

A Rasa Reading of *Prayer on a Clear Morning in the Month of Magh*

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Article History: Received May 21, 2020; Revised August 10, 2020; Accepted October 4, 2020; Online Published November 2020

To cite this article: Lamichhane, Y. R. (2020). A rasa reading of prayer on a clear morning in the month of *magh*. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki (JoNG)*, III (1&2), 73-81. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.3126/jong.v3i1-2.33146>

Abstract

The study examines how the persona perpetually searches tranquility in the poem entitled “Prayer on a Clear Morning in the Month of Magh” by Laxmi Prasad Devkota. For the study, I have entered into rasa reading to explore the sovereignty of śānta rasa, which is pervasively dominant in the poem. As the nature of śānta rasa, all emotions merge out of śānta and finally in the end, submerge into it. Primarily, the determinant, consequent, and transitory emotions are identified and further analyzed to illustrate how they conjoin. Through the discussion, it appears that any sensitive readers of the poem could identify themselves to the persona’s emotion as one involves in prayer. It stands as the devotion and celebration of the God and nature in the month of Magh; that represents creation and clarity. It happens there suspending ‘I’, surpassing ego, and searching metamorphosis of the lustrous desires, fabric beauty, and worldly pain for overcoming both life and death enjoying the elixir of the Sun and learning the lesson from the God. As a result, the persona believes in the dying down of the worldly dream to achieve delight and disillusionment eliminating shiny lacy veils entrapping humanity. Thus, the poem searches tranquility as a state of pure peace relishing utmost and absolute aesthetic pleasure, sama. Finally, it expands the scope of the Eastern aesthetics, especially unfolding and widening the area of śānta rasa, which is usually overlooked even in the Eastern literature.

Keywords: emotions, peace, rasa, sama, śānta rasa, tranquility

Introduction

Laxmi Prasad Devkota, one of the versatile litterateurs from Nepal, has contributed to diverse genres of literature and honored as 'The Great Poet'. His poetry incorporates folklore to modern domains with a deep understanding of the Eastern and Western philosophies. In this regard, the Eastern classical poetry has a legacy to *stotra* in Sanskrit aesthetic and Indian poets from Tamil Nadu to Kashmir have to struggle from the middle of the foremost millennium to liberate poetry out of that prayer (Pollock, 2016). Following the same line, Devkota has written a poem “Prayer on a Clear Morning in the Month of Magh” in the form of prayer, releasing poetry from the purely Vedic or religious subject matters searching aesthetic ends in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The poem by Devkota mainly describes the beginning of *Magh* and according to the Hindu calendar; it is the month of knowledge, clarity, and creation. The Eastern aesthetics has been excessively supplanted

in this creation. This study aims to explore *sānta rasa* as the dominant *rasa* in the poem mainly exposing the persona's conquest to tranquility. This harmony could be possessed in the specific philosophic and psychological state beyond the ordinary desires and fears of life that is why the very prospect of *Śānta rasa* has often been questioned (Tubb, 1985). Of course, the question and the problem often foreseen are related to the [im]possibility of the performance of the *Śānta rasa* on the stage. In this context, Watave & Watawe (1942) accept that "*Śānta rasa* is more philosophic in nature and is fraught with several complications" (676) which heightens the hesitation to incorporate it in the taxonomy of *rasa*. Nevertheless, borrowing the idea of Anandavardana, Tubb (1985) later clears that one has no problem with *Śānta rasa* in poetry that is communicated through wordplay. This discussion approves the space for *Śānta rasa* in the poem and encourages the exploration of *Śānta rasa* as a prime quest of the persona. It also tries to examine how the persona has been perpetually searching tranquility in this poem.

Review of Related Literature

The critics of the poem "Prayer on a Clearing Morning in Magh" seem to focus on the language, myths, and depiction of nature. Hutt (2018), a translator of the poem reveals that among many other poems of Devkota as he translated or read, he loves "Mad" and "Prayer on a Clearing Morning in Magh". For such appreciation, Hutt (1993) supposes that the second poem is "entirely different composition because it weaves together references to Hindu mythology and description of natural beauty to offer an insight which is deeply personal but also resounds with a profundity which is universal" (p. 43). This fusion of Hindu myths and the depiction of natural magnificence make the poem universal even if it shares deeply personal insights. Nature as a healer, Gouli (2019) also asserts that "Devkota portrays nature as a sight of celebrations and offerings treating it as a source of energy in achieving victory during sufferings" (p. 51) relating him to romanticism reading his poem entitled "The Rain". The author explores the effort of Devkota for linking the life, literature, and nature together in the poem. Moreover, Adhakari (2010) believes that "Devkota passed his life under the rules and regulations of Hindu traditional society festering with injustice and inequality" (p. 2). So the affects of religious consciousness and the rebellious awareness are found parallel in his writing. Discussing the strength of the words used by Devkota in "Prayer on a Clearing Morning in Magh" to communicate the emotions, Subedi (1992) deems that Devkota has explored "the potentiality of language as a medium of presenting experience" (p. 4). Here, the choice of the powerful language describes the simple reflection for the depiction of scenery and lyrics both unexpectedly.

In a study, Lohani (2016) observes Devkota as an ecocritical poet. He further argues him as an ecologically aware global thinker; he is conscious of the symbiotic interconnectivity and interdependency between man and nature. Similarly, assessing the huge output of Devkota in Nepali Literature, Subedi (2015) perceives the wonderful artistic force in his overall writings. The force has driven him to the journey of massive creativity. Likewise, Nathan (1981) defines Devkota as an unwitting surrealist because of his indifference to the repetition of work in the same line (p. 839). Devkota could move along with the consciousness of the time, keeping humanism at the center. He enfolds prophecies to project contemporary life and society in colorful word pictures. Adhikari (2010) considers Devkota as a modern poet having the

consciousness of the age. He is one of the Nepali poets, whose writings have translated into the English language much. Some of his writings are originally in English and several writings have self-translated too.

Since, this paper examines the peace, liberation, serenity, and eternity as the dominant emotions of the poem to validate that the persona in the poem is perpetually searching tranquility, which arouses *Śānta rasa* in the conscious audience that is dominant in each stanza. Finally, the study seeks to expand the scope of *rasa* reading in poetry mainly unfolding and enlarging the area of *Śānta rasa* dealing with the overlooked subject.

Methodology

For this purely qualitative interpretation, the English version of this Nepali poem, translated by Michael James Hutt as *Prayer on a Clear Morning in the Month of Magh*, is selected which is published in an anthology entitled *Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature*. The whole interpretation relies on the light of *Rasa*'s theory focusing on *śānta rasa*. However, there is a dispute about strong existence, the possibility of performance, and stable emotion of this *rasa* as well but the study does not enter into such debate and exercises the fundamental concepts of *śānta rasa* as the theoretical framework to authenticate the textual evidence of this modern Nepali poem selected for the study. The summary of the content has been interpreted relating the context to infer logical conclusions with strong evidence.

Likewise, the longing of the poet for tranquility to achieve liberation and transmigration would be inferred through this textual analysis. Any ideal reader can simply experience these emotions and savor *śānta rasa*, which is defined as “*rasa of rasas*” by Abhinavagupta (as cited in Larson, 1976, p. 378). *śānta rasa* arouses liberation, peace, and tranquility, which are considered as the highest aim of a human being. It is also known as *maharasa* that “all feelings in aesthetic experience merge out of the *śānta* and are in the end submerged in it” (Thampi, 1965, p. 79). While categorizing *rasas* into pleasurable and painful, it falls in durable one with utmost profundity and objective intensity as *śānta* has the pleasurable foundational factors (Marchand, 2006). Readers may ask, whether there can be the classical aesthetic in the text written by the author who is known as modern. The issue is answered by the study on the poem, which was published originally in a collection under the section entitled Modern Nepali Poem applying classical Indian aesthetic, *Śānta rasa*.

Results and Discussion

In the title, the “clear morning” and the “the month of *Magh*” stimulate cloudlessness, purity, and eternal peace as the consequent emotions overcoming fuggy, muggy, and inauspicious *Paush*, the month of death. Especially Hindu philosophy believes that gods come to the earth as the spring starts in the month, *Magh*. The “prayer” in the title works as the transient emotion and it bestows devotion and blessing of God. The conjunction of all these emotions develops, as Cox (2017) believes to “the emotion of beatific calm” (p. 57) which is the trustworthy nature of the *śānta rasa*.

Similarly, the “lacy veil” which has been discarded by the blueness and again the clear morning suggests the dying down of the worldly desires to achieve delight and disillusionment in the first stanza,

which goes as follow:

How clear this morning is!

The blueness has cast off her lacy veil.

Afterward, the excitement and positive attitude of the persona to the clear morning show his prime quest that is purity or serenity in the lines. Such ultimate happiness that arises from the destruction of desire as believed by Anandavardhana (as cited in Rustomji, 1981) is sought in the poem in the form of casting off the lacy veil of delusions and desires.

A legendary sage and author of classical Sanskrit literature, *Ramayana*, Valmiki observes the pathetic scene of killing a crane by a hunter in the second stanza which is full of compassion to stimulate tragic reactions in the poem. In Hindu myth too, Valmiki articulates impulsive curse to the hunter killing a mating bird in form of a verse/curse (Pollock, 2016). As the blood of the crane speckles in the sky, it manifests kindness in the heaven and even the sun could not tolerate, so it climbs up as described in the last three lines of the second stanza, which go as follow:

Celestial gods appear to those

who long with shrinking hearts to see them:

the sun climbs up.

Moreover, the mercy, pain, and grief seem to serve tragic *rasa* in the beginning but when there is the presence of celestial gods for expressing kindness and climbing up of the sun, all these immortalize the death of the bird intrinsically indicating *śānta rasa*. Schechner (2001) considers that Abhinavagupta has added this *śānta rasa* as a ninth *rasa*, a transcendent *rasa* that absorbs and eliminates all other emotions (p. 32). The crane also represents the human being and the hunter stands as a devilish force in the poem and at last, all these tragic emotions serve for non-violence and immortality in the poem that the seemingly tragic *rasa* could be contributive for *śānta rasa* where its emotions are contributive to each other (Upadhaya, 2010). Like mixing colors, different *rasas* contribute to form or strengthen other *rasas*.

Besides these, the legacy of immortality from the previous stanza repeats in the third stanza for further discussion with details. The conversion of the bird's flight into gold, singing futuristic songs, and the raising finger of the tree to immortal sunbeams suggest the enlightenment as the prime goal of all creatures existing in this environment, as persona prays in this stanza, "which have attained their enlightenment/ and are flung out now for the world". The references of the bird, tree, and human seem to deliver the message of universal peace as a profound aspiration of the persona. This aspiration is intensely woven and deeply rooted in his heart as quietness and relaxation. This peace writes Thampi (1965), connotes tranquility, calmness, and serenity, which helps for a better understanding of life. In the last two lines of the stanza, the rays of the sun are inspirational enough to arouse creative emotions.

Mainly the reference of Brahma in the fourth stanza reminds him of the architect of *Natayasastra*, the preceding deity of the fantastic *rasa*, and the time just before dawn. There is a clear indication that the spring has knocked the door to wash out anxiety of life to replenish freshness and brightness as the lines go.

The morning star which disappears

is Brahma, who envisaged all Creation,

a flock of pure cranes swims in the brightness,
 moving living wings of joy to life's rhythm,
 the quest begins, the world is moving,
 its feet climb onto the street.

Here, the rainbow of music, the swimming of the crane in brightness, and the beauty from fourth and upcoming fifth stanza simply stimulates joy, satisfaction, and dream as consequent emotions of *Śānta rasa* that deal with the purification of the desires and worries through transcendent ego for a cosmic peace in artwork that is full of aesthetics (Deutsch, 1970). Such purification and contemplation exist in spiritual insights and esthetic understanding as to the essentials for *Śānta*, which is pervasive in the subsequent lines.

A bird of lustrous beauty came first to the treetop,
 It sang a secret rainbow of music and slipped away.
 Within me, a bird cried out, moving its wings.

Poetry in the Eastern literary criticism is an “expression of emotions through suggestion, and the aim is to arouse at least an echo of that feeling in another” (Rustomj, 1981, p. 83). Mainly, in the last lines of the fifth stanza “Within me, a bird cried out, moving its wings,” suggests that the persona is not interested in such illusionary satisfaction, false fantasy, and bodily pleasure but the knowledge and creation. Actuality, *Śānta rasa* derives its pretext to liberation from such bondages acquiring wisdom (Gerow, 1998). In the poem, the speaker wants to achieve spiritual liberation and transcendental happiness being free from all the worldly pleasure and lustrous beauty. In this stage, Odin (1986) believes that “the subject-object duality disappears; the self is united with the absolute and experiences the unity of *Brahma*” (p. 303). This *Brahma* is “one” in Platonic sense and enlightenment in the Eastern intellect.

Seemingly contradictory scenes of embracing, kissing, and sitting together as stimulant factors in the poem from the sixth stanza may mislead the audience to the state of erotic enjoyed. Nevertheless, Pollock (2016) believes that the ethos of peace is contrary to this love, wealth, and morality as it aims to spiritual liberty. Since the lines go on as:

They embrace and kiss with red lips of pleasure;
 now see them more composed,
 sitting smiling together,
 telling the tale of morning,
 casting forth warm colors.

Now, while readers meditate upon the above lines, they reach far beyond those misleading emotions. There seems the sub-merge of heaven and earth out of nature for the oneness that there was already a merger of the worldly creatures to nature. In this regard, it is claimed that “poetry is not essentially an imitation of nature, though nature is depicted in it” (Chaudhury, 1965, p. 147). Similarly, in the poem, the descending of the “Heaven” and the ascending of the “Earth” give new insights of wisdom as ultimate knowledge for tranquility when they meet on the mountain peak probably at dusk telling a tale of the new dawn. This is real happiness and calmness. Anandavardana holds that happiness and peace achievable

through the extinction of the lingering cravings and such happiness is even more than sixteen times greater in comparison to the blissful pleasure (as cited in Tubb, 1985). In this regard, this pleasure can make private heaven within oneself.

The “lovely garment” and the “gentle intoxication” as the stimuli and the “dawn’s music” as transitory emotion for generating *rasa*, the description of the flowering of the fruit in the seventh stanza arouses peace within the mind. In the last two lines of the stanza, audiences identify themselves to that bird which is the man in form of implicature when the persona goes on praying:

The bird thinks its cage is freedom
so it sings all those songs once again.

Beyond literal meaning and sense for Anandavardana, "implicature is the soul of poetry and the *rasa* is the soul of implicature" (as cited in Pollock, 2016, p. 89). Relating to the implicatures from the above lines, it brings a realization about the illusionary world and impure freedom, which we enjoy repeatedly assuming real in the days of a cold and compressed month of *Paush*. Eventually, that evokes the passion of absolute freedom and the thirst of true wisdom within audiences as *Śānta* fulfills the goals of freedom from any form of burden (Mukerjee, 1965, p. 94). The peace and tranquility heal the burden and shapes the path of success.

In addition, the following eighth stanza talks about the pathetic condition of humanity in the first three lines, and the last two lines show that even in such a depressing situation the sun gives warmth to rejuvenate life and joy in this world.

The poet lies exhausted on a mat
the net of straw is ragged
he's a lame dog with a one-horned cow.
We say this life is joy when we feel
the sun's warmth on our bodies.

Furthermore, the sun’s warmth connotes the supreme soul of the life that teaches a great lesson for men's release from the frustration of the material world particularly shown by Devkota using imagery of “a lame dog with a one-horned cow”. Any conscious reader can simply detect his passion for the ultimate peace and start feeling like him while reading the poem. In this context, the *Śānta rasa* is a “poetic communication and experience of peace” (Rustomj, 1981, p. 86). All such pathetic and frustrating situations indicate the real dreams of human beings and only peace seems the solution to all problems.

However, the ninth stanza simply indicates the disinterestedness to a cold death in the beginning but later the persona guides the readers to both hot dishes of the elixir and glory of the immortal sunbeams. Additionally, it also shows that the hotness of the sun and *Śānta* are equally necessary for the creation. For instance, the first four lines of the stanza go as follows:

Death is cold, so they say,
but the sun's ageless dish is hot.
The grasses chant their morning prayer;
rooted in soil, they rise up for the sunbeams.

Of course, even the engagement of the grasses in praying stimulates the necessity of the ultimate knowledge in form of sunbeams for all that is pacified by the worldly desires in this world. The prayer as the transitory emotion with other emotions from the same stanza contributes to annihilate the ego of humankind for peace and humanity. As Viswanatha has suggested, *śānta* is “born of that mood in which man's ego is completely annihilated, and he becomes one with humanity” (as cited in Panikkar, 1998, p. 465) that is identical to the endless aspiration of the persona in the poem for emancipation.

After that, in search of the “plate of radiance” in the tenth stanza, the persona bows his head down with full devotion and sincerity. He asks God to teach him the ultimate lesson in the final and conclusive stanza as the *śānta rasa* situates on the apex of all the ends of humans because it results in liberation through transmigration overcoming life and death (Pollock, 2016). As Devkota concludes his poem and prayer:

Teach me, God,
to win through the net of Death.

Finally, the readers can simply feel the emotions as the persona of the poem. The potential lesson from the God and the felt emotion would certainly guide to win the cold death to achieve ultimate knowledge and tranquility through the transmigration and metamorphosis of the so-called dream, lustrous desire, and material prosperity in this world as *Śānta rasa* refers to *Moksha*, the highest goal of the human being (Gerow & Aklujkar, 1972). The request to God by the persona to mentor the life signals that no worldly prosperity is further meaningful to achieve the final goal.

There is also the reference of depressing days and the active spirit to come out of it.

Delmonico (2000) has realized that it is true in *rasa* reading when literature strikes readers; they have to realize that they have approached it in terms of *rasa* aesthetics effectively. In this sense, the poem heavily strikes the cords of the poetry connoisseurs and the *rasa* can be savored in each stanza, which is perpetually longing tranquility as dominant emotion of the poem suspending “*Ī*” in aesthetic experience (Deutsch, 1970) without being hurdled by some misleading emotions.

Conclusion and Implications

The persona in the poem searches tranquility in the form of a prayer. This quest perpetually becomes stronger in each stanza to the last line in the poem whereby persona asks God to liberate him by teaching ultimate lesson through transmigration and metamorphosis of the lustrous desires, fabric beauty, and worldly pain. This final lesson is for surmounting the cycle of life and death releasing men from the sensual world enjoying warmth of the sun for absolute freedom in the month of *Magh*, which represents clarity and creation. For that, there is the rupture of the subject-object duality that leads to the experience of unity to *Brahma* as pure happiness. Distinctively, it happens there through suspending “*Ī*”, surpassing ego, and searching transcend.

Although, there are some complimentary emotions in the poem related to other *rasas* that may confuse readers in the beginning but they all sub-merge with the *śānta*, heaven, and oneness fulfilling the aim of spiritual liberty. Such a heavy description of natural beauty as a fantasy and powerful depiction

of the painful scene as tragedy ultimately strengthens peacefulness, calmness, and purification through juxtaposition to achieve the spiritual insights being free from both lustrous beauty and merciful grief. The persona believes in the dying down of the worldly desires to achieve delight and disillusionment eliminating all the lacy veils and the depressing situations.

Consequently, the poem searches tranquility that represents a state of pure peace relishing utmost and absolute aesthetic pleasure- *sama* through the devotion, enlightenment, and serenity. The poem has suggested the roadmap to pure freedom and one can enjoy it by annihilating men's ego. Of course, the study guides any reader to a better understanding of the text identifying different types of emotions especially related to *śānta rasa*. However, we can hardly generalize the conclusion of the study as the overall philosophy of the poet that it has examined a poem of a prolific and versatile author. However, the study expands the scope of the Eastern aesthetics in poetry mainly unfolding and enlarging the area of *śānta rasa* iterating the generally overlooked subject, even in the Eastern literature.

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