

## The treatment of nature and love in Andrew Marvell and Cankam (Tamil) poets: a comparative study

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### Abstract

The beauty of nature has been sensuously described by Andrew Marvell in his poetry. His poems entitled 'The Garden' and 'Bermudas' explicate the beauty and wonder of nature vividly. Likewise, in the Cankam (Tamil) poetry such as Thirumukurattupadai, Kalitokai, Kuruntokai and Akananuru, one can find parallel description of nature. This is only a parallel study. Andrew Marvell has described the different moods and the feelings of the passionate lovers scrupulously. In Cankam poetry also one can find the innumerable moods and feelings of the lovers portrayed succinctly. Even though, the poets belong to different regions and cultures, their feelings seem to be the same.

**Keywords :** nature, Andrew Marvell, Cankam, syllogism, comparative literature.

Andrew Marvell is one of the very important metaphysical poets. His poems present a combination of feeling and intellectuality and a synthesis of thought and passion. Most of his poems reveal that he is a great poet of nature. Marvell is also a remarkable poet of love. In his love poems, metaphysical strain is clearly seen. Using arguments he presses towards a conclusion by seemingly logical steps. According to Annabel Patterson (1994), "Andrew Marvell was an incorruptible patriot, garden loving poet, metaphysical wit, Neoplatonic savant, the man of puritan conscience, the reasonable loyalist politician and the literary critic disguised as a lyric poet". Any scholar who reads Marvell's poetry could trace parallel ideas in the poems written by Cankam poets in Tamil language.

Andrew Marvell's early poems express a fondness for the charm of rural nature. He has a great love for garden, meadows and rivers. In the following lines the poet is addressing woodvines:

Bind me, ye woodvines, in your twines  
Curb me about, ye gadding vine  
And oh, so close your circle lace,

Similarly in a Tamil poem written by Karuvor Pouthiran, a mullai plant (a vine) has been admonished not to smile at the poor plight of the lover separated from the lady love (Kuruntokai 162) (Saravanamuthu, 2006).

In the poem 'The Garden', Marvell derives sensuous delight in describing the natural scenery. Ripe apples hang from the trees over the poet's head. The bunches of grapes hang so close to his lips that their juice enters his mouth. The nectarines and peaches reach his hands. Moreover, he stumbles on the melons which are found on the ground. He is so entangled among the flowers

that he almost falls on the grass. And here are the lines:

Ripe apples drop about my head  
The luscious clusters of the vine,  
Upon my mouth do crush their wine  
The nectarine, and curious peach.

Likewise in Thirumukurattupadai, Nakkirar, a Tamil poet describes, a natural scenery sensuously. The cataract makes akil and sandal pieces of wood fall down. It also makes honeycombs and jackfruits roll down. It makes monkeys and elephants tremble because of the chillness. Moreover, it uproots the banana trees and scatters coconuts in different directions (Mohan *et al.*, 2004).

In Kalitokai (a Tamil poetic collection), a sensuous description of nature has been depicted. It is raining heavily with intermittent lightning and thunder during a midnight. With the help of light produced by the lightning, the elephants enter the field and eat the plants. After hearing the footsteps of the elephants, the man living in the forest climbs up the top of the wooden platform and using a catapult pelts the stones in different directions. The stones scatter the flowers of the vengai tree. They also make the jackfruits fall down. Moreover, they penetrate the honeycomb and the mangoes also fall down. They also tear the banana leaves. Finally, the stones strike into the jack fruits (Kalitokai 41) (Viswanatha *et al.*, 2004).

In a poem written by Parinar in Akananuru (another Tamil poetic collection) nature has been portrayed vividly. A wild pig with sharp horns drank water in a pond. It also dug the ground and ate many tubers. A cataract which fell from the rock would end up in a pond. By the side of the pond there was a thick hedge. Above the hedge there was a tree with bunches of white flowers. These flowers used to shed pollen down on the pig. And in the end, the pig would graze the grains and have a sweet nap by the side of the hill (Akananuru 178).

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In Andrew Marvell's 'Bermudas' one can find sensuous description of nature. In the Brumudas Island, God has given eternal spring which lends beauty to everything. Many birds visit this place. To take care of the people living there plenty of bright oranges are found in the trees. They look so bright. They appear to be golden lamps hanging in the darkness of green orchards. There are pomegranates which look like jewels. One can find melons grow at its feet. A rare variety of pineapples are also found there. God has gifted the Island with cedar trees.

In the same way, in a Tamil poem, nature has been described beautifully. During the night, the rain lashed the hill region where pepper plants grew in plenty. A monkey plucked a jack fruit but it dropped it into the cataract. Hence the stream brought it to the place where people would drink water. Such a sensuous description is found in Kuruntokai (Kuruntokai 90).

Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' is one of the best metaphysical love poems in English literature. In the poem, 'To his coy Mistress' a lover addresses his beloved who refuses to grant him sexual favours because of her modesty. The beloved could not waste her time in search of rubies on the banks of the Indian river, the Ganges. The lover could not waste complaining about his unfulfilled love on the banks of the English river Humber. If they really had time, he would spend a hundred years in praising her eyes and gazing on her forehead; he would spend two hundred years in admiring each of her breasts; and he would spend thirty thousand years in praising the remaining parts of her body. But the lover tells that the time is passing at a very fast pace. Her beauty will no longer exist after a few years. All her nice sense of honour will turn into dust and all his desires to make love to her will turn to ashes. Therefore, the lover concludes that it will be proper for them to enjoy the pleasures of love when she is young and fresh.

In Akananuru (a Tamil poetic collection) the lover is asking his coy mistress to open the clothes in order to let fresh air fan her body. When he removed it himself, she looked like an unsheathed sword. She gave him a shy look hiding her secret parts with her long locks of hair (Akananuru 136) (Jeyabal *et al.*, 2004).

According to George Willamson (1968):

"To his Coy Mistress" is more than a Carpe Diem poem because it exhibits man's race with time, which can make coyness in a lady a crime, especially if it is artful".

In the above mentioned poem of Andrew Marvell, the lover speaks about inconstancy of beauty and youth and hence seeks the love of the beloved. Similarly, in Kalitokai a beloved reinforces the inconstancy of youth

by stating that the young age will fade away as water of the river dries up. She also says that life is like the passing wind and it is not eternal. Hence, the beloved wants to remain with the lover always. (Kalitokai 20)

Andrew Marvell uses syllogism in the poems "To his Coy Mistress" and "Young Love". In the poem "Young Love" the poet invites the little girl to love him. He gives reasons why the little girl should love him while she is still too young. The poet opines that her father will not have any suspicion about her love. He also states that the young ones of animals experience the feeling of love. Moreover, he argues that the girl may die prematurely. These are all false syllogisms (Kalitokai 20).

In the poem "To His Coy Mistress" the poet woos the beloved by stating the reason that beauty and youth are inconstant. A lover woos the beloved by stating the syllogism that a person drinks water just for his pleasure and not for the pleasure of water (Kalitokai 62).

Syllogism is used in another poem in Kalitokai. When a mother is worried about her daughter who fled with her lover, a wayfarer consoles her by using strange syllogism. The sandal wood which is grown in the hilly region will not be useful for the hills, but for the people who use it. The white pearls found in the deep ocean will not be useful for it, but for the people who wear them. Likewise, her daughter will not be useful for her (Kalitokai 9).

In the convention of 'Tear Poetry', one can come across many poems such as Crashaw's "The weeper", Donne's "A Valediction: of weeping" and Andrew Marvell's "Eyes and Tears". In the poem "Eyes and Tears", Andrew Marvell states that eyes look more beautiful when they are swollen as a result of weeping. Even the destructive lightning of the God Jove gets extinguished in his tears, when he feels pity. These are all exaggerated statements. The poet also expresses his desire to shed tears like rain drops, sometimes to shed thin tears, and other times copious tears. He also states that eyes are deceptive but the tears are the better judges of things. In a Tamil poem there is an exaggeration in the description of shedding tears by the ladylove. The lover has been travelling through the hot deserts. At that time, the beloved is inviting the dry white clouds to take enough water from her tear flood and become black clouds. Later, these black clouds are expected to go to the desert and pour rain drops wherever her lover walks. (Kalitokai 145).

Donne also uses exaggeration in his love poem. At the moment of parting the lover sheds tears. The beloved also sheds tears profusely. When the tears get mixed, the great flood, the deluge will be caused. This deluge will destroy both of them.

Till thy tears fixt with mine doe overflow  
This world by waters sent from thee,

My heaven dissolved so  
(A Valediction: of weeping)

According to Robert Wilcher (1985),

Eyes and Tears and Mourning both exploit the topic of weeping, which was widespread in European literature and which was equally suitable for erotic and religious purposes. In English, Donne had built a witty argument out of it in 'A Valediction: of weeping', beginning with the double conceit of Tears as coins and wombs bearing the image of the woman who causes them to flow. The images of tears as 'pendants' and 'honey' which suggest that weeping is a decorative and sweetly pleasurable activity, reinforce the earlier note of self centred indulgence.

Andrew Marvell has written a poem entitled "The Mower to the glowworms". It is in the form of an apostrophe. According to Leech (1979),

Apostrophe signifies an orator's interruption of his address to his audience, in order to address some third party, who may either be present or not. The contextual absurdity of addressing someone who is unable to hear or answer is more pronounced when the addressee is dead or not even human.

The poet describes the glow worms as living lamps. The light of the glowworms shows that Mower is at work cutting down the grass. The glowworms are also useful as they show the way to the strayed Mower who is going home in the night. In the light created by the glowworms, the Mower can find his way home. Mower is feeling frustrated because his ladylove Juliana has been indifferent towards him. Therefore, Mower has no comfort and in his case the glowworms are useless in showing him the way home-ward.

Similarly, in a Tamil poem (Kalitokai 147) Nallantuvanar depicts the sorrow of a lady who is in search of her parted husband. The poem is in the form of an apostrophe to the sun. She orders the sun to find out the whereabouts of her husband. She speaks as if it was the duty of the sun to trace her husband. Thus the great Sun is belittled by her. According to Julian Lovelock, "Like Shakespeare's famous sonnet 'My mistress eyes are nothing like the sunne'. Only more outrageously, Donne's poem reverses the tradition of hundreds of patriarchal and Elizabethan love poems in which the Sun is a touchstone of ecstatic tribute".

Sensuousness means gratification of the physical senses. Andrew Marvell and Tamil Cankam poets have the

unique gift of communicating their own sensuousness to others through concrete images and word pictures.

Andrew Crozier (1995) commends the poetic quality of Andrew Marvell as follows:

The special quality of Marvell's imagination, what we are unprepared for, is his mastery and distribution of kinesthetic effects, achieved by a frequent use of verbs, carefully chosen and contrasted. The word needed to describe this strenuous exercise of the imagination, I think, is speculative, including its almost forgotten sense of looking into things within the mind. Marvell does not affect to speak his mind or open it for inspection, but draws us into its workings.

The poetry of Andrew Marvell has the same ingredients as the poetry written by Cankam poets. Andrew Marvell and the Tamil poets have described nature sensuously. They have also delineated the different moods and feelings of the lovers vividly.

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