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EXPLORING NEW DIMENSIONS OF RASA THEORY IN PERUMAL MURUGAN'S  
*SONGS OF A COWARD: POEMS OF EXILE*

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Abstract

*Songs of a Coward: poems of exile* is a recent work by Perumal Murugan. Years after his first novel- *One Part Woman* or *Madhorubhagan* was published, he had to go in exile due to the political unrest that occurred related to this work. Murugan even announced his death as a writer, unable to stand the various claims levelled against him. It is during that period of immense turmoil that he started writing numerous poems letting out his boundless emotions and feelings. *Songs of a Coward* or *Kozhaiyin Paadalgal* (in Tamil) is that poetry collection containing his various 'poem in exile' as its subtitle suggests. These poems originally written in Tamil have been translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan into English. It is through this work, that he made a resurgence into the field of literature after all the setbacks he had to face. Infused with imageries and metaphors, the poems take us on an emotional journey, at the end of which the readers empathise with the author himself. His themes vary from a small touch me not plant to a rented house to a flower to woman to a sheep and even to the Judiciary and God. We can thus categorise the various poems under the nine rasas or the navarasas mentioned by Bharata in his *Natyasastra*. Nava means 'nine' and Rasa is often translated as 'mood', 'emotion', 'expression' or 'sentiment'. The Navarasa, refer to the nine expressions that humans often show. These are love (*shringaara*), laughter (*haasya*), kind-heartedness or compassion (*karuna*), anger (*roudra*), courage (*veera*), fear (*bhayaanaka*), disgust (*bheebhatsya*), wonder or surprise (*adbhutha*) and peace or tranquility (*shaantha*). A dominant mood or emotion can be seen in every poem. By exploring this through the lens of rasa, we get a better understanding of how the poet tries to bring out the true emotions. Navarasas are usually applied to Performance Arts. Since such systems do not exist for poetry, a system is employed here where we relate each selected poem to the dominant rasa in it.

**Keywords:** Perumal Murugan, Navarasa theory, Aniruddhan Vasudevan, Exile

I. INTRODUCTION

"...I'm not sure if these are good times for poetry.  
But it's poetry that has inaugurated my good times.  
(Murugan 289)

These lines are from the speech made by the famous writer Perumal Murugan at the launch of his book *Songs of a Coward: poems of exile*. We know Perumal Murugan as the writer who was threatened by right wing activists for his portrayal of

the sexual customs of people belonging to the Kongu Nadu region in his novel *One Part Woman* or *Madhorubhagan*. Years after the novel was published, he had to go in exile due to the political unrest that occurred as an aftermath to this work. He even announced his death as a writer, unable to stand the various claims levelled against him. It was during that period of immense turmoil that he started writing numerous poems letting out his boundless emotions and feelings. *Songs of a Coward* or *Kozhaiyin Paadalgal* (in Tamil) is that poetry collection containing his various 'poems of exile' as its subtitle suggests. These poems originally written in Tamil have been translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan into English. It is through this work, that he made resurgence into the field of literature after all the setbacks he had to face.

This collection of poems transports you to a season of despair. He found writing as his sole ray and way towards hope, which he carried out not for the reader, but for the satisfaction of the self. To understand the depth of emotions in his verses, one must, first, be aware of the circumstances under which these poems were composed. Murugan's life makes for a curious case study. On one hand, it underlines the fragility of freedom of expression in our country and, on the other; it shows the purpose of a writer - to reflect social realities through his writings. The collection can thus be marked as an expression of the poet's deepest feelings and concerns regarding matters that affected him.

In January 2015, Murugan announced that he was giving up his writing career after he was attacked by the Hindutva supporters, who claimed that his novel *Madhurobhagan* was blasphemous. The novel explored the problems of caste divisions in the context of a childless marriage and alludes to real-life places and communities. The protests by Hindu and caste-based outfits focused on the portrayal of historical traditions related to Ardhanareeswarar Temple in Tiruchengode, where the eponymous presiding deity is part-Shiva and part-Parvati in one idol. The Tamil title of the book, *Madhurobhagan*, is a translation of the name of the deity (Ardhanareeswarar), just as the English title, *One Part Woman*, is an allusion to the deity's form. The protest was continued by local units even after

they lost momentum at the state level. He was ultimately compelled to apologize and withdraw his book from the market.

In a statement he gave to the Press, Murugan stated that the writer in him was dead. He stated that he was no God and was not going to resurrect himself. He also said that he had no faith in rebirth. As an ordinary teacher, he wanted to live as P. Murugan. He wanted to be left alone. That was his way of voicing anguish at being hounded by some in his hometown of Tiruchengode for writing a novel deemed prurient and defamatory – five years after its publication.

But then the Madras High Court, citing Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India, ruled that there was no binding force or obligation in the previous state intervention that forced him to apologise and withdraw the books. The court further directed the state to provide appropriate protection when artistic or literary personas come under attack and to form an expert body to help guide the police and local administration to develop sensitivity to the issues involved. The poems in *Songs of a Coward* were written when Murugan was struggling to make a sense of all that was happening in his life and how it might affect his existence as a person and a writer. Later, Murugan broke his silence at Delhi's Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, saying he felt like a walking corpse and a rat in a burrow and that he did not want to write one word in the first three months after he declared the death of the writer in him. A year later, his *Songs of a Coward* hauntingly portrayed the turbulent emotions that he faced through his journey. In the introduction to the book, Murugan says that the poetry collection was in a way, a first book for him. Containing two hundred and ten poems, the collection has been translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan.

Murugan's poem 'The Divine Tongue' is one of the most evocative poems from the collection. A few lines from the poem:

I am angry enough to curse  
that the hands that burnt my effigy  
shall char in the same fire  
That the words that flew at me  
like poison-soaked arrows

shall turn back to go  
and wound and kill  
the stone hearts that sent them (4-11)

This collection of poetry is significant as it allows readers to better understand the mind of this writer. We understand the kind of mental pressure and agony he went through during those times. "As I started to write, I began to revive little by little, from my fingernails to my hair. It was poetry that saved me. Kozhaiyin Paadalgal, 'a coward's poems', is a book of such poems." (Murugan 289)

There are works which move us to an extent where we cannot stop thinking about them. *Songs of a Coward* is one such work. The various poems and their themes have multifarious meanings and unorthodox interpretations. Murugan wrote this work at a bad point of his life, as a kind of protest to anyone and everyone who denied him his basic rights to express his thoughts. Even after he declared that he would no longer be writing, he gathered up his spirits and came up with such a sensational work of art.

Infused with imageries and metaphors, the poems take us on an emotional journey, at the end of which the readers empathise with the author himself. The author has used the simplest of themes and imageries to portray his complex ideas. His themes vary from a small touch me not plant to a rented house to a flower to woman to a sheep and even to the Judiciary and God. One noticeable factor common in all these poems is emotional intensity. We can thus categorise the various poems under the nine rasas or the 'navarasas' mentioned by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*. *Nava* means 'Nine' and *Rasa* is often translated as "mood", "emotion", "expression" or "sentiment". The *Navarasa* refers to the nine expressions that humans often show. These are love (*shringara*), laughter (*hasya*), kind-heartedness or compassion (*karuna*), anger (*raudra*), courage (*veera*), fear (*bhayanaka*), disgust (*bheebhatsya*), wonder or surprise (*adbhutha*) and peace or tranquillity (*shantha*).

In Chapter two of this project, a detailed note on the theory has been explained. The origin of the theory, its various sub divisions have been covered in the same. Chapter three deals with the

summary of the poetry collection *Songs of a Coward*. Major poems from the collection which are to be analysed have been explained in this chapter. Chapter four deals with the analysis of various poems already explained. How the chosen theory is relevant in the context of the collection and how the theory can be applied to each of the selected poems has been explored in this section. Chapter five is a note of conclusion where certain findings and conclusions regarding the whole work has been explained.

## II. Exploring Rasa theory

A fundamental way in which one human being differs from the other is on the basis of what emotions occur to them and how they express it. Various studies have surfaced based on this aspect of human psyche. One among such prominent fields is the Indian Aesthetics. It is a unique philosophical and spiritual point of view on art, architecture and literature. In Indian Aesthetics, a *rasa* denotes an essential mental state and is the dominant emotional themes of a work of art. It can also be seen as the primary feeling that is evoked in the person that views, reads or hears such a work.

Thus the art of music and dance which was well developed during Vedic age itself has been systematized by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*. He condensed and codified necessary laws to govern music, dance and drama. Not only these three, but all that are essential to the authors and actors like the knowledge of grammar, prosody, rhetoric, *rasa*, *bhava* were also clearly mentioned in this work. His *Natyashastra* with its thirty-six chapters includes the writing of drama and its production in any encyclopaedic work on dramatic art. It is considered the fifth Veda- the *Natyaveda* since the word or speech is extracted from *Rigveda*, music or song is from *Samaveda*, the art of acting histrionic expressions from *Yajurveda* and the elements of *rasa* from *Atharvaveda*.

In Indian Aesthetics, what we express forms the *Bhava*. It is the feelings expressed by the performer. Then there is *Abhinaya*, the means by which the performer conveys his part to the people. The audience or those people at the receiving end react to this message. This is how *rasa* is created.

Thus, the *Navarasa* can be generally explained as the nine reactions to the nine emotions. *Bhava-Abhinaya-Rasa* forms a trilogy. Emotion issues from the mind of the performer. The performer manifests it through speech, gestures or by any other means. This expression is *Abhinaya*. Then there is the audience who receives and responds to the message. Based on nine major emotions, nine major reactions are classified. They are the Navarasa.

The prime enquiries posed in this theoretical context are, who is the receiver of the poetic pleasure? What are the terms that define receiver of different kinds of literature or art? The answer can be given as following: the receiver and its definition can be decided by the literary form which they are going through or enjoying, for example a perceiver of poem, novel or story is called as reader. A person watching a play on the stage or movie on screen is called as spectator. A person listening to music on a tape recorder or on a radio is called a listener and the persona may be tagged as audience if he/she is listening and watching music orchestra on the stage. In short the perceiver or narratee of the literary work of art can be defined from the literature which he or she enjoying. So far as Bharata is concerned, in his treatise on dramaturgy called *Natyashastra* and calls the perceiver as spectator (*sahardya*) who watches a play being performed on the stage. Now, how does the spectator achieve poetic pleasure? What is the process of enjoying the *rasa*? The celebrated rhetorician, Bharata tries his best to solve this aesthetic phenomenon in one sentence, say in one *Sutra* (aphorism), which is seen in Chapter six of *Natyashastra*.

The idea of *Rasa* in drama or poetry is a unique creation of Indian Dramaturgy and rhetoric. The translation of this word 'Rasa' is also very difficult as it is an enjoyment or experience in the mind of the sympathetic audience or reader. It is an individual experience brought through the expression of *Bhava*. The *Rasa* is created or promoted in the mind of a spectator by the *Bhava* being expressed. These two- the *Rasa* and *Bhava* are interdependent, as *Rasa* is not created without *Bhava* and *Bhava* has no existence without *Rasa*. *Bhava* can be considered as the physical body and

*Rasa* being its soul. *Bhavas*, the emotions has no meaning in the absence of *Rasa*. *Bhavas*, the emotions represented in the performance gets translated into emotional state of experience in the minds of spectator, so called *Rasika* and makes the presentation thoroughly enjoyable.

The term *rasa* has been described as taste, essence, self-luminous consciousness etc. In Chapter six of the Sanskrit text *Natyashastra*, by Bharata, a description has been given for the *rasa* theory. The *Rasa Sutra* summarizes the factors in art construction that leads to relishing of the *rasa*. *Vibhava*, *anubhava*, *vyabhichari bhava*, in combination with one another bring about the supreme charm or *rasa* in the spectator. *Vibhava* includes the determinant, the cause or the *karana*. It is of two types: *Alambana Vibhava* and *Uddipana Vibhava*. *Anubhava* is the impact or after effect or consequence of a determinant. The function of *Anubhava* is to capture the emotion or the prevailing permanent psychological state which is the *Sthayi Bhava*. *Vyabhichari Bhavas* are transient emotions also called *Sanchari Bhavas*. This helps the permanent psychological states to mature into *Rasa* or the aesthetic delight in the spectator. A step further, awareness comes in the minds of the spectator which Bharata calls *Rasanispattih*.

*Rasa* is produced from a combination of Determinants (*vibhava*), Consequents (*anubhava*) and Transitory States (*vyabhicaribhava*). The nine emotions as said above can be divided into 'Core emotions' and 'Ancillary emotions'. For instance, in the book *The Room on the Roof*, we feel sympathy and pity for the character of Rusty. But he is a character, who grapples to live a life of freedom. He finally escapes the hold of his strict guardian and starts living his own life, where he is happy and satisfied. The character of Rusty passes through various emotions like anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty owing to lack of his experience and his introversion. In this situation, the main emotion is a joy we feel, as he aspires to live a life he wants. But we also feel pity, sympathy and satisfaction on the other side, finally leading to joy in our minds. As a reader, one certainly moves with the character's emotions, reacting to the sadness, anxiety and uncertainty yet we share the joy of the boy. Here, joy

can be said to be the 'core emotion' as that is what Rusty aspires to experience in his life. The other minor emotions we feel are called 'ancillary emotions'.

The eleven elements are described as the essence of *Natyashastra* by Bharata, but Rasa and Bhava are the main aesthetic performances in provoking a desired emotion that leads to open the heart and mind of spectator to understand the message and idea of the poet. Rasa and Bhava occupy a significant treatment by Bharata. They are followed by other nine elements *Abhinaya, Dharmi, Vritti, Pravritti, Siddhi, Svava, Aatodya, Gana and Ranga* that embellish a dramatic presentation. Bharata in his *Natyashastra* introduces the combination of Vibhava, Anubhava and Vyabichari Bhavas that creates the Rasa. Rasa is produced in the minds of Sympathetic audience as a result of configuration of the determinants, the consequents and the transitory moods. They are known as causes, effects and auxiliaries in the spoken language. The latent emotion that comes to be manifested by all the above things is called as Rasa like the food becomes relished with the mixture of different spices, Rasa accompanied by these Bhavas become the source of *Ananda*. Vibhavas - the determinants are the causes. They create an illusionary reality when the character is being presented in a particular environment. When a spectator or a reader watches or reads a drama or poem, the basic emotion is excited by these Vibhavas - the determinants or the causes, and leads to Anubhava - the consequent or the effect. Things are made felt by means of words and gestures which is called Anubhava. It is related to words as well as to gestures and movements of major and minor limbs as in dance or other performance arts. This will be a voluntary expression like smile, shedding tears, laughter, scary looks, angry looks etc.

Thus Vibhavas and Anubhavas create a State (*Sattva*). The Vibhavas are two types *Alambana Vibhavas* and *Uddipana Vibhavas*. Hero and Heroines are *Alambana* and seasons, flowers etc. are the *Uddipana*. The emotions, the cause of excitation retained in the mind of a sympathetic spectator/reader till the Rasa is experienced, these inherent emotions are called Sthayibhava or Static

emotion such as love. It is of eight types. The physical involuntary expression follow the identification of the emotion of sympathetic mind are called *Satvika Bhavas* or responsive emotions like the glances, sweating, horripilation etc. It can be said that *Satvika Bhavas* are Anubhavas the consequents, but *Satvika bhavas* are involuntary actions in an exalted state and Anubhavas are voluntary expressions. These are again eight types. The emotions those do not have stability like Vibhavas, Sthayibhavas, but rise, exist and vanish quickly are called *Sanchari bhava*- the transitory emotions. These are passing emotions that are compared to the waves of the ocean, promotes the creation of Rasa in the sympathetic mind and submerge into the same. These are thirty three in number. They contribute to the creation of Rasa and retains till the realization of Rasa.

Vibhavas (the determinants) can be called as Sthayibhava (the static emotion) as they are cause of excitation. It is a clear manifestation of the determinant (*Alambana vibhava* and *Uddipana vibhava*) on the mind of the sympathetic spectator considered as the ocean. It becomes root cause of the creation of Rasa. Dormant emotions like love get excited when they come into contact with hero or heroine. Anubhavas (the consequents) are the physical expressions following the emotion caused by the determinant may be called as *sattvika bhavas* (the responsive emotions) like love or seed germination is experienced by the glances or by words and gestures in case of love, sprouting in case of seed. The dormant emotions originated in the mind get accomplished by the responsive emotional expressions. The actor with concentrated mind can produce whatever the effect the situation demands. Anubhavas may be imitated simply by the practice of acting, but the responsiveness (*Sattva*) is a mental state of an actor (inner feelings) expressed with the bodily actions (external movements).

Vyahicharibhavas - (the transitory emotions) are also called *Sancharibhavas* only flash momentarily and do not stay for a long time. The mind and body when subjected to an emotional impact, the mind experiences a series of emotions. They traverse between the actor and spectator, make the static emotion (Sthayi bhava) stronger;

make the mind respond favourably to the experience of Rasa.

All these Bhavas are subordinates to the principal Rasa. The sentiment is caused by the Vibhavas, expressed by the Anubhavas and nourished by Sanchari bhavas becomes Rasa. In an ordinary world, due to woman, moon etc. *rati* is produced. It is expressed with glances. When the Sthayibhava, the permanent mood is experienced due to Vibhava, Anubhava and Vyabhichari then it becomes Rasa. According to Bharata, the Rasa is only *Loukika Rasa*. He explains it on the analogy of *Paka Rasa*. When we mix food made of rice wheat etc. with some *Vyanjanas* (spices) a peculiar taste like *Shadabha* is produced which gives pleasure to the eater. Similarly with the help of Verbal, physical and mental gesticulation, rasa gives pleasure, joy to the *Sahridaya* (sympathetic Spectator). Hence they are called *Natya Rasa* which is very important in any kind of art presentation.

*Rasothpatthi* is another interesting element in the whole process of conveying the emotions. There are a bunch of factors that leads to rasothpatthi. The familiarity of the onlooker, (the reader when it comes to a book) to the grammar of the form (which can be equalled to a literary work or a book) certainly determines how he or she reacts to the performance (or the writing of an author of a book). This draws out the fact that rasothpatthi is much personalised and will vary from one person to the other. The audience's or the onlooker's mental state also has to contribute to rasothpatthi. For instance, no two people read a particular literary text in one single way; it surely differs. It depends a lot on the reader's state of mind while reading too. Some enjoy some book and might have read it more than once; while others might find it very dull and boring. If the author can hook you on by his writing, it might even move you and empathize with the characters in it. If the person is physically present and mentally absent, rasothpatthi hardly evolves. The spectator's or reader's positional comfort, surroundings and atmosphere can affect this factor too. Another element that can grab the attention of the reader or onlooker, in a performance, is the character graph and presentation of the character in

it. If the presentation is slipshod, it will irritate one's sensibilities and will distract one's focus.

Sometimes, when we see a play, or read a work of art, we often feel like it has a piece of our lives. It can be a story we heard in or childhood, or a tale we loved reading; all these personal experiences also plays an important part in rasothpatthi. Thus rasothpatthi is a one to one experience every viewer has with the presentation he or she is viewing. It depends on a range of factors, though in varying proportions. Hence, rasa creation is a complex and never-ending exercise throughout a programme/reading when it comes to a literary work. This in turn helps us to understand the fact that the nine rasas are very broad classifications and there are many subtle variations operating with them.

Navarasa as the name suggests are nine in number. They are *Shringara, Hasya, Karuna, Raudra, Veera, Bhayanaka, Bibhatsya, Adbhutha and Shantha*. Bharata talks of eight rasas. The ninth rasa was only added later. In a generic form, we can categorize them into two sections- four as happy (*Shringara, Hasya, Adbhutha and Veera*) and four as unhappy rasas (*Roudra, Bhayanaka, Bhibatsa and Karuna*). It was in sixth century that Udhbhatta, a great aesthician, talks of nine rasas and he is the one who says *shantha* is the ninth rasa. Later on in eleventh century, Abhinavagupta defines *shantha*. He rectifies the *shloka* written by Bharata in *Natyashastra* and in this manner he defines *shama* as the sthayibhava of *shantha rasa*.

Shringara rasa can be translated as love in many dimensions- it can be erotic love, romantic love or attraction or beauty. It is considered to be the mother of all rasas as it gives scope to a wide range of emotions such as jealousy, fear, anger, compassion, physical intimacy etc. Its sthayi bhava is *rati* which is erotic love or passionate love. Lord Vishnu is the presiding deity of Shringara rasa. It is the crown emotion that is capable of healing anything. The term literally means to decorate, or engage in a love talk. The playful exchanges between lovers or spouses, all evoke Shringara rasa. It also means the kind of love or such strong emotion we feel towards anything and everything in this

universe. Shringara can be used to explain the love between friends, the love between a mother and her child, the love for God, the love between a teacher and her disciples etc. Rich imagery is associated with this love and it gets portrayed at many different levels. Shringara rasa based on its sense of usage can be classified into *Samkshipta* (depicted by shyness), *Sampanna* (reunion of lovers or a couple after a long separation and expression is full of love), *Sambhoga* (the central theme of Shringara, literally meaning union. The factors that evoke this are seasons, garlands, desires, loved ones etc.) and *Vipralambha* ( term means separation, indifference, jealousy etc.)

Hasya is used to explain a feeling of joy or mirth often marked by laughter and sense of humour. It can be used to depict simple light-heartedness or riotous laughter and everything in between. Teasing and laughing with a friend, being amused and carefree or simple feeling frivolous and naughty are all facets of hasya. It is born from the *sthayibhava hasa*. This rasa makes us feel relieved and tension-free. *Atmasthan* means the self-laughter where one is laughing at oneself while *Parasthan* is the process of making others laugh. Hasya can be further divided into six, based on the intensity and way of laughing. *Smitha* (smiling very little and gently emoting through glances in a dance), *Hasitha* (also termed *mandahaasa*, where teeth is shown slightly), *Vibhasitha* (slight sound is heard while laughing), *Upahasita* (satirical laughter with eyes wide open, nose expanded, and head and shoulder are bent), *Apahasitha* (silly laughter with tears coming out of eyes), *Atihasitha* (excessive laughing or noisy long laughter with teary eyes) are the six types.

Karuna is grief and compassion. The feelings of unspeakable tragedy and despair, utter hopelessness and heartbreak, the sorrow caused by parting with a lover, the anguish caused by the death of a loved one are all Karuna. So also, the compassion and empathy aroused by seeing someone wretched and afflicted is Karuna. The sympathy and fellow feeling that sorrow engenders in the viewer is also karuna. Karuna can be of a personal nature as when one finds oneself depressed, melancholy and distressed. More impersonal sorrows relate to the despair regarding

the human condition in general, the feeling that all human life is grief and suffering. It is Karuna of this sort that the Buddha was trying to overcome on his path to salvation. Karuna has three subdivisions- *manasika*, *vachika* and *angika* caused due to separation from their loved ones, damage due to virtue, loss of wealth etc.

Rowdra is anger and all its forms. The self-righteous wrath of kings, outrage over audacious behaviour and disobedience, the fury caused by an offense, the rage evoked by disrespect and anger over injustice are all forms of Rowdra, probably the most violent of rasas. Rowdra also encompasses divine fury and the fury of nature which is used to explain unexpected calamities and natural disasters. In Indian mythology, Lord Shiva, the Destroyer, is thought of as the master of all disharmony and discord. Shiva performing the *tandav*, a violent dance is what creates havoc in the three worlds namely the sky, the earth and the nether world. It means roaring and has a sense of rage. Anger can lead to irritation, hatred and violence. It is a property of fire, and just a moment of anger can destroy a lifetime of goodwill.

Veera is heroism. It represents bravery and self-confidence. Manliness and valiance are the trademarks of a Veer or a fearless person. Courage and intrepidity in the face of daunting odds is heroism. Boldness in battle, the attitude with which martyrs go to war, and the valour with which they die are all aspects of heroism. Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, is typically the model for this Rasa. His confidence and heroism while facing the mighty ten-headed demon king Ravana is part of Indian legend, folklore and mythology. A somewhat different type of heroism is displayed by characters like Abhimanyu, who went to war knowing fully that he would be severely outnumbered and almost certainly die and yet fought so bravely as to earn accolades even from his enemies. In Indian music, this rasa is represented by a lively tempo and percussive sounds. It reflects a heroic or manly attitude. Everyone has a warrior inside him/her; it's just that you need to awaken it from dormancy. It is strong, vibrant and is associated with bravery, confidence, determination, self-assurance and valour. Veera Rasa has three subdivisions which are

*Daanavira*-heroism in charity, *Dharmavira* –heroism in virtue and *Yuddhavira* -heroism in war.

Bhaya is fear. The subtle and nameless anxiety caused by a presentiment of evil, the feelings of helplessness evoked by a mighty and cruel ruler, and the terror felt while facing certain death are all aspects of bhaya. The fear for one's wellbeing and safety is supposed to be the most primitive feeling known to man. Bhaya is the feeling evoked while facing something that is far bigger and more powerful than oneself and which is dead set on one's destruction. Bhaya is the feeling of being overwhelmed and helpless. Dread, cowardice, agitation, discomposure, panic and timidity are all aspects of the emotion of fear. Bhaya is also used to characterize that which causes fear. People and circumstances that cause others to cower in terror before them are as central to portrayal of this rasa as those feeling the fear. It has got three subdivisions- *Vyaja* or fictitious horror, *Aparadha* or horror due to a grievous mistake and *Vitrasita*, horror due to a fear complex.

Bhibatsya simply means disgust or repugnance. This emotion is awoken by anything that nauseates us or sickens us. When something happens beneath human dignity or something coarse and graceless falls in front of our eyes, it causes an intense feeling of disgust in us. Not surprisingly, this emotion is usually represented fleetingly. It usually acts as a catalyst for higher and more pleasant emotions. It characterizes judgemental mind, self-pity, loathing and also self-hatredness. It can be further divided into *shuddhaja* which means exciting and *udvegaja*, the inflicting. The exciting is created by seeing disgusting things and the inflicting is created by looking at blood intestines etc.

Adbhutha wonder, amazement & surprise. It also depicts our innocence and playfulness. The moment wherein we are surprised or curious or in awe of something, we appreciate and enjoy those little things around us. We get fascinated and become an adventurer of life. Adbhuta is wonder and curiosity. The awe that one feels when one comes across something divine and supernatural, some power or beauty that is remarkable and never

seen or imagined before is Adbhuta. Adbhuta is the curiosity of man regarding the creation of the world and all its wonders, the astonishment caused by seeing something unusual and magical. The appreciation of a marvel that goes beyond the routine and the mundane is Adbhuta. The glory of a king returning from a successful battle, the magical feats of a god are both adbhuta to a common man. Adbhuta is when divinity makes a surprise appearance in the world of men. Adbhuta rasa has two sub divisions- *Divyaja*, the exquisite and *Anandaja*, the pleasurable.

Shanta is serenity and peace. It represents the state of calm and unruffled repose that is marked simply by the lack of all other rasas. Because all emotions are absent in Shanta there is controversy whether it is a rasa at all. According to Bharata, the author of *Natyashastra*, the other eight rasas are as proposed originally by Brahma, and the ninth, Shanta, is his contribution. Shanta is what the Buddha felt when he was enlightened, when he reached the higher spiritual plane that led him to salvation or nirvana and freed him from the cycle of life and death. Shanta represents complete harmony between the mind, body and the universe. Sages in India meditate for entire lifetimes to attain this state. In music it is often represented through a steady and slow tempo. Shanta is a clear and cloudless state. Shanta is untroubled steadiness. Shanta is the key to eternity. Santa Rasa is yet a ninth, not mentioned by Bharata, but has been accepted as one of the Rasa's during later periods. *Sama* or the placid static emotion gives rise to Santa Rasa. Abhinavagupta says all the thirty three vyabhicharibhavas are vyabhichari bhavas of shanta. He says the vibhava or the cause of why Shanta emerges is *tattvajnaana*.

According to Abhinavagupta in the minds of the spectators a particular emotion (Sthayi Bhava) is already present in the form of *Sanskara (Vasana)*. This inherent permanent mood inferred from its *Loukika* causes features like women, garden etc. remain in the heart of the appreciating audience. This permanent mood depicted in a *Kavya* or presented in a *Natya* will have a special power and thereby lose their individuality and some kind of Universalization is affected. Such causes (*Karanas*)



were given special names like Vibhava etc. The Vibhavas are generalized or impersonalized in the minds of the reader or the spectator through the suggestive power of clever representation. Then the Sthayi which in the heart of the Sahridaya in the form of Vasana gets aroused and Rasa gets manifested by itself.

Emotions are the essence of human communication and understanding these 9 rasas or emotional essences will help cultivate greater awareness and control of one's emotions. The manifestation becomes the source of transcendent charm and is spoken as Rasa. This *Rasananda* is said almost to be equivalent to the Philosophic bliss (*brahmananda*) that we take pride in.

### III. Summary of *Songs of a Coward*

The poems in *Songs of a Coward: poems of exile* by Perumal Murugan paints a picture of the rough and explosive emotions that the author went through after he was forced to apologise and withdraw his book *Madhorubhagan* by fringe right-wing groups. In this poetry collection, he tries to figure out the happenings in his life and how it might affect his existence even as a writer. He writes down these poems to satisfy his own soul. Murugan had announced his own death as an author and withdrew from public life for some time. He wrote these poems during that period of exile when he was struggling to find meaning for his life. His novel *Madhorubhagan* explored the problems of caste divisions in the context of a childless marriage and alludes to real-life places and communities such that they were considered to be slurred.

The protests by Hindu and caste-based outfits focused on the portrayal of historical traditions related to Ardhanareswarar Temple in Tiruchengode, where the eponymous presiding deity is part-Shiva and part-Parvati in one idol. The Tamil title of the book, *Madhurobhagan*, is a translation of the name of the deity (Ardhanareeswarar), just as the English title, *One Part Woman*, is an allusion to the deity's form. This made way for expansive discussions and debates on the freedom of expression. The limits of how far a person can express his thoughts without being afraid

of the society's general opinion were widely discussed.

The poetry collection consists of two hundred and ten poems. They make readers think, ponder and question one on many levels. The poems originally written in Tamil have been translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan into English. The translator writes a note in the beginning of the book, where he mentions how he has gained an acute awareness of the space around Murugan and the various things that animate that space.

One important poem in the collection is 'Touch-Me-Not'. It is about a Touch-Me-Not plant which slowly grew from its seed. One day, a boy tries to pluck the red flower on it, when it suddenly shudders and closes. Then the boy brought his friends to show them the wonder. One among the boys touched it with a finger; it shrunk. Another touched it with his foot; another touched with a shoes; and another with a stick; another with his lips. Though it shrunk all that time, it slowly tried to unfurl, when one of the boys threatened it with his voice. After that, not a single leaf unfurled. Here, the Touch-Me-Not plant might stand as a symbol of woman who is molested and attacked by a group of boys. The adjective used for the boy in the poem is 'innocent'. This might be a mild mockery at how the society views everything a man does to be of an innocent nature by putting the blame on women.

'The Spider's Target' is another thrilling poem in the collection. It is about a spider which has woven its web from one tree to another tree, which is distant from each other. The spider never lives in that web. No one knows much about the web too. But wherever it is, the spider always keeps watch from there. Many who cross the road in broad daylight do not seem to notice the web. Every single person is busy in their own lives. Small bugs, little insects, beetles and butterflies get caught in that web, they struggle and they die at last. From somewhere, the spider sees all the happenings. In the last stanza, the poet says that the spider is never going to emerge soon as its target is bigger- a human hand. Here, by taking the spider and at last introducing the concept of a human hand, the poet tries to bring in a contrast. Even the spider's target

has grown to become unimaginable and beyond its limitations.

In the poem 'Show your face', the speaker is tormented due to anxiously awaiting someone. For the speaker, every form moving at a distance appears to be that 'someone'. Voices coming from long distances sound sweet like that 'someone'. The speaker goes on to say that she/he has faced situations where she/he stepped out with hope and had to turn back disheartened. The speaker keeps checking the phone and is ready to attend a call from that person anytime. The speaker even checks for the missed calls. In the next few lines we see an adamant speaker, who says that the other person has to call first and that the speaker is not going to call that person first. If the speaker were to call first, then what is the point of the waiting? All that the speaker wants to see is the other person's face. The speaker stands there like an old woman who awaits her grandson to bring the *karichoru* he went to get.

'Protection' is a poem where two dogs of different genders form the central characters. In this poem, a female dog runs and tries to escape the stray dogs chasing her. The female dog ends up in front of an iron gate of a house that has dogs barking from within. Here, we may compare the plight of the female dog to that of a woman. The kind of tortures and assaults women have to face in our times is beyond expectations. Most of the times, we are to believe that there are only a few safe places for women in this world. Rest of the places are like the house mentioned in the poem. When a woman tries to escape atrocities, it takes new form and reinvents in other places.

'They Toil' is another piece of poetry, where Murugan is amazed at the city life and its practices. He describes the city as a place filled with young people, who wear clothes that are clean and neat, unlike the natives of a village. They wear backpacks that match their dresses. They only wear attractive shoes and good socks. They eat food without touching it with their hands. They have become good employees, who toil day and night, even forgetting the time of day. The poem ends with the line "May the world prosper" (Murugan 62). Here, Murugan shares his surprise at such a different way

of life that is unbelievable for him. He is not even sure if people who lead lives like these turn out to be prosperous in life. He thus shares his reading of life, which has turned out to be more materialistic according to him.

'The Eraser' is yet another inspiring poem. In this poem, all the attention goes to a simple thing-an eraser. The poet or the speaker says that he is going to use his body's moisture as an eraser. He wants to start erasing all his manuscripts. He is ready to accept his past mistakes and rub it away. He wants to make them right at least now. The speaker says that after many days of erasing, the cleared pages sparkle like lightning. The sparkling pages refer to how he has washed off his sins and the truth has started to appear on those pages. In the last paragraph, he says that the eraser has started to drip blood by its over usage. Even if that is the case, he should keep erasing. By doing so, he will press the erase 'against the wall of time'.

'What Shall I Do?' is a poem where the poet is self-introspecting. He says that he has commanded his pen that the ink will henceforth drip from its tip only for signatures, accounts and journal entries. Then the poet goes on to say that his signature varies each time he puts one. The pen is working out of his control. It is not listening to him anymore. When the poet takes a look at the previous day's grocery accounts and journal entries, he sees vegetables coming alive and a crow jumping out of his journal. The poet in the concluding lines expresses his anger and frustration at the actions of the pen. He feels like breaking its tip and fling it away. The poet here is looking back at his previously written poems and regrets slightly on writing some lines due to which he has to now live a torturous life. By personifying the pen, he describes his own emotions and is greatly frustrated.

'The Dog I Used to Know' is a poem where the speaker says that a dog that he knew has now gone rabid. That dog used to show gratitude, affection and loyalty to him. It used to guard the house, see him off, wait for his return and cause no trouble to him at all. The dog did not put any burden on the speaker. It would even clean up its own vomit. The dog was intelligent enough to spot the

enemies and stay away from danger when required. But presently, the speaker is running away from its gaze; he is hiding now. The speaker has weapon ready in hand waiting for the right time to kill it. Thus, the dog which was once very loyal and loving has now turned violent and rabid.

'The Battlefield' is a poem that represents the battle of a common man. A common man is not always prepared to be a part of the battle. At times, he accidentally gets into it. The speaker here does not have a sword, spear or arrow to aim. He does not have elephants to unleash or soldiers to command. In spite of all this, he sets out from home to the battlefield everyday armed, armoured with a battle plan and an army. The speaker here has a glow of confidence over him. Though he is not physically equipped, he is mentally equipped to face whatever challenges that life poses before him. He has the courage and will power to face it.

In 'Pity is Still Alive', the main character is a rat. Though it had food to eat and a place to live, it was caught in a trap and it lost all that it had. But the people who caught it, could not bring themselves to kill it. They carried the trap out and opened it in a barren expanse. It took a little while for the rat to sense its freedom and run out. Thus it is only by the pity of such good souls that the rat is still alive. The poem, in a few lines makes us think of what we would have done if we were the ones who caught it. It makes us believe in humanity and goodness.

'The Atheist' is a short yet powerful poem about beliefs. In a country like India, religion is given very much importance. An atheist is not very well accepted in our society. Murugan himself has been prey for the cruelties of the people's orthodox religious sentiments. In the poem, we are introduced to a character of an atheist. This person is asked many questions by the believers. Most believers question one's decision to become an atheist and look at them with surprise and disbelief. The poet says that when people react in this manner all he says is 'Yes even God knows that' (Murugan 72). It is more like a mockery at the age-old orthodox beliefs that the believers hold on to.

'Old Accounts' is a poem where the poet expresses his disbelief and amazement at how

people still hold on to the old accounts despite the time that has gone by. All he can see is people waiting with ledgers in hand with many unsettled accounts in his name. Some ledgers only contain a single word he has uttered, which even he has forgotten in the course of time. He describes how the ledgers span a lot of pages registering the slightest of his actions or details. He goes on to say that one can never finish turning the pages of that book. All these dues turn out to be a burden for him now. These might have helped him grow in his life at some point, but now they are all burdens. When the dues are not paid on time, knives will come out, says the speaker. It means that those people might go to any extent to get the unpaid debts back. The speaker has to endure all that pain. He, at the end, sarcastically thanks God for showing him, how far his old debts go. It is a kind of reminder that he has to do a lot of things which he left undone earlier. In our way forward, we often prefer not to look back at the past to see if we have anything else to finish doing. The speaker is rather surprised when he suddenly sees the old accounts appearing. It is this element of surprise that sustains throughout the poem.

'The Final Head' is another poem which has violence and bloodshed in it. The speaker describes how fresh human heads roll at his feet oozing warm blood. Each time a new head falls, his face swells with pride and he seems to grow bigger. The speaker imagines himself to be great as he sees a halo forming around his head as he stands on the pile of heads. The speaker has the feeling that he conquered something. He climbs backwards, one step each, on a staircase made of heads. All he can see is more heads. In the concluding lines, the speaker says that he has a sword in his hip to chop off the very last human head he sees. The poet here intends to cut down all the evil heads in the society who are up to doing only evil things. He thus wants to conquer all the negativities spread across the world and make it worthy to live on this earth thereafter.

The poet had announced his death as a writer soon after all the uproars caused against his previous book. The poem 'That Will Tell You' is about one such death. Here, the poet shows us a group of people who are not ready to accept the truth of

death. The death here can be taken to be a symbolic death of the writer, Murugan himself. He says that the people were refusing to believe that he is dead. But for the poet, death is a natural thing. Some people die due to old age; some others due to sickness; some others due to accidents. He refers to his death as just one among those. He lets the people choose by what name they should address his death- a mass murder, a coward's suicide, a drama, or even a lie. He says that once the people are done naming it, they can go mind their own business. He would then clear away all the confusions and rumours surrounding his death and turn it into a star and fix it on the sky that will speak for itself about his death. Here, we see a calm and contented speaker or poet who is not in a haste to prove his death. He might be fed up of the happenings around him and is ready to accept any kind of comments passed by others about him.

'The Sea's Silence' is another poem where the poet tries to explain his present state of mind by using the image of a sea. He says that wherever he goes people ask him if the sea has gone silent. Many people including the ones that know the sea, those who have seen the sea, those who have seen images of the sea, or those who have neither seen nor known the sea ask such questions. He replies to them by saying that the sea has fallen silent. Soon after that, he ponders on what he said- if the sea can actually go silent or not. But he himself realises that the sea has truly gone quiet-silence on its surface and the tumult of waves in the deep. The poet tries to show us how much pain he has been enduring all this time.

'I Like the Rainy Season Too' is another simple poem where the poet tells us how much he likes rain and the kind of mood it creates. He has returned home from summer like the hero of Sangam poems. His wife awaits him at the door teary-eyed. He wipes her tears and thinks of his mother who passed away not so long ago. The summer might refer to his time when he was regarded as a writer. Monsoon on the other hand might refer to his time in exile when he had to stay away from writing things he loved. He says that he would turn the time between summer and monsoon into a story for his children. Many relatives come by

and go. As it rains, he closes the curtains and enjoys the cold nights. It is an uneventful time for him as nothing great happens. He cleans his house, kills the flies, seals the blotches on the walls etc. When he peeps out, all he sees is lightning darts across the sky. Many say that the weather is never going to change. But the optimism in the speaker makes him say that he likes this rainy season as one can just stay in when it rains. The poet might be shedding some light on the period of exile that he led, which was rather uneventful for him. He tries to see the good side of it and gains back the long lost hopes about coming back to writing more works of his.

'My Voice' is a strong poem which can be related to various themes. In the first reading, we feel that the poem speaks about rape and other atrocities against women. We have a speaker who says that her throat was closed and lost its voice at the touch of a mysterious finger. Immediately, she hears a voice of another person who speaks in her voice. Due to that person, now her voice could be soon heard in cities, highways, conferences, debates and magazines. But in her own house, her own little town, in her front porch, her voice was simply absent. Here, we may compare the state of the speaker to any person who has lost his voice or agency. It is always expected that a man would come and rescue women when in need of help. It never occurs that the woman would herself speak up for her and thus attain justice. The knight in shining armour is always seen in stories. The poet may be taking a dig at this attitude, where the survivors or victims lose their voice due to the overpowering of someone else's voice and actions.

In the poem 'Why Do You Do These Things?' he brings in the themes of caste discrimination. He criticises those people who abuse someone else's caste, who befriends someone due to their caste, who push someone away due to their caste etc. He asks them why they do these kinds of things. There are people who make someone evil for their caste, who gather crowds in the name of caste, who write books in the name of caste, who make money in the name of caste etc. There are certain others who even find their own identity through their castes. He asks them when they are going to realise the triviality of all this; that their minds are all shackled!

'They Are Just Thirsty' is a poem of few lines written in a light note. Shepherds stand around the sheep always safeguarding them from running away. But he says that the sheep are just thirsty to explore the world around; to know the happenings of the world. They have no intention to do anything bad-it's just that they are curious. The poet here might be taking a dig at the overprotective parents who seem to be funny in the eyes of the poet.

'A Flower' is a simple poem which gives us the image of a flower that blooms after big bang. A sharp scent oozes out of it. It is very appealing in nature and spreads its radiance around. He says that the flower would reveal and establish everything. He is optimistic and fills the poem with a lot of hope through the image of a flower.

'Judgement Day' is the last poem in the collection. Here, the poet tries to showcase his own anxiety. He writes that he anxiously awaits the words from the God. He then tries to console his self by saying that God's language only has good words. He optimistically awaits the verdict from the court regarding his previous book, and wants to get back to writing things he wishes to convey to his readers. Thus the poetry collection ends with a very optimistic poem giving the readers a lot of hope and promise for a better tomorrow.

#### **IV. Implementing the Rasas in the Poems**

*Shringara rasa*, one of the nine rasas, can simply be translated as love, attraction, compassion or beauty. It is considered to be the mother of all rasas. Perumal Murugan has been known to write on rustic themes that are more close to the nature. In this work too, he fondles nature with his brilliant use of nature imageries and metaphors. There is a poem where he describes a flower. Soon after it blooms, a scent emanates from it, 'fresh' and 'electric'. The flower, he says, is capable of establishing everything. The poet is in love with the process by which a flower evolves. He considers a flower to be an important part of the nature as it has the ability to soothe minds and spread happiness. He establishes a certain kind of relationship with nature- one of love and sentiments. Here, this also connotes to a shared relation between individual and the divine, here, the flower.

*Hasya rasa* is one that is used to express joy or mirth. The term 'hasya' itself means laughter. In the collection, hasya rasa is seen in a poem 'They are just thirsty', where he describes shepherds and their sheep. The shepherds are always worried about their sheep fearing that they would run away. They even stand surrounding the sheep so that they can catch the ones that try to escape. Then the poet shifts the focus to the sheep which do not even think of running away and are just thinking of some water to quench their thirst. The poet here tries to mock the rigid social institutions we have, in our society. These societal institutions are well aware of the kind of restrictions they try to impose on people. He implies that due to this, they are all the more scared if one voice would rise asking for their individual freedom that the society is denying them. The systems would have unquestionably existed in the society if it was good and had a certain value in it. Instead, they always try to stand around the mass of people to keep the sheep from running away. On the other hand, the society is safe until the individual reaches a point of realisation. Otherwise each individual is happy to be inside the conventional society as they do not have to lose their energy claiming for their rights. The poet thus finds this society to be funny or containing hasya- the one that laid out the rules are afraid of its existence, because it is flawed.

'The Atheist' is a poem which is from the viewpoint of an atheist person. In very few lines, the speaker sarcastically hits back at one of the criticism he received for his choice of belief. Discrimination against atheists, both at present and historically, includes persecution of and discrimination against people who are identified as atheists. Discrimination against atheists may also comprise negative attitudes, prejudice, hostility, hatred, fear, or intolerance towards atheists and atheism. As atheism can be defined in various ways, those discriminated against or persecuted on the grounds of being atheists might not have been considered atheists in a different time or place. When the other person mocked him, the speaker retorted by saying that even the God knows that he is an atheist. Thus it brings a small smile to the readers and also makes one think about it.

*Karuna* is the next rasa which means pity and compassion. While sadness is an ingredient of compassion, true compassion goes beyond sadness to an unending kindness that does not taste like sadness at all. The poet grows extreme compassion and pity towards a simple touch-me-not plant. This poem titled 'Touch-me-not' tells us the growth of a plant reaching its full blossom. A boy then tries to touch it and as soon as that the plant shrinks as if it died. Later he brings up his friend, by which time its leaves had opened up. A boy among them touched it, and it shrank. Another boy touched with his foot or nearly stamped on it; the next boy touched them with his shoes; and another with a stick, nearly beating it up; another with his lips and the leaves completely closed. As soon as it opened up again one boy touched it with his threatening voice and it closed forever. This can be compared to the plight of a girl being brutally raped by few men. The poet was unable to stop it or help it as it was a wild flower of his imagination. Thus he writes it down and brings out his extreme sadness by the might of his pen. The poet here can only pity the condition of that being.

Another dimension of this rasa is sadness. 'The Sea's Silence' is one such poem where the speaker expresses his/her sadness. The speaker and his emotions has been equated with a sea. The speaker is being asked the same question by most of the people-"Has the sea fallen silent?" (Murugan 79). Even when everyone asks the same question, the speaker tries to overcome the sadness by asking a question back-"Can the sea fall silent?" (Murugan 79). The final lines suggest that the sadness is real and deep and that the sea has silence on its surface and tumult of waves in the deep. It might be referring to depression here. Depression is a constant feeling of sadness and loss of interest, which stops you doing your normal activities. Different types of depression exist, with symptoms ranging from relatively minor to severe. Generally, depression does not result from a single event, but from a mix of events and factors. The silence that has been attributed in the poem to the speaker can be due to such a deeper level of agony and pain.

'Pity Is Still Alive' is a poem that portrays the life of a rat caught in a trap. It is described that the rat had all that it needed-fresh food to eat; its

own place of comfort and belonging; its own familiar pathways etc. Later it lost everything and is finally trapped. Just because pity was still alive, the hands that trapped it could not make them to kill it or drown it. They carried the rat to an open space and let it out. The rat sensed its freedom and ran out into the vast expanse. There is a sense of pity that we feel towards the little being. It did not do anything wrong but still had to suffer a lot. The rat here represents a lot of marginalised sections of our society who are being cornered for just being so. As a reader, there is a sense of helplessness that is felt. Though we want to do something for the little being we can only empathise with it wish its life to be less torturous. Thus the Navarasa - *Karuna* can be very well linked to this particular poem.

The *Raudra* rasa is a disagreeable, destructive rasa. This energy of anger expresses itself from a mild irritation up to real fury. This kind of furious sentiment can be seen in the poem 'The Final Head' of this collection. Here we have a very angry speaker who is surrounded by freshly chopped heads and warm blood. He is busy taking the lives of the many that have caused distrust to him or his fellow beings. He is of the notion that wrongdoers deserve to be killed and that he has been born to remove all such evil. He places foot on a head on the ground and looks up to find that the sunlight was forming a halo behind him. Thus he is clearly not guilty and is rather proud of his own deeds. The poem ends by a note where he sets off to take more heads with a sword in his hip. *Raudra* rasa is mostly seen in wicked characters; but it does not mean that good characters do not show *raudram*. Though their basic nature is calm and collected, they have moments of anger as we see in the speaker of this poem.

Everyone has experienced anger. The intensity of your anger can range from profound annoyance to extreme rage. It's normal and healthy to feel angry from time to time in response to certain situations. But sometimes people experience an uncontrollable anger that often escalates, especially when the provocation is minor. In this case, anger is not a normal emotion but a major problem. 'What Shall I Do?' is one such poem where the speaker has unreasonable anger towards something. The

speaker's frustration can be seen in the choice of words and tone of the poem. Anger comes from a variety of sources and can vary widely. Some common anger triggers include personal problems, memories of a traumatic or enraging event etc. In other cases, an anger problem may be caused by early trauma or events in a person's life that have shaped their personality. In some cases, hormonal changes can also cause anger, as can certain mental disorders. The speaker asks "Is my pen/disobeying my orders?" (Murugan 66). Thus the speaker's anger knows no boundaries when he attributes anger even to a non-living thing. The poem ends as the speaker says that he might just break the tip of the pen and fling it away with anger. Throughout the poem the reason for his anger is not clearly mentioned. Each reader can bring in their own reasons for it and easily relate to the speaker's emotions completely.

*Veera rasa* is the next one, which is an embodiment of an energetic, determined and unrelenting nature which has no surprise or confusion. It conveys courage, bravery, boldness and self-confidence. One of the last poems 'The Battlefield' contains *veera rasa*, especially as of a *Yuddhaveera*. The speaker says that he does not have a sword, spear, arrows or armies to act at his command. Nevertheless, he sets out to the battlefield with a battle plan and an army. Thus, even though he does not have huge masses to support him and hail him, he has the confidence and courage to win the battle. He has belief in himself. Here, the poet's own courage can be placed in the context. The battle field here is the society that has restricted him. Even though he had a number of people disallowing him to live his life freely, he was destined to make a plan, come out of that burrow and face the music.

When a mistake is made, people try to pretend that it did not happen. They try to cover it up, justify the wrong situation, and that leads to additional mistakes. Quite often, more damage is done to relationships, trust and integrity by the actions taken after the original mistake. This is true in personal relationships as also in any other relationship. The poem 'The Eraser' is about the courage to accept one's mistakes and rectifying them. Most often, people get prosecuted, not for

the original crime, but for the attempt to cover it up by lying. The poem intends to say that mistakes are always forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them. That is, there is power in properly admitting a mistake. Accepting personal responsibility; which is taking ownership of your own behaviour, mistakes and the consequences of that behaviour. Until you accept responsibility for your actions or failures, it will be very difficult for you to develop self-respect or even have the respect of others. Rather than trying to cover up a mistake, there can be many personal and organizational advantages to properly admitting a mistake. Actually anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.

In the poem 'The Spider's Target', a spider's life has been described. It has intelligently woven its web to trap its prey. Later it keeps a watch on the perfectly woven web to see if any prey gets trapped. The spider here is heroic and cunning. Even the spider's target has grown beyond imagination. It does not plan to go near the web until it gets a satisfying prey which is a human hand. It is also described in the poem that every other being is busy with their own lives. It might be this monotony that led the spider to be so cold hearted. It is the experiences that made him courageous. Thus we can relate this poem to the *navarasa veera*.

*Bhayanaka*, the next *rasa*, is the feeling of panic and dread brought on by the anticipation of danger. It denotes a weakness of heart and a want of strength in character. 'The Dog I Used to Know' is one such poem that shows the speaker's fear. It tells us that a dog, which once used to wag its tail and showed affection, is not the same anymore. It used to guard the house; it used to be independent and loyal; it would do deeds to the speaker. But now, the speaker runs away from its gaze, hides somewhere, with a weapon in his hand ready to kill it. This poem has a refrain 'The dog I used to know has now gone rabid' (Murugan 1, 7, 13, 20, 26). Here we may consider the speaker to be one whom the society no longer accepts due to some change in him/her; probably one of the LGBTQ community. Until a time the speaker remained either a male/female the society had no issues; but as soon as he got transformed into a transgender and discovered his gender with freedom; the society is no more

approving of it. The society has gone rabid. The society used to replenish the person with all goodness and affection until a specific time; but not anymore. The person who is at last content in his identity and existence has to now run fearing this dog growing extreme trepidation and hate against it. Thus the person plans to kill this noise of chaos and unrest residing in the dog.

'Protection' is a poem about a female dog which is chased by a few stray dogs. The female dog tries to escape the tortures of the stray dogs chasing it. The fear or the rasa *bhayanaka* can be manipulated in two ways- the fear we feel as we read the poem; the fear in the mind of the dog. The dog runs and sits in front of an iron gate. But the Iron Gate was of a house that had another set of dogs which barked at it from inside. Here, the poet tries to say that wherever the female dog tries to escape, danger looms around it. The female dog even represents the females. Females have to suffer for mostly no wrong they did. This sense of fear by presenting the stark reality has been well executed in the poem. In just seven lines, the poet successfully takes us through the rasa 'bhayanaka'.

'I Like the Rainy Season Too' is a poem which actually describes the plight of the poet. Murugan had to stay in exile for quite a period of time. This poem also has a speaker who stays at home due to the heavy rain and thunder outside. The poet is feared and numb at the same time thinking about the situation he is in. He says that he wiped his wife's tears, killed many insects, wiped and kept things clean at home. It is the feeling of panic and dread brought on by the anticipation of danger. It denotes a weakness of heart and a want of strength in character. Fear is the base emotion of the Bhayanaka rasa. But at the end, the speaker tries to see a positive even amidst the entire struggle. He says that he likes the rainy season as one can just stay in when it rains. Thus, though he is afraid and facing a challenge, he tries to see a good in it taking it in the right spirit.

*Bhibhatsa* rasa in *Natyasastra* deals with the odious sentiment or disgust. This rasa is often evoked at the sight of something unpleasant or hearing something undesirable. 'Why Do You Do

These Things' from the poetry collection possesses this rasa of disgust. The poet comments at the outrageous attitude of some people and cannot help, but express his disgust at them and their deeds. He describes some people who abuse people for their caste, who kill someone for their caste, who gather crowds in the name of their caste, who write a book in the name of their caste and finally who submit to authority in the name of caste. The refrain of the poem is a question- 'Why do you do these things?' (Murugan 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31). It ends by the lines- 'When will you realize/that your minds are shackled?' (Murugan 266). The poet here directly expresses his disgust and frustration at the people who created an issue of his first work *Maathorubhagan* or *One Part Woman*. The poet is unable to understand as to why these people stay divided due to a caste, something of least importance to exist and live in a country which is hailed widely secular.

'My Voice' is a poem that describes the feelings of a survivor. When someone touched her without consent, she could not respond or react to it suddenly. It was rather a moment of shock. It was someone else who spoke for her. That feeling when you are unable to react to a situation like you wanted is disturbing. At a point we start questioning our own psyche. There are chances that it turns out into self-hatred. Here also, the speaker was in a similar situation. Her voice was simply absent. The whole experience itself was disgusting to her. The thoughts about it itself disturbs her. Added on to that is her inability to react to that situation. It is said that the basic feeling of *Bhibhatsa* rasa is disgusting and is generated by excitants (*vibhava*) like sight of unwanted ugly things or events etc., ensuants (*anubhava*) like spitting and variants like infatuation or illusion etc.

*Adbhuta* is another rasa of wonder, astonishment and curiosity. This rasa describes human life which is full of wonders to explore. 'They Toil' is a poem, which describes the drastic changes that have befallen our culture and its people by the Occident. The speaker is unable to contain his excitement as he sees the people in a city. They are driven by technology and wear costly things. They have learnt to eat with spoons, wear shoes and socks



etc. They have even become diligent, punctual employees working for companies of the West. They do not seem to find a difference between day and night as they are live all the time and even forget about the shifting time zones. The speaker, out of curiosity and amusement, observes, learns and tries to adapt to the present-day practices of life and even wishes the world good in his last line 'May the world prosper' (Murugan 62).

Most often we do not realise how there are hundreds of people keenly observing and watching what we do in our lives. Many of them show a greater in our lives than in theirs. As these people poke their nose into our affairs, we are often taken aback by these gestures. They remind us of things which we might have already forgotten. It is the same surprise that the speaker of the poem 'Old Accounts' has. There are a lot of debts to be fulfilled which are brought to her by people in their ledgers. When we understand that there are things that we do not understand, it makes life beautiful and exciting, full of wonders to explore, full of opportunity for new understanding and personal growth. The speaker thus slowly gets to know more about life, the different kinds of people and continue the journey of life filled with wonder and excitement. Wonder is not a Rasa that one can create by will, even though it can be wilfully denied. The key to wonder is to remain open-minded toward the miracle of life, which can be experienced in everything. Unfortunately, tricky people exist as well as true miracles, so one has to judge carefully. A budding flower is a miracle, whether the flower is taking its time naturally or whether it happens more rapidly in the hands of a saint. Seeking out the less obvious miracles is a favourite past time for many, but there is no real need to fly to the Moon since we are already in space.

The final rasa is *Shantha* or tranquillity. It is marked by a feeling of calmness, quietness and peacefulness. *Shantha* represents complete harmony between the mind, body and the universe. The poem 'That Will Tell You' is about the poet's peaceful state of mind, where he does not find it necessary to explain to anyone, the reason behind his deeds. Murugan had declared his death as a writer, soon after the unrest began to develop,

based on his work One Part Woman. His readers refused to accept his announcement. Here the poet says that death is very natural and they die due to various reasons. His death, he claims, is just one among the many. People can call it a mass murder, a coward's suicide, drama, or even pretence. He says that once people are tired naming it, they can go about minding their own daily business. He says that he himself will clear the darkness and turn it into a star on the sky, which will speak forever. Thus, he is not bothered anymore about what people think about him or his words. He has reached a calm and composed state of mind where nothing affects him and is overcome with the pleasure of nothingness.

In the poem 'Show Your Face', the speaker is waiting for someone. For the speaker, every form moving at a distance appears to be that 'someone'. Voices coming from long distances sound sweet like that 'someone'. The speaker goes on to say that she/he has faced situations where she/he stepped out with hope and had to turn back disheartened. Thus the speaker is slowly realising what it really means to wait for someone. For this, a lot of patience is required. In the beginning of the poem, the wait has been described as 'tormenting' and full of 'anxiousness'. But at the end the wait has turned to be more of patience and calmness. The speaker has realised that his anxiousness is not going to do any good to the situation. But he has not given up too. Due to this calmness and tranquillity that prevails in this poem, it can be associated with the navarasa 'shanta'. All that the speaker wants to see is the other person's face. The speaker stands there like an old woman who awaits her grandson to bring the *karichoru* he went to get.

As we move on to the final set of poems, we can see a tinge of hope in them. How much ever the poet has suffered, he still hopes that things end up positively and peacefully. 'Judgement Day' is one such serene and calm poem. The speaker is anxiously awaiting the words from God. He asks and confirms to himself that God's language only has good words and thus the final verdict will also be good. The poet thus brings an end to his turbulent set of emotions which we saw throughout the poetry collection and plants a ray of hope in the reader's mind.

Thus, many other poems, along with these can be categorised and studied under the various rasas. It is invigorating to study each poem and find an unknown shade of it from nothingness. Also, the very fact that, it is a study of the emotions of human mind makes it all the more interesting to work on it.

#### V. Conclusion

“It is silence that gives me strength now, I’ll write to gain further strength...Let me be quiet. And write. I shall speak to you through my written words.” (Murugan 291)

These are words from Murugan’s statement in New Delhi on the occasion of the launch of his new book of poems *Songs of a Coward*. This paper aimed at an analysis of selected poems of Perumal Murugan’s poetry collection *Songs of a Coward* in the light of the Navarasa theory by Bharata from *Natyasastra*. The collection has over two hundred poems. Written during a hard phase in the poet’s life, each poem has a soul in itself which voices out a plethora of emotions. An interesting thing about these poems is that they are mostly based on peasant life, nature and its cultural tradition. Many a times, the poet writes down comparison of the village life and the city life.

Through this collection, he proves that he is a better poet than a writer. This collection would turn out to be memorable for those who have led such a life close to nature, far from the hustle and bustle of the city. However, this work is a huge change regarding his writing style. They can be described as a whole lot of poems having a life of their own, speaking up for themselves. His poetry has a way of nudging the innermost thoughts of a reader and wakes them up. Any reader can be possibly transferred to a land of South India where there is an imaginary home where he/she is comfortable watching Murugan do all the things he described in the lines. Some poems are melancholic while others are angry. Most of them have a very stark imagery of nature and use nature emphatically as a metaphor for the poet’s anguish.

In this book, he describes about growing up, facing life, the joys and the prejudices he kept facing, the dilemma of being a writer, his innermost

thoughts and appreciation of everything good or bad that keeps happening in his life. Some lines are difficult to comprehend in the first reading. When read twice, they tell a lot more than one can think of. His way of playing with words is simply amazing, closest to being magical. All this book talks about is how a person sees his world in his own special ways.

Flowing from a brutal and merciless expressing of the hatred he has faced by the society; he adds a tinge of accepting the same with pungent love. In a long time, someone had not articulated the feeling of loneliness, self-acceptance and the shunning-down hatred that society has to offer. The author seems to have written these poems for himself. To give a leeway to that constant voice that was once booming within, but then later subdued by the so called moral cries of the community; to vent the hurt & the pain, to heal or even to hope. Few of the poems quite naturally pass his pains of hurt and anger onto the reader. When looked at as a chronicle of the author’s mental journey through pain, hurt and anger, every single poem feels important and significant. For someone, who wants to understand the consequences of controversies such as those revolving around *Madhorubagan*, this book can be interesting.

Reading this book in the light of the Rasa theory brought about many undiscovered dimensions of these poems. Each poem evokes a feeling in us with its varied use of concepts and images. In response to this, different kinds of emotions awake in us which are the rasas. This experience of reading a poem and finding the rasa that relates with it has been the process of writing this paper. This paper hints us that, there is a rasa connected to each point in our lives. All we have to do to manifest the rasas is to enjoy the moment and experience it to the fullest. It is useful to keep in mind that a rasa includes not just the emotion, but also the various things that cause that emotion.

The new edition of MLA handbook has helped bring out this paper to its fullest. What is different about the eighth edition is that it recommends a universal set of guidelines that writers can apply to any source, in any field. *Songs of a Coward: poems of exile* in a way reflects life itself.

It takes you through an emotional ride with most poems dealing with nature and rustic life. It introduces fresh dimensions of everyday matter into your mind that may even haunt you for quite a long time after the read.

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