

## Lecture Series on Comparative Aesthetics

### Lecture No. 1

#### **The Rhetoric of Allegory: a Comparative Study of three Plays**

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### **Abstract**

Allegory, “Speaking otherwise than one seems to speak”, employs personification in order to expound theological or political doctrines couched in narratives. It is thus a figure of speech and a sub-genre simultaneously. In terms of Indian poetics it may be called *drshtanta*, *pratika* or *upadesakatha* comprehending fabulations like *Panchatantra* and plays like *Prabodhachandrodaya*. This paper compares the literary devices employed by three plays, widely separated in time and place: *Everyman* (16<sup>th</sup> century England), *Prabodhachandrodaya* (by Krishna Mishra, Sanskrit, 11<sup>th</sup> century India) and *Manonmaniyam* (Tamil play written by Sundaram Pillai, 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the then Travancore state, now part of Kerala). All the three are didactic plays intended more for closet reading than for staging publicly. All of them raise profound philosophical-moral questions by presenting characters who represent abstract moral qualities and schools of philosophy. The themes and structure of the plays are analysed from the perspective of traditional and modern dramaturgical concepts. The significance of the yogic term “unmani” in *Manonmaniyam* is brought out to demonstrate the play’s indebtedness to the Sanskrit allegorical play entitled *Bhavana-Purushottama*.

## Lecture Hand-out

### **Everyman**

(English)

*Everyman* (15<sup>th</sup> century), the most popular of the English mediaeval morality plays, can be studied along with *Prabodhachandrodaya* (11<sup>th</sup> century) and *Manonmaniyam* (19<sup>th</sup> century) because all of them employ allegorical framework in order to edify the reader about certain fundamental values that the humankind is supposed to adhere to. The mediaeval English morality play *Everyman* was published in 1495. Dismayed that mankind lives a life of pleasure and sin, God calls his messenger Death and commands him to summon Everyman to account for his life. When his offer of bribery and prayer for postponement of the day of reckoning are rejected by Death, Everyman goes to his best friend Fellowship to accompany him to God's presence. Fellowship would gladly accompany him to eat and drink and wench, even to help him murder someone but would not go with him to the other world. Disappointed by the blunt refusal by the fair-weather friend, Everyman now turns to his Kindred and Cousin. Cousin has a cramp in his toe and Kindred offers the company of his cheerful and lusty maid. Wealth (Goods) which Everyman had passionately loved all his life declines his plea. Good Deeds is willing to go with him, but she lies on the ground bound by his sins. Her sister Knowledge appears and assures him: "Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide / In thy most need to go by the side." Knowledge leads Everyman to Confession who prescribes severe penance which would redeem him from his vices. When Everyman scourges himself, Good Deeds rises from the ground and is ready to go with him. Everyman puts on the garment of contrition and calls his friends, Beauty, Strength, Discretion and the Five Wits. They encourage him to go to receive the last sacraments; but when Everyman invites them to creep into the cave (grave) they hurriedly leave him to his fate. But Good Deeds does not desert him. Everyman sinks with her into his grave. Knowledge can hear the angels singing. They carry his soul to the heaven. Then Doctor reiterates the moral that nothing in the world can save man except the good deeds he performs while alive and if his accounts are not clear God would curse him to perdition and thereby to burn in the everlasting hell fire. And those whose accounts are clear would be taken to heaven to be crowned.

## Reference

A.C.Cawley (ed.), *Everyman and Mediaeval Miracle Plays*, J. M. Dent (London 1993), pp 197-225

## **Prabodhachandrodaya**

(Sanskrit)

*Prabodhachandrodaya* by Krishna Mishra is technically not a *nataka* but a *prakarana* because while the former is a dramatization of known legends (*khyatavrittam*), the latter is entirely a product of the dramatist's imagination (*kavikalpitam*). Krishna Mishra, an 11<sup>th</sup> century *advaitin*, is said to have written this didactic play to enlighten a disciple of his who found his master's metaphysics too abstruse. "The Rise of the Moon of Spiritual Wisdom" is one of the foremost allegorical plays in Sanskrit. Purusha, the Self of Man, is wedded to Maya. Her son is Manas who is married to Pravriti (Action) and Nivriti (Detachment) whose sons are called Moha (Delusion) and Viveka (Discrimination) respectively. They together with their followers are locked in combat. Moha orders Dambha, son of Ahamkara (Ego) to go to Varanasi and harass Sama (Restraint of Mind) and Dama (Restraint of Senses). Moha also wants to destroy Vishnubhakti and Santi, daughter of Sraddha (Faith). Santi meets some heretics, the Jains, the Baudhas and the Kapalikas. Viveka goes to Banaras to fight Moha. In the battle all the anti-vedic heretics are destroyed. Vishnubhakti sends Saraswati to enlighten Manas who prefers Nivriti to Pravriti. When Manas becomes peaceful Viveka and Upanishad convince Purusha that he is one with Brahman. He thus realizes the truth about his self and becomes enlightened. The plot of the play is convoluted and the characters lack individuation. However, considering the vapidness of similar plays in Sanskrit, this one achieves its aim of presenting a philosophical doctrine in terms of personified representations that do not completely lack dramatic vitality. The drama is particularly interesting because of the way it aspires to embody the *santa rasa* which did not find favour with most rhetoricians of the time.

## **Manonmaniyam**

(Tamil)

Originally published in 1891 the text of the play has been reprinted by the Manonmaniyam Sundaranar University Press as its inaugural publication. P.Sundaram Pillai (1855-1897) who was a professor of Philosophy at the Maharaja's College in Trivandrum, admitted that his play was not written for the stage but for reading and indicated that the characters and situations had allegorical import.

The action begins when good king Jivaka, ruler of Madurai, is persuaded by his evil minister Kudilan to shift his capital to Tirunelveli where a fortress was built by the latter in pursuit of his selfish plans. The guru of the royal household Sundara Maharshi builds a secret tunnel in Tirunelveli leading up to the Chera kingdom in order to protect Jivaka from the evil machinations of Kudilan. One night Jivaka's young daughter sees the Chera King Purushottaman in a dream and predictably falls in love with him. Purushottaman, presumably by telepathy, also meets Manonmani in a dream and promptly falls in love with her. Jivaka decides to marry his daughter to the Chera King. But the minister Kudilan manages to send his son Paladevan to invite the Chera King. Paladevan recasts the marriage proposal to a declaration of war. In the meantime Kudilan succeeds in persuading Jivaka to arrange for the marriage between Manonmani with his own son Paladevan. When Kudilan comes to know of the tunnel he invites the Chera King to kill his own master. But Purushottaman arrests him and arrives at the palace where Manonmani recognizes her dream-lover and garlands him.

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