prominent one being *sāttvika bhāva*. It refers to involuntary psychosomatic reactions like stiffening, sweating, and chills. Vyabhicāribhāvas are considered to be the waves on the ocean of sthāyibhāvas. It is a series of fluctuating emotions that feed the dominant emotion. Ramacandra and Gunacandracandra — the two well-known disciples of Hemacandra — vigorously and eloquently advocate their own view that rasa is both pleasurable and painful. In the *Kārikā* they define rasa as follows: “A permanent emotion (*sthayi-bhāva*), when generated by determinants (*vibhāva-s*) and nourished or strengthened through the introduction of transitory feelings or accessory moods (*vybhicāri-bhāva-s*) and made cognisable by consequents (*anubhāva-s*), becomes rasa, which is both pleasurable and painful.”¹⁰ A woman in love anxiously waiting at the rendezvous to meet her lover may feel disappointed that he is not coming, may fear that something might have happened to him, may be jealous that he might have been courted by another woman, or may feel delighted in remembering the coaxing words that he had whispered into her ear. Vyabhicāribhāvas are thirty-three in number. They are satiety, languor, apprehensiveness, weariness, and mental repose, deadness of faculties, exultation, depression, sternness, anxiety, fear, jealousy, anger, arrogance, memory, collapse, vanity, dream, sleep, wakefulness, bashfulness, possession by evil spirits, stupor, prudence, indolence, agitation, ratiocination, dissimulation, mental pain, delirium, despair, impatience, and indecision. For instance, *Nāṭya Śāstra* speaks about one of the vyabhicāribhāvas:

Anxiety is characterized by doubt and is found in women and other low characters. It is produced by causes such as kidnapping, offences done by the king, and committing bad deeds. It is represented by effects such as looking again and again, covering (the face), a dry

⁹ Sheldon Pollock, ‘The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 29, no. 1/2 (April, 2001, Special issue: Ingalls Festschrift), pp. 197-229.

¹⁰ Ramacandra and Gunacandracandra, *Nāṭyadarpana with their own commentary* (Gujarat: Oriental Institute of Baroda, 1959)

mouth, licking the lips, a pallid face, stammering, trembling, dry lips, a dry throat, becoming black like a crow.¹¹

Hence, *sthāyibhāva* combines the various accessory moods into a greater totality. Herman Tiekens opines that, “the permanent emotions are compared to kings surrounded by a large retinue of servants. It is said that it is because of this superiority among the emotions that the permanent emotions obtain the name of *rasa*.”¹² Indian aesthetics dictate that there are eight *sthāyibhāvas*. They are *rati* (love or erotic desire), *hāsa* (humour), *śoka* (sorrow), *krodha* (anger), *utsāha* (enthusiasm or cheerfulness), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsā*/disgust and *vismaya*/wonder, and these give rise to eight *rasas*. They are *śṛṅgāra*/eroticism, *hāsyā*/comedy, *karuna*/pathos, *raudra*/fury, *vīra* heroism, *bhayānaka*/terror, *bībhatsa* (disgust) and *adbhuta* (wonder). Later, theorist Udbhata includes *śānta* (quietism) as the ninth *rasa*. An art form like Kathakalī utilises these *rasa* components effectively to convey the emotions and feelings of characters by fusing them with its structure.

Kathakalī and Mistress

Kathakalī plays consist of two types of poetic composition. First is a *śloka* that narrates the entire story's unfolding incidents. After the *śloka*, the *padam* (main song) starts. These *padams* will be in first person singular many a time that convey the thoughts or expressions of a character. To present a particular incident or justify action in Kathakalī, the story explains the past events that lead to the present context. Thus, *śloka* is followed by detailed enactment of incidents by the characters in first-person narrative or soliloquy. For example, in the *śloka* sung in the tenth scene of the famous Kathakalī play *Kalyanasaugandhikam* (The Flower of Good Fortune), the lustre, strength and the terror instilled by the epic hero Bhīma are communicated through this verse. Philip Zarrilli explains, “Roughly eighty percent of the *ślokas* are sung without actors on stage and set the mood and narrate the context for the scene which follows. When the actors perform during the singing of a *śloka*, they enact the essence of what the singers are narrating.”¹³ Both *ślokas* and *padams* are appropriate to the mood of the story. Thus, L. S. Rajagopalan and

¹¹ Bharata Muni, ‘Nātyasāstra VII: 1992, 1934, 1954, 1964’, in *Nātyasāstra with the Commentary of Abhinavagupta, Vols I-4*, eds. M.R. Kavi and J.S. Pade (Barods: Oriental Institute, 1964), p. 352.

¹² Herman Tiekens, ‘On the Use of “Rasa” In Studies of Sanskrit Drama’, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2000), pp. 115-138.

¹³ Philip Zarrilli and B. Kathakalī, *Dance Drama* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 41.

V. Subramanya Iyer opine: “The Kathakalī plays, or *attakathas* (atta means ‘play’ or ‘dance’ and katha means ‘story’), consist mainly of ślokas and padams. Both are sung in *ragas* (melodic scales) appropriate to the sentiments of the story.”¹⁴ These theatrical nuances are employed in the text of *Mistress* to frame the drama of the story and contextualise the modern narrative within traditional storytelling. Though the setting is contemporary, the story still contains the universal emotional components outlined by Kathakalī.

Mistress is set in a picturesque Kerala with Kathakali as the background. It is predominantly the story of a Kathakali actor, Koman, and his niece Radha. The novel begins with the arrival of Chris, who comes with the idea of writing a book on Koman. Later, he develops an extramarital relationship with Radha, who is already married to Shyam. The plot unravels this estrangement between Radha and Shyam and its eventual consequences upon the lives of these characters. It also unfolds the past life of Koman and the truth about Chris's relationship with Koman. In *Mistress*, each chapter begins with a prologue attributed to each *rasa*. In this prologue, the ambience of the respective chapter is metaphorically explained in a similar manner to the śloka. This paper analyses each chapter in the book with respect to each *rasa*.

There are many studies focusing on the various aspects of the novel *Mistress*. P. Sridharan and Dr. T. Ramakrishnan particularly consider feminist perspectives in the novel.¹⁵ They study how Anita Nair portrays the frustration and disappointments of women who experience social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society in the novel. Similarly, Debotri Dhar has examined feminist agency, post-coloniality, and the politics of desire in the novel.¹⁶ She argues that Radha-Krishna story from Hindu mythology allows the novel to address key questions surrounding female agency and desire in feminist and postcolonial theory. Gincy P. Kuriakose and T. R. Muralikrishnan critique the gender, resistance, and

¹⁴ L. S. Rajagopalan and V. Subramanya Iyer, ‘Aids to the Appreciation of Kathakalī’, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 10, no. 2/4 (1975), pp. 205-210.

¹⁵ P.Sridharan and Dr. T.Ramakrishnan, ‘Feministic Perspectives in Anita Nair’s *Mistress*’, *Adalya Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2020), pp. 1526-1530.

¹⁶ Debotri Dhar, ‘Radha’s Revenge: Feminist Agency, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Desire in Anita Nair’s *Mistress*’, *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2012), pp. 1-18.

compromise in *Mistress*.¹⁷ They explored how female characters like Radha stand as an image of resistance in contrast to the compromises females make, which eventually make them subservient to patriarchy. Building on this existing bank of literature, this paper uniquely analyses how the structural characteristics of Kathakalī, as well the most important acting technique *navarasa*, contribute to the narrative structure of the novel.

Śṛṅgāra Rasa: Love for the Unknown

Mistress begins with the chapter named after the rasa śṛṅgāra. As the śloka presented as a prologue in Kathakalī, the writer explains what *śṛṅgāra rasa* is and how it is produced in an art form like Kathakalī. In the prologue to every chapter named after each rasa, the novelist explains the various uddīpanavibhāvas resulting in the generation of that particular rasa. When David Buchta writes about Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Līlāmṛta*, she describes how uddīpanavibhāva intensify the experience:

The portrayal of the hero and heroine (nāyaka and nāyikā) shows their suitability as lovers (*ālabhanavibhāva*), and the scene is set for a loving rendezvous (uddīpanavibhāva); they display the symptomatic behavior (anubhāva) of that love; and they progress through temporary emotional states (vyabhicāribhāva) that heighten rather than obstruct the development of their love.¹⁸

Similarly, in the first chapter *Śṛṅgāra*, Nair describes the uddīpanavibhāva: “There are flowers everywhere. Balsam and hibiscus. Yellow trumpet-shaped flowers and the tiny, delicate ari-poo in the hedges. Marigolds, chrysanthemums, countless hues that shape our needs.”¹⁹ Further, “The skies are lit up with the moon. A night orchestra plays: crickets with malaccas strung on their wings, the frog with the rattle in its throat, the hooting owl, the rustle of palm leaves, the wind among tress.”²⁰ The narrator speaks about *vanampadi*, a bird sings like singing from the heaven’s door like singing for unknown. This imagery symbolises that love for the unknown is also an aspect of śṛṅgāra rasa.

¹⁷ Gincy P. Kuriakose and T. R. Muralikrishnan, ‘Gender, Resistance, and Compromise, a Critical Study of Anita Nair's *Mistress*’, *Meridian*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2016), pp. 55-59.

¹⁸ David Buchta ‘Evoking “Rasa” Through “Stotra”: Rūpa Gosvāmin's “Līlāmṛta”, A List of Kṛṣṇa's Names’, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3 (December 2016, Special Issue: Stotra, Hymns of Praise in Indian Literature), pp. 355-371.

¹⁹ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 7.

²⁰ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 8.

Each chapter of *Mistress* is divided into different parts and each part is observed from the perspective of one character. Radha is the narrator in the beginning of the first chapter on śṛṅgāra. It starts with the arrival of Chris to meet Koman, a Kathakalī artist. His arrival and his interactions with the various characters are narrated by Radha. Various moments narrated here express the various accessory moods of śṛṅgāra rasa. In the very first meeting, Radha is enamoured with Chris. She says, "What an attractive man."²¹ This chapter gives the hint about Radha's disinterest in her husband Shyam; this revulsion adds to her fascination towards Chris. She subsequently describes herself as a 'mistress', further emphasising her discontent with their relationship.

The second part of the chapter is from the perception of Shyam, where śṛṅgāra rasa is depicted through Shyam's jealous towards Chris and his fears that Radha will be unfaithful. Another narrative is from the perception of Koman. When Koman sees Chris and Radha together, he is reminded a prototypical enchanting couple in Kathakalī. He says, "I think of Nala and Damayanti. Of lovers in Kathakalī who embrace without actually doing so. Only an experienced 'veshakkaran', an actor with more than mere technique, can perform that embrace. With arms that do not touch the woman, and with only his eyes, he lets her know that he desires her."²² In another context, he also compares Chris to Keechakan, a flirtatious anti-hero in Kathakalī. Nala and Keechaka are two important characters in Kathakali who are known for the two faces of śṛṅgāra. Nala embodies the romantic love towards his beloved Damayanthi in the play *Nalacharitham*. While Nala falls in love with Damayanthi, they exchange their passion, not through a physical relationship but various gentle romantic gestures such as looks and smiles. Similarly, the character Keechaka, the brother of King Virata in *Keechakavadham*, is a flirt. He tries to woo Draupadi (disguised as Sairandhri) forcibly using his power. Kathakali depicts these characters effectively utilising various acting techniques like gestures, dance and rasa-oriented facial expressions. In Chris, Koman could see the characteristics of both Nala and Keechaka, a gentle lover and a flirt. Through these instances, this chapter explores various accessory moods of śṛṅgāra rasa.

²¹ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 8.

²² Nair, *Mistress*, p. 29.

Hāsya Rasa: Contempt for Convention

Hāsya rasa is one of the common *rasas* present in literary works. M. Arogyaswamy investigates how Shakespeare treats comic (*hāsya*) sentiment in his plays from the Indian perspective of *rasa* concept.²³ Similarly, Mahendra Kumar Budhathoki examines the application of *hāsya* rasa in Shakespeare's 'My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun' and Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'.²⁴ Milind Dandekar chose Eugene O'Neill's Play *Desire Under the Elms* to study using *rasa* theory in which *hāsya* has a great significance.²⁵ The chapter in this novel titled "Hāsya Rasa" depicts the permanent as well as various accessory moods of *hāsya* rasa in the life of the characters. In the prologue to this chapter, the narrator alludes that *hāsya* is not about mirth alone, but is also associated with other expressions as well such as contempt for conventions. Derision is also an accessory of *hāsya* rasa, such as that with which Radha looks at the routine, monotonous rituals of married life. This sarcasm or contempt is the reflection of affinity between herself and her husband Shyam in their married life. "I lie next to Shyam, unable to sleep. We have our bedtime rituals, Shyam and I. We have been married for eight years, after all, and there is no escaping the ritual of routine."²⁶ Radha ruminates with a self-condemnation. This sarcasm is generated out of her contempt for Shyam on various motives, and this absence of close affinity leads to the conflict in the novel. Debotri Dhar explains this as, "Haasyam or contempt, the next *rasa*, traces Radha's desire for Chris back to the contempt she feels for Shyam. Ironically, she feels that it is Shyam who holds her in contempt and treats her, his wife of eight years, as a valued but lifeless object."²⁷

²³ See M. Arogyaswamy, 'Shakespeare's Treatment of Comic Sentiment (Hasya Rasa): An Indian Perspective', in *Acting Funny: Comic Theory and Practice in Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. Frances N. Teague (Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), pp. 153-163.

²⁴ Mahendra Kumar Budhathoki, 'The Application of Hasya Rasa in Shakespeare's "My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"', *The Outlook: Journal of English Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2020), pp. 67-76.

²⁵ Milind Dandekar, 'Evaluation of Eugene O'Neill's Play "Desire under the Elms" in the Light of Nine Rasas of Bharat Muni', *The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2013 Proceedings*, pp.167-178.

²⁶ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 53.

²⁷ Debotri Dhar, 'Radha's Revenge: Feminist Agency, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Desire in Anita Nair's *Mistress*', *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2012), p. 5.

The narrator adopts a Kathakalī technique to unfold the story of Koman, Radha's uncle, by presenting a flashback that leads to the present context. For instance, in *Balivijayam*, when Ravana takes his sword *Chandrahāsam*, Narada asks the story behind the acquisition of the sword and Ravana relays this. This provides ample opportunity for the actor to present the character in an effective way, which is the backbone of Kathakalī and helps the character to convince the audience his mightiness, valour and nobility. This contextualises present-day feats and increases their impact. Similar technique is applied throughout *Mistress*. To understand the present-day life of Koman, the narrative must describe his father Sethu. When Radha meets Chris, he informs Radha that Koman narrated his past life. But Chris did not understand who the character Sethu was. He asks Radha to explain the story precisely. She will clarify that Sethu is Koman's father, and will convince him why Koman started the narration in a way like "In the beginning was an ocean..." which is a Kathakali technique. Instead of coming straight to the story's core, it will start from the past, including associated people. Radha feels a kind of attachment and becomes very passionate when Chris calls her name when they continue talking for a long time, though she tries to restrain herself from advancement. To convey her predicament, she narrates the story of Ahalya in Ramayana.²⁸ Radha comments that poor Ahalya bore the brunt of the curse for a more extended period. Radha got aghast about the choice of this story and feared that Chris would interpret this as an invitation. These kinds of thoughts amused her to realise the aspirations within her. Explaining the comic episode in Indra's life due to the curse and the resemblance between Ahalya's story and their relationship supplements the hāsya rasa in the book.

In the same chapter, there is an argument between Shyam and Radha. Radha starts a new initiative in their match factory, aiming to introduce literature to the workers there. She plans to divert their attention from

²⁸Ahalya was created by the god Brahma as the most beautiful woman married to the much older Sage Gautama. One day Indra comes disguised as her husband. Ahalya sees through his disguise nevertheless accepts his advances. Seeing this, Sage Gauthama curses him to have caused a thousand marks of the vagina on him so that everyone would know he had been philandering, followed by a redemption that the marks will turn out to be eyes. Thus, Indira managed to get away with little more than embarrassment. But the curse upon Ahalya that she will turn out to be stone remains for an extended period until she regains her human form after being brushed by Rama's foot

serialised romances and gossip about film stars to literary classics like *War and Peace* and Marquez. Shyam finds this irritating, ridiculing Radha by telling her that she doesn't have any practical knowledge about the world she lives in. Since both Radha and Shyam belong to the upper caste, they will naturally have a superiority complex with respect to their cultural positioning in the society. So, when Radha attempts to introduce world classics to poor workers in the factory, Shyam mocks at her, claiming that the proletariat are not fit enough to understand Classics and that they are destined to do petty jobs that do not require intelligence. In the next part of the chapter when Koman is the narrator, we can see how sarcastically he presents the norm of Indian family life. He specifically laments how gender equality is sabotaged by patriarchy, with this section narrated through a sarcastic simile of his caged bird Malini. As the bird is caged by human beings for entertainment, Indian patriarchy captures their wives and daughters in their homes. This chapter is rich in with many humorous and sarcastic moments that produce *hāsya rasa*. The moments explained in this part on *hasya* deal not only with the comic effects but various accessory moods like contempt for conventions, snobbery out of casteism of patriarchal hegemony etc. Thus, these comic moments are not just for the sake of jokes, but add to the totality of the narrative.

Karuna Rasa: The Throbbing of Remorse

Sorrow is the permanent mood of *karunam*, as it is an inevitable part of human life. Parattukudi Augustine and Melville Wayne studied *karuna rasa* from a Buddhist perspective in their comparative analysis between East and West, in which they claimed that Buddhism stands out in its character of the centrality of compassion.²⁹ As a prelude to the difficult situations of the characters in the novel, the writer narrates the story of Buddha, setting the tone of the chapter. However, *karuna rasa* is produced not only in sad moments, but from various accessory moods like anxiety, debility, distress, madness, reminiscences, sickness etc.

In the first part of the chapter on *karuna rasa*, Radha speaks about Shyam's anxiety on Radha spending too much of time with Chris. This anxiety is clearly visible in his words when he calls Radha over the phone and asks about her return. "So what time are you coming home? I am hungry.

²⁹ Parattukudi Augustine and Melville Wayne, 'Understanding the phenomenon: a comparative study of compassion of the West and *karuna* of the East', *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1-19.

Rani Oppol is bored. Will you be coming in the next half hour? The SP and his wife have said they will drop in. Isn't it over yet? Rani Oppol was saying it isn't right for you to spend so much time in the Sahiv's company."³⁰ When Shyam comes to know that Radha is acting as a transcriber for Sahiv, Shyam is enraged and thinks that Radha is working as a stenographer to Chris. This anger is out of anxiety, one of the accessory moods of karuna rasa.

Karuna rasa is beautifully expressed in this chapter through Koman. He is worried upon witnessing intimate moments between Radha and Chris. It feels like they are wrapped in each other in a "tableau of intimacy".³¹ Though their relationship is romantic and fulfilling, it is still adultery and worries Koman. Still, it evokes the artist in him. Nair elevates the beauty of that scene by using the metaphor from *Uttaraswayamvaram* Kathakalī.

Duryodhana, then a cruel Kaurava prince, and his wife Bhanumati are in a beautiful garden in the night time. The combination of the beauty of the moment and the loveliness of his wife arouses in Duryodhana a great desire to make love to her. He turns to her with the nakedness of his desire showing. "Kalyani, he tells her, gazing at the fullness and perfection of her breasts and letting his eyes rake the curves of her body, I can't think of a more perfect place or time to make love to you."³² The given quotation refers to a romantic relationship that is not merely platonic love but mixed with sexual desire. These references to Kathakali are frequent in *Mistress*, which helps the reader grasp the intensity of human relationships in the characters' lives.

In the flashback scene where Koman's parents' life is portrayed, karuna rasa is poignantly present. It is especially demonstrated through the treatment that Sadiya, Koman's mother, received in her family due to her relationship with a non-Muslim, Sethu. In one example, her father laid heated iron rod on her calf; when she screamed out of pain, he placed the heated iron rod for the second time by the line of burnt flesh. He did all these not because of any criminal act on the part of Sadiya, but in the name of tradition, punishing the breaking of a taboo. Though the father loved Sadiya more than her sister, the burden of ancestry overwhelmed him. Here, Nair discrimination in the name of religion and caste. This segment on karuna rasa proves that apart from sadness, it expresses its various accessory moods like anxiety in Shyam, a mixed feeling of romance and righteousness in Koman,

³⁰ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 105.

³¹ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 127

³² Nair, *Mistress*, p. 128.

and a painful experience in Sadiya. Thus, the chapter explores the multiple facets of karuna rasa portrayed.

Raudra Rasa: The Fury of Passion Entangled

Raudram is a rasa always attached with the emotion of anger and its accessory moods. Nair gives a vivid picture of fury by using natural phenomenon of rain. This ‘objective correlative’ is effectively used in the novel to represent the mood of the characters and emotions.

But there is another kind of rain. It begins with a gathering of grey clouds as the afternoon wears. There is a hush punctured only by the rasping croak of crows, the rumble of thunder, an old man heaving and snoring as he sleeps. The leaves resonate with silence. Then the rain falls. On leaves, on tree tops, on dried palm leaves... In the night, the darkness is a thick velvet drape muffling stars and noises. Only the steady drip of the rain penetrates. For this is the rain riddled with fury. When thunder rules and clouds burst. When jagged flashes of lightning tear the sky, striking trees, ripping through the trunks browning leaves...The end of October brings the *thulavarsham*. And this is the rain that doesn't fall quietly, but rages and roars.³³

This furious imagery of nature given in the prelude to the raudra rasa represents a perfect objective correlative to the lives and state of affairs of characters in this chapter. Anger or raudra rasa dominates even the physical life of Radha and Shyam. When Radha comes home in the late midnight, Shyam gets angry. He wants to exhibit his anger and frustration upon her. When he tries to woo her for sex, she refuses flagrantly. This makes Shyam furious and he sexually assaults her. Here, Nair problematises a major patriarchal issue of Indian society. Radha asks the same question furiously whether he considered her as an object. Shyam's patriarchal mind is repeatedly reflected in his claim that she was his possession. Two different faces of raudra rasa can be seen here. One is raudram mixed with anger and indignation, another with sternness and intoxication. Radha always feels that physical relationship with Shyam is nothing less than rape. Her anger is linked to disgust and revulsion, another accessory mood of raudra rasa. On the other hand, when Radha is with Chris, there is another mood of raudra is present, the fury of passion as it was explained in the prelude to the chapter. In David L. Gitomer's paper "Wrestling with Raudra in Sanskrit Poetics: Gender, Pollution, and Śāstra", he quotes Bharata's definition on raudra rasa as, "Bharata wants us to know that everything they do is Furious; even their

³³ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 151.

love making is violent.”³⁴ Thus, the chapter depicts not only anger, the permanent mood of roudra rasa, but also various facets like indignation, disgust and revulsion felt by Radha, fury of passion as in between Radha and Chris.

Vīra Rasa: Assertion of Self-identification and Destruction of Social Prejudice

The prelude to the chapter starts with the various faces of vīra rasa. It is the courage of a person during a crisis situation or threat, analogised to the courageous act of the bird drongo. It protects its young ones by attacking the other birds that threaten its young; feeble birds like pigeons, babblers, and doves nest nearby to drongo and in turn, their young ones are protected. Vīram is not only about showing an aggrandised courage, but survival instinct as well. Another accessory mood of vīram is the care and protection given for the vulnerable. Various facets of vīra rasa are explored through the characters in this session on vīram.

The 'phone call scene exhibits various modes of vīra rasa. Out of frustration and irritation, Shyam 'phones Radha asking where she was on the previous night. He fears her admitting she had been with Chris. The frustration and false pride felt by Shyam results in him deluding himself as to the type of husband and man he is; he believes himself to be virtuous, despite all evidence pointing to the contrary. Nair links these feelings to the patriarchal notion of care and possessiveness in heterosexual relationships. He positions himself as a martyr of vīra rasa. Another instance where the *rasa* is expressed is in the words of Ranioppol, Shyam's sister. Here, vīram is expressed in the form of her notions of pride about ancestry, cultural legacy of the family, norms of the society etc. She blames Radha for wearing modern dress which, in her opinion creates a sexual appeal which is not suitable for a family of theirs. People like Ranioppol believe that the valour and pride of a family lies in its ethos. Interestingly, in Indian poetics, this rasa is usually associated with patriarchal life, not matriarchal; in this novel, both men and women exhibit vīra rasa. Female characters' vīra rasa is more profound and effective in the novel. J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan say that vīra is generally present in noble characters and has dynamic energy. It arises from vibhavas such as correct perception, decisiveness, wisdom;

³⁴ David L. Gitomer, 'Wrestling with raudra in Sanskrit Poetics: Gender, Pollution, and śāstra', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2000), pp. 219-236.

courtesy etc.³⁵ Thus, vibhāvas are the principal exciting and stimulating causes to produce rasa. Vira rasa is the expression of valour in one's life. And true valor is the outcome of correct perception in one's life, proper decisions, wisdom and intelligent implementation. People with pretentious valour will not have these faculties and fall into traps. Another example is when Radha finds out that Shyam is keeping a track of her menstrual cycle. She finds this insulting, as the act questions her fidelity. This kind of attitude on the part of Shyam is like a patriarchal superiority complex denying women's agency. And, she will say to Shyam that it is unfair to do so. No other character in this novel is as courageous as Radha. Her valour and pride are in sharp contrast with the false pride of Shyam which is artificially constructed by Indian patriarchy. When she insults him by asking him to check his sperm count, Shyam's false pride and dignity is completely drained off and he becomes a timid person within no time.

Koman also embodies vīram in a unique way, internalising it through the process of self-identification. He seeks the courage to go on finding the meaning of his life. He compares his journey of life having got relationship with many women and still able to retain his freedom to the life of Ravana in the Kathakali play *Ravanotbhavam*. In this play, Ravana does penance to acquire the boon that he can neither be killed by weapons nor by Gods themselves. He knows that he can achieve this because he believes in himself (veera rasa). He tries to acquire the boons not by begging but by sheer power. He lit around him four sacrificial fires and ordered the sun to stand still as the fifth fire. He keeps one foot on the fire and offers his prayers to the creator for thousand years. When the creator doesn't appear, he offers his heads one by one. He severs all the nine heads. Still, God doesn't appear in front of him. When he is going to offer his tenth head, God will appear. Having been satisfied with his willpower and dedication, the creator will give him all the desired boons. What makes him so valourous is his belief in himself. Similarly, Koman also courageously lays bare his life to discover himself like Ravana. However, he does not have ten heads to sacrifice but goes through various painful penances in his life. Though Koman admits that he doesn't have ten heads, still he believes that he can discover the 'I' within him.

³⁵ J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture* (Pune: Deccan College, 1970), p. 31.

Bhayānaka Rasa: The Insidious Fear of Loss

The *bhayānakam* is usually attached to situations that instill fear. It can happen in response to horror, or to a genuine threat. There are situations where one becomes extra vigilant and calculative out of fear. This chapter deals with such aspects of bhayānaka rasa. Nair explains the nature of this fear by citing the example of cutting wild pineapple, and how the fear makes one careful. When you cut the pineapple, you await cuts and bruises, snakes that crouch hidden in the undergrowth etc. This instance in the prelude gives an insight into the fear prevailing in the life of the characters in the novel. Kanti Pandey opines:

Bhayānaka rasa (terrible) derives from experiencing fear which the Natya Shastra sorts into feigned fear, fear from wrongdoing, and fear from danger. It is represented by shaking hands, wide opened eyes scanning for danger, and backward movement. This rasa is reserved for characters of lower origin, children and women for, according to the cultural norms of the time, their fear is genuine. However, venerable characters can occasionally display feigned fear as well, such as in the case of a scholar in front of a king, or a king in front of a god.³⁶

In the first part of the chapter, Nair centres fear in the life of Shyam. His fear is produced out of doubt and mental agitation. He fears that he will lose Radha due to her adulterous relationship with Chris. Shyam tries to recollect the telephone conversation with Radha. The tone of her voice makes Shyam suspicious and he goes into wild imaginations about her adultery. He reflects, “Was it then I knew fear for the first time?”³⁷ Here, the fear is generated not when Shyam experiences something frightening right in front of his eyes, but as he anticipates a situation which can completely ruin his life, like the vigilant anticipation about a frightening moment when you cut pineapple as explained in the prelude to this chapter. Similarly, he fears that he will face a heartbroken situation seeing Radha’s adulterous relationship with Chris. Everything seems to be an image producing fear in his mind; her travelling with Chris, her talking, laughing, and Shyam’s employees’ reactions. Even the dust accumulated on the table provokes him to assume that she hasn’t been home for a while. The whole world appears to be the manifestation of treachery for Shyam. Unlike Shyam’s fear born out of anticipation of losing Radha forever, Radha’s fear regards the consequences of her actions. She

³⁶ C. Kanti Pandey, *Comparative Aesthetics (Indian Aesthetics)* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Press, 2008), p. 219

³⁷ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 244.

realised that Shyam had been informed about Radha's adulterous relationship with Chris. This would have dire consequences. The chillness of fear ran through her spine. "A wave of panic engulfs me," says Radha.³⁸

In Koman's life, bhayānaka rasa is present in a different form. He feels that his arrogance is the manifestation of his fear. Humility is considered cowardice. To hide up this sense of incapability, Koman pretends to be arrogant. It is nothing but a mask to cover up one's fear about one's own ability. When Koman reflects on his life, he sadly realises that there is an element of fear in him that drives him in bizarre ways. Additionally, Koman's old age instills in him a fear of loneliness. Though he has gone through different stages of fear, this fear of loneliness is something intolerable for Koman. Hitherto, engagement with art has kept him busy and this loneliness was not so evident in his life. Now, art demands less and less of him, and when Maya leaves, he feels fear of loneliness for the first time in his life.

Bībhatsa Rasa: The Internal Revulsion and Agony

Bībhatsa is the feeling of disgust or aversion towards something. Nāṭyaśāstram describe it as "nauseating ... from a sight of stool or worms, simple, and exciting ... from the site of blood and similar objects"³⁹ In the case of *Mistress*, *bībhatsa* is not concerned with external repulsion, but with the internal world of disgust that various characters feel out of guilt and shame.

Radha feels disgust about her adulterous relationship with Chris. She asks, "Can anything be worth this repugnance? How much longer can I do this? This cheating, lying and pretense?"⁴⁰ Her relationship with Chris provokes her to be more introspective about her actions. Her inner fear helps her to realise that the relationship with Chris is just lust and that it rules her. Losing control over one's wantonness is the most condemnable and disgusting face of *bībhatsa* rasa. She goes to the extreme, wildly thinking that Chris may consider her a slut. She believes that there is nothing worse than losing one's own dignity. This disgust is not something individual, but social.

³⁸ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 249.

³⁹ Puspendra Kumara Śarma, Abhinavagupta Fl. and Manomohana Ghosa, *Nāṭyaśāstram = Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni* (Delhi: New Bharatiya Book, 2010), p. 338.

⁴⁰ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 290.

Chastity of a married woman and the concept of adultery is a social construct; this is why Chris feels less disgust with himself than Radha does.

In contrast, Shyam's disgust is generated out of negligence. Having come to know about Radha's adultery, Shyam feels disgust and anger towards Koman for not correcting Radha. Instead of convincing Radha on what she is doing is wrong, Koman silently supports and closes his eyes against untoward things. Shyam feels that his feelings and emotions do not have any value in their life. Negligence by the family and society is the most painful disgust one can have, and Shyam is a victim of this throughout the novel.

Nair also problematises another issue of traditional art forms. A traditional art form like Kathakalī has been refined by various connoisseurs after taking various aspects of this art form into consideration. These reformations help Kathakalī to preserve its aesthetic appeal and the intensity of presentation. However, the neo-liberal world destroys the aesthetic aspects of art forms by changing the format of art according to its conveniences. While describing the negative impact of tourism, Pratheep P. S points out,

In India, a classical form of dance known as Kathakalī originated from Kerala. The facial make-up is so intricate and takes hours and hours to finish. But in many cases, the Kathakalī actors had given few minutes to perform before the tourists. It is a great insult to this classical art and its actors. The point was made earlier that, not only do countries have unique cultures, but within a country subcultures exist.⁴¹

What is lost here is its pristine nature. In the novel, Shyam is the representative of this utilitarian, money-minded neo-liberal businessman. For him, art and literature are useless products. If at all is to be preserved, it should be for the monetary benefits alone, not for art's sake. This mentality encourages him to utilise this great classical art form in bits and pieces for his financial gains, not to promote the art form. This creates a feeling of disgust in the minds of real art practitioners and lovers like Koman, Radha and Chris. Shyam's sarcasm is, "Not a full performance, mind you. My guests will fall asleep. Just enough to interest a western audience. We could choose something from *Duryodhana Vadham* or *Prahladacharitham* or one of the battle scenes. Something vigorous and colourful...and gory."⁴² This

⁴¹ Pratheep P. S, 'The Impact of Tourism on Indian Culture', LSCAC Conference Proceedings, *4th International Conference on Language, Society and Culture in Asian Contexts* (2016), pp. 429-437.

⁴² Nair, *Mistress*, p. 300.

shows the disgusting mentality of the business world towards the world of aesthetics. The chapter brilliantly explores various faces of *bībhatsa rasa* exist in the lives of various characters in different ways.

Adbhuta Rasa: The Appalling Revelations

This is the *rasa* which originates without any premeditated waiting or calculation but immediate. It is to feel wonder on the things happening in the moment, one should keep the mind transparent and innocent like a child. According to Marchand, “wonder comes when we recognise our own ignorance.”⁴³ He further says, “the moment we know what is happening and how, the *adbhuta rasa* disappears.”⁴⁴ Radha is surprised by the ambivalent nature of Shyam. On one hand, he believes superstitious beliefs like not to cut one’s nails in twilight. On the other hand, he is a man who uses all the latest technologies like gadgets or practices. Radha sees a conflict of modernity in him, simultaneously primitive and modern. This surprises a modern and sensible woman like Radha. This ambivalence is widespread in well to do middle-class society in Kerala. Here, *adbhuta* is produced out of confusion which is a *vyabhicāribhāva* of *adbhuta*.

Another moment at which *adbhuta* is portrayed is when Radha informs Koman of her pregnancy. He becomes dumbstruck and does not know how to react. He is the only person who knows that Radha has an illicit relationship with Chris. He recollects the similarity with Radha’s mother, thinking that history repeats. “Like mother, like daughter. Does wantonness, like diabetes and multiple sclerosis pass from one generation to the next?”⁴⁵ As is explained in the prelude, *adbhuta* cannot be produced or occurred with a preparation or pre-condition. It happens in a moment. The revelations of this chapter, particularly about pregnancy and parenthood, leave the characters shell-shocked. After being shocked by the revelation of Radha, Koman is surprised once again when Chris reveals that he is the son of Angela, Koman’s previous wife. This chapter delineates how various accessory moods of *adbhuta rasa* exist in the life of various characters.

⁴³ P. Marchand, *The Yoga of the Nine Emotions* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 2006), p. 55.

⁴⁴ Marchand, *The Yoga of the Nine Emotions*, p. 56.

⁴⁵ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 341.

Śānta Rasa: Chilling Tranquility of Detachment

The last chapter of this novel considers the presence of śānta rasa in the lives of the characters. Śānta rasa is primarily the tranquility and stillness in life. It was not included as one of the nine rasas in the beginning, as it cannot be expressed on one's face like the previously discussed eight rasas here. The peace of mind experienced in the life of the characters is what intended in *Mistress* as śānta rasa. Here, it is through detachment; the characters in this novel become free and finally experience śānta rasa. When one can enjoy the śānta rasa, they will be relieved off all the conflicts and bondages and the same happens in the lives of the characters in the novel and the novel ends in a peaceful mood.

In *Rasaesthetics*, Schechner has written that, "a perfect performance, should one occur, would not transmit or express śānta rasa but allow śānta rasa to be experienced simultaneously and absolutely by the performers and partakers."⁴⁶ In the life of Radha, she experiences śānta rasa when she decided to leave Shyam thinking neither to cheat him anymore nor to go with Chris, since she does not find anything common between them to lead a peaceful life. Though she does not have an idea when to go, she feels that by this she atones for all the mistakes committed. Radha reflects,

I feel a core of calm reside within me. All the passion I burnt with, the contempt I felt for my life, all the sorrow I knew for chances wasted, the anger I felt at being trapped in an existence so stifling, the fear of what lay ahead, the disgust I felt for myself, the yearning, the deceiving, the worrying, the aching.... The whirling, twisting chaos has settled into this quietness that floods me.⁴⁷

Her husband Shyam also feels this tranquillity when he lets her go, though he loves her more than anything in the world. Koman advises him to give her enough time to ponder upon her life, and that he is sure that Radha will come back to Shyam's life. Chris decides to leave quietly. Koman believes that through this departure, all lives will fall into place. The novel ends with a chilling tranquility in the lives of Radha, Shyam and Koman. They all feel different form of śānta rasa in the sense of loss, though their loss is not something easily digestible.

Conclusion

The novelist chooses the structural and thematic aspects of the art form Kathakalī to portray the complex and sensitive lives of characters from

⁴⁶ R. Schechner, 'Rasaesthetics', *The Drama Review*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2001), p. 32.

⁴⁷ Nair, *Mistress*, p. 397.

different backgrounds. To comprehensively depict the characters' emotional world, the novelist is not merely using these characteristics as an embellishment or outer frame but infused into their daily lives. To integrate these elements of Kathakalī, the writer uses all the nine *rasas* and the structural patterns of Kathakalī. Thus, the narrative becomes highly effective in portraying all the complexities of human life vividly and aesthetically. This paper attempted to identify the above mentioned thematic and structural aspects and explained how those elements intensified and strengthened the narrative. To sum up, the novelist established the universal fact that every human life is a vivid spectrum of all the nine *rasas*, and they are the foundational stones of human life.