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## A Critical Appraisal of Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam* in the Light of the Rasa Theory

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### Abstract

*Nāṭyaśāstra* was written by legendary Bharata Muni, who was known for his dramatic theories. *Nāṭyaśāstra* is said to be created by Lord Brahma and Bharata Muni was agent of Brahma on earth, who introduced us to this great treatise. The material, which was used in *Nāṭyaśāstra*, was collected from many different sources and *Ācāryas*. *Ācāryas* like Tumburu, Narada, and Nandi gave this treatise a complete shape. Later, many additions and alterations were done according to the requirement of time and space. Sons and followers of Bharata popularised and transferred his art of drama to the world. In the present research endeavour, the researcher is analysing Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam* in the light of the rasa theory.

**Keywords:** *Nāṭyasāstra*, Rasa Theory, Poile Sengupta, Mangalam

### Introduction

As the name suggests, the *Nāṭyasāstra* is a treatise about theatre. The main reason to compose this text was to give instructions to actors for their performances. It comprises of four topics –acting, dance, music, and *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment). *Nāṭyasāstra* was composed in verse form, gathering its knowledge from all four Hindu *Vedas* and various other sources. It is also known as *Nāṭyaveda* because it helps both the people, who are curious and want to enjoy aesthetic beauty and the people, who are afraid of study of the *Vedas* and *Purānas*. It makes them understand human life and its objectives. G.K. Bhatt mentions in his translation of *Nāṭyasāstra*, that “Tradition considers the *Nāṭyasāstra* as an additional Veda, so important has it been in the history of Indian literary thought” (Bhatt 1).

*Nāṭyasāstra* comprises mainly of four subjects: dance, music, acting and *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment). *Rasa* is a central subject among these four subjects in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Remaining

three subjects are the means of presentation of *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment) that has been stretched to a full-fledged theory called *Rasa Siddhānta* (theory of aesthetic sentiment). The greatest quality of this theory is that it has erected its edifice on the foundation of the commonality of *bhāva* (human feeling and emotions) that are later classified into two kinds: *sthāyibhāva* (basic sentiment) and *vyābhicāribhāva* (transitory emotion). *Rasa Siddhānta* theory is used to analyse the aesthetic qualities in a work of art & literature.

### **About the Author**

Poile Sengupta is a well-known face in modern Indian dramatic sphere. Sengupta is a senior schoolteacher, college lecturer famous for her writings for children and for plays dealing with various topics and issues. She was born as Ambika Gopalakrishnan in the year 1948. She studied in Delhi University and went to Ottawa to do a course in children's literature at Carleton University, which helped her write children's books like *The Exquisite Balance* (1985), *The Way to My Friend's House* (1988), *The Story of the Road* (1993) and *How the Path Grew* (1997). She writes columns for children out of which 'A Letter to You' and 'Roll Call' are widely known. She has also written a poetry collection named *A Woman Speaks* in which she deals with various issues related to women in the present-day society.

In addition to this, she is a successful actor who acted in award winning film *The Outhouse*. She is the founder of a theatre club in Bangalore that helps the amateur actors to refine and shape their art. She is also the member of Jury of Trinity College, London for an International Competition of Plays for Younger People. This wide range of experience in theatres and acting has greatly helped her writings and helped her to stand out from her contemporary playwrights. Her book *Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play* (2001) consists of six plays dealing with a wide range of themes like love and passion, women empowerment, revenge and retaliation, human relationship and human emotions, political injustice, and the need for social change etc.

### **About the Play**

The first play in the book *Mangalam* (1993) won Poile Sengupta a special price in the Hindu Madras Players Playscripts Competition in the same year of its publication, for its socially

relevant theme. In the modern society everyone talks of women empowerment and giving girl child equal opportunities in all spheres of life but if we go into the ground reality, the condition of women in the society has not changed significantly. There are numerous cases of domestic violence against women and sexual abuse of the girl child adds to this problem. Through this play, Sengupta is trying to highlight this issue and show how a woman has to suffer in an Indian society. By using the device of play within a play, she also gives voice to the characters in the second act of the play to talk about the functionality of drama and also the issue of domestic violence against Mangalam in the First Act. Though they are discussing about the injustice done against women in a society, it finally comes out that a girl name Sumati from the same family becomes a victim of sexual abuse by her father's friend. The injustice against women is not always done by those who are uneducated, illiterate and don't have any idea about the seriousness of the issue. It is also done by those men who pretend to stand for women rights and indulge in these heinous crimes whenever they get a chance. Hence, this play is a wakeup call for all the women in the society to stand for each other and fight against all odds.

The play *Mangalam* is the first play in the book *Women Centre Stage* authored by Poile Sengupta. It was first performed on 14th of January 1994. The play reflects upon the conditions of women in the present-day society. The playwright uses the dramatic device of play within a play and tries to show how women have to suffer in male dominated society. The first act of the play starts with the focus on the funeral of Mangalam. Everyone in the family is mourning her death except Dorai, her husband. Dorai goes down the memory lane to the days of his marriage and recollect the incidents that lead to his marriage with Mangalam. He clearly recollects how he was deceived by his in-laws and was lured for the marriage. All the female characters in the play are shown as strong and rebellious. Chitra is one who goes against her father's will and gets married a person out of her caste. Thangam is another who in the first act of the play, stands for her sister Mangalam and answers against all the allegations put forward by Dorai against his wife.

The play starts with Mani, a bank employee, and his wife Revathi arguing about the struggles of a daughter-in-law in house of her in-laws. Suddenly, the focus shifts to Thangam, who is wailing and sobbing on the death of her sister. Dorai, the husband of the

dead Mangalam is indifferent towards his wife's death. He is severely criticised for this by Thangam. Thangam decides to take charge of the family after her sister's demise. She takes care of Kannan, the youngest of the family and decides to get Chitra married to a well settled groom. As the play progresses, we come to know about the hidden truth behind Dorai and Mangalam's marriage. Mangalam was two months pregnant when she was married to Dorai. Dorai was completely unaware of this fact earlier. But when he came to know about this, he was not in situation to say anything because he was dependent on his father-in-law financially. By the end of the first Act of the play, all the family members come to know about the person who had raped Mangalam. She was a victim not a whore as Dorai use to call her.

The second act of the play deals with a case of sexual harassment. The harassment was committed by Nari, who was a friend of Sumati's father Srin. The second act starts with Suresh, Sumati and their mother Thangam discussing about the first act of the play, which was performed a day before. Later, they are joined by Vikram and Radha and their parents Nari and Vaidehi. They discuss about several things like the marriage of their children and their housing plans etc. By the end of the play, Sumati is accompanied by Nari to the garden where she was sexually harassed and the play ends there.

### Application of Rasa Theory

Reading the play in the light of Bharata's Rasa theory (aesthetic sentiment) brings new insights. We can identify a list of *Rasas* by a close reading of the play. *Raudra Rasa* is one of the dominant rasas in the Play. In the beginning of the play, *Raudra rasa* can be felt by the conversation of Revathi and Mani.

REVATHI: I am telling you there was another silver kooja, there was. I remember it clearly. She took it out for Kannan's pool. She must have given it to that sister of yours. As if she hasn't given her enough already. A steel cupboard last Deepavali, two silk vaistis for your brother in law, a gold chain for his mother...

MANI: That's enough. If she wanted to give things to her daughter she had every right to. She used to tell me that she never wanted us to be

humiliated like she used to be in her husband's house.

REVATHI: What about my being humiliated in my husband's house?

MANI: Oh, stop it. You women have nothing better to do than go on and on about the pettiest of things. Who said what to whom and in what tone and why and... (3)

In this conversation, Revathi is complaining to Mani that her mother-in-law gives everything to her daughter Usha. One day, when she finds out that silver kooja is missing; she presumes that her mother-in-law must have given it to Usha. This excites Mani's anger. He was busy with some paperwork, and he loses his temper after Revathi's nagging. Revathi is the *alambanavibhava* because she arouses the sentiment of anger from Mani. The Silver kooja is the *uddipanbhivava* because it is main reason behind their argument, and it stimulates Mani's anger. *Vyābhicāri bhavas* in this conversation are *ugrata*, the talking and scolding of Mani and *amarsaor* the anger that Mani shows by his gestures. The combination of all these elements leads to the *sthayibhava* of anger which further leads to *Raudra rasa*. In the first act, it is evident from the conversation of Thangam and Dorai in the following lines:

DURAI: Stop! Let him hear it too. He is old enough, isn't he? (To Kannan) Do you know, you fool, from where your sister learnt her whoring? From her mother. From your mother. You thought your mother was a devil, isn't it? And your father a raakshan? Well, let me tell you something...

THANGAM: That will do. Let the boy go and pay his fees. What is the use now of talking of dead and gone things?

Exits with kannan.

DURAI: Dead and gone things? How can it be dead and gone? Vivekananda, I have lived with it for 31 years. Every moment I have spent in this house, in her house, I have heard to leave with it. Bad day bought me; her family bought me to keep their good name. Her father bought me. To keep his self-respect, for his daughter's self-respect. ... (softly, bitterly.) and then, the other thing the thing that haunts me, the robs my sleep ... (20-21)

The whole description is about the anger. Dorai, the head of the family, shouts at Thangam. He is questioning his wife Mangalam and gets angry over both her and his in-laws. He is feeling deceived and then he shouts on Thangam, who is at the receiving end of Dorai's anger. Here *alambana*(supporting cause) is Thangam for whom Dorai's anger is awakened. *Uddipan*(stimulating factor) is Mangalam's character for which Dorai's anger is enraged. The changes that occurred due to the rise of these emotions or *anubhavas*(visible effects) are the changes in the speech of voice of Dorai which are loud, soft, and bitter at times. These short-lived emotions or *vyābhicāri*(transitory emotions) are *ugrata*(scolding, shouting) and *amarsa* that deals with anger by evident gestures. These emotions lead to *sthayibhava* of *krodha*. The whole conversation brings out the *Raudra Rasa* (sentiment of Furious). Last scene is another example of *Raudra rasa* from the play.

There is a sudden, terrified scream from inside. Sumati.

SUMATI: (off) No! Uncle! No! ... (Sumati rushes in through the garden door.)  
Appa! Appa! ..(she breaks down sobbing as Vikram, Suresh and Radha come running in through the inner door.)

THANGAM: Sumati! What has happened? Amma! Sumati!

Nari enters in a rush through the garden door. Short. Focuses on him.  
He is dishevelled, out of breath.

VIKRAM: You bastard! (Lungs forward. Suresh restrains him.) (69)

In this conversation, by the end of the play where Nari accompanies Sumati to the garden a sudden terrified scream of Sumati can be heard. We are not told directly as to what has happened there in the garden. We can only figure it out from the reactions of the characters present on the stage that Sumati has been sexually harassed by Nari. This arouses the sentiment of anger in Vikram, and he advances towards Nari to hit him. Here, *alambanavibhava* is Nari who excites Vikram's anger and wrath. *Uddipanavibhava* in this incident is Nari's attitude towards Sumati that creates an atmosphere of tension and shock. The *anubhavas* working in this example are the rushing of the characters and sobbing of Sumati. The *vyābhicāri bhavas* in this example are *ugrata*, the scolding and threatening of Vikram and *Jadata*(stupor). All this leads to the *sthayibhava* of anger or wrath.

Though the play is serious but still there are some comic interludes in between that add the

*hasyarasa* in the play. An example of *hasyarasa* can be seen from the interaction of Radha, Vikram, Sumati and Suresh in the second act of the play.

RADHA AND VIKRAM: Hi! Hello! Hello aunty! Hello Su!

THANGAM AND SUMATI: Hi! Hello Radha! Hi Vikram!

VIKRAM:(To Sumati.) Oops! I shouldn't be saying 'Hi' to a lecturer, Should I?

SURESH: How dare you address her in that in that improper manner, sir? Rectify your gross error immediately.

Vikram is about to go to Sumati, Suresh pushes him back to the door, makes him ring the bell and re-enter. Vikram submits with good grace, though it is evident that Sumati is not amused.

SURESH: (Prompting.) Say it. G-o-o-d m-o-

VIKRAM: Good morning ma'am. How are you, ma'am? Nice day, ma'am.

Vikram's mock deference is appealing and Sumati smiles. Radha has been giggling all the while. (47)

In this conversation we can see Radha, Vikram, Sumati and Suresh having a good time together and they were making fun with Sumati. The whole point of this conversation is to mock Sumati and to pull her leg by showing respect to her. All this happens when Radha and Vikram enters in the house of Sumati and Suresh. At that time, they are having a conversation with their mother Thangam. When they enter the house, they greet Thangam and Sumati but Vikram realises that Sumati is an English lecturer and he should treat her with respect. At the same time, Suresh also joins Vikram, and both start making fun of Sumati. Suresh even asks Vikram to go back to the door and re-enter to greet Sumati again with respect. Sumati is not amused by this, but all the other characters present in the conversation are having a great time. This is an example of *hasya rasa* and the *alambanavibhava* is Sumati. *Uddipanvibhava* in this example is the playful atmosphere of the house. The changes which occurred due to the rise of these emotions or *Anubhava* (physical effects) are Suresh pushing Vikram back to the door and Vikram re-entering the house. The

*vyābhicāri bhavas* (transitory emotions) are *harsa* or joy of the characters. All these emotions lead to the *sthayibhava* of *hasya* leading to *hasya rasa*.

### **Conclusion**

The play, *Mangalam*, reflects upon the conditions of women in the present-day society. The play finally consummates into *hasya rasa* or the comic. The play *Mangalam* by the playwright Poile Sengupta, is able to connect with the audience because the characters, plot, diction, setting and themes used in the play are familiar and very close to the day-to-day life of common people. The playwright takes a proper care of all the elements in the play to connect with the audience. The audience would find it easier to connect with the characters and the play as a whole will help in the success of the play.



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