

Woman Rains: A Metaphorical Glance into Select Malayalam Movies

¹Aswathy Maheswaran, ² Bhagyasree B., ³ Shintu Sebastian

¹Research Scholar, ²Research Scholar, ³M.Phil Scholar

Dept of English, St. Thomas College, Pala
MG University, Kottayam, Kerala, India

Email: ¹aswathymaheswaran4u@gmail.com, ²sreenimisha16@gmail.com, ³shinspalmuriyil@gmail.com

Abstract: Rain, a phenomenon, has often been coddled by whiz kids as the different facets of women and her emotions. It is an integral part in films especially in Malayalam and used by many as a character, background, and even as a theme. Just as rain, the reverberated presence of female characters is the insignia of Molly wood. In some fabulous films women are presented along with rain or as a reminder of certain female characters. This paper is an attempt to explore the metaphorical, the inevitable yet invisible relationship between rain and women which is portrayed in certain select Malayalam movies such as “Vaishali”, “Thoovanathumbikal”, “Perumazhakkalam”, and “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu”. Here the competency and vigour of female characters and how they are transcended to the realm of human sensations through the image of rain is analyzed. Women in these movies drizzle love and laughter, shower kindness and sometime burst with anger. They undergo all the bhavas of human life and rejuvenate as well as purify others through their actions and self-transformation as rain seeds and destruct forms of life on earth.

The symbolic occupancy of rain to contain varied qualities of women and the ability of women to reciprocate its different forms are revealed. The development of rain to the status of the determiner of the emotions or cultivator of emotions in audience is explicably delineated.

Key Words: Fluidity in women, Sexual fluidity, Sthayi bhavas (permanent emotions) and Vyabhicari bhavas (transient emotions), Malayalam films, rain, Women characters, Performativity.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Cinema, the celebration of aesthetic experience, has an enormous influence on human mind all over the world. Even though the genre has been parted into commercials and art, the ultimate aim of this artistic expression is to bring about ‘rasa’ or the aesthetic tasting in the minds of the audience. Sage Bharatha, the father of Indian Aesthetics, reminds us that rasa can be created through the union of *Vibhavas*, *Anu bhavas* and *Vyabhicari bhavas*. He has narrated eight permanent emotions (*Sthayi bhavas*) and thirty three transient emotions (*Vyabhicari bhavas*) in his *Natyasasthra*. In silver screen, life and emotions are metaphorically represented through objects, colours, and even through movements. Even though it has the merit of dialogues for the quick delivery of emotions to the audience, geniuses have made use of certain phenomena and objects to portray their concepts. The metaphors used in films have the function of being the determiner of emotions. As far as the dramatic performance is concerned, the aesthetic pleasure can be taken along with appropriate gestures produced by body (*angika*), voice (*vacika*), gestures concerning dress and ornaments (*aharya*), and psychological or psycho-physical changes (*sattvika*). He defines it as “*Vibhava-Anu bhava- Vyabhcari bhava-Samyogat Rasa-nishpattih*” [1]. Cinema, now a days, is the most effortless and convenient form to grab aesthetic pleasure.

To add to the beauty of narration film makers display many abstract as well as concrete entities in frames. Rain is one of the favourite phenomena of the directors in the Mollywood industry. Rain has been seen behind the bars of windows, along with characters and in the rhythm of music in films. But knowingly or unknowingly in certain films it has become the synonym of the female characters. The rain, along with the heroine, smiles, laughs, cries, becomes romantic and at times bursts out with anger. The metaphorical presence of the rain, here, acts as *alambana vibhavas* and *uddipana vibhavas* and even as the characters. Through the films like “Thoovanathumbikal”, “Vaishali”, “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” and “Perumazhakkalam” the rain has become an unforgettable wonder and the reflector of permanent human emotions (*Sthayi bhavas*). This is an attempt to portray how these eight permanent emotions and its corresponding rasas are manifested through rain, on behalf of the female characters in the four selected movies.

The analysis of the four selected Malayalam films delve into the hitherto blurred frontiers of the woman-rain relationship. Historically speaking, attempts have been made by many of the ingenious and resourceful directors to capture the beauty of rain on the frame. In most of the earlier films, rain symbolized the sadness, happiness, tranquility or other such emotions of the characters on screen. Unlike being just an insignia of human emotions, in the films: “Thoovanathumbikal”, “Vaishali”, “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” and “Perumazhakkalam” rain is the personification of woman or rain is the woman or woman is the rain.

2. MATERIALS:

The materials under discussion in this paper are four films “Thoovanathumbikal”, “Vaishali”, “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” and “Perumazhakkalam”. The attempt is to trace how the natural phenomenon rain has become the essential reflection of the permanent emotions of the women characters portrayed in the movies.

3. METHOD:

The central women characters and the dominant rasa they stand for in the four films – “Thoovanathumbikal”, “Vaishali”, “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” and “Perumazhakkalam” – are analyzed in the light of rasa theory propounded and popularized by Sage Bharatha. The depth of the feminine quality of each character is scrutinized with the help of sexual fluidity theory advocated by Ian Kerner and Lisa M. Diamond.

4. DISCUSSION:

4.1. Thoovanathumbikal

P. Padmarajan selects the name “Thoovanathumbikal” for his 1987 film — suggestive of a few people in the midst of traditional bondages who choose to be free birds on the vast firmament doing what their hearts wish. “Thoovanathumbikal”, the unsurpassed movie of Padmarajan has broken all the existing notions of love and has transcended it to the realm of an extraordinary relationship. Rooted in the miserly yet extravagant life of Jayakrishnan, the movie paints a rainy lady Clara and Radha – comparatively weaker yet a beautiful offshoot.

It rains when Jayakrishnan first addresses Clara in the forged letter of the mother superior. The thunder breaks the sky when Jayakrishnan pronounces the first sentence in the letter: “To dear daughter, Clara...”. As the letter is a gizmo of deceit, the rain drops which makes the letter pad wet is the unseen tears of Clara herself. It is Clara herself who cries into the letter — though the eyes of her which are shown amidst the rain is veiled in the romantic glare. The look tears down his egoistic self and compels him to spend a thoughtful moment looking into his restless and pricking conscience. That rain which announces the arrival of an extraordinary girl shakes the life of Jayakrishnan and marks the inception of a new approach to life. The life of Jayakrishnan was till then like a barren land which has never tasted the sweetness of romance.

4.2. Perumazhakkalam

If Clara manifests love, the women and rain in “Perumazhakkalam deal with the rasas *karuna* and *hasya* with their corresponding *sthayibhavas soka* and *hasa* respectively. “Perumazhakkalam”, a 2004 movie under the direction of Kamal, tells the story of love, friendship, sufferings, inter-religious bonds and sacrifice. The movie is anchored to the lives of two women from different religious and cultural setting living their lives with diverse beliefs, customs and traditions: Raziya (starring Meera Jasmine) and Ganga (starring Kavya Madhavan). Raziya is married to Akbar (starring Dileep) who has gone to Saudi Arabia seeking fortune.

The movie begins with rain which makes Raziya’s father to recall the sweet memories of his past days with the great music director Baburaj. The movie sets off with *hasya rasa* with the happy recollections of Raziya’s father, where Raziya’s smile creates an ambiance. Within seconds the mood of the film is changed. After hearing the sad fate of Akbar, Raziya and the rain become one. Raziya, who has been introduced to the viewers as a charismatic personality, one who always laughs and is dear to children, sheds all her colourful life squeezing herself in a Black purdah. Raziya weeps loudly in one or two scenes in the film but most of the time when the viewers expect a blubbering it rains heavily. When Raziya is smashed with the news of her husband in Kozhikkod, Ganga, the counter version of Raziya, has accepted her fate silently. She is shown in her white saree, the unofficial dress of a widow. She is in silent tears. A comment given by the media worker in the film is crucial at this juncture. She remarks that the rain has swallowed the dreams of the young couple Raziya and Akbar and dragged it to the depths of Kallayi river while the water in Kalpathi river is filled with the tears of a young widow Ganga. Amidst the heavy down pour of *soka*, the movie has room for *hasa* as well where the sweet romantic memories of the two couple: Akbar – Raziya and Raghu – Ganga become the *alambana vibhavas*.

4.3. Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu

Directed by T.K Rajeev Kumar – the Malayalam film director and the National Award winner – “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” is a revenge drama which tells the story of Bhadra, a girl who lost her parents in the cruelty of a nasty landlord, Nadeshan (starring Thilakan). As each dramatic performance arouses aesthetic pleasure in the sahrdaya, this movie arouses *roudra*, *veera*, *sringara* and *beebhatsa* with their *sthayibhavas krodha*, *utsaha*, *rati* and *juguptsa* respectively. *Roudra* is the *stayi bhava* of Bhadra – the iron lady who thrives to be the ‘VeeraBhadra’ of her father’s dreams. Rain is the omniscient presence in the movie though it is not shown to the audience until the last seen. As Bhadra furiously waits for the substantial annihilation, so is the rain waiting to pour down with its massive power. Rain is Bhadra incarnated as one among the panchabhoothas – the water. The furious thunder and lightning that the character holds in her is indicated through the back ground score, when she stops for a moment at the ‘mada’ or the tomb where her father Chandrappan - the revolutionary political activist - was buried alive by force. The thunder that strikes breaking the horizons, when Bhadra stops there, is the first sign of the revenge that lurks in her.

4.4. Vaishali

In Vaishali, Bharathan attempts to equate woman with rejuvenation, hope and prosperity. The whole movie is an attempt to bring rain to the kingdom of Lomapada, Angarajyam, who has an unconceivable wife and an adopted daughter. There is a talk in the kingdom that the famine is the result of the barrenness of the queen and his adopted daughter is a bad omen. He has begotten a daughter in a courtesan named Malini.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS :

5.1. Thoovanathumbikal

Clara appears in the film like a rain. She and the rain are personification of rati (love), one of the *Sthayi bhavas* described by Bharata in *Natyasastra*, and hasa (happiness) rasa. She comes to the screen for a short period of time and goes off to shadows like the rain makes its appearance in seasons. When she is there the hero's life is filled with hopes, dreams and kindness while in her absence, he is cold, sad and clouded with anxiety (*Vyabhicari bhava* of rati). When he gets the message of Clara's arrival his mind dances like a rain-craving peacock. Their relationship represents two types of love as narrated by the sage Bharatha: love in union (*Sambhoga*) and love in separation (*Vipralambha*). Whenever rain comes Jayakrishnan is overwhelmed with love and happiness and whenever he remembers or meets Clara, he experiences the same. The untied long hair of Clara reminds the viewer of the unexpected arrival of rain on earth. Like the first rain on earth her love and physical contacts changed his mind like the rain changes the nature of a desolate land. Rain drops dripping down from the foliage after the intercourse is the symbolic Clara satiated by her first sexual experience. When Clara asks to Jayakrishnan, why not ruin herself by fulfilling all the desires of the heart when it is obvious that she would be ruined at any rate. The natural love and beauty of Clara demolishes his egoistic self and created a void in his mind which is gradually filled up by the soothing love of Clara. And he wonders and asks to Radha "How could she do it which none others can...".

Rain is the silhouette of Clara as it rains every time when the pleasure seeking birds - Jayakrishnan and Clara meet. The rainy nature of Clara becomes clearer through the verbal utterance (*vachika*) when she spends time together with him. She asks him to find a place where she could see stars and sky-the real adobe of rain where she could be happy and natural.

Clara in the beginning is the thunderstorm, then a heavy rain, at times a simple shower, very often a drizzle, later a few weak droplets dripping down, finally a timid shower. Though she enters into the life of Jayakrishnan through the forged letter as a thunderstorm, as the heat of their sexual pleasures gives way for the innocent Radha, Clara is a shower who is hesitant to come down to the earth - Jayakrishnan. When Clara calls him in the heart of night, there was no rain yet she says it rains in her place. When the passion of Jayakrishnan declines for Clara, only she sees rain as she is away from Jayakrishnan and she is the rain. Clara, the rain, retrieves from Jayakrishnan to shower in herself. This is why there is no rain in their last meeting.

Clara invokes love in the hero as she rains in him. She is the determinants (*alambana vibhavas*) of Jayakrishnan's love. He sees Clara when it rains. For him she is the rain, the rain of love, mirth and life. The very presence of Clara creates delusion (*moha*) and, harsa (joy) in Jayakrishnan while Radha becomes envious (*sanka*), despair (*visada*) in the presence of rain (Clara).

5.2. Perumazhakkalm

The quiet and calm presence of Ganga reminds us of the dangerous stillness of the water and the strength of rain that could destruct everything silently. The rain acts there as the stimulating excitant (*uddipanavibhava*) which stands for the tears of both woman. The rain speaks of the sorrows of both women. Both cried together when they realize that their pain is same – the pain of losing the dear one. When they lose the self-control and make a scream-crying then the rain covers their face and their tears mixes with rain and becomes one. The rain that Raziya sheds is her deep sorrow but by forgiving Akbar Ganga becomes the rain of sacrifice, compassion and mercy. The white attire of Ganga becomes the symbol of sacrifice which finally lead to happiness - a saturated feeling of the self, whereas Raziya even at the end seems to be a rain cloud that needs to be pelt down its sorrows and guilty feeling that they are responsible for the fate of Ganga. Through rains, these women cultivate depression (*dainya*) in us.

The first glance brands the movie under the label of tragic-comedy with the persistent rain giving it the background of mourning and melancholy. It is quite usual a reading to give the rain the customary status of a usual symbol or the reflection of the characters' emotions.

The movie showcases the various dimensions of rain as she herself is Raziya and Ganga at various stages of their lives. She is the drizzle, the heavy downpour, the rain-storm and at times the thunderstorm. Raziya's smile flags off the movie where the drizzle captures the joyful mood in its entirety. Adding to this, the dripping of the rain drops are melodious and soothing to the ears in the beginning.

In the scene in which Aamu Elappa (starring Salim Kumar) breaks the truth to Raziya regarding the crime committed by Akbar, rain pours down heavily which is Raziya herself in hot tears. John Kuruvila (starring Biju

Menon) tells Raziya and her family that Akbar who was overwhelmed by guilt and love for his friend - Raghu Rama Iyyer (starring Vineeth) - whom he killed accidentally, had confessed to the police force about the crime committed. At the very moment, the thunderstorm starts which is nothing but the heart broken yelling of Raziya. Raziya in utter depression and disappointment over her imprisoned husband is enshrouded in the heavy rain. When rejected and insulted by Raghu's family, Raziya – who had gone seeking the mercy of Ganga to rescue her incarcerated husband – returns home through the heavy rain accompanied by her father. At the zenith of emotions of the heroines, thunder breaks the ear lobes of the viewers.

Kunjikkannan (starring Mala Aravindan), consoles Raziya saying: even though it rains now, the sun will come out for sure. This is suggestive of the present condition and the impending resolution. In one of her frequent attempts to win the sympathy of Ganga, Ganga moves away from Raziya overlooking her pleas throwing her into the heavy down pour.

Of the many word pictures drawn in the film, one spoken out by Mani Swamy is striking as he says about Raziya who left the premises of the agrahara after waiting so long for Ganga, she disappeared like a shadow through the silver threads of rain. Later in the second part of the movie, it is through the same mournful yet powerful rain that Ganga steps out of the agrahara after giving solace to Raziya's life. When Ganga is thrown out of the agrahara, for rescuing the murderer of her husband, comes down the heavy rain rattling across the roofs of the street. By rescuing Raziya from the mourning rain, Ganga steps into the same. From this moment till the end, Ganga is the heavy downpour as Raziya got the light of hope in her life.

Though the movie appears in the robe of tragi-comedy, as the heavy rain stops in the minds of the three, Ganga, Raziya and Akbar, it starts in the minds of the audience.

5.3. Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu

Rain and its product water are the very shadows of Bhadra which reflects her face in the viewers' eyes. When Nadeshan conducts 'shathrusamaharapooja' at his home, the metal water pot is toppled down by the servant and the water flows into the *kalam* washing off the picture of the deity drawn for worship. The flowing of water is shown as soon as the priest's words are heard that the enemy comes as a woman. The shot of the slithering water shows water as the woman (Bhadra herself) prowling with her revenge.

By making Nadeshan jealous of his son Bhadra becomes the real deity of destruction with her red attire saffron bindi and untied hair. She through rains watches the fight between the father and the son, both are her enemies, in disgust (*Jugupsa*- one of the *sthayi bhavas*). It rains along with her pain which finally changes into *Krodha* (anger) yelling and yearning for the blood of Nadeshan and his son Uthaman. The death of them has finally been interpreted as the natural death, - death due to electric shock in heavy rain falls and flood- even though it is done by Bhadra. The nature was with her where the power of the rain becomes the power of Bhadra and her heroic deed and anger becomes that of the rain. Both Rain and Bhadra purify the village with the murder.

The thunder strikes for the second time in the movie as in the climax Bhadra reveals her true identity to Nadeshan. When the fifteen-years-long vengeance wins the battle, comes down the rain with all its vigour and fury. Bhadra with her victorious laughter is the heavy rain-storm.

5.4. Vaishali

The alluring beauty of Vaishali who dreams of becoming the wife of Rishyasringa brings him and rains to the country but is abandoned by the Rajaguru- a Brahmin- as her land was once cursed by one of them. Before she met Rishyasringa her life had been like a clear sky. When she comes back to the land she is like rain, she brings new hopes, happiness and prosperity along with her- the changes that only the rain can bring to where famine affected. It is not the famine of the land that the film is trying to convey. It is the dearth that affects the lineage of the king. Through her even the pedigree of the Lomapada gets a chance to be continued. In the life of Rishyasringa also, Vaishali is a rain that showers love upon him. She was an object of astonishment (*vismaya*) for him. The rain which decides the climax of the movie, creates happiness in everyone at the beginning like Vaishali and her mother, thinking about the prospects of new life promised to them. But as the rainfall increases, it becomes a disaster. The Rajaguru and the King try to control them before it invades or destroy the legacy of the kingdom. She is the one who brings the rain to the country and finally becomes rain water which gives itself for serving and nourishing other's dreams. The terror of loneliness and the helplessness of facing death foster a mood of indignation in the spectator.

Fluidity is the essence which is common to rain and the woman. The rain which is water itself is fluid in matter and so is woman who is a heap of various fluids. Apart from the presence of fluids in her body physically, the sexuality of a woman is also marked by fluidity. Recent researches done in the fields of women's sexuality have come to the conclusion that women have become more fluid in terms of their sexuality and sexual desires.

Sexual fluidity encompasses how we identify our sexual preferences, such as straight or gay; or actual sexual behaviour [sic]; sexual thoughts and fantasies; and genital or brain responses to sexual stimuli. Evolutionarily

speaking, sexual fluidity kept women mating and reproducing offspring with their husbands, even when their sexual preference was not strictly heterosexual.[4]

As Ian Kerner borrows extensively from Lisa M. Diamond, the psychology professor at the University of Utah, who states that the sexuality of women is comparatively more fluid than that of men. To back her argument, she comes up with the three characteristics of women's sexuality. She says, the women can easily find both the sexes sexually attractive, their attractions changes even after having a long-term relationship with the person from the other sex and the women are more attracted to a specific person and not to a particular gender. [2]

Viewed in this angle, each of the heroines in the four movies : Bhadra, Ganga, Clara and Vaishali show high sexual fluidity. Bhadra though as an act of revenge, transfixes her sexual choice from Nadeshan the landlord to his son Uthaman and finally to her true love Moosakkutty though the sexual intercourse never takes place. Ganga as a true Brahmin is the devoted and faithful wife of Raghu, yet transcends her limits to rescue a to-be-widow lady Raziya. Though too short a feeling, Ganga feels one with Raziya, as she is a widow and Raziya soon would be one if Ganga steps back. Clara, though enjoys a transient yet heavenly union with Jayakrishnan, she could easily shift her sexual desire from one man to the other as her profession demanded her that. Even she feels a strange sympathy for the innocent Radha too. Vaishali though dreamed of becoming the wife of Rishyashruna, her fluidity of sexuality was transmitted from her relationship from her (m)Other – with whom she identified herself in terms of sexuality and all other realms – to the young sage.

6. CONCLUSION:

Rasa theory labels the films: “Thoovanathumbikal”, “Vaishali”, “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” and “Perumazhakkalam” as absolute dramatic performances each fulfilling its purpose of arousing the aesthetic pleasure. The four movies in unison manifest all the eight rasas or sentiments propounded by sage Bharata: *sringara*, *vira*, *karuna*, *hasya*, *raudra*, *bhayanaka*, *bibhatsa* and *adbhuta* through its female characters. Each movie proves to be a perfect blend of *Vibhavas* – both *alambana vibhavas* and *uddipana vibhavas*, – *anubhavas* and *vyabhicari bhavas*; three of which combine to produce the ultimate rasa.

The concept of sexual fluidity, carefully chosen, links the omniscient rain in the movies with the respective women protagonists. Fluidity elevates the rain from being just a symbol expressing the emotions of the characters to the very personification of the lady narrators. Clara in “Thoovanathumbikal” is the amorous down pour of Jayakrishnan's life while Vaishali is both a drizzle in the love-thirsty Rishyasinga and the heavy life-giving down pour in the lives of her subjects. Of all the women characters in the four movies, Bhadra in “Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu” is the terrifying thunder storm incarnated for devastation and total annihilation of the social evils and Raziya in “Perumazhakkalam” is the rain of distress and trauma whereas Ganga becomes the rain of sacrifice and compassion.

The quality of water that sometimes flows slowly and sometimes gushes aggressively is in every way analogous to the emotions of the women characters which can either be a disturbing quietness or a terrible bursting out. Rain witnesses challenges and overcomes obstacles just like the women experiencing the ups and downs. By discovering the metaphorical meanings of the overriding images of water and analyzing the relation between rain and woman we are able to build mental spaces of the images and the network, thus understanding the hidden themes engrained in these movies. The physical and psychological traumas of the protagonists and their self redemption arouse the eight *rasas* and the elements of sexual fluidity trace the success of the women characters in creating their own identities treading untrodden pathways.

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