

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to analyze and interpret the element of spiritual transcendence in three Indian English novels – R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958), Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) and Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) – using the frameworks of *Rasa* theory. This theory holds that literature is essentially an emotive discourse and explores the interplay of emotions, their intensification and their experience (as an aesthetic emotion) by the reader or audience. The work presents this ancient Indian literary theory and then examines the narrative of the novels in the light of *śānta rasa* – which has strong spiritual connotations in Indian context – and attempts to show how other aesthetic emotions have the potential to lead to *śānta*.

The basic assumption of this work is that the *rasa* theory in general and *śānta rasa* in particular, still have deep relevance in the context of literary analysis of texts today, especially in our culture. In spite of more than a thousand years that separate the emotive theory of *rasa* and the contemporary works which have been chosen, there is still immense potential for application of these literary tools to current literary works. In fact, a survey of literature in the field shows a distinctive revival of interest in ancient Indian aesthetic theories as well as their application to diverse works including plays, poetry, fiction, music and painting. Coming to *śānta rasa*, it both involves and implies the possibility of a state of calm, contentment, resolution of conflict, stasis and balance that can be achieved in and communicated through a work of art.

The choice of the novels has been guided by some basic criteria. Firstly, they cover a wide range of emotions and styles in their wide canvases. Secondly, they belong to different periods of time covering a span of almost 50 years which is a comprehensive period for coverage in the context of Indian English novels. Thirdly, all these novels cover a wide range of emotions, move through conflicts, turbulences, traumas, but they also hold a distinctive element of spiritual quest, a desire to reach a stasis.

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