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Emotion of Love in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: A Rasaesthetic Perspective*

Bidur Rai

Lecturer of English

Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan

bidurrai33@gmail.com

Abstract

This research article attempts to explore the emotion of love in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. The paper aims at finding how the love emotions are evoked in characters and how the spectators or actors experience these emotions while reading the novel. Fitzgerald's novel is a depiction of the Americans living in the material world where they hanker after material bliss, forgetting human sensitivity. The text unfurls some issues like dream, hope, and desire to win love, which ultimately results in frustration and spiritual sterility in the Western country. Basically, the novel is about a man's quest for wealth and dream. However, he utterly fails to realize these in the text. To analyze the text, I embark upon Indian Rasa Theory. As such, the Indian Aesthetics has categorized nine emotions. Thus, I use the critical perspective of Indian Aesthetics as a theoretical framework to advance the arguments. Particularly, the perspectives from Seldon Pallock and Peter Marchand are used in the textual analysis. Seldon Pallock marks that Rasa emancipates from the combination of factors, reactions, and temporary emotions. Findings drawn from the discussion are that love emotion out of nine emotions is available in some characters, events and description of scenes in the text. Furthermore, these emotions help appreciate the literary text through the notion of rasa theory.

Keywords: Dominant emotion, rasa, rasaesthetics, romantic relationship, transitory emotions.

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Rasaesthetics and Emotion of Love

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* depicts the Americans who seek the material bliss by forgetting human sensitivity. The text mentions some concepts such as dream, hope, and desire as characters win love, and experience frustration and spiritual sterility in the Western country. Love and desire test or problematize the characters in the Fitzgerald's text. Love, desire, and sex motivate nearly every character in the text. Nevertheless, the core relationship is described as unhealthy and unstable. At this point, Gatsby's portrayal of love and desire is complicated and this leads to his ultimate destiny. Like Scott Fitzgerald, Gatsby is the American hero of romance, a vulnerable quester whose fate has the aesthetic dignity of the romance mode at its strongest (Bloom 5). Here, Daisy-Gatsby relation contrasts with that of Daisy-Tom but Nick's relation with Jordan develops before they end the relation. The tragic end of Gatsby is caused by his frustration of achieving the dream and his love for Daisy. Therefore, the American dream is unfulfilled. In this context, it is important to observe how each relationship progresses, and what each specific bond says about Fitzgerald's depiction of love. Fitzgerald's novel can be studied with use of rasa theory as a frame of interpretation so the objective lies in examining nine emotions manifested by the Indian scholars in the ancient times.

A rasa in Sanskrit literally means 'juice' or 'essence' in Indian Aesthetics. In other words, a rasa denotes an essential mental state. It is the dominant emotional theme of a work of art. Bhatta Nayaka argues, "Aesthetic experience is the experience of the universalized aesthetic object by the subject in the state of perfect bliss..." (Mukerjee 92). *Rasa* means "flavor" in Indian aesthetics. Thus, the theory of rasa is the primary concept of classical Indian arts. They include theatre, music, dance, poetry, and sculpture. The author classifies nine emotions: love, laughter, compassion, anger, courage, terror, disgust, surprise, and peace (Marchand 6-7). Out of nine emotions, quite few emotions function at a time once a text is studied from such viewpoints. Its study increases a good understanding of the literary text. Logically, humans manifest the emotions according to the situations.

Some critics and authors have made the critical debates on the primary text *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald in different perspectives. These critics and reviewers have analyzed the text, focusing on the thematic aspects. Critically examining the text, James

H. Justus reviews that *Gatsby* validates how the copiously “conscious individual” perceives life as despairing, and the person is “determined to make it otherwise” (131). The human life is filled with hopelessness and absurdity but it can be interesting and lively.

Similarly, Raymond M. Vince comments on *The Great Gatsby* partially as a “reinterpretation of the American Dream” (92) and this dream develops in Fitzgerald’s masterpiece between “old world and new world, between East and West, and between home and lack-of-home” (92). At this point, Fitzgerald’s novel embodies the model of the American Dream, which is the quest of most Americans yet such dream shatters before it is realized. In a different note, Harold Bloom writes, “Whatever the American Dream has become, its truest contemporary representative remains Jay Gatsby, at once a gangster and a romantic idealist, and above all a victim of his own High Romantic, Keatsian dream of love” (5). Here, Gatsby’s failures are the result of his romantic idealism and fantasy of love.

Offering the views of other critics above, Barbara Will argues that the *Gatsby* “self-consciously inscribes this process of forgetting into its own narrative”, and eventually its readers are confronted to react if presence is implied (126). In a novel of basically romance, the protagonist’s attempt to reclaim the lost history literally fails for he embraces the notion of high romantic fantasy and ends willingly his life for the sake of his love for Daisy.

Referring to Bharata Muni, Tapasvi Nandi records and mentions that the Nāṭyaśāstra is the earliest “artwork on dramaturgy” and it “lays down the theory of Rasa” which can be pertinent and applicable to the “art of music, dance, painting, sculpture, and literature”. Rasa is “applicable to the dramatic art in particular and then to any fine art”. The sensitive reader / spectator should be focused (para. 1). Similarly, Peter Marchand has studied nine emotions: love laughter, kind-heartedness or compassion, anger, courage, terror, disgust, and peace or tranquility (6-7). In a Sanskrit term, Sringara is one of the nine rasa, the aesthetic realization of emotions. It is generally interpreted as erotic love, romantic love, or beauty. The content of traditional Indian arts is focused on the romantic relationship between a man and a woman. The dominant emotion, which is thus generated in the text or in the actors’ performance, is love and erotic emotion according to Indian aesthetics.

Similarly, Seldon Pallock writes, “Rasa arises from the conjunction of factors, reactions, and transitory emotions” (45). For the study of rasa, Fitzgerald’s novel can depict all of the emotions; nevertheless, it apparently demonstrates love emotion. But, Elizabeth Otten Delmonico believes that Indian writers has studied rasa and tried to know artistic and spiritual experience. It is a classical Sanskrit concept (520). In the same way, mentioning Bharata, the ancient Indian scholar, again the critic argues that a dramatist finds the “seeds of the theory of rasa” in the *Natya Sastra* and he “enraptures sensitive viewer” (521) through words, plots, gestures, songs, dance, and costumes. The critic remarks, “Rasa is a cumulative response to more or less nameable and conventional signifiers as these signifiers combine and build into a powerfully moving pattern” (522). When the scholars integrate actions, colors, objects, and character types and pattern these elements, they produce the emotional effect. Although the critics have commented, reviewed and critiqued the primary text from different viewpoints, there are some scopes left for the researchers to critically examine it from the perspective of the use of emotions. Thus, the article argues that out of nine emotions, love emotion is depicted in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

Manifestation of the Emotion of Love in Fitzgerald’s Novel

Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is basically a rags-to-riches story in which the novelist depicts Gatsby as a paragon of self-made man of success. He starts everything and becomes a millionaire. He achieves the success that everyone in America is seeking for at that time. Gatsby has a huge house, servants and many friends who attend his parties. But all his success and status assist in his decay. In analysis of emotions, Bharata Muni mentions the dramatic rasas such as the erotic, comic, tragic, heroic, violent, fearful, macabre and fantastic (Pollock 44). Nick Carraway is the narrator of the novel and introduces the reader with the characters and the settings of the story. Nick is from Minnesota and he moves to New York because of his interests over the bonds. He rents a small house in the West Egg district of Long Island, near a mysterious neighbor named Jay Gatsby. Given the concept of rasa as per the Indian aesthetics, Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* may manifest many emotions, but the dominant one is the emotion of love. However, other emotions equally are evident in this text. Such emotions are noticed in the lines: “There was the boom of a brass drum, and the voice of the orchestra leader rang out suddenly above the echolalia of the

garden” (Fitzgerald 52). At this point, the sights, sounds and musical perception create a sense of beauty and attraction. Somebody plays the piano at the request of Gatsby, the host of the largest party. Thus, the erotic emotion is manifested.

In the text the love emotions are suggested in the case of two characters— Daisy and Gatsby; *sringara* typically rendered as erotic love, romantic love, or beauty suggests the romantic relationship between lover and beloved. They are the representations of the individual and the divine. Gatsby aspires to rekindle his passion and romance with Daisy as he has accumulated great wealth. As the eminent sage Bharata in *Natya Shastra* suggests, “The rasas are manifested in “colors and the deities”. The erotic is the “blue-black” and Vishnu is the “presiding deity for the erotic”. He argues, “The comic may be described as an imitation of the erotic” (Pollock 46). While they are in their relation, Gatsby has to join the army until their relation grows strong and matured. In the words of Nick Caraway, a narrator driving to east egg to see his old friends— Tom and Daisy, the setting serves to evoke the emotion of love:

Their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red-and-white Georgian colonial mansion, overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran towards the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping sundials and brick walls and burning gardens.... (Fitzgerald 6)

The given passage manifests the essence and beauty of the colossal house as described by the narrator. *Sringāra* can best be expressed in a dramaturgy (*Bharatanatyam*). Alisha Ibkar rightly points out: “The fluttering eyelashes of the innocent maiden are just as contrived and just as important a part of the *sringara rasa*” (182). Literally, *solah sringar* signifies makeup or adornments. It is a ritual, passed down through ancient culture. The same is intended to decorate and give gifts of beauty on her. Figuratively, the attraction between lover and beloved is produced. So, this relationship between the individual and the divine parallels that of *Vishnu*, the presiding deity.

Gatsby’s gigantic Gothic mansion in West Egg renders the image of the erotic (*sringara*). Nick’s next-door neighbor is Gatsby, who is a mysterious man. And then, he throws extravagant parties every Saturday night. At this point, Bharata asserts, “Vishnu embodies himself in *sringara*, i.e. youth, love, and happiness” (Mukerjee 92). Here is the set of the mansion and the expensive parties hosted by the protagonist, which evokes the aesthetic beauty and attraction. Such an example of the emotion of

love can be observed in the description of the party through the words of Nick. Fitzgerald writes, "There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars" (26). Here, beauty and attraction echo through music, sights and movements of the guests in the party. Moreover, the base for the growth of the emotion of love is observed in the description of Gatsby's large garden: "... with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden" (Fitzgerald 26). Thus, the phrases "enormous garden", "hundred feet of canvas", and "colored lights" suggest the ideas of attraction and beauty.

Gatsby tells that he knows Daisy in Louisville and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are simply an attempt to impress Daisy. Quoting Freud, Sara Ahmed states, "The pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of suffering are to make love the center of everything" (125). Gatsby stares at Daisy with such undisguised passion. It is obvious that Gatsby is in love with her. Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection after an initially awkward reunion. They rekindle love, and begin an affair. Instances of this kind can be indicated in conversation between Gatsby and Daisy:

We haven't met for many years, said Daisy, her voice as matter-of-fact as it could ever be.

Five years next November. (Fitzgerald 56)

In their conversation, they are not intimate, but sound formal in tone. In contrast, Gatsby has intense desire to win her heart and Daisy faintly remembers the event while Gatsby is a "mystery" for those who attend his parties, he is even more, as Carraway notes, "an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words" (Will 128). Similarly, the use of colors indicates the growing love between the characters "...Gatsby, in a white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold-colored tie, hurried in" (Fitzgerald 54). At this point, shades or patterns of colors are arranged purposefully. Therefore, such words as "white, silver and gold" are the colors that prompt the emotion of love.

Educated at Yale, Nick has social connections in East Egg. It is a fashionable area of Long Island home to the established upper class. He is different from the other inhabitants of West Egg. He drives out to East Egg one evening for dinner with his cousin, Daisy, and her husband, Tom, an erstwhile classmate of Nick's at Yale. Tom has a lover, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the valley of ashes. Their romantic relationship is nothing but erotic love. Quoting Abhinavagupta, an Indian aesthetician, G. B. Mohan Thampi argues, "Rasa designates" a variety of meanings such as "flavor, relish, love, desire, and beauty" (75). Fitzgerald suggests these in the given lines, "Sitting on Tom's lap, Mrs Wilson called up several people on the telephone; then there were no cigarettes, and I went out to buy some at the drugstores on the corner. When I came back they had both disappeared..." (Fitzgerald 20). The relationship between Tom and Myrtle is not romanticized; rather she develops such a relation for money while Tom woos girls out of sexual jealousy. The expression "they had both disappeared" suggests the erotic emotions both in Tom and her mistress, Myrtle. In contrast, Tom keeps for the affair at a vulgar, gaudy party in the apartment. Myrtle begins to taunt Tom about Daisy. Tom breaks her nose in a small brawl although Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair. Indian scholar Thampi observes, "Our reactions to persons and objects can be described in terms of attractions, repulsions, or indifferences (76). Seen from this argument, Tom is deeply outraged by the thought that his wife could be unfaithful to him. Thus, jealousy as a part of the emotion of love is present in Tom's extra marital relation, although disgust can be depicted in their unmatched, fragile love relation.

Nick begins a romantic relationship with Jordan Baker, who is a beautiful, cynical young woman. It does not last long. He breaks off his relation. Nick's affairs with Barker can be observed in the given passage: "Her grey, sun-stained eyes stared ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires" (Fitzgerald 39). Their relations improve but do not last long. Such phrases as "slow-thinking", "interior rules" and "brakes on desires" suggest that he is a calculating figure and his love relation does not thrive extensively. When Gatsby dies, Nick arranges a small funeral. He ends his relationship with Jordan. And then, he moves back to the Midwest to escape the disgust. He feels unhappy for the rich but careless people and the emptiness and moral decay of life. In such a case, the event certainly arouses pity and

compassion on the readers, actors for the protagonist, who garners our sympathy at this moment.

Nick eventually receives an invitation to one of Gatsby's legendary parties. He encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself. He is a surprising young man who affects an English accent. He has a remarkable smile, and calls everyone 'old sport'. Here Richard Schechner describes:

There is no natya without rasa. Rasa is the cumulative result of *vibhava* [stimulus], *anubhava* [involuntary reaction], and *vyabhicari bhava* [voluntary reaction]. For example, the *sthayi bhava* [permanent emotions experienced inside] becomes a rasa along with the different *bhava* [emotions]. (29)

From the given passage, love emerges from the collection of stimulus and involuntary and voluntary reaction. Speaking of relation between Myrtle, and George, who have married for 12 years, they are not happy. She tries in vain to escape terrible reality and seeks comfort and romance in life. Her dreaming of luxury, comfort and wealth is nothing but a romanticized notion of the imaginary world. In light of this argument, Bhatta Nayaka opposes that an ordinary spectator cannot "identify himself with very extraordinary characters like Rama" but another Indian scholar Abhinava reacts that human soul "passes and carries impressions through high and low forms of life" (Arjunwadkar 96). Thus, the idea of happiness is the outcome of the play of emotions. The very term has its roots in the Upansadic concept of the Brahman. In this regard, Myrtle reiterates her marriage to her sister, "I married him because I thought he was a gentle man" (Fitzgerald 23). Thus, the notion of marrying a person indicates desire and happiness, which constitutes *sringara*. There is another instance of how much Wilson loves his wife and Wilson explains calmly, "I've got my wife locked in up there" (Fitzgerald 87). On the other hand, forcing someone to love reluctantly does not essentially mean the healthy relationship between the two persons. Hence, disgust rather than desire is depicted in the case of Wilson and his wife, Myrtle. The novel closes with Nick's remarks about the rich people. They are really immoral and hollow on the East Coast. For him, the American dream of happiness and individualism crumbles into quest for wealth just as Gatsby's dream of Daisy dissolves by money and dishonesty.

While looking at the romantic relationship between Gatsby and Daisy, the early relation of theirs contrasts with that of the latter, because he is an embodiment of romantic enthusiasm in their early dating before moving to the world war, but later Daisy and he are not comfortable and more romantic as before. At this time, Seldon Pallock writes, “Rasa arises from the conjunction of factors, reactions, and transitory emotions” (45). The emotion of love takes its root in the frequent courting, conversations and the environment. For instance, if an actor cum performer appears in the lonely wilderness on the theatrical stage and acts out like the beloved, the audience or spectator begin to receive similar experiences like that of an artist on the playhouse. Thus, emotion is expressed because of factors, reactions and temporary emotion, which are the stimulating elements for communicating emotions in the readers. Hence Fitzgerald argues, “Gatsby stood...gazed around with fascinated eyes. Daisy watched him and laughed her sweet exciting laugh...” (108). Thus, these activities suggest the increasing romantic relationship between them. One would notice that there is some kind of erotic emotion. Likewise, once Daisy approaches Gatsby and lands kisses on him. Erotic emotion is depicted in a conversation between these ladies:

DAISY: You know I love you.

JORDAN: You forget there's a lady present. (109)

In the extract, an act of love-making invites both performers and actors to share the identical emotions. In this respect, Schechner describes the ways of communicating the taste as acting (*abhinaya*) so every emotion implies a permanent emotion (31). Readers or spectators relish flavour or taste by way of performance or acting. Here, Gatsby's unfulfilled desire for Daisy unquestioningly reveals unconcealed emotions of beauty, love, and sexuality.

Conversely, Fitzgerald writes about Tom's blatant desire for his wife and Tom's clandestine move to protect her so Fitzgerald argues: “You've been seeing this man for five years? Not seeing, said Gatsby, No, we couldn't meet. But both of us loved each other all the time” (122). In this trajectory of intimate relations, Tom is cautiously maintaining his relations with her whereas Gatsby endeavors to win Daisy's love. The romantic relationship of Gatsby with Daisy is understood: “Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay” (Fitzgerald 76). Gatsby has wanted to woo Daisy once again long after they (old time lovers) split. Arguably, it is his intense love

that motivates him in pursuit of joy and dream as he makes continued efforts in this direction. Money can buy everything but ideal love. In summary, it manifests love emotion not in the performers but in spectators.

When Nick arranges the meeting between the old-time lovers, Gatsby shares his joys, showing Daisy colorful, expensive clothes that are extremely bright and shiny. For instance, Gatsby opens and whirls suits off the wardrobe and tries to assure her of wealth and affluence over the times. This reunion of the two characters in the text and revitalization and renewal of healthy, emotionalized relation depict love emotions. Fitzgerald writes, "Recovering himself in a minute he opened for two hulking patent cabinets which held his massed suits and dressing gowns and ties, and his shirts piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high" (Fitzgerald 88). Nick reports that Gatsby joyously exchanges happiness because these stuffs are the source of joy. Therefore, the text illustrates the vision of romance, love and attraction. It has expressions such as "hulking patent cabinets, massed suits and dressing gowns and ties, and his shirts piled like bricks in stacks" and things are decorative, attractive and ornamental. In this sense, Elizabeth Otten Delmonico observes, "Rasa is a cumulative response to more or less nameable and conventional signifiers as these signifiers combine and build into a powerfully moving pattern" (522). These patterned items produce emotions on the readers or actors. Accordingly, conventional signifiers create the meaningful responses in the form of rasa. As far as logic goes, colorful stuffs contribute to the making of emotions. So, following the discussion above, the text shares the elements of the emotion of love abundantly.

Conclusion

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is simply a novel about pursuit of love and the American dream. Use of rasa perspective in the western text has been experimented despite the fact that there are other eastern texts available abundantly. The emotion of love is the one of the emotions in the text the theory of rasa discusses and that is depicted in Fitzgerald's novel. Some emotions that are related to the rasas of *bivatsa* or *shanta* or *karuna* can be observed in this text; however the dominant emotion is love. Deaths of Myrtle, George and Gatsby evoke disgust emotion; absence in Gatsby's funeral and insensitiveness to human sufferings arouse compassion in the case of Gatsby. The emotion of love is evoked in the Tom and Myrtle romance and Daisy-

Gatsby love relation but George-Myrtle romance fails to appeal to the minds. The emotion of love is manifested in the relationship among the major characters. The love emotion is expressed in the description of extravagant parties hosted by the protagonist, in pursuit of his beloved, in his richly decorated garden. Aside from this, the varied shades of colors— yellow car and green light— evoke love in the text.

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