

PULCHRITUDE OF RASA : THE COMPONENTS OF AFFECT IN MUDIYETTU

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Abstract

Affect theory focuses on non linguistic factors or affects that manifests itself in myriad ways, especially as emotions. This is so significant with regard to the physical aspects of dramatics. In various ways, the costumes, makeup, gestures and facial expressions conveys very distinct meanings in multiple ways. From the purview of Indian Aesthetics, Bharatha Muni's Natya Shastra contains in it significant aspects of the emotional effects of art in the process of aesthetic relishing. The rasa school gives focus to the innate tendency of human beings to respond to everything in nature. This paper titled "Pulchritude of Rasa : The Components of Affect in Mudiyettu" explores the effects created by the art form and its rendition, especially based on the rasasutra. Therefore, special focus is given to the theoretical aspects such as vibhavas, anubhavas, and vyabhichari bhavas.

Mudiyettu is an ancient art form of Kerala, which through it's brave and vigorous nature, gives voice to various muffled voices and thereby shatters the falsities and masks of grand narratives. It is a traditional ritualistic art forms which centre around the mythological story of the fight between Goddess Kali and the demon Darika. The dramatics of the whole art form is full of semiotic nuances and is a feast to the senses and intellect. This paper surveys the elements of affect theory in this rich semantically significant art form in the light of Rasa theory.

Introduction

Affect theory in literary theory, refers specifically to the mood, emotions and feelings resulting from any artistic work or text. The effect or formation of various impressions and attitudes in spectators, readers or people in general is the core of this concept. The major proponent of this theory is Silvan Tomkins, an American scholar, psychologist and theorist. The cultural undertones of affect are undeniable and evident. This has an inseparable relation with 'power' as well. In the case of performances, body

movements, gestures, attire and makeup. This is quintessential for the purpose of effective and meaningful communication.

Tomkins's consistent Phenomenology of the affects has brought our attention to the aesthetic, that is, what affects feel like in experience. He is careful to observe that affect is rarely experienced in its "pure" state. As amplifier of the drives and, more generally, part of a system of motivation that fuses with thoughts, perceptions, motor actions, drive states, and other affects, affective experience is almost always a blend. Consider, for example, how Tomkins understands emotions: these consist of one or more affects in combination with cognitive or drive states in a manner that colours, flavours, or inflects the affects. (Frank and Wilson 4)

RASA

Rasa theory is one of the core theories of Indian Aesthetics. Aesthetics is the study of beauty. Rasa school of Bharatha Muni is one of the prominent schools of poetry in India. Natyashastra is the first literary work which gave a theory of aesthetics. The word rasa means sap, beauty, essence, relish, nectar and many more. It refers to the essence of what the reader or spectator, called Sahridaya, sees, listens or reads. The essence of rasa theory is explained in the famous rasa sutra of Bharatha Muni: '*vibhavanubhava vyabhichari samyogath rasa nishpatti*'. Vibhava refers to the causes of transformation, anubhavas are the resulting actions which are voluntary and vyabhichari bhavas are wandering emotions. All these components in union, produces rasa. Performances awakens the sthayibhavas in rasikas which manifests itself as various rasas such as sringara, hasya, karuna, raudra, bibhatsa, bhayanaka, veera, adbhuta and nirveda.

In poetry the vibhavas and other elements have their existence as words. Poetry is the most complex and valuable of all the arts. The complexity and value partly arise from the unique qualities of its mode of using language to achieve its effects. Poetry uses all the resources of words, including their sound value, to the fullest extent possible. It is this exploitation of the multiple resources that accounts for the subtlety, complexity and depth of poetic experience. (Thampi 315)

We can find interesting parallels between affect theory and rasa theory of Bharatha Muni with regard to how the spectators are affected by the performance in myriad ways. The

elements of affect theory in rasa is significant with regard to the emotional effect of the art on the spectators. In this light, the Kerala folk art form called Mudi yettu can be understood and perceived based on the rasa sutra of Bharata Muni

A beautiful and semantically rich art form , Mudi yettu depicts the fight between Goddess Bhadrakali and the demon Darika. It is usually conducted in Bhagavathi temples. Mudi yettu is one of the rarest art forms which got listed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The communal aspects of this art form is also heavily significant as this is not just merely an art for entertainment alone, but a strong platform to voice their identity and existence. The importance of folk arts get immensely significant in recent times as they, unlike many other art forms such as Kathakali or Thullal for that matter, contains in it a whole corpus of sociological and cultural underpinnings that have shaped themselves into the form and content of art forms in myriad and unique ways. Right from their appearance to the verses that they render, traces of many a remarkable factors can be found and digged up. Mudi yettu is usually performed mainly in the four districts in Kerala namely Ernakulam, Idukki, Thrissur and Kottayam. This splendid art form is performed to please the goddess and the entire village participates in it. The order of performance of this dance drama includes Kalamezhuthu, Kalam Pattu accompanied by musical instruments like chenda, idakka, kombu and ilathalam. It is followed by Kelikottu and the dance drama is performed after it. The main characters of Mudi yettu are Bhadrakali, Darika, Danavendra, Koyimbadan and Kooli.

Vibhavas

The causative factor behind rasa is called vibhava. It is the determinant. There are two types of Vibhavas: alambana vibhava and uddipana vibhava. Alambana vibhava refers to the characters on which the sentiment is clung. Uddipana vibhavas are the right conditions or conducive environment apt for creating transformation in the spectators .

Vibhava is the objective condition producing an emotion. Vibhava may be of two kinds: i)alambana and (ii) Uddipana. Alambana vibhava means a person or persons with reference to whom the emotion is manifested. Uddipana Vibhava means the circumstances that have excited the emotion. (S N. 191)

In Mudi yettu, the major elements that can be categorised as vibhavas are the characters or rather, the actors who plays the characters and mythological story and premises based on which this art form is formed upon. The major characters of Mudi yettu are Bhadrakali, Darika, Danavendra , Koyimbadan and Kooli. The story of Mudi yettu is taken from the puranas. Darika and Danavendra are two demons, who got a boon from Lord Brahma that they won't be killed by any man in the universe. Those arrogant demons started perpetuating violence in the world and inorder to put an end to their cruelties, Shiva sent Bhadrakali upon the request of Sage Narada to protect the world from those toxic duo. Kali kills them and presents their heads to Lord Shiva. This story is enacted as Mudi yettu. Koyimbadar is Sage Narada and Kooli is the fool. The performance is done at night time and the bright costumes, makeup and lamp and fire , with the dark background provides an instant effect of bhaya rightly. All these factors acts as major vibhavas or causative factors of transformation or affect in the spectators.

Anubhavas

Anubhavas refers to the resulting action. These are non verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions , the deliberate physical manifestations. " Anubhava means bodily expression by which the emotion is expressed. Thus the arch glance of a lady, her inviting smile, may be regarded as Anubhava"(191). Involuntary anubhavas are called sattvik bhavas. In Mudi yettu, the fierce and anger of Kali is very evident through the facial expressions, sounds, gestures and actions of the artist. Percussion, attire, and makeup adds to this effect. The swirling of sword, rapid rotations with one hand placed on the heavy headgear or *mudi* , dance and battle cry are examples for this. The funny expressions , random jumping and running, shrilly voice, rhythmic dance to folk beats and randomly calling people from audience irrespective of their age and feeding them are more instances in this regard. Sattvika bhavas such as *swarasada*, *vepadhu* and *sweda* are also significant anubhavas .

Vyabhichari Bhavas

Vyabhichari bhavas are transient or fleeting emotions. Those wandering emotions are not primary ones but rather, they add to the effect of sthayi bhava and its role in the performance.

Apart from these clearly organised dominant emotions there are innumerable transient moods and mental states which accompany them in any experience. They do not attain the intensity of emotions; nor do they last long...But the permanent emotions cannot be expressed in poetry without depicting these moods. The *sthayins* are very subtle; they manifest themselves through these moods. Love is manifested in the agent's longing or joy or bashfulness.(Thampi 313)

The major vyabhichari bhavas in Mudi yettu are rathi, hasa, bhaya, and vira.

Affect theory has various dimensions. The dimension of emotions is what is being focused here in the purview of both Indian aesthetics and Mudi yettu. The Vibhavas, anubhavas and vyabhichari bhavas together creates rasa in the audience, who are simultaneously a part of the performance as well. Art is not a process of momentary entertainment. It is not a silly way to stimulate human senses for pleasurable escapades. Not every art can evoke rasananda in the spectators because it is through the emotional and intellectual communication through various means that the purpose and essence of the art form is conveyed effectively. The process of rasananda or aesthetic relishing, the manifestation of transformation in the audience can be paralleled to the affect. Affect is not mere emotions alone, rather, it is the process of feeling, the actual manifestation and modification. Affects are not uniform in every person, according to Silvan Tomkins, just as sthayi bhavas differs from person to person. He rightly distinguishes between emotions, feelings and effects. Emotions are a mix of feelings and previous memories. Feelings are realization of affects. Affects or what Indian Aesthetics calls sthayi bhavas are inherent in every human beings and with the presence of appropriate rasanubhava, those bhavas are lighted up.

When we respond to poetry, the emotional states are not simply undergone and suffered; they are perceived and tasted. The Sanskrit words to describe this process are *carvana* which means masticating and *rasana* which means tasting. These words refer to the imaginative reconstruction of the meanings and identity of the poem by the reader and to his active enjoyment of the emotion even while they reverberate in his heart. ...The liberative function of poetry is partly an outcome of this peculiar nature of poetic experience. Poetic experience frees us from being a slave to emotions which are generally chaotic, discordant, powerful

and blind. This is one of the saying that poetry makes our insight into life keener(Thampi 339)

Conclusion

Mudiyettu is not a monopoly of any class. The whole village participates in it wholeheartedly. The character Kooli represents women of old times and is highly symbolic in myriad ways. Devotion, power, dramatics and other folk elements are the ingredients that makes this a relish for spectators. For some, this art form is an opportunity to experience a divine performance in front of their eyes while for some other, the valor and . rage of Kali and Darika -Danavendra war drives them. No matter what, a significant shift is brought in the rasikas and this affective power of arts that manifests as the blooming of *adbhutapushpa* or the height of dramatic enjoyment and pleasure as Abhinavagupta says. This magical feeling creates an *alaukika* or out of the world experience for the *sahridayas*.

Works Cited

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