



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comparative Study of Poetic Language and Aesthetic Thought in Medieval Indian and English Romantic Poetry

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Abstract

This scholarly inquiry pursues a cross-cultural analysis of poetic diction and aesthetic theory in English Romantic poetry and the Indian Medieval era, with special reference to the theoretical paradigm of Keshavadasa. Building on concepts like Rasa, i.e. aesthetic emotion, Bhava, i.e. emotive state or psychological condition, and the fourfold typology of poetry. This research investigates representative works of William Wordsworth, Keats, Blake, and Coleridge from an Indian aesthetic perspective. Adopting a qualitative textual methodology, the paper scrutinises stylistic elements and formal characteristics, figurative devices and foundational philosophical perspectives across the two traditions. The analysis demonstrates substantial similarities, affective articulation, depiction of nature and authorial intent, while simultaneously foregrounding foundational divergencies in metaphysical foundations and universal aesthetic principles. The paper advocates the relevance and utility of Indian aesthetic theory in intercultural literary analysis, thus contributing to the decolonisation of literary criticism and extending the horizons of comparative literary studies.

Keywords: Poetic language, Aesthetic thought, English Romantic poetry, Indian Poetics, Aesthetics, Keshavadasa, Bhava, Rasa, Indian Romanticism.

Introduction

Western theoretical frameworks have traditionally organised the field of literary study, which has been instrumental in shaping literary analysis in diverse cultural contexts. However, the application of these theoretical concepts in non-Western literary systems and traditions, particularly in India, needs to be re-evaluated. Given the deep and rich tradition of Indian aesthetic theory, there is a growing need to consider indigenous aesthetic theories and explore their significance in cross-cultural literary studies.

But in England and abroad, nature was important and is conceptualised differently in various literary scenarios. The era of English literature, named the Romantic era, made a significant advancement in nature poetry, and some theoretical concepts were also formulated during this time. The famous definition of poetry by William Wordsworth was articulated in this period, and some of the concepts like primary and secondary imagination, and the “willing suspension of disbelief” by Coleridge, were introduced. On the other hand, the Indian poetics provides a more elaborate discussion of poetry, and some critics have defined the working definition of poetry. For example, Bhamaha, Anandavardhana, Jagannatha, Kuntaka, Abhinavagupta, Mammata and Dandin, who is well known for articulating his views on the Indian Epic form of poetry. This leaves the question of what poetry is, in the Indian context, open to question, and therefore, requires a re-definition of the genre/form of poetry. Western Literary Criticism has offered a variety of definitions of poetry, but to some extent, these have been problematic.

For centuries, the field and study of English literature have been dominated by Western and Eurocentric/non-Asian theories and have been fed the theoretical model that is imposed on the non-European/Indian sub-continent. Nearly all the theories, ranging from the period of Classicism to the modern or contemporary stage of literature, such as Structuralism, New Historicism and even interdisciplinary

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fields like Memory Studies, Trauma Studies and Disability Studies, etc., are based on Western models and structures that have no relevance in a multi-cultural society such as India. So, with a plethora of Indian concepts and poetics right from ancient times, it is urgent to overturn the viewpoint and viewpoints about Indian Aesthetics and theoretical ideas. A new and newer outlook from the point of view of Indian culture is required.

The English Literature's Romantic Era has left an enduring legacy for the English writers and other writers across the world, emphasising the aesthetic significance of nature and the human-nature relationship, and became the major literary movement of Romanticism globally.

However, the Indian society and culture have been involved in acknowledging the relationship between humans and nature and the importance of nature in life. Nature is considered a sacred being in Indian philosophy, which has its presence in recent times too.

This research explores the classification of poetry as described by Keshavadasa and applies the aesthetic categories to the texts of British Romantic poetry to analyse the universality of Indian poetics.

Objectives

- To investigate salient characteristics of literary language in British Romantic Poetry
- To evaluate Keshavadasa's taxonomy of poetic forms in the classical Indian literary theory
- To implement Indian aesthetic concepts in relation to chosen poems of the Romantic period
- To ascertain points of convergence and divergence in aesthetic philosophy between two literary traditions
- To assess the importance of Indian poetics in cross-cultural literary studies.

Methodology

The ongoing investigation takes a qualitative and text-based cross-analytical approach, which is based on the in-depth analysis of the text. The conceptual framework is used to analyse the selected poems through the British Romantic literature and the theoretical models of the literary theory of Keshavadasa, with special emphasis on the stylistic elements, figures of speech, and aesthetic categories such as Rasa and Bhava. The method of analysis is hermeneutic, which focuses on cross-cultural critique rather than empirical and quantitative measurement.

Western Versus Indian Definitions Of Poetry

The different definitions of poetry used in the Western context, when analysed or tracked back, are attributed to the debate concepts of Plato and Aristotle which were not only opposing in terms of its nature and behaviour, but also discriminatory and willingly contrasted with other fields of study such as philosophy (in the case of Plato) and history (in the case of Aristotle), to demonstrate the superiority of

the basic discipline/argument. Then, with a good distance in between, during the Romantic Era, Wordsworth attempted to provide and redefine the form/genre of poetry with a new terra firma, which was paradoxical in its nature later on, and also his friend and co-writer S. T. Coleridge contradicted. However, from an Indian perspective, nearly all the theorists and critics related to Indian Poetics and Aesthetics defined it without contradicting the previous/prior concepts but were nevertheless able to get new significances in the genre.

Western Definitions

- "Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity." (William Wordsworth)
- "Poetry is an interpretation of life through imagination and feelings" (William Henry Hudson)
- Poetry is a "musical thought" (Thomas Carlyle)
- Poetry is a "rhythmical creation of beauty" (Edgar Allan Poe) (Hudson, 2018)

These are not the only definitions of poetry but there are other definitions of poetry. The problematic aspect of these definitions is that they are contradictory to themselves and generic. The fact that the ideas of Western poetry are conflicting does not necessarily imply that these ideas are dismissed. The topographical, spatial and historical setting has been considered. By claiming that poetry is a spontaneous overflow, Wordsworth makes this claim in opposition to the previous definitions and conceptions of poetry that were already in place during the era of Homer and Plato. When these canonical writers have slightly fixed the parameters, Wordsworth recreates it by introducing or enlarging the perception because poetry can never have a fixed or definite structure, but rather a burst of water, which fills both inward and outward, and it is the form of human expression.

Dual ignorance, therefore, comes in this discourse of poetry and literary theory. By striking poetry, Plato politicises the issue and turns it into a human expression, which is why it is a phenomenon that contradicts itself, and is acceptable at the same time. The rest of the Romantics then followed with their stress on such elements as nature, emotions, the primal simplicity of life, intuition and a desire to enrich the life of the self with the help of aesthetic beauty. Whereas the former concepts were political and materialistic. The romantic meaning of poetry involved seeing life as a more comprehensive human phenomenon as perceived by a layman. This causes the shape of poetry, specifically the Romantic poetry, to be a comparative and then a contrastive discourse. Therefore, it gives more importance to human feelings and imagination than to rationality and materialism. Indeed, apoliticality in poetry was the trademark of Dryden, once again being challenged by the Romantics, who thought that the definition of poetry of the modern/romantic era is not a fixed and rigid rule, but rather the expression and manifestation of their being, selves, and feelings.

Therefore, in the period of Plato and Aristotle, when a fixed pattern was in the spotlight, imagination was intentionally placed in the foreground in the period of the Romantics. This enables Coleridge to expound on imagination, and he divides it into primary imagination and secondary imagination. This, once more in the historical context, he puts it into perspective of the more recent interpretation of the genre of poetry. In the context in which Plato criticises the poets and the artists, Coleridge stresses the imagination of artists, which has been consciously cultivated over time, and which is an *esemplastic* imagination, and it is only seen by the poets and artists, and it is a great work to cultivate the latter. In that regard, Coleridge has been effective in developing the facet of Western poetry.

In this way, in response to the questions that Plato posed that poets and poetry are immoral and make a man weaker, the Romantics concluded that, on the contrary, poetry is an art that makes the person stronger and brings harmony in the co-existence of the human within nature, as well as makes a person an elevated part of nature. This, in a critical and theoretical sense, was an intellectual and calculated turn of the Romantics towards the reconsideration of poetry as a literary genre. Through this realisation, Coleridge and the other Romantics, such as Keats, Byron, Shelley and even the pre-Romantics, attempted to uplift the form of poetry and make it a higher form of discourse. The form of poetry in the Western definition of poetry has influenced a variant of poetry in each period of English literature. It was otherwise in the era of Plato, then it changed a twist in the era of the defence by Aristotle, it was different in the era of Spencer and Shakespeare in the Enlightenment era, in the Victorian era and the Modern and Post Modern Era.

Nonetheless, in the Eastern/Indian context, numerous arguments and debates have occurred regarding the form of poetry. The word structure is employed here very consciously; the Indian Aesthetics/Poetics talks in a very significant way about the structure of a poem and not just as a genre. Already before the Romantic turn in the genre of poetry, the Indian critics were striving to define poetry, which, of course, involves the conceptualisation of the types of poetry provided by Keshavadasa.

Eastern/Indian Definitions

- "A happy fusion of *śabda* (sound) and *artha* (sense) is called poetry." (Bhamaha)
 - "The body of Poetry is the combination of denotative word and sound, while its soul is suggested sense." (Anandavardhana)
 - "Poetry is a word promoting delight." (Jagannatha)
 - "Poetry is that which is endowed with literary qualities (*gunas*) and ornaments (*alankaras*)." (Dandin)
 - "Rasa is the soul of poetry" (Abhinavagupta) (Dev, 2020)
- Unlike the numerous Western versions of poetry, Indian Aesthetics is concerned with the production of Rasas and

Bhavas, relative to Romantic poetry, which stresses the feelings and nature. Indian poetics dwells more upon the essence of the arrangement of poetry. It universalises the emotions rather than the Romantic concept of depiction of the inner self or reality. Indian Poetics does not consider poetry as a social institution and a moral role, but provides transcendent joy.

These conceptualisations denote a systematic and multi-strata method of literary theory in Indian aesthetic theory, whereby semantic content, emotional reaction, and structural features are integrated in a consistent system and integrated model. By contrast, Western conceptualisations, particularly during the Romantic era, have the propensity to emphasise personal emotion and imaginative expression. This contrast constitutes the theoretical foundation for the cross-cultural analysis carried out in this investigation.

About Keshavadasa

He just happens to be among the most influential writers who imprinted his mark on the structure of poetry by trying to bridge the gap between the Indian/Sanskrit Aestheticism/Poetics and literary criticism. He was born around 1555-1617 CE and was an important medieval Indian theorist, but mainly wrote in Braj Bhasa, so that the poetry could be comprehensible to the mass audience of his day. The Braj language of erstwhile India, in the Braj region of Western Uttar Pradesh, centred around Mathura, was spoken in the Braj region. He might have opted to write in Sanskrit, but the linguistic digression is that he intended to turn the Indian Poetics into a discussion of the layman, thus making it a practical literary exercise. Through this, Keshavadasa made Sanskrit Poetics more of a vernacular or a domesticated one and understandable by the general people of his era. Democratized literary apprehension did not confine itself to it, but also to emerging non-Sanskrit vernacular writers and to non-Sanskrit scholars. Thus, Keshavadasa could match the poetic examples of the theory of Indian Aesthetics by writing in Braj Bhasa. In this way, he criticised the classical notion that Sanskrit was the sole generator of knowledge or that it is solely a lingual generator of knowledge.

This breaking of the traditional norms formed the basis of an early intellectual decolonisation movement in India, despite colonial modernity, despite Sanskrit as his inherited/family language, and his being a Sanskrit scholar himself. This is in line with the Wordsworthian ideology of writing poetry to the masses. This clearly shows that the Romantic concept of composing poetry for the masses concurs with the Indian concept. This modernity of Keshavadasa is early modernity, making even pre-Romantic definitions and structure of poetry. It also confirms that it is not always the East that borrowed from the West (although it might have been influenced), but the models and structures of the Indians were the most common and the most practised.

The Four Kinds of Poetry

These are the four types of poetry that Keshavadasa presents. He further gives the characteristics of the attributes of each of the four types.

- Kaushiki
- Bharati
- Arabhati
- Sattviki

Analysis And Discussion

Kaushiki

Keshavadasa sayeth: merriment and love and tenderness and simple words and happy sense, that poetry of Kaushiki seed. (Devy, 2020) As such, the characteristics of Kaushiki's poetry are: merriment, love, tenderness, a happy sense, and simple words. The above are the notions, reasons and features assigned even before the Romantics, and these are the features that are highly applicable in the poems of the Romantic Era. For Instance,

- "I wandered lonely as a cloud
- That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
- When all at once I saw a crowd,
- A host of golden daffodils;
- Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
- Fluttering and dancing in the breeze." (Wordsworth, 2013)

Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils" or "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is characterised by Kaushiki's kind. It has a tender tone; it talks of merriment or joy, and it kindles a happy mood in the minds of its readers, and also reflects the poet's joy, when Wordsworth concludes the poem by saying that the image of the field of daffodils gives him merriment, joy, or pleasure - "And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils." It also shows the traits of love for nature and plain words.

Another poem of Kaushiki's kind in the Romantic poetry is that of Keats. For example, his well-known poem "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" also shows the traits that are seen in the Kaushiki kind by Keshavadasa.

"I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild." (Keats, 1820)

In this poem, the knight's speech to the narrator starts with expressions of merriment and affection and goes on to the end with the same, which produces delight in the poet and the reader. The poem is the narration of a love affair between the lady and the knight, which is again Kaushiki's poetry. So, these two poems (not only them) are examples of how Indian Poetics can be applied to Romantic poetry.

The other examples where the kind can be applied are: "Ode to Nightingale", "To a Skylark", etc.

Bharati

The second kind, Keshavadasa, is described as Bharati, "that verse in which the sentiment heroic is, and wonder too, and merriment; appealing to the mind whose sense - that soul delighting poetry is of the kind 'Bharati'". (Devy, 2020). Therefore, the characteristics of this type of poetry are that it can be merriment, heroic in tone, wonder and soul delighting. Again, the poem of Keats is of the kind Bharati "La Bella Dame Sans Merci"

"I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried— 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam, With horrid warning
gapèd wide,

And I awoke and found myself here, On the cold hill's side." (Keats, 1820)

Once the knight, who is a heroic figure in the poem, realises that he has been fooled and wakes up, he is ensnared by wonder; even the narrator, who is hearing the knight but not responding to him, is in wonder. Here, wonder in terms of confusion and mixed emotions. So, we can see happiness and love in this poem, but for a time/period. The knight is considered heroic, and the question is addressed to the knight at the beginning of the poem because of his knightly heroism. Being a knight/soldier, he is assumed to be heroic and brave, and hence, the narrator wonders at his sadness, and at the end, the question leaves the readers. The reason for his sadness is also justified, which is an appeal to the intellect. The knight, answering the narrator, explains that he met a fair lady in the meadow, who was as lovely as a fairy's child. They both fell in love, and the knight, also, to express his love, did many things for her. She, then, led the soldier to the cave, or elfin grot, where she kissed him. They made love. But when the knight awoke, the lady was gone. And he finds that she has tricked him. So this explanation of the question of the narrator is rationalising and also mental. Hence, these characteristics of the poetry of Bharti suit Keats' poem.

Arabhati

In his poetic diction, "Says Keshavadasa: that verse in which the violent sentiment, and dread, and loathing are, in which there is alliteration, and words have meaning diverse: such poetry should be considered 'Arabhati'. (Devy, 2020). Thus, the features of the Arabhati type of poetry include violent sentiments, dreadful things, loathing, and alliteration (a figure of speech) and diverse meanings. These are seen in William Blake's poem "The Tyger", who was a pre/early romantic poet. The lines of the poem are as follows:

"Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,

Could frame thy fearful symmetry? [...] And what shoulder, & what art, Could twist the sinews of thy heart? And when thy heart began to beat. What dread hand? & what dread feet?" (Blake, 1794)

The Tyger is a poem that portrays fear. It gives a vivid picture of the tiger, a ferocious creature that has been known to brutally kill other animals. A tiger will not leave its prey when it is on a hunt. This is a feeling of violence that Blake captures. In addition, the second characteristic of being a dreadful creature also belongs to the Arabhati kind. The tiger is a dreadful animal. Through the tiger, or the attributes of the wild creature, Blake juxtaposes the two types of individuals in any society. Or, to put it differently, he draws a distinct line of society into two: good and evil. The tiger is compared with the evil people, and the prey of the tiger with the good, innocent people. It is these wicked individuals in society who take advantage of the innocent ones. With this dichotomy, the duality of meaning in the poem occurs as well, or what Keshevadasa refers to, the diversity of the meaning. This comparison of the tiger and the lamb appears later in the poem. Here, the word the has been used deliberately. The lamb, who is Christ, is the symbolic representation of Satan, the tiger. Therefore, the poem has a variety of meanings. "When the stars threw down their spears And water'd heaven with their tears: Did he smile at his work to see? Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (Blake, 1794)

Speaking of the final feature of the Arabhati type, i.e. alliteration, it is introduced already in the very first line itself. The sounds include /t/ and /b/. Thus, the preromantic poem of Blake contains all the traits.

A second instance of the Arabhati type of poetry would be The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by S. T. Coleridge. The poem is a narrative verse that is split into 7 sections and has supernaturalism. Wonder is reflected due to these supernatural elements. Further, Coleridge has outlined the ghostly elements in the poem, which satisfy the aspect of dreadfulness. The narrative diction of the poem has the style of reflecting fear poetically, where the horror and ghastly narration is shown by the narrator of the poem, who happens to be the poetic persona in the poem, the Ancient Mariner. As the poem is a narrative verse, it possesses duality of meaning, not to mention that it can be interpreted in many ways. Therefore, also gives the characteristic of diversity of meaning.

Sattviki

The fifth and final type, as Keshavadasa asserts, is the Satviki type. The characteristics of this type are: "Where wonder, valour, evenness, all the three feelings meet in equal part, and all the senses are known as soon as heard, that which is reckoned by all men to be the pure Sattviki verse, as explained by Keshavadasa. (Devy, 2020). Such characteristics

can be traced in the romantic poetry of Shelley and Keats, i.e., Ode to Autumn and Ode to the West Wind, respectively. Taking a closer look, the same characteristics can be discovered in the works by John Milton and John Donne, Paradise Lost and The Holy Sonnets. But placing the romantic poetry in the centre, the poems describe all the characteristics of the Sattviki type.

P. B. Shelley is referred to as the revolutionary poet, and the revolution and uprising are highly represented in his Ode. He has composed Ode to Westwind as a kind of revolutionary appeal to his brothers who were joining the Waterloo Massacre. His revolutionary ideas, too, which are also, as it were, full of wonder, when he says that carry away with it his thoughts and bury it as the seeds that germinate and grow into a full tree. This allegorical form introduction introduces the aspect of wonder, and when he transforms his ideas, it demonstrates valour. Evenness of his thoughts is reflected in the way his ideas are presented in the Ode. Ode to Westwind, therefore, even though it does not directly, but indirectly or metaphorically, belong to the category of Sattviki kind.

The features of Sattviki poetry are also presented in the poem of Keats, Ode to Autumn. This Ode is among the final poems of Keats. Keats has gone through difficulties and tribulations in his life. This is the Ode, in which he has realised that he has been living in the final stage of his life, and he is soon to die. He was ill with Tuberculosis. Therefore, the very process of writing that it does after the acknowledgement of the reality introduces the concept of valour in his poem. He remarks that the tree is wearing off the leaves one after another, and he is losing his breath. And because the tree is hanging on to the last leaf, so is he wrestling to the end. Even the analogy of the season with its coming portrays not only the valour, but also his clear, moderate, balanced mind. So, the three emotions of valour, wonder and evenness are just as prevalent in the poems of Shelley and Keats.

When the poems Paradise Lost and the Holy Sonnets are revealed (a detour, slightly, of the Romantic Age), these three sentiments are present there, too. The valour of God, His angels, and, according to Milton, the heroic valour of the character of Satan are perceived. Because the poem is an epic, there are numerous verses where we find a sense of wonder, bafflement and even-handedness of Milton to bring forth his ideas in his poem. Indeed, in the example of Milton, as is the case with Keats, the act of writing is itself a heroic act that is full of valour. Milton composed this epic when he lost his sight. In the case of the Holy Sonnets, these characteristics can be observed in most of them when Donne refers to Christ as the saviour of humanity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Indian framework of poetics predates and, in several ways, anticipates the principles later articulated by Romantic poets. The work of Keshavadasa,

a 16th-century poet-scholar, is particularly significant for its meta-critical approach to literature, including an awareness of its limitations, which extends beyond the scope of Romantic theoretical models. Despite a gap of nearly 150 years between Keshavadasa and the Romantic period (1798–1832), notable parallels can be observed, highlighting the adaptability and universality of Indian poetics. Key findings reveal that concepts such as Bhava (emotion) and Rasa (aesthetic experience) resonate strongly with themes in British Romantic poetry, especially in their treatment of emotion, nature, and artistic expression. However, fundamental differences remain in philosophical orientation: Romanticism emphasises individual subjectivity, whereas Indian aesthetics focuses on a universalised aesthetic experience. The study underscores that Indian Knowledge Systems offer well-developed interpretative frameworks capable of analysing both indigenous and foreign literary traditions. Rather than rejecting Western theories, it emphasises the importance of recognising and utilising existing Indian intellectual traditions as alternative or complementary approaches. For future research, there is a need to examine Indian aesthetics more systematically within the context of contemporary academic discourse on Indian Knowledge Systems. Developing a culturally grounded and socially relevant Indian theoretical model is essential, particularly one that reflects the diversity of Indian society. Additionally, analysing Western and Indian frameworks in parallel can contribute to a more balanced and inclusive literary discourse, enhancing both local and global academic engagement.

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