

Vibhatsa Rasa in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract

*This paper explores disgusting emotions as vibhatsa rasa in F. Scott Fitzgerald's literary masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* (1925) through rasa theory. In this novel, Fitzgerald depicts the real picture of 1920s American society and how Americans ran after materialism. They felt that the ultimate happiness was possible through material prosperity, which is almost the same today. They work hard, earn money, get a comfortable life, and live in prosperity but lack happiness. The waves of materialism in them disturb the minds and bodies of the Americans. They are eternally blind and demonstrate moral decency while chasing their dream. Therefore, this paper examines the different kinds of disgusting emotions present in American people by observing the attitudes and feelings of the characters and their behaviors in the novel. As a qualitative applied research, the paper draws on the principles of rasa, especially vibhatsa rasa to explore disgusting emotions in the text. Physical, moral, and psychological disgust evoke the feelings of vibhatsa rasa in the text. It begins with the rise of materialism and the popularity of the American Dream. In a real sense, the deaths of Myrtle, Gatsby, and George reflect physical disgust arousing visceral emotions. The moral and psychological disgust of the characters contributes a lot to the formation of vibhatsa rasa. The series of undesirable emotions destroy the thread of human relationships. Americans need to overcome the unpleasant feelings of depression, dissatisfaction, and self-pity to imagine a better future for mankind.*

Keywords: disgust, disgusting emotions, rasa, vibhatsa rasa, visceral

Background

F. Scott Fitzgerald reflects the true picture of 1920s America in the novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925). The story begins with Nick Carraway, narrator, memorizing his father's words. His father's words probably signal the complexity of modern life in New York City. Nick looks up the life of New Yorkers like a researcher. In reality, Nick dislikes how people live, love, make money, and kill each other in modern American society. He believes technological modernity, consumerist thought, and open society create an obscene world. In addition, the obscure, grey, and dismal picture of Valley of Ashes reflects the horrible image of landfill sites. Because of all this, the despair, dissatisfaction, and depression of Americans rise despite their material prosperity. This atmosphere contributes greatly to evoking disgusting emotions in the novel.

Rasa is the supreme emotion in a work of art and literature that influences our mind and body. Vibhatsa rasa appears in Fitzgerald's text while critiquing the American Dream against the backdrop of their material prosperity. The series of negative and unpleasant emotions circulate among Fitzgerald's character like an electric current. The undesirable emotions evoke feelings of disgust in Americans despite their material prosperity. Depression, dissatisfaction, and self-pity of the American flashes throughout the novel that evokes vibhatsa rasa in the reader.

Review of Literature

Fitzgerald's work has taken the attention of scholars worldwide ever since its publication. The whole world knows that he suffers from depression when his wife Zelda goes mad. Morris Dickstein claims that Fitzgerald has an experience of failure. "I worked hard as hell last winter," he later wrote, "but it was all trash and it nearly broke my heart as well as my iron constitution" (Dickstein 69). Fitzgerald's failure reaches its apex. Unlike Dickstein, Jerome Mandel argues Fitzgerald is "a writer of medieval romance" (542). Mandel finds the qualities of lords, kings, and knights in Gatsby's character. But, Fitzgerald admits with Laura Guthrie: "I don't know what it is in me or that comes to me when I start to write. I am half feminine—at least my mind is" (Kerr 406) Fitzgerald's declaration signals that his writing revolves around the gender of emotion. After all, popular writers like Edith Wharton and T. S. Eliot also admire Fitzgerald's popular work.

Early reviewers failed to recognize the intention of Fitzgerald's novel. H. L. Mencken writes that Fitzgerald's work was, "no more than a glorified anecdote" (qtd. in Kuhnle 219). Mencken's criticism looks a bit superficial because he underestimates Fitzgerald's association with Jay Gatsby and America. Unlike Mencken, T. S. Eliot comes up with a different understanding of Fitzgerald's work. He declares, "...the first step forward in American fiction since Henry James" (qtd. in Kuhnle 219). This is the evidence of Fitzgerald's progressive writing in comparison to his contemporaries. Giles Gun appreciates Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and calls it "the Imagination of Wonder" (172). Gun finds the quality of awe and astonishment in the novel. In this way, Fitzgerald and his artistic work draw positive and negative criticism from scholars.

Fitzgerald's novel is a representative work on the theme of the American Dream. Marius Bewley rightly claims that the novel "...offers some of the severest and closest criticism of the American dream that our literature affords" (223). Bewley's claim revolves around the deep interpretation of the phrase American

Dream. Similarly, William Rueckert reviewed this novel as a "...deep, dead-end center of the American mind" (326). Rueckert reflects on how Americans moved towards nothingness in the twenties. In contrast, Kenneth Eble argues that "Gatsby had literary qualities hospitable to exegesis; its structure and theme and style were well suited to the passion for analysis which has dominated literary study since World War II" (34). Eble focuses on Fitzgerald's literary qualities along with its structure, theme, and style. In reality, scholars still explore new ideas in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* even after nine decades after its publication. This research study, therefore, explores disgusting emotions in Fitzgerald's work through the concept of rasa theory to fill the gap in the study.

Fitzgerald depicts the horrible picture of America during the 1920s in this novel. Nick, the narrator, observes the life of the New Yorkers. He dislikes how people live, love, earn money, and kill each other in a modern open society. The shadow of this complexity has become the part of the American life. Thus, this article attempts to answer the following research questions: What different types of disgust are present in the novel? How does the text depict the contexts of American priority to material prosperity? How does the novel generate the feeling of vibhatsa rasa among Americans? How is the American Dream a vibhatsa sentiment in *The Great Gatsby*?

This article explores the different of disgusting emotions and their implication in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative approach to research with interpretive design. The paper explores disgusting emotions in *The Great Gatsby*. The researcher has used the ideas of rasa from Bharat Muni, Abhinavgupta, and Mukerjee. Miller and Marchand's ideas are used to explore disgusting emotions. The novel has been considered as the source of primary concepts. In addition, the ideas and opinions of other scholars are used to justify the argument of the paper.

The Rasa Theory

Rasa [Emotion], a Sanskrit word, means juice in English. But it means emotions that dwell in our mind and body while interpreting arts and literature. The credit for giving ideas of rasa goes to the Indian sage Bharata Muni who may have lived sometime between the 1st century BCE and the 3rd century CE. His ideas are derived from the stage of divine religious incidents. Bharata's *Natyasastra* [a Sanskrit manual of performance and performance theory] defines rasa as:

There is no natya without rasa. Rasa is the cumulative result of vibhava [stimulus], anubhava [involuntary reaction], and vyabhicari bhava [voluntary reaction]. For example, just as when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is experienced, or when the mixing of materials like molasses with other materials produce six kinds of taste, so also along with the different bhavas [emotions] the sthayi bhava [permanent emotions experienced “inside”] becomes a rasa. (qtd. in Schechner 29)

Bharata believes that rasa is the major quality of Natya [drama]. It appears in other forms like dance, cinema, music, and literature. Rasa is produced by the combination of stimulus, involuntary reaction, and voluntary reaction in drama just as the juice is relished from the mixture of different spices in the food. The sthayi bhava [permanent emotion] becomes rasa. In reality, it is an emotional experience in a work of art and literature.

Indian aesthetics solely depends upon rasa theory. The compact idea of rasa appears in the philosophical writings of Radhakamal Mukerjee. According to the *Natyasastra* (dramaturgy) of Bharata, “rasa (literally, flavor, relish) is the seed and fruit of the arts” (Mukerjee 91). Bharata regards Rasa as a supreme element in a work of art. Similarly, Abhinavagupta is an authentic philosopher who interprets rasa theory. He claims, “Rasa is the be-all and end-all of the creator poet, deriving from his vivid imagination” (qtd. in Pollock 165). Abhinavagupta regards rasa as the artistic product of the creator. There are nine rasas [emotions] in Indian aesthetics. They are shringara [love], hasya [joy], adbhuta [wonder], shanta [calmness], raudra [anger], veerya [courage], karuna [sadness], bhayanak [fear], and vibhatsa [disgust]. Deity Mahakala represents vibhatsa rasa [disgusting emotion] and the specific color is blue. Depression, dissatisfaction, and self-pity are other emotions that evoke disgusting emotions.

Repulsive things or events arouse disgusting emotions. William Ian Miller admits, “Disgust is a feeling about something and in response to something, not just raw unattached feeling...” (8). Disgust, according to Miller, is a natural reaction toward something. Disgusting emotions are undesirable in life. Peter Marchand regards anger, fear, sadness, and disgust as undesirable and disagreeable emotions (8). Undesirable and disagreeable emotions play a crucial role in breaking relationships instead of developing love and harmony in the society. The negative emotions have strong associations with modern people and its impact is clearly seen in the works of art and literature of 1920s.

Exploring Vibhatsa Rasa in The Great Gatsby

The exploration of a *rasa* in a work of art and literature begins with understanding emotions. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* contains both desirable and undesirable emotions. This study explores the disgusting emotions in the text to find how they evoke *vibhatsa rasa* in the mind and body of the reader. The succeeding pages examine the different kinds of disgust that ultimately contribute to the formation of *vibhatsa rasa* in the text.

Physical Disgust

Fitzgerald's setting of the novel in the Valley of Ashes and series of killings are the basic sources of physical disgust for the reader. Nick's intimacy with Tom offers him an opportunity to come across the desolate land called the Valley of Ashes at the very beginning of the novel. T. S. Eliot's portrayal of brown and foggy London is parallel to Fitzgerald's Valley of Ashes in an American setting. Valley of Ashes is the objective correlative of all the moral filth in urban society. "Disgust undoubtedly involves taste, but it also involves — not just by extension but at its core — smell, touch, even at times sight and hearing. Above all, it is a moral and social sentiment" (Miller 2). Disgusting emotions are very powerful to energize human sense organs, contends Miller. Sometimes, they are related to the faculty of moral judgment. Fitzgerald states, ". . . This is a valley of ashes — a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (29). The phrases "grotesque gardens", "smoke", "ash-grey men", "powdery air", "dimly", "crumbling", etc. are enough to instigate disgusting emotions. Anyone who stands in front of a Valley of Ashes feels pollution. In essence, the ugliness of the valley represents the lifestyle of Americans.

The replica of Valley of Ashes appears in the life of the inhabitants and their businesses. The inhabitants of the valley reflect it through their emotions and physical appearance. For a sage Anandavardhana, "...emotion in literature can only be communicated by implicature- or to use Ananda's other technical term, can only be "manifested" —via the combined activity of aesthetic elements as each generates its own meaning" (qtd. in Pollock 79). Even a sage prefers an indirect way of transferring emotion. Fitzgerald suggests the ugliness of the inhabitants through their physical appearance and gestures. Nick notices George Wilson as a faintly handsome, anemic, and spiritless man. His light blue eyes are longing for a bright future in a gloomy atmosphere. Similarly, Nick sees Myrtle in a dark blue dress. George's light blue eyes and Myrtle's dark blue dress evoke disgusting emotions in that setting. Similarly, the description of Wilson's garage is equally dreadful. "The

interior was unprosperous and bare; the only car visible was the dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner... When he saw us a damp gleam of hope sprang into his light blue eyes” (Fitzgerald 30). Wilson's working condition reminds us of what we call hell- an imaginary place of disgust. Wilson's light blue eyes are in search of hope in a gloomy atmosphere. Fitzgerald uses the phrases “unprosperous”, “bare”, “dust-covered”, “dim”, etc. to signal undesirable emotions. Americans survive in the hellish environment while running after material prosperity.

Similarly, Gatsby's wild party reflects the disgust of modern American society. The most interesting thing about his party is that neither the host nor the guest knows each other. Vulgarity equals the party and moral ugliness in the party attendees. Gatsby's narcissistic personality defines the American Dream. Roger L. Pearson identifies Gatsby as “...a self-deluded fraud living in a world of shams” (640). According to Pearson, Gatsby is controversial due to his mysterious identity. His hypocrisy is reflected in the time he throws a lavish party to win admiration and sympathy of Daisy. Fitzgerald states, “And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before (26). The depiction of Gatsby's garden is an absolute disgrace which evokes a sense of physical disgust. This obscenity threatens human civilization in America. In reality, what happens at the party is undesirable but unavoidable for Americans due to their material sickness. This is where the source of human suffering exists.

Likewise, the rumor that spreads at Gatsby's parties reflects the dark side of the American dream. It begins with Gatsby killing a man and ends with his bootlegging. The gossip at the party indicates his criminal background. Barbara Will admits Gatsby's character as “...a force of corruption: a criminal, a bootlegger, and an adulterer” (126). Gatsby's connection with the underworld signals what Americans do to fulfill their dream. Their involvement in offensive activity produces disgusting results. Sara Ahmed argues that anything that comes in contact with disgusting things becomes disgusting (87). According to Ahmed, disgust functions as a contact zone. Gatsby's business is offensive due to his contact with the appalling world. “Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once...he was a German spy during the war” (Fitzgerald 47). The series of rumors that Nick listens to is disgusting. Gatsby attains material prosperity against the backdrop of a criminal background. In short, Gatsby's mysterious character evokes repulsive emotions.

The series of killings begins with Myrtle: the sensuous wife of George Wilson. She suffers from depression when George locks her in the room. Her depression rises when she sees Tom with Jordan and Nick. Myrtle mistakes Jordan

for Daisy at that time. As a result, she breaks the lock and runs out into the evening to meet Tom. She hits a car and her body lies on the ground in dust and blood. Ahmed asserts that disgust depends upon contact and "...the proximity of the object to the body is felt as offensive" (85). Distance determines the offensiveness of the object. Myrtle's case elucidates the very idea of Ahmed. According to Nick, "...her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick dark blood with the dust" (Fitzgerald 127-28). Myrtle's dead body looks offensive from the closeness and evokes a strong sense of physical disgust. Nothing can be more offensive than Myrtle kneeling in the dust and her blood falling onto it. Her death is the result of an ambitious dream. But, Gatsby dies when he attempts to hide Myrtle's real killer, Daisy. Tom informs George that the owner of the yellow car is Gatsby. He succeeds in white man's politics and takes revenge on Gatsby by giving misinformation to George. His attitude toward Gatsby is disgusting because Tom identifies Gatsby as a "Nobody from Nowhere" (Fitzgerald 121). Tom's cruel remark signals the white man's domination in the USA. Will identifies Gatsby as "...a figure marked by failure and shadowed by death..." (125). Failure becomes the real identity of Gatsby, according to Will. Gatsby fails to pursue the love of Daisy but sacrifices his whole life for his dream. His dream comes to an end when George, an inhabitant of the Valley of Ashes, shoots him. Nick describes Gatsby's condition in the swimming pool as "...the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool... a thin red circle in the water" (Fitzgerald 103). This is how the chapter of a dreamer closes. The demise of the idol of the American Dream circulates a vibhatsa sentiment in the readers.

Like Gatsby's death, his funeral renders the tragedy of modern people who prioritize material prosperity. Neither the business partner nor party attendees participated in his funeral. The presence of a few people in the procession indicates how the fraternity has disappeared in contemporary American society. It is the result of running after nothingness. Will claims Gatsby's fortune as a package of ... his "unutterable visions" that lead to "unutterable depression", and ultimately "incoherent failure. . ." (128). Gatsby's fate is the result of his disillusionment that money can buy love and happiness. Neither has he got Daisy's love nor happiness in life. Nick explains that Gatsby's funeral procession looks like a fantasy. "About five o'clock our procession of three cars reached the cemetery and stopped in a thick drizzle beside the gate. . ." (Fitzgerald 160). The environment of the cemetery is gloomy. They are experiencing pouring rain. Most guests who enjoy Gatsby's cordiality fail to attend his funeral. What can be more heartrending than Gatsby's funeral? Nick, the narrator, feels something strange that he does not want to happen at that moment.

Moral Disgust

Fitzgerald's novel begins with a sense of moral disgust growing during 1920s in America. Nick's first meeting with Daisy, Tom, and Jordan Baker exhibits the way of the American lifestyle and romance. This is where the kernel of disgust lies. Baker informs Nick about Tom's infidelity against the backdrop of a romantic atmosphere. Tom's unfaithful love affair with Myrtle Wilson, according to Nick, reflects his moral decency. Bhatta Lollata, argues that "Rasa in the primary sense of the term exists in the character..." (qtd. in Pollock 68). Our character evokes different rasas in the mind of the audience. Just as Lollata argues, Jordan's personality arouses self-pity through her unpleasant story. Nick notices a "... pleasing contemptuous expression. . ." (Fitzgerald 26) on her face at that time. The oxymoronic expression certainly evokes distress in readers and it is the by-product of the American dream which prevails in contemporary American society. This is how Nick comes in contact with the morally degraded people of New York City. The actions and behavior of Tom, Daisy, and Myrtle evoke a sense of moral disgust.

In addition, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg is another set of objective correlative of modern man's life in the city. They are eternally blind to all the disgust around them. But, Abhinavgupta rightly proclaims that a human being "... is keen for some acquisition but then is overcome with repugnance if the object is unsuitable..." (qtd. in Pollock 179). Human desire for achievement is an instinct according to Abhinavgupta but they feel disgusted when the object is inappropriate to them. Nick's perception of urban life turns out to be repulsive when he comes across the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. "The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose" (Fitzgerald 29). The blue and gigantic eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, again, arouse ugly emotions. Americans' inability to realize this horror is the primary cause of their suffering and moral degradation.

Tom and Myrtle's duality reflects modern people's lack of moral decency. Tom is the husband at East Egg and lover of Myrtle outside the home. Myrtle is a wife at Wilson's garage and mistress at the New York apartment. Fitzgerald's representation of modern American society is disgusting; it is proved by the way people love, lie, and betray in the novel. Tom's New York apartment is a fine example of modern vulgarity. The conversation that takes place between Tom and Myrtle in the apartment reveals how modern people behave when their dream is shaken. In disgust reactions, 'words' are also cast out or vomited (Ahmed 94). The choice of words and expressions comes out as a weapon. The way Myrtle Wilson debates with Tom shows her dissatisfaction. "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy! shouted Mrs.

Wilson. I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai—" (Fitzgerald 25). Myrtle's reaction displays her visceral emotions. Later, Tom breaks Myrtle's nose as a spontaneous reaction. The visceral bleeding evokes disgust. What can be more disgusting than this episode? Tom and Myrtle reflect the erosion of social values and ethical standards.

Psychological Disgust

Psychological disgust reveals the characters' deep emotional and moral state of mind. Fitzgerald's characters delve into the inner conflict and self-loathing experience. For instance, Gatsby's meeting with Daisy reflects his profound dissatisfaction with life. Nick arranges the meeting at Gatsby's request. Though they are meeting after five years, his reaction displays a confusing state of mind. Lollata argues that "Rasa arises from the conjunction of factors, reactions, and transitory emotions" (qtd. in Pollock 68). The combination of factors, reactions, and transitory emotions produces a rasa. Gatsby's meeting with Daisy evokes disgusting emotions when we analyze his mind. First, he looks with "tense and unhappy eyes" when Nick and Daisy are talking . . . Then, he concludes that the meeting is "a terrible, terrible mistake" (Fitzgerald 84). These two instances foreshadow the despair of Gatsby at the heart of the novel. Besides Gatsby, Daisy's emptiness and Tom's affair with Myrtle elucidates the psychological disgust of the elite.

At last, Nick notices the obscene word while revisiting Gatsby's house after his death. His moral judgment represents the exact sentiment of Americans. Ishmael describes the worst form of panic or terror as an "object terrible in itself" (qtd. in Elmore 441). Some objects are horrible to look at. Nick contends, ". . . On the white steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight, and I erased it, drawing my shoe raspily along the stone. Then I wandered down to the beach and sprawled out on the sand" (Fitzgerald 165). The obscene word that Nick sees is mysterious. Just like that word, the American dream is mysterious. Nick's attempt to erase the word is a temporary solution to the permanent concern of the world. Or it is the immediate reaction of the disturbed mind. They are already bound by the dark clouds of depression, dissatisfaction, and self-pity while longing for material prosperity.

Conclusion

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* manifests disgusting emotions critiquing the American Dream against the backdrop of the material prosperity of the 1920s. Material prosperity has become the real dream of Americans after World War I. They are ready to sacrifice anything regardless of culture, history, and tradition to pursue their dream. Crime, bootlegging, and infidelity have become part of the American

lifestyle. This is why disgust becomes the price of material prosperity and the American Dream. The understanding of disgusting emotions in Fitzgerald's text is a profound experience of vibhatsa rasa for a reader. The depression, dissatisfaction, and self-pity of the Americans generate the feelings of vibhatsa rasa in their mind. Physical, moral, and psychological disgust reverberates in the actions and behavior of Fitzgerald's character. For instance, the series of death episodes in the novel evokes physical disgust in the reader. Tom and Myrtle's infidelity exposes the kind of moral disgust that exist in American society. Similarly, Tom's cruelty, Daisy's emptiness, and Gatsby's dream elucidates the psychology of Fitzgerald's character. They need to overcome the feelings of depression, dissatisfaction, and self-pity for an ideal life. The researcher wants to recommend new researchers to do further research on desirable emotions to secure the future of young generations in America.

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