



Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer: Classicism, Universal Love, and the Transcendental Spirit in Modern Malayalam Poetry

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Citation: Binoy Varakil (2018). Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer: Classicism, Universal Love, and the Transcendental Spirit in Modern Malayalam Poetry, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 24(2) 436-437
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v24i2.11027

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer (1877–1949), one of the celebrated triumvirate of early modern Malayalam poets, is best known for his classicist diction, historical scholarship, and synthesis of devotion and humanism. This paper reassesses Ulloor's poetry as a fusion of classical poetics and modern universalism, with particular attention to his poem "Music of Love." The study argues that while rooted in Indian spiritual and ethical traditions, Ulloor's concept of love, unity, and the Oversoul reveals affinities with the Transcendentalist vision of Walt Whitman and Emerson. Through close readings of "Music of Love," "Umakeralam," and "Karnabhooshanam," the paper explores how Ulloor constructs a poetics of compassion, cosmic brotherhood, and divine participation, anticipating a global humanism that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, Malayalam poetry, Music of Love, Transcendentalism, Walt Whitman, classicism, devotion, humanism, Oversoul

Introduction

Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer stands as one of the most distinguished poets in modern Malayalam literature. Alongside Kumaran Asan and Vallathol Narayana Menon, he helped usher Malayalam poetry into the modern age. Ulloor's work differs from his contemporaries in tone and temperament. Where Asan sought spiritual reformation and Vallathol national regeneration, Ulloor pursued the revival of classical poetics and humanistic spirituality. His poetry reveals a scholar's discipline and a visionary's grace—a blending of the ancient and the modern, the regional and the universal.

Ulloor's Poetic Philosophy: Classical Form and Humanistic Vision

Ulloor's poetry reflects the values of ancient Indian culture—patience, sacrifice, kindness, devotion, patriotism, and heroism. Yet he modernized these ideals into a universal humanism. In many poems, Ulloor prays for a healthy alliance of all nations, standing for human brotherhood and urging unconditional love toward all beings. His poetic persona resembles that of a seer-poet who, like Emerson or Whitman, sees divinity immanent in all existence. Both Indian Vedantic and Western Transcendental philosophies converge in Ulloor's world view.

Music of Love: The Universal Religion

Among Ulloor's shorter lyrics, "Music of Love" stands as a quintessential expression of his universalist philosophy. The poem declares, 'There is but one religion: Love, the life of the world. It is the white moon which feeds us with her silvery milk.' Religion, to Ulloor, is not confined to ritual but is the law of love uniting all beings. This metaphor resonates with the Isha Upanishad's vision of unity and with Whitman's celebration of universal brotherhood.

Comparative Readings: Music of Love, Umakeralam, and Karnabhooshanam

While 'Music of Love' articulates Ulloor's universalist humanism, 'Umakeralam' and 'Karnabhooshanam' embody these ideals in narrative and mythic forms. In 'Umakeralam,' Ulloor fuses devotion with patriotism, portraying the land of Kerala as both sacred geography and moral ideal. Through his invocation of Shiva and Parvati, he merges cosmic love with national identity. The poet's language brims with epic grandeur, but his

moral message—love as the principle of regeneration—remains the same. Similarly, 'Karnabhooshanam' revisits the Mahabharata's tragic hero Karna, focusing on his generosity and ethical conflict. Karna becomes a symbol of dharmic love transcending personal loss. In both epics, Ulloor extends the emotional and spiritual philosophy of 'Music of Love' into mythic action. Love becomes dharma, compassion becomes heroism, and poetry becomes a mode of moral remembrance.

The Poetics of Unity and Brotherhood

The middle stanzas of 'Music of Love' warn: 'Mistrust is deadly and can change the bridal chamber into funeral pyre, green garden into wasteland, heaven into hell.' Ulloor dramatizes the destruction caused by hatred and the necessity of trust as spiritual virtue. These lines echo the Bhagavad Gita's discourse on delusion and the human duty of compassion. In contrast, 'Umakeralam' uses the imagery of the fertile Kerala landscape to express the harmony of humanity and nature, while 'Karnabhooshanam' depicts love as the force that redeems tragic destiny.

Love as the Eternal Pulse of Existence

'Love moves the kindness of fathers, mothers, sisters, wives, friends,' writes Ulloor. Here, love is not an emotion but the essence of creation. This transformation of personal love into cosmic energy parallels Whitman's assertion that every atom of existence partakes in divinity. Ulloor's synthesis of bhakti, prema, and karuna establishes love as the dharma of the universe, making him a poet of both classical devotion and modern humanism

Transcendental Vision: The Oversoul and the Cosmic Dance

The concluding stanzas of 'Music of Love' introduce a transcendental mood: 'Praise be to Thee, giver of life, O dancer supreme! All mankind forms your troupe of dancers; I too am a humble member.' The cosmic dance symbolizes creation and dissolution. The poet identifies with the rhythm of divine energy, echoing Whitman's celebration of life's cycles. Through this image, Ulloor universalizes Indian spirituality into a poetic vision akin to Emerson's Over-Soul and Whitman's cosmic democracy.

Comparative Contexts: Whitman, Transcendentalism, and Indian Modernism

Ulloor's alignment with Western Transcendentalism stems from shared spiritual assumptions: the unity of all existence, the immanence of the divine, and the sanctity of love. While Whitman achieved this through free verse and democratic voice, Ulloor achieved it through classical order and mythic symbolism. Their convergence marks a global moment in modernism where the East and West meet in spiritual humanism. By integrating these ideals into Indian literary tradition, Ulloor expanded the horizons of Malayalam poetry beyond regionalism.

Conclusion

Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer's 'Music of Love' epitomizes his poetic synthesis of classical devotion and modern humanism. When read alongside 'Umakeralam' and 'Karnabhooshanam,' the poem emerges as a moral and aesthetic manifesto. Through love, Ulloor unites dharma and aesthetics, personal emotion and universal law. His works transcend boundaries of religion, geography, and time, echoing Whitman's call for a universal brotherhood grounded in divine unity. Ulloor remains one of India's earliest modern poets to envision a world redeemed by love.

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