

Exploring the Marvellous Sentiment: An analysis of Vivek Shanbhag's Ghachar Ghochar

Deepika ¹, Dr. Kavita ²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

Abstract

Ghachar Ghochar is a psychological novel written in 2015 by the Kannada author Vivek Shanbhag and translated into English by Srinath Perur. Widely regarded as one of the finest contemporary Indian novels, it presents an intense family drama suffused with emotions such as love, jealousy, arrogance, pride, and sorrow. Consequently, the novel fulfils the reader's aesthetic expectations by evoking a wide spectrum of emotions and aesthetic delight. Although the narrative is rich in multiple rasas, such as Śṛṅgāra, Hāsyā, and Kāruṇa, the Adbhuta rasa (the Marvellous Sentiment) predominates. The present paper examines the Marvellous Sentiment in Ghachar Ghochar and analyses how the novel remains faithful to Bharata Muni's classical Rasa Siddhānta in evoking a sense of wonder and astonishment in its readers.

Keywords: Rasa theory, marvellous sentiment, Ghachar Ghochar

Introduction

The Marvellous Sentiment (Adbhuta Rasa)

Bharata Muni, in his seminal treatise Nāṭyaśāstra, asserts that rasa constitutes the very essence of literary and dramatic art. He identifies eight primary rasas, among which Adbhuta (the Marvellous Sentiment) occupies a significant position. Adbhuta rasa arises from the dominant emotional state (sthāyibhāva) of astonishment (vismaya). This sentiment is generated through determinants (vibhāvas) such as encounters with the unusual, the fulfilment of long-cherished desires, magnificent places, supernatural events, or magical phenomena. Its physical manifestations (anubhāvas) include wide-open eyes, a fixed gaze, horripilation, tears of joy, perspiration, utterances of admiration, and expressions of delight. The transient states (vyabhicāribhāvas) associated with Adbhuta rasa include weeping, paralysis, agitation, choking of the voice, haste, inertia, and similar responses.

Bharata further observes that the Marvellous Sentiment manifests in two principal forms: alaukika (celestial or otherworldly) and ānandajanya (arising from joy or pleasure). While the former is evoked through visions of divine or heavenly beings, the latter originates from rare, unexpected, or extraordinary experiences of happiness.

Viśvanātha Kavirāja, the fifteenth-century Sanskrit aesthete, explains that the profound amazement experienced by the heart and mind when confronted with something beyond the mundane constitutes vismaya. Classical Sanskrit drama, it is often observed, culminates in Adbhuta rasa (Praveer 78). This sentiment may be evoked through plot construction and narrative design, or, in modern artistic forms, through techniques such as evocative music, editing, and grand visual settings. Contemporary science-fiction cinema, such as Jurassic Park, The Avengers, and Harry Potter, relies heavily on technology to create such experiences of wonder. In the literary domain, Shanbhag's Ghachar Ghochar stands out as a compelling example of the Marvellous Sentiment articulated through narrative means.

Ghachar Ghochar: An Overview

Vivek Shanbhag's Ghachar Ghochar offers a penetrating exploration of family relationships and social transformation

in contemporary India. Parul Sehgal aptly describes it as a "spiny, scary story of moral decline" that charts a family's unsettling journey from extreme poverty to sudden and unprecedented wealth. As the narrative unfolds, it exposes the moral and emotional corrosion that accompanies material success. The novel abounds in emotional registers such as love, jealousy, arrogance, pride, guilt, and sorrow, and is infused with several rasas, notably Kāruṇa, Śṛṅgāra, Hāsyā, and Adbhuta. Together, these sentiments contribute to the novel's rich aesthetic texture and enduring impact on the reader.

Manifestations of the Marvellous Sentiment in Ghachar Ghochar

In Ghachar Ghochar, Adbhuta rasa is evoked through several interrelated narrative elements: the unconventional and enigmatic title, the mysterious figure of the waiter Vincent, and the distinctive setting of the Coffee House. In addition, the novel juxtaposes memories of extreme poverty with the astonishment induced by sudden wealth. Ordinary familial relationships are thus rendered extraordinary, enabling both the narrator and the sensitive reader (*sahridaya*) to experience a sustained sense of wonder.

Vincent: The Enigmatic Waiter

The character of Vincent, the waiter at the Coffee House, plays a pivotal role in evoking the Marvellous Sentiment. His presence consistently surprises both the narrator and the reader, generating an atmosphere of mystery and the uncanny. Vincent's unusual behaviour, intuitive understanding of the regular customers, and minimal yet pointed speech contribute to his enigmatic aura.

The narrator observes that Vincent "can take us all in with a single glance" and seems to know the regular patrons "better than they know themselves" (Shanbhag 1). Descriptions such as "great deliberation," "wings," and actions performed "suspiciously quickly" suggest an almost supernatural alertness and speed. Vincent unflinchingly serves the precise drink a customer desires, as though he can read minds, thereby astonishing the narrator.

Despite speaking very little, Vincent invariably articulates exactly what the narrator needs to hear. His words appear to carry “sublime meanings,” prompting the narrator to imagine him as a saint with “lakhs of people falling at his feet” (2). At times, Vincent is even invested with divine attributes: “Who’s to say the gods cannot take the form of a restaurant waiter when they choose to visit us?” (3). The narrator repeatedly feels compelled to confide in this “all-knowing man” and to seek his counsel, explicitly likening him to Lord Krishna, with the tuft of his turban recalling the deity’s peacock feather.

In moments of agitation, the narrator openly implores, “What should I do, Vincent?” (1). Remarkably, Vincent’s seemingly ordinary responses acquire extraordinary significance. The narrator waits for hours in anticipation of a word or gesture from him and even acts upon his advice, as seen in his decision to end his relationship with Chitra. Vincent thus emerges as a symbol of mysterious and transformative forces, embodying *Adbhuta rasa* through his saintly demeanour, inscrutable wisdom, and profound psychological influence.

The Coffee House as a Site of Wonder

The Coffee House itself constitutes another important locus of the Marvellous Sentiment. The narrator regards Vincent’s words as “pearls of wisdom” and describes his time spent there as “the most comforting part of my day” (3). The building, nearly a hundred years old, is portrayed as “airy, spacious, high-ceilinged” (1), fulfilling Bharata Muni’s criteria for evoking *Adbhuta rasa* through magnificent settings. Its architecture and photographs evoke nostalgia and transport the reader to an earlier, more graceful era of the city.

For the narrator, visiting the Coffee House becomes a daily ritual. His wife, Anita, likens it to a temple, with Vincent as the presiding deity. The narrator admits, “Somehow, my unvoiced appeals seem to be heard when I’m in the Coffee House” (3). At times, the anticipation of visiting the Coffee House and encountering Vincent is so intense that it keeps him awake at night. Even in the absence of domestic conflict, he invents excuses to visit, confessing, “I have no real reason to come to the coffee house” (3).

Within this setting, Shanbhag creates a microcosm of society that evokes wonder through the interactions of diverse characters. The Coffee House becomes a space where ordinary human exchanges acquire extraordinary resonance. Through vivid description, symbolism, and subtle narrative shifts, the author amplifies the experience of *Adbhuta Rasa*, enabling readers to perceive the marvellous dimensions embedded in everyday life.

The Unconventional Title and the Aesthetics of Wonder

The title *Ghachar Ghochar* itself evokes a sense of wonder. A colloquial Kannada expression meaning “tangled up beyond repair,” it signifies disorder, entanglement, and moral confusion. As an onomatopoeic and seemingly nonsensical phrase, the title immediately intrigues the reader and establishes the thematic foundation of the novel.

The title encapsulates not only material chaos but also the emotional and ethical dilemmas arising from sudden affluence. The family’s transition from simplicity to wealth induces astonishment and bewilderment, as relationships once governed by necessity become ensnared in greed, fear, and complicity. This movement from the ordinary to the

extraordinary aligns closely with the essence of *Adbhuta rasa*, which thrives on unexpected transformations and rare experiences.

Episodic Structure and Thematic Wonder

The novel’s episodic structure further contributes to the evocation of the Marvellous Sentiment. Individual episodes, whether recalling extreme poverty or depicting excesses born of wealth, generate awe in both characters and readers. On the one hand, memories of deprivation evoke astonishment at human endurance; on the other, the family’s disturbing moral decline in the wake of prosperity provokes a different, more unsettling form of wonder.

As the reader navigates these episodes, a sustained sense of astonishment emerges from the intricate portrayal of familial relationships and social change. Shanbhag’s nuanced storytelling and psychological depth ensure that *Adbhuta rasa* operates not merely at the level of spectacle but as a profound aesthetic and ethical experience for the *sahrdaya*.

Conclusion

A reading of *Ghachar Ghochar* in the context of *Rasa* Theory reveals that Vivek Shanbhag successfully captures the essence of the Marvellous Sentiment. The novel evokes *Adbhuta rasa* through its distinctive title, the enigmatic figure of Vincent, the evocative setting of the Coffee House, and the astonishing consequences of sudden wealth. By juxtaposing the mundane with the extraordinary, Shanbhag foregrounds the complex emotional and moral landscapes shaped by affluence.

The novel thus exemplifies Bharata Muni’s conception of effective literature as that which is both aesthetically enriching and morally instructive. Through its sustained evocation of wonder and astonishment, *Ghachar Ghochar* not only delights the reader but also compels reflection on the transformative and often destructive power of wealth in human relationships.

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