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COMIC SENTIMENT IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF ANAND NEELAKANTAN

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Abstract

Emotion is a part of human being's life, after breathing if anything makes human alive that is emotion. One such emotion or sentiment is comic that one experiences throughout the life. *Hasya Rasa* or Comic Sentiment is an emotion or feeling that one wants to feel all his life. Happiness is a feeling that one wants to be in it all the time in his life especially when life is a long journey which is full of ups and downs, good and bad experiences, *Hasya* is a *rasa* that gives joy and bliss to human beings. Thus, *Hasya Rasa* is one of a very important emotions for not only humans but for all the living beings' lives. Comic Sentiment is one of the *rasas* depicted in *Bharat Muni's* work *Natya Shastra*. It is a part of Indian Aesthetics and has universality in it, for it signifies laughter and laughter is an omnipresent emotion in human being's life as well as literature that one feels throughout his life. Anand Neelakantan is a renowned contemporary Indian Mythological and Historical fiction writer in English. This paper intends to study Comic Sentiment depicted by the eminent contemporary author Anand Neelakantan in his selected works such as *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, *Ayaya: Roll of the Dice*, *Bhoomija: Sita*, and *Ravana's Sister: Meenakshi*.

Keywords

Aesthetics, *Rasa Theory*, *Pramatha*, *Hasa*, Mahabali, Chandali, Acharya.

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Aesthetics is a philosophical term concerned with the nature of art and with judgements concerning beauty. It is and has always been an eternal part of the Indian philosophy and differs in context and approach from that of the Western. *Indian Aesthetics* has always aimed for realizing the meaning of in-depth beauty of art and self. The practice of aesthetics in India has been from ages but it was never recorded until 1st Century BC with Bharat Muni's epic work on dramaturgy the *Natya Shastra*. It intensively discourses about the expression of art through limitation, transportation, unities, manners, etiquettes, acting, dancing, music, costume, make-up, spectacle, characters, limb movements, diction, gestures, and most importantly the 'sentiments' i.e., the *Rasa*. The *Rasa Theory* is an eternal part of *Natya Shastra* and chiefly the soul of it as discussed in its chapters 6 and 7. One of the *Rasas* discussed in *Natya Shastra* is Comic Sentiment, its color is white and the deity related to is Lord *Pramatha (Ganesha)*. Its *Sthayibhava* (Durable Psychological State) is '*Hasa*' and generally denotes laughter arousing out of a comic situation. It is said that life is full of tickles and gives different types of comic moments to those who can feel the tickling. Also, there are different tones to laughter, it can be a generous laugh, a sarcastic laugh a mischievous laugh or a witty or a subtle one varying with the situation.

As the narrative of *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* moves forward, Ravana with his brother departs from his home to conquer the world. Meanwhile he encounters Mahabali, known as the mightiest and greatest of all Asura kings. Here, the author Neelakantan depicts *Hasya Rasa* or Comic Sentiment in the incident when Ravana and his younger brothers meet Mahabali. Ravana and his brothers enter a cave blindfolded. The attendants of king Mahabali lead them to the mighty king for fulfilling their wish. Then Ravana hears a voice ordering the attendants to remove the blindfolds of Ravana and his brothers. The first glance Ravana sees after the removal of his blindfold is a very old man, who is seeing him with a gentle and serene smile on his face. His smile is the symbol serenity and the wisdom of ages. Through his smile on his face, Ravana recognizes him that he is the great king Mahabali. In these lines author

Neelakantan depicts Smita means a gentle smile that exhibits *Hasya Rasa* in the incident of the work *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*.

And then a deep, resonating voice ordered that our blindfolds be removed. As they were lifted and our eyes adjusted to the darkness inside the cave, we saw a very old man seated on a large stone chair. He stared intently at us. I held my head high and glared back at him. Slowly, imperceptibly at first, but then engulfing his whole face, a smile crossed his face. As if touched by a magic wand, the tough and mean-looking old man was transformed into a man of vigour and vitality. His face emanated a serenity beyond words. His smile conveyed the wisdom of ages. Slowly recognition dawned on me, it was Mahabali! (27)

Further in the tale, king Mahabali sees fire of ambition in Ravana's eyes and welcomes him to his kingdom to learn every possible thing he can learn from him. He tells him to come with an open mind for this place has a lot to teach him. The old man has his own style and a kind smile. Then continuing his kind smile, he waves his hands and with a taunt dismisses Ravana and his brothers.

The old man had style. Then with a wave of his hands and a kind smile, the corners of his mouth twitching with a slight hint of a taunt, the Emperor dismissed us. (30)

The author Neelakantan depicts the happiness of Ravana's family here. He depicts different kinds of smile in the cited lines. Here's the description of Ravana's marriage and how happy his family is because of his marriage and the rituals that spread joy all over in the kingdom. Everyone is happy in his wedding except Ravana. He smiles at everyone and tries to put that smile on his face and shows that he is the happiest person in the world. Further he maintains his smile and feels a strain because of that. Gradually, his smile decreases and just smiling lips with showing teeth remains because he has no romantic feelings towards Mandodari.

My sister fluttered around showing off her newly-made jewellery and escorting all and sundry to Mandodari's chamber to show off her new sister-in-law. For once I pitied the professor's daughter. I had to keep my temper in check and smile at everyone and act as if I was the happiest man in the world. The strain of keeping a smiling face when I was seething inside, started telling on my nerves. By Friday morning, my smile was almost a grimace. (173)

On the wedding day, Ravana wakes up at a depressed hour and his relatives carry him for a ritual bath at the palace lake. People are staring him there and laughing a lot. Elder men and women comment on him; girls are laughing at Ravana then lead him to a room and apply mehendi on his toes and palms. He sees that old women are singing songs about the pleasures in bed, he feels like he is a girl. The songs of very old women make him laugh a lot at them. In the following lines author Neelakantan depicts the different kinds of smiles that denote *Hasya Rasa*.

I was woken up at some godforsaken hour on Friday morning and almost dragged for a ritual bath at the palace lake, amidst peals of laughter. Gaping men and women; elders commenting; girls giggling around corners... These came from the depths of the human soul and glorified an eternal truth—procreation, the only tool for the survival of human beings. I should have tried not to laugh at them. (173)

As the story of the novel *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* moves forward, the author introduces Karna and his father, who belongs to Suta caste which is one of the untouchable castes for the upper caste's people. In the tale Karna wishes to become a warrior and he tells his wish to his

father Athiratha. Athiratha is a charioteer and his job is to serve the royal family. After seeing the eagerness to become a warrior in Karna, he goes to a Brahmin sage Kripa to teach his son. Kripa insults both of them for being untouchables and then asks for a huge amount of money that is impossible to pay for Karna's poor father. Athiratha tells sage Kripa that he is very poor, sage thinks that he is asking money from him instead. Then, Kripa tells Athiratha that he is too very poor and has no money to lend him. Then he tells Athiratha that if he has money, he would have enjoyed a few more mugs of wine in the tavern and breaks into boisterous laughter.

"Swami, I have a humble request..." "I am broken as an earthen pot. I do not have any money to lend you. If I had, I would have enjoyed a few more mugs of wine in the tavern." The Acharya broke into boisterous laughter. (53)

Further, in the tale author depicts *Hasya Rasa* through Kripa's character. Sage Kripa is an unorthodox and notorious person. He doesn't care about society and social norms. After Acharya Drona's arrival at Hastinapur, Kripa has been fired from his job of princes' tutor. Kripa doesn't care about all these things and spends his time at the tavern, enjoying and laughing with his friends. He doesn't follow the old norms of the Brahmin community.

Karna knew Kripa was a maverick Brahmin, who did not care for social and ethical norms. Now that Acharya Drona had come, there were murmurs in palace that Kripa, for all his learnings and skill with arms, would be fired as the Princes' tutor. Kripa behaved as if he had not a care in the world. He could be seen in the tavern from early morning, laughing with his cronies, when other members of his caste were busy with prayers and ablution. (54)

Further, Kripa checks Karna's abilities as a warrior and agrees to teach him the skills of becoming a warrior. Athiratha's happiness has no limit after knowing this, but soon Kripa smiles mischievously and puts forward his other demands for teaching Karna.

"Will you teach him, Swami?" Athiratha could barely hold back his tears of joy. "Why not?" A mischievous smile played on Kripa's thick lips. (55)

As the story proceeds, Suyodhana and his friend's attend the gathering in the Indraprastha palace of Pandavas. In the gathering a huge fight arises between Pandavas and Suyodhana's troop. Everyone insults Karna for being a low caste Suta and Suyodhana for befriending him. Suyodhana comes forward to take a stand against this injustice as per him and falls into a water pool while doing this. His dhoti slips from his waist and he stands naked in front of everyone. Karna comes forward to pick up Suyodhana's dhoti from the water, as he does so, everyone starts laughing at Suyodhana and the laughter echoes through the hall. Then, Draupadi makes a comment on him that he is blind like his father and laughs at him boisterously.

Karna leaned down to pick up Suyodhana's dhoti from the water. As he did so, laughter echoed through the hall. "Andha! Blind, just like his father." It was Draupadi. She bit her lip pointing to the naked Suyodhana, no longer able to control her mirth. (407)

After the fall of Suyodhana or Duryodhana, when Draupadi comments on him of being blind like his father Dhritrashtra, everyone starts laughing at him and the laughter fill the hall and become the roar or more louder as compared to the previous moment. Everyone is laughing at Suyodhana at the moment and the entire assembly is shaking with laughter. Suyodhana's nakedness makes everyone laugh at him more, the priest, the people around Suyodhana everyone's laughter and the insult Suyodhana feels in the Indraprastha palace leads to the deadly war of Kurukshetra.

Laughter filled the hall and became a roar. The whole assembly shook with amusement. Suyodhana stood naked in the middle of the Court, laughter and ridicule burning his ears, shamed and insulted beyond imagination, as the Priests who had run away in fear a few moments before, came back boldly and began showering abuse on him. Suyodhana refused to take his dhoti from his friend's hand or come out of the pool that barely wet his ankles. He stood there defiantly while insults and ridicule showered on him from all sides. (407)

In the work, *Bhoomija: Sita*, the author Neelakantan depicts the happiness that the saint Valmiki experiences after watching the mating dance of Krauncha birds. Nothing has given him this kind of great joy that he is feeling at the moment. Valmiki feels whole and united with the universe after watching the love of Krauncha birds. He raises his hands to the sky and starts smiling and dancing in happiness.

The saint sat watching the mating dance of the Krauncha birds. He was bursting with happiness. Neither his endless meditation for peering into his inner darkness, nor the chanting of holy mantras had given him the kind of bliss he was experiencing. The sky above him was a bright azure. I am the sky, thought the saint... the soil had an ethereal fragrance. 'I am the earth,' said the saint... The banyan tree where the birds had perched, fluttered its leaves as a breeze oozed through it. 'I am the leaves that wave to the sky; I am the roots that strive to embrace the earth; I am the whole tree and the seed; the saint said raising his hand to the sky. The wind played with his flowing beard. 'I am the breeze,' the saint said drinking the sweet smell of honey that the wind had stolen. (6)

As the saint Valmiki starts feeling whole with the universe, he looks at the Krauncha birds and laughs in joy and feels that he is the laughter. He feels united with the nature. He feels that everything is laughing with him in great joy that he is feeling. He is in love with life and with himself. He feels that he is everything the start and end of everything. This denotes his utter happiness that he experiences because of the Krauncha birds.

He looked at the Krauncha birds and laughed. 'I am the laughter,' said he through his chuckles. 'I am the earth, the moon, the stars, the sun, the ant, the bird, the river, the mountains and the deserts,' he screamed at the top of his voice. The mountain laughed with him. It caught his cry of bliss, amplified it manifold and echoed it. The saint started to cry. 'I am the tears,' he said through his teardrops. 'I am the sorrow and I am the joy; I am the passion; I am life and death.' (6)

Further, author Neelakantan depicts the utter happiness of saint Valmiki. Tears of happiness fall down through his cheeks. He feels united with everything that he sees after the incidence of watching the love of Krauncha birds. He feels his oneness with the universe and feels enlightened about his existence in the world. He feels overwhelmed with happiness after feeling the beauty of love that he is witnessing at the moment.

The ants that were marching with food stopped in their path as a drop of tear fell before them and splattered into a million droplets. He mumbled a word of apology to the little creatures and watched them resume their march. He could feel the oneness with the marching ants- he felt one with the food they carried, he felt he was many and he knew he was one. I am the universe and I am the atom. I am everything and I am nothing... 'Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram- Truth, Divine, and Beautiful,' he cried. Bliss, Ananda. He felt over-whelmed. (6)

In the work, *Ravana's Sister: Meenakshi* when Chandali and Meenakshi finish their meal, they further continue their conversation regarding the great Kingdom of Ayodhya. Meenakshi further says that she becomes philosophical when she doesn't get sufficient meal to eat. In this way she makes a satire on the prevailing rein and laughs at the situation. Then Chandali continues that in that case, she is a seer on most days because she never gets sufficient food to eat most of the time in Ayodhya. Both the women burst into laughter again. Then Meenakshi sees Lakshman and laughs at him because he gets shocked after seeing Meenakshi in Ayodhya. Then again Meenakshi laughs at what he has done to her earlier, this time her laughter is louder.

'I become philosophical when my stomach is half empty. It is a disease,' said Meenakshi and laughed... 'In that case, on most days, I am a seer,' the Chandali said and they both burst into laughter yet again. Meenakshi had started to like this woman... She laughed when Lakshmana mumbled, 'Soorpanakha!' His whip dropped from his hand. Meenakshi touched the hole where her stately nose used to be and laughed loudly. (6)

Comic Sentiment or *Hasya Rasa* is a feeling of joy that comes from within, when one feels that life is good. Humor is its most typical expression and may also cause joy in others. It is not an event or an act that creates the purest *Hasya*, pure *Hasya* is real happiness, a joy that comes from within for no apparent reason. This *Hasya or Comic* is a divine *Rasa* that expresses joy an expression of divine bliss and the author Anand Neelakantan has beautifully depicted Comic Sentiment in all his works and provided a joyful experience to readers through the lives of various funny characters and incidents in his works taken for this research study. Thus, the works of Neelakantan provides a joyful journey of smile, laughter, and happiness to the ones who go through it.

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