

Indian Aesthetic and Western Modernism: Re- Reading James Joyce's Ulysses Through Rasa Theory**Dhananjay Mahaldar**

Research Scholar (PhD), Department of English, Sikkim University, Sikkim, India

Article Received: 05/12/2025**Article Accepted:** 06/01/2026**Published Online:** 07/01/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.8.01.66**Abstract**

Human life is an amalgamation of certain instinct emotions or sentiments like love, sorrow, hatred, pity, fear, fury, heroism, wonder, etc. The most acclaimed Indian theatrologist, Bharata Muni's path-breaking work, *Natyasastra* conveys all these sentiments or emotions which are called *rasa-anuvaba*. The word, *Rasa*, first appears in the ancient Vedic literature which means "taste, flavour, juice or essence". The fundamental aim of any kind of art is to enhance the mind of the readers and provide aesthetic enjoyment. A close conspicuous analysis of the available literature may expound the fact that the most fascinating area of intersection between Indian and Western literature is to be found in the realm of poetics and aesthetics. In the sphere of Indian aesthetics, the key to any analysis of aesthetics transformation is the most acclaimed theory of *Rasa*. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is an example of modern psychological novel sets during a single day which deals with the psychology of the protagonist, Leopold Bloom and his different types of emotions and sentiments in different kinds of his state of mind. Here, in the novel, the two main characters- Bloom and Stephen pass through a number of emotions, sentiments and feelings which turn shape the epistemic texture of their characters. This paper through the lens of *Rasa* theory assesses its appliance and analyzes its aptness and suggestiveness in the modernist novel, *Ulysses*.

Key Words: *Rasa* theory, *Rasa-anuvaba*, Aesthetics, Poetics, and Psychological novel.**Introduction:**

"Yatha bijadbhavedvruksho vrukshotpushpam falam yatha Tatha mulam rasaha sarve tebhyo bhāva vyavasthita." (*Natyasastra* 6. 36-38)

(Just as a tree grows from a seed and flowers and fruits from a tree, to the sentiments are the source (root) of all the psychological states and likewise psychological states exists as the source of all sentiments.)

It is a fact that Rasa theory can be applied to modern literature and this fact proves its universality, timeless quality and rich potential. Even today, dramas are written for aesthetic pleasure. The Rasa Theory of Bharata Muni knowingly or unknowingly is employed by authors and relished by readers as well as spectators. If we remove the rasa from life, life becomes inert and motionless like a beautiful wall clock, whose main spring has been removed. Prof. Chaturvedi has rightly said, “As far as the question of the place of Rasa in a Kavya or Natya is concerned Bharata feels that they (Kavya or Natya) should be replete with Rasa like the garden which is covered by flowers in the spring season: Pushpavkirnaha kartavyaha kavyeshu hi Rasaha budaihi.” (19)

There are eight lasting emotions which are (1) Rati (“love”) (2) Hasya (“mirth”) (3) Soka (“sorrow”) (4) Krodha (“anger”) (5) Utsaha (“energy”) (6) Bhaya (“fear”) (7) Vismaya (“astonishment”) (8) Jugupsa (“disgust”) (Tiwary:1984, 7) Abhinavagupta has dealt with each of them elaborately in his text Abhinavaharati them in the context of Purushartha forwards the idea of Sama, mental stage of sage which is directly related to the highest end of life or salvation, be developed into a pleasurable rasa, called Santa Rasa. Of the incidental emotions they are as many as thirty three number: Despondency, Despondency, Weakness, Intoxication, Joy, Agitation, Stupor, Arrogance, Despair, Longing, Sleep, Epilepsy, Weakness, Apprehension, Envy, Intoxication, Joy, Agitation, Stupor, Arrogance, Despair, Longing, Sleep, Epilepsy, Dreaming, Dreaming, Cruelty, Cruelty, Awakening, Indignation, Dissimulation, Assurance, Sickness, Insanity, Awakening, Indignation, Dissimulation, Assurance, Sickness, Death, Death, Fright Fright, etcetera (Tiwary:1984, 10).

If literature is communication of a special kind, language is the means of that communication. The language of literature is emotive and it has a feeling of It has a universal and timeless appeal that connects readers of different countries, cultures, religion, ideologies, passions and prejudices to appreciate literature of altogether a different place as it provides aesthetic enjoyment to them. Aesthetics or The Theory of Rasa in art and literature has been one of the early pursuits of human mind. The idea of rings in the idea of beauty and A thing of beauty is not only a joy forever, but it is an invitation to explore the reasons for that It has a universal and timeless appeal that connects readers of different countries, culture, religion, ideologies, passions and prejudices to appreciate literature of altogether a different place as it provides aesthetic enjoyment to them. Aesthetics or The Theory of Beauty in art and literature has been one of the early pursuits of human min beauty naturally b rings in the idea of beauty and A thing of beauty is not only a joy forever, but it is an invitation to explore the reasons for joy.

The most fascinating area of intersection between Indian and Western literatures, can be said to be found in the realm of poetics and aesthetics. Indian poetics is nothing

but Sanskrit poetics which is an immortal encyclopedia of the theories and doctrines about poetry and drama. The development of Sanskrit poetics has been traced through its fairly long and varied course of history, which covers an extensive literature of more than one and half millennium. Sanskrit literature, where writings of a philosophical and speculative nature are bound, has been a fertile field in which many books have been written to enlighten the views of the readers on the nature and of poetry and on the nature of poetic delight.

The Indian poetics is evolved out of the dramaturgy and the oldest existing work on Indian poetics is the *Natyasastra* by Bharatmuni. The *Rasa siddhanta* occupies prestigious place among the schools of Indian poetics and Bharatmuni is acknowledged to be the first exponent of *Rasa* theory which he has systematically set forth in his treatise *Natayasa*. The Indian view of art is broadly known as the aesthetic conception of *rasa*.

The word *Rasa* is the simplest and at the same time the most bewildering expression in the Sanskrit Language. The word may convey different meanings in different contexts, but its essential core remains unaltered. "The word's meaning is the simplest and at the same time the most bewildering expression in the Sanskrit Language. The word may convey different meanings in different contexts, but its essential core remains unaltered. The word's meaning has been a botanical substance, a sensory, an aesthetic delight, a transcending otherworldly experience" (Buchta and Schweig: 2012, 623)

Rasa literally means taste, sentiment, aesthetic emotion etcetera. The Theory of *Rasa* essentially deals with the various kinds of emotions, how they are depicted, inferred and transferred through a work of art, it holds that finally literature is about life and its emotions. of this theory lies in that it deals with what is common to all mankind at all times- emotions. It is a theory which is considerate of the entire literary process from its very conception in the mind of the artist to its final perception in the heart of the perceiver or reader. It is a subtle state, requiring the pervasive influence of several different kinds of emotions and a host of feelings into fusion before it may be evoked. The Indian writers on poetics classified emotions into two categories i.e. lasting and incidental or transitory.

The *Rasas* can be enumerated corresponding to their emotions as the emotion of love and the transitory feelings longing or anxiety, insanity, fever, stupor, romance and attractiveness are bound up with the *Sringara* or the Erotic *Rasa*. The high spiritedness and the incidental feelings like assurance, contentment, arrogance and heroism use the *sings* of the *Veeram* or Heroic *Rasa*. Anger and the attendant feelings of indignation, intoxication, recollection, inconstancy, envy, cruelty, and agitation occurs

with the Raudram Rasa or the Rasa of Fury. Mirth with its accompanying states of indolence, weariness, weakness and stupor may arouse the Hasyam Rasa or the Rasa of Mirth. Astonishment and the feelings of Joy, agitation, distraction and fright provoke the Adbhutam Rasa or the Rasa of Wonder. The emotion of sorrow is conducive Karunyam Rasa or the Rasa of pathos. Disgust and the ephemeral feelings of agitation, sickness provoke the Bibhastam Rasa or the of Indignation. The emotion of fear produces the Bhayanakam Rasa or the Rasa of Terror. There is also a Santam Rasa or the Rasa of Peace which is added by the later authors and deals with the peace or tranquillity of mind through the bliss of self-realization.

Abhinavagupta's unique and supreme contribution to Rasanbhuti consists in his that the emotions reside in the Samajika's soul in the shape of vashas (instincts) or Samskaras, by reason of their being transmitted and inherited by us from birth to birth. He states that the relish of Rasa is novel and unique is a mental function in taste the Sthayi experiencing loneliness, resulting from a contact with the Vashas of taste the loneliness, resulting from a contact with the Vashas of pleasure and pain. Thus the instincts which characterize the living being from birth Sthayis are the innate instincts which characterize the living being from birth. Everyone seeks pleasure, ridicules other on accounts of pride, is pained when separated from the desired objects, is angry at the causes of such h. Everyone seeks pleasure, ridicules other on accounts of pride, is pained when separated from the desired objects, is angry at the causes of such separation and wishes to abandon many things. These mental states have their traces in every human being, only some have them to a greater extent while others have them to a smaller extent. These Sthayis inherently but latently in the soul became felt and experienced under the impact of the dramatic representation or the poet's delineation by some have them to a greater extent while others Sthayis existing inherently but latently in the soul became felt and experienced under the impact of the dramatic.

Rasa is simply the enjoyment of one's own nature by consciousness. This experience of self-realization Ananda and rasa experience is nothing but this Ananda. For in the sense that as . simply the enjoyment of one's own nature by consciousness. This experience of self-realization leads to a blissful stage or Ananda experience is nothing but this Abhinavagupta, rasa is alaukika Ananda in the sense that experience of rasa, as distinct from ordinary emotional experiences, requires of the audience process of abstracting and generalizing emotional experience. Abhinavagupta distincts from ordinary emotional experiences, requires of the audience process of abstracting and generalizing emotional makes a pertinent remark and says that "rasa is the transcendental delightful nature tinged with the predominant feeling excited with the dramatic makes a pertinent remark and says that "rasa is the transcendental delightful

perception of one's own nature tinged with the predominant feeling excited with the dramatic display"(Mishra: 1979)

Veeram or Heroic Rasa

The predominant emotion of zeal or utsaha develops into Veera Rasa when manifested by means of the suggestive factors in a dramatic composition. The ancients have observed that such zeal appears running in five channels of human mind and thus presents five patterns when viewed objectively. The zeal may be in respect of giving gifts (dana), in showing compassion (daya), in combating the enemy (yuddha), in observance of duty(dharma) and in taking and practicing oath (pratigya).

Thus the varied heroism may produce five types of heroes and accordingly the five types of heroic sentiment as well. In other words, the hero may have the munificent zeal, the sympathetic zeal, the bellicose zeal and pratigya veer. Their suite of suggestive factors also varies accordingly. The forth chapter of the novel named

Calypso, symbolizes the heroic significance of the protagonist Leopold Bloom. Veeram or the heroic rasa is the prominent rasa of Bharata Muni's Natyasastra and Abhinavgupta's description of Rasa theory. In this novel, Ulysses, the notion of Leopold Bloom as an epic hero is laughable—his job, talents, family relations, public relations, and private actions all suggest his utter ordinariness. It is only Bloom's extraordinary capacity for sympathy and compassion that allows him an ironic heroism in the course of the novel. Bloom's fluid ability to empathize with such a wide variety of beings—cats, birds, dogs, dead men, vicious men, blind men, old ladies, a woman in labor, the poor, and so on—is the modern-day equivalent to Odysseus's capacity to adapt to a wide variety of challenges. Bloom's compassion often dictates the course of his day and the novel, as when he stops at the river Liffey to feed the gulls or at the hospital to check on Mrs. Purefoy. There is a network of symbols in Ulysses that present Bloom as Ireland's savior, and his message is, at a basic level, to "love." He is juxtaposed with Stephen, who would also be Ireland's savior but is lacking in compassion. Bloom returns home, faces evidence of his cuckold status, and slays his competition—not with arrows, but with a refocused perspective that is available only through his fluid capacity for empathy. T.S. Eliot describes the protagonist, Leopold Bloom as "Leopold Bloom becomes a modern Ulysses, an Everyman in a Dublin which becomes a microcosm of the world." At the same way, the notable critic of modern literature Stuart Gilbert said that the "personages of Ulysses are not fictitious". Hence, Veera Rasa is deeply rooted here in this imitative modern novel, Ulysses.

Sringarah or the Erotic Rasa

It is best among the rasas used in art and literature in the modern society. This rasa is called the Rasa-raj. It towers over all the other sentiments as it is the most important emotion in human beings. It appeals to human mind as life is a never ending quest for love and affection. Love is portrayed through rich imagery and there are different meanings of love e.g. love between a mother and a child, love between

siblings, love between friends, love between a man and a woman, love between the Almighty and devotee and so on. The sthāyibhāva for sringara rasa is Rati (love).

Returning to the beach that served as stage for Stephen's earlier musings and finds Bloom there pondering his perception (markedly less theoretical) of young Gerty MacDowell and her underwear. Even less concerned with philosophy is Gerty, who gleans she is the object of a man's desire and happens to be quite busy living up to her objectification. When her group runs off in pursuit of the nearby fireworks display, she stays behind, soaking up the male gaze and feeding it with more and more view of leg until the exploding Roman candles overhead mimic Bloom's ejaculation. Meanwhile, anthemlike strains of organ and men's voices are heard emanating from a nearby church to remind us there is a temperance retreat in progress. When Gerty gets up from the rock and lamely limps away, we are left with Bloom alone on the dim-lit beach in a guilttainted postmasturbatory reverie, reflecting on women and sexuality with his characteristic concreteness, providing a complementary foil to Gerty's ruminations on the subject.

Hasyam or the Rasa of Mirth

Hasyam Rasa is one of the prominent rasas of Natyasastra by Bharata Muni. Laughter is the most vital factor in human life. It varies from light hearted giggle to a rapturous outbreak of laughter. The sthāyibhāva of this rasa is Hasya. The object of ridicule is alambana of this sentiment. The dominant emotion of laughter is created by incongruous costumes, comic actions, untoward movements, the unbridled speech, absurd activities and change of voice. It is generated by possibilities of deformity. Smile, tickled appearance, exhibition of teeth and similar features are the ensuants. Contempt and disturbance (Udvega) are the auxiliary feelings. According to Bharat, Hasya-rasa is of two kinds: (i) Atmasta (Subjective) and (ii) Parasta (Objective). When one laughs at himself, it belongs to the former type; and when one makes another laugh it is of the latter type. He further observes that generally the comic sentiment is found among the low characters and among women at large. Yet a humorous character may be a high personage at times, a middling or a base person. The mode of expressing humour, is therefore bound to differ in nature.

One of the funniest chapters of a supremely funny book, "Cyclops" maintains its ironic humor with the help of a thoroughly unreliable narrator—a bitter, petty barfly equipped with a sardonic outlook and an exquisite sense for the cliché. The "I" narrator's account is interrupted by the voice of another narrator—one countering "I"'s vigorous deflations with equally preposterous inflations (in the form of amusing descriptions of Rabelaisian proportions). Among those so described is "the citizen," a worn-out patriotic bigot in an eyepatch who plays Polyphemus to Bloom's Odysseus. Jewish Bloom finds himself in unwelcome territory in this drunken den of nationalist bigotry. Distracted over the scene he imagines (correctly) to be transpiring at his home, Bloom allows himself to be drawn into an argument with the anti-Semitic "citizen." Even Bloom's very presence in the

pub is misunderstood. He has come to meet Cunningham so that the two of them can visit Dignam's widow with an offer of help; yet he is perceived as having come only to collect his winnings on Throwaway. Finally, when Bloom fails to pick up a round of drinks, the atmosphere of suspicion about him ignites into a confrontation over nationalism and intolerance given in comically cosmic dimensions, and our hero is whisked away from catastrophe by Cunningham "like a shot off a shovel."

Karunyam or the Rasa of Mercy

Soka is the dominant emotion which develops into Karuna rasa. It deals with the feelings of despair, heartbreak, hopelessness, death, separation from loved ones, etc. In both Eastern and Western literature Karuna rasa is considered to be of the superior kind. Aristotle speaks of Catharsis which the spectators receive as tragic relief and Bharat speaks about the same tragic flow which is called Karuna.

Stephen wanders the beach, thinking of his past, his family (especially his dead mother), and the constant change and uncertainty of life. He knows he is seeking something, something that cannot be found in family life, in intellectual pursuits, but he still does not know what that something is. Stephen realizes the difficulty of connecting with other people, but also senses that he is part of the cycle of life and death. He sees this in the movement of the ocean and his own urination, and as he moves off down the beach, thinking of drowned men, we are ready for the next part of the book. Bloom's odyssey through Dublin continues now by carriage to the cemetery to attend Dignam's funeral. Hynes the reporter buttonholes Bloom about the identity of a mystery man wearing a Mackintosh coat. Death is everywhere in this episode, explored from various perspectives via Bloom's rambling, often fumbling ruminations on the nuts and bolts of spiritual beliefs and rites, and of decomposition and renewal.

Bloom remembers he had forgotten to remember to take his key. Through the bird's-eye vantage afforded by a loftily impersonal third-person narrative, we watch Bloom climb over the railing and into the house to receive Stephen for a friendly cup of cocoa and conversation, a refused offer to stay the night, and a cordial parting urination together beneath the stars. After Stephen leaves, Bloom finds his way to bed past rearranged furniture, remembrances of his past life with his adulterous wife, and crumbs from the jar of potted meat brought that afternoon by the usurper of his conjugal bed. Brushing away his predecessor's crumbs, the returning hero climbs into bed, head to his wife's feet, boldly orders himself an unprecedented breakfast in bed metaphorically vanquishes an imagined host of her suitors, and then plants a kiss on her plump behind before his embarkation for the Kingdom of Hypnos down into a tiny blot of unconsciousness in the space of a dot on the page.

Adbhutam or the Rasa of Wonder

The sthayibhva for Adbhuta rasa is Vismaya. Unexpected and supernatural elements are responsible for generating Adbhuta rasa. It is full of wonder and curiosity,

which arouses out of superhuman activities, unrivalled beauty and fascinating and enchanting things. This rasa is assisted by marvelous elements, which arouse feelings of surprise and gradually develop into Adbhuta rasa. The wonderful objects or an unexpected incident or performance of the impossible, like the feats of jugglers become the allamanda of the Marvelous sentiment. The circumstances surrounding such an object or incident excite the feeling. The unwinking gaze, broadening of eyes, use of interjections, twisting of fingers are some of the expressions that ensue from the rise of the Adbhuta rasa. Stupor, perplexity, unboundedness and flurry are the ancillary feelings that support the sentiment. It is generally followed by such self-existent states as stupefaction, flow of tears, horripilation and choked voice.

Stephen Dedalus, in part a self-portrait of the author, has just returned to Ireland from his studies in Paris (to which he was headed at the end of Joyce's preceding work, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*). He shares lodgings with a medical student, Buck Mulligan, in the Martello tower at Sandycove, and the book opens with a rooftop exchange between Stephen and the irreverent Mulligan. Stephen has been kept awake by the nighttime ravings of Mulligan's friend Haines, an Englishman with bad dreams, and wants to know when the latter is leaving. He also complains to Mulligan about his distasteful comment on the recent death of Stephen's mother. The two then go downstairs for breakfast with Haines. They leave the tower together for the swimming hole, where Mulligan, like a good usurper, asks the work-bound Stephen for his key and some money and sets a date for them to meet at half-past noon.

The world is Molly's now; rather, Molly is the world now, and through the massive, ever-shifting sea of liquid prose that constitutes her monologue, we explore the yet-unseen sides of things limned throughout the book from other, largely male, perspectives. Washing up on shore from this freely-flowing tide of words (eight unpunctuated sentences totaling some nearly sixteen-hundred lines) are countless gems of insight into the psyche of Molly, Woman, and the world. Beginning with her surprise over Bloom's breakfast order and some random remembrances of life with her husband, she proceeds in reverie over her recent tryst, before seeing it in the context of her past and future life. Molly's review of her marriage and family, and before that her childhood on Gibraltar, gives way by turns to amusing ambivalent appraisals of men and women, as well as flights of romantic curiosity about younger men, like Stephen, before building to a great peroration of sustained lyrical sweep in affirmation of the pervasive power of love, of the reality of loss, and, yes, of her ultimate acceptance of the man she married (or at least the man he was when she married him) "Yes".

Bibhatsam or the Rasa of Disgust

Bloom continues his circuitous avoidance of home, hearth and Blazes Boylan by paying a call on Mina Purefoy, whom he knows to be experiencing a difficult birth. At the hospital he runs into a group of young carousers including Stephen, who happens to be avoiding his homecoming as well on account of his own problem with usurpers. Bloom once

again finds himself to be an outsider looking in on an unwelcoming society. His concern for the well-being of his surrogate (spiritual) son, Stephen, prompts him to linger on well past the delivery of the baby until the doctor is free to leave with the gang for the nearest pub. The language in which the episode lives creates a masterful portrait of the English language itself, evolving as it does from the highly convoluted and ponderous Latinate and Saxon stages through the various centuries of signature literary styles to the jargon-riddled commercial babble of modernity, perhaps the worse for wear with the help of an escalating rate of intoxication.

Bhayanakam or the Rasa of Horror

In the fifteenth chapter Circe, there is Bhayanaka Rasa. In keeping with the late hour, high blood alcohol level, and magical powers of Homer's Circe, this episode is expressed largely in a hallucinatory manner that invites comparison with the metaphoric power of dream logic. Bloom and Stephen move freely in and out of a sorceress' world, where personages and fears from their recent and distant pasts are made manifest to them in a seamless process of metamorphosis, and put down on the page in dramatic form, replete with stage directions. Stephen heads for the red-light district and is followed by Bloom, who is concerned in a fatherly way over Stephen's well-being. In the house of Bella Cohen, Bloom flirts with Zoe, falls under the spell of the whoremistress Bella, and keeps watch over Stephen, who, after a traumatic hallucinatory visit from his deceased mother, attempts to break her hold on his psyche by smashing his walking stick against Bella's chandelier. Bloom pays Bella for the damage and follows Stephen into the street. Stephen is punched by a British soldier unimpressed by Stephen's rhetorical skills, and Bloom protects the unconscious recipient of that punch so that the latter might avoid falling into the custody of the police. The episode (and with it Part II, the "Odyssey" proper) ends poignantly with Bloom's vision of his own son Rudy (who had died eleven years ago at the age of eleven days) as he might have been in life, now eleven. By associating Rudy with Stephen at this point, the image powerfully reinforces the book's undercurrent theme of father and son in search of each other.

There are plenty of emotions, sentiments and feelings reflected in the novel, Ulysses through various Bhavas of Rasa. Raudram Rasa and Santyam Rasa are also there in a latent way, consequently in the first and last episode of the novel. In the first chapter Stephen is very angry on Buck Mulligan by his torturous behavior as he welcomes his friend to Stephen's house. Santa Rasa is added later on by the contemporary authors. In the episode Ithaca, after knowing about the affair between his wife, Molly and Boylan, he does not show a ray of aggression to her. Even after knowing about her twenty five suitors, he does not ask a single explanation from her. Molly's self-realization at the very last episode, Penelope, is also an example of Santam Rasa. This episode describes Santam Rasa of the novel. Ulysses.

In nutshell, it can be said that James Joyce's *Ulysses* is a modern work of aesthetics where almost all the Rasas are reflected in latent manner in the novel. In the ongoing process of the novel, one can see that how the two protagonists and Molly experience the different types of rasas through their actions. Rasa theory has a universal criterion to appreciate by any literature and it is applicable to all literature. To conclude, it is said that Indian and Western literatures share an area of intersection in the realm of aesthetics and poetics and the application of Rasa theory in James Joyce's *Ulysses* tries to set up bridge between these two literatures of the world.

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