

Ambikapathi-Amaravathi and Romeo-Juliet: A Comparative Study

Prof. L. Lakshmanan & Dr. D. Nagarathinam

Abstract

“Ambikapathy and Amaravathy” is the most popular love story in Tamil Literature. The love blooms between a poet and the daughter of a king. The king subjects the lover to death. His sweet heart, Amaravathy, joins in his death. *Romeo and Juliet* is also a tragic love story from English Literature. **Romeo** and **Juliet** are two young and passionate lovers. Their love is opposed by their warring families. They secretly marry themselves. Their married life doesn't last long. Romeo is banished on a murder case. Juliet and the well-wisher of the lovers concoct a plan to reunite with Romeo and live peacefully in another country. The plan fails; the two lovers die pathetically. Both lovers' end is similar and heartrending.

Key words: Ambikapathy-Amaravathy, Romeo-Juliet, Comparison, youthful love and passion

Introduction

“Fatality plays the major role” and “Man proposes and God disposes”. These are commonly known sayings. Many groups assume that after all the human beings are puppets in the hands of fate. Whatever may be a well-conceived plan it could fail unexpectedly. This is what happens in the following stories - one in Tamil literature” **Ambikapathy and Amaravathy**^(2,6) and another in English Literature **Romeo-Juliet**^(1,3) by Shakespeare.

Here, we find two pairs of passionate lovers propose to a happy married life but they fail in their attempt and the ending is fatal and heartrending. The story of **Ambikapathy-Amaravathy**^(2,4-6) is well known to the Tamil speaking community and it has captured the imagination of the young lovers. **Romeo and Juliet**^(1,3) is an enduring tragic love story written by William Shakespeare about two young star-crossed lovers whose deaths ultimately unite their

feuding families. Human likes and dislikes, love and hate, and earnest desire to help the lovers play an important role in both the stories. That tragedy in life is possible even in best of circumstances and even against our longing for life is revealed in these stories.

The Story of Ambikapathy and Amaravathy

In the eleventh century, there was a rich king named **Kulothunga Cholan** in Tamilnadu. He had a beautiful daughter named **Amaravathy**. The king showered affection on her. The young princess enjoyed full freedom. To feed her aesthetic sense, the king arranged a tuition under the most admired poet **Kamban**. He was addressed using a title which meant the monarch of poets. Ambikapathy learned the art of writing poems as a student of Kamban. Once, the poet had to go on a tour for some time. He entrusted the teaching of poetry to his son Ambikapathy. He was equally good at teaching and writing poetry. During that period, the people hailed the poet as “*Kamban veetu kattu tharium kavi padum*”⁽⁵⁾ (Even the weaving machine of Kamban at his home could sing songs with the influence of the poet), so, there is no wonder his son was good at teaching of poetry. **Amaravathy** cheerfully underwent the learning under the young and handsome Ambikapathy. In due course, the young teacher and the student fell in love with one another and became united in love.

Consequences of the Love between the Teacher and the Student

When Kamban came back after his tour, he came to know his son’s passionate love for the princess-student Amaravathy. To make it worse, the news and rumour of the love affair reached the king’s royal poet Ottakoothan^(2,6) and ultimately the king. Ottakoothan wanted to punish the lover - Ambikapathy in a novel way.



Courtesy: www.rajtamil.com/2013/07/watch-ambikapathy-movie-online/

A Challenging Test

Ambikapathy was asked to compose 100 poems⁽²⁾ extempore extolling the virtues of Divine Bliss without bringing in mortal love. If he succeeds in this test he could marry the princess 'Amaravathy. If he fails, he would be beheaded.

Ambikapathy took the challenge and started singing the songs. Sitting behind the screen in the court, Amaravathy started counting the number of songs throwing a flower on a plate for each song. She began counting. She counted mistakenly the invocation song as a part of the 100 poems. The king's poet Ottakoothan also counted the poems very carefully.

A Hasty Appearance of Amaravathy

Amaravathy emerged hastily from the balcony. Ambikapathy believed that he had already finished singing one hundred songs. Quite unfortunately, at the sight of the dazzling beauty of Amaravathy, Ambikapathy sang one more song with the words and phrases about the beautiful feature of Amaravathy. The sadist royal poet Ottakoothan did not accept the calculation of Amaravathy including the invocation song. So, he declared that Ambikapathy failed to complete one hundred songs as per the norms and conditions of the test; only ninety nine poems excluding the invocation song he sang.

Ambikapathy was Beheaded

Awaiting the opportunity, the king declared the **death-penalty** on Ambikapathy. In a state of shock by the death-penalty to her beloved lover, Amaravathy fell on the dead body of Ambikapathy and died.

The Story of Romeo and Juliet



Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_and_Juliet_\(1968_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_and_Juliet_(1968_film))

Now, let's view the story of '**Romeo and Juliet** by William Shakespeare.

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“Everyone has their fate and the more people try to avoid it, the more trouble they get into.” This quotable quote from the play suits the theme of this story Romeo-Juliet.

An Archetypal Love Story

The tragic play of Romeo and Juliet was written by the world renowned playwright William Shakespeare who was born in 1564 and died in 1616. One of his most famous plays is *Romeo and Juliet*^(1,3). It is a heartrending tragedy. Through the incomparable intensity of his language, Shakespeare succeeded in his effort, writing a play that is universally accepted in western culture as the preeminent, archetypal love story. The prologue of this play gives us briefly about the story:

“Venue: In fair Verona.

“From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes,
A pair of ‘star-crossed’ lovers takes their life
Whose misadventur’d piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife?
The fearful passage of their mark’d love,
And the continuance of their parents’ rage,
Which but their children’s end naught could remove...”

Ill-fated Couple

The prologue refers to an ill-fated couple with its use of the word “**star-crossed**” which means, literally, against the stars. Stars were thought to control people’s destinies. The structure of the play itself is the fate from which Romeo and Juliet cannot escape.

As rightly remarked by the Prince of Verona, the two houses of ‘Montague’ and ‘Capulate’ behave like beasts. Their mutual ancient enmity ends in the death of their children.

‘...That quench of fire of their pernicious rage with purple fountains issuing from their veins, on pain of torture, from those bloody hands throw their distemper’d weapons to the ground.’...old Capulet and Montague once more, on pain of death, all men depart.’

Romeo

The hero of this play Romeo is a young man of sixteen. He is handsome, intelligent, and sensitive. He is not at all interested in violence. The only interest of him is love. He is intelligent, quick-witted, fond of verbal jousting (particularly about sex), loyal, and unafraid of danger. He is a romantic hero.

His calf love

Romeo was infatuated with a rich and beautiful lady, **Rosaline**, who never appeared in the play but only is referred to. He is found lovelorn as he was rejected in his puppy love. Romeo regrets about his calf love.

When his cousin-**Benvolio** advises him to forget the calf-love towards Rosaline, Being a rejected lover, Romeo hates the love and gives his opinion about the love:

‘Alas that love, whose view is muffled still
Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will!
‘O, heavy lightness! Serious vanity!...
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this’
...Love is a smoke rais’d with the fume of sighs;
Being purg’d, a fire sparkling in lover’s eyes;
Being vex’d, a sea nourish’d with loving tears’
What is it else?
Madness most discreet,
A choking gall and a preserving sweet. Romeo -Act.i.sce.i line
Love goes toward love as school boys from their books
But love from to love towards school with heavy looks.

How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!---Romeo Act.sce.line
Parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow
How much salt water thrown away in waste,
To season love, that of it doth not taste'

A Dramatic Change

At the first sight of Juliet, the memory of Rosaline faded away. Of course, Rosaline slips from Romeo's mind. The love, Juliet shares with Romeo, is far deeper, more authentic and unique than the clichéd puppy love Romeo felt for Rosaline. We find a profound and intense passion in his love with Juliet. He is driven by this love to sneak into the garden of his family's enemy, risking death simply to catch the glimpse of Juliet. At last he commits suicide upon the fake death of Juliet.

Juliet

Juliet is fairly fourteen standing between immaturity and maturity. She is the daughter of a rich Capulet-the enemy of Montague, the father of Romeo. She is obedient to her father, and dutiful. She is rather childish and she is not comfortable talking about sex when her nurse cracked a sexual joke in Act 1 sce. 3.

Capulet-the patriarch of Capulet family, father of Juliet, describes his daughter as 'My child is yet a stranger to the world'

'She is the hopeful lady of my earth.'

Romeo in the Feast of Capulet

Juliet's father arranges a feast in his house and invites all the lusty young men and levy of fresh female buds. The fun and the frolic go on. Wearing a mask Romeo participates in the feast. The first meeting with Juliet happens there.

Let's see the beauty of Juliet through the eyes of Romeo. He is sinking under heavy burden of love.

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“What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief
...” O, It is my love’
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
‘The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars’
As day light doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven,
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night
O, see how she leans her cheek upon her hand,
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!’
O, speak again, bright angel! For thou art as glorious to this night
Being o’er my head,
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wond’ring eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air’
Juliet reciprocates Romeo’s love:
‘...I gave thee mine before thou didst request it;
And yet I would it were to give again.
‘My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite’
‘Love goes toward love as school boys from their books,
But love from love towards school with heavy looks’
How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!

Romeo calls Juliet as 'Shrine.' The forcefulness of love is shown on romantic love with intense passion. In Romeo and Juliet, love is a violent, ecstatic, over powering force that supersedes all other values, loyalties and emotions⁽¹⁾.

Juliet's first meeting with Romeo propels her full-force toward adulthood. She is able to see and criticize Romeo's rash decisions and his tendency to romanticize things. She calls Romeo "the God of my idolatry", elevating Romeo to the level of God. (Act 2. sce.1.156)

Friar John, the well wisher of the lovers arranged their wedding secretly to eliminate the enmity of the warring Montague and Capulet.

Murder Follows Murder

In a street brawl, Mercutio, the close friend of Romeo, is killed by Tybalt, the enemy of Montague. To avenge the death of his friend, Romeo kills Tybalt, and the furious Prince of Verona banishes Romeo. The newly wedded Juliet is struck with grief.

A Secret Plan

Juliet visits Friar Lawrence, and together they concoct a plan to reunite her with Romeo. The Friar gives a potion that will make her seem dead for at least two days, during which time Romeo would come to meet her in the tomb and they could escape to live together out of Verona.

Juliet drinks the Friar's potion that night while her father is arranging to wed Juliet to Paris - the kin's man of Capulet. Her nurse finds Juliet dead in bed. The whole house decries Juliet suicide. By Friar's influence Juliet's body is placed in the family vault.

The Bad News Has the Fastest Wing

Unfortunately, Friar fails to send the news of the fake death of Juliet before Romeo receives the news about the death of Juliet. Friar's well-conceived and well-intentioned plans end with failure, the ill-fated tragedy of the play occurs. Here we find '**Fatality plays the major role**'. Heartbroken Romeo hurries back to the tomb with a bottle of real poison. He finds Juliet dead. Hastily he drinks the poison, gives Juliet a last kiss, and dies. In a few minutes Juliet wakes

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up and finds that Romeo is dead. She doesn't kill herself out of an intensity of love, just as Romeo did.

Juliet's suicide actually requires more nerve than Romeo's: While he swallows poison, she stabs herself through the heart with a dagger. She is heartbroken. Juliet's development from a wide-eyed girl into a self-assured, loyal and capable woman is one of Shakespeare's early triumphs of characterization. It also makes this play one of his most confident and rounded treatments of a female character. The precious jewels of Verona are lost. The two houses of Capulet and Montague and their ancient 'Grudges' are overwhelmed by the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. The family members of those two houses seem to be, as beasts; 'Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean'. The two 'foes' hatred strangulate the true love and kill the 'Ill-starred lovers Romeo and Juliet. 'The entire people of Verona, including the hard-hearted prince shed tears.

Then the enmity of the two houses vanishes.
'What ho! You men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage,
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground
...old Capulet and Montague,
"once more, on pain of death,
....all men depart"!!!

The pathetic end of the passionate lovers Ambikapathy and Amaravathy reminds us the similar tragic death of Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare who wrote the play in the sixteenth century. The first one is a story told among the Tamils for centuries.

Comparison

In the story of Ambikapathy and Amaravathy, the lovers are rash and violent in love. The impatient Amaravathy erred in the arithmetic calculation and emerged from the balcony. At the

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sight of the dazzling beauty of Amaravathy, Ambikapathy is misled that he has finished the target of one hundred songs. He begins to sing one more song charged with emotions describing the physical features of his sweet-heart-Amaravathy. Both lovers' hasty decisions become fatal.

Similarly, in the story of Romeo and Juliet, Romeo drinks poison before Juliet wakes up from the tomb. After the death of Romeo, Juliet commits suicide in deep passionate love for Romeo. The hasty decision of Romeo results in the death of the lovers.

If Amaravathy had appeared after the declaration of the king' judgement, Ambikapathy would not have sung the song about the sensual pleasures. The king would not have passed the death-penalty.

Similarly, if Romeo had delayed for a few minutes, he could have escaped from Verona with Juliet and lived happily, the story would not be a tragedy.

Conclusion

The following quotes may be considered. Shakespeare seems to highlight the role of Fate in his play:

“Everyone has their fate and the more people try to avoid it, the more trouble they get into.”

“These violent delights have violent ends, and in their triumph Die; like fire and powder, which, as they kiss consume”---Romeo

‘For never was there a tale of more woe, than of Juliet and her Romeo’

On the other hand, there is not much reference to fate in the traditional story of Amaravathy and Ambigapathy. Interestingly the story is narrated more as a secular story that focuses on young love.

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Prof. L. Lakshmanan
laxmanmegalai@gmail.com



Dr. D. Nagarathinam
Dnagarathinam1960@gmail.com

Theni Kammavar Sangam College of Technology
Veerapandi (Via.)
Theni – 625 534
Tamilnadu
India

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