

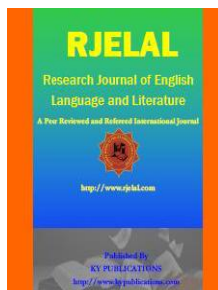


## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN ACTION: THE STUDY OF SELECTED ENGLISH ROMANTIC LYRICS IN ODISIA TRANSLATION

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### ABSTRACT

Comparative literature goes beyond the conventional limits of just comparing two culturally dissimilar texts having a point of similarity. The point was to bring about different cultures together sitting in the drawing room. Now the scope spreads above and over and includes the concepts of reception study- of how literature of one culture is received by the other, influence study- of how one culture influences the other and the cultural transition through translation. The heydays are gone, now the job of comparators becomes large and vital which brings them out of their drawing room and fetches them out to study the cultural contours through empirical study.

The paper explores the reception of English romanticism to Odia poetry through translation. For this purpose I select two Odia romantic poems; Nandakishore Bal's *Kokila Prati*- a translation of William Wordsworth's *To the Cuckoo* and *Banapriya*- a translation of Percy Bysshe Shelly's *To a skylark*. The research on this area will unveil the cross cultural migration of romanticism, from English language, culture and milieu to vernacular language Odia. As and when required I may use back translation method to display the distinction between English romanticism and romanticism in Odia. At last, returning to comparative literature, by thematic analyses, I will show "translation study represents the future of comparative literature" (Susan Bassnett) and how comparative literature brings two cultures closer.

Key Words- Romanticism, comparative literature, translation

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Odia literary history blurs the distinction between romanticism and modernism. The Odia romantic age finds no unique personality but identifies it with the modern age. Still the romanticism is noticeable in Odia literature. The evolution of romanticism traces back to the collaborative publication of *Odia Kabitabali*- first part in 1876 and subsequent part in 1885-by two eminent poets, Radhanath Ray and Madhusudan

Rao. Undoubtedly both of them, deserved to be called as romantics, were influenced by English romantics and the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. The pioneer romantic poets in the Odia team, apart from the above two, are Gangadhar Meher and Nandkishor Bal. Their works reflect exotic scenic setting of Odisha, the countryside, hill side, the antique temples, the sea beach, and widespread lake and so on.

The paper explores, in the beginning, the reception of English romantic lyrics in Odia. The intention is not to show the role translation played in mere transforming one language to another and one literature to another rather it explains the coincidence of two cultures on the same concept of a literary genre i.e. romanticism. The romantic sensibility that arose in early twentieth century Odia literature is undoubtedly an incursion of nineteenth century English literature. English education motivated the rapt Indians to study English literature. In fact a faction of Odia poets followed English romantic tradition. The reason behind a large number of Odia geniuses pursuing British romantic tradition needs discussion and scholarship. Since English romanticism traces the importance of freedom, revolt, pantheism, medievalism, the Odia writers, adopted romantic genre to convey their repressed anguish- their lost freedom, their glorious past.

Going by the history, we may deduce that the advent of Odia romanticism is a rejection of gaudiness archaisms, and frequent use of personifications in the poetry of Riti Era, like the rebuff of English romantics to neoclassics. The poetry of Riti Era illustrates nature as a metaphor of love: seeming passive, the nature is described in the narrower view of love for women. But the definition of love broadened in the hands of Odia romantics. They readily recognized the mythical representation of nature. The romantic poets actively use the passive and dull ornaments the Ritis used. For them the exotic nature served as an envoy to convey the protest against exploitation of rich over poor. (Madhusudan Rao, *Akas Prati*, stanza12). They looked at nature in a larger cultural practice. They did not respect the rules of English romantics to limit the concept to narrow sphere of nature and supernaturalism. Violation, compression, condensation, substitution and elimination of the original English poems became their common strategy of writing poetry. For them original carries no sanctity, one can dilute, add or subtract it. They use English romantic works as liberally as they can do and never oblige for it; even they never use the name of original writer. The Odia poets were

ambivalent to western past and were not fascinated to learn them as well.

Odia romanticism, a colonial subject, reflects nationalism in Odia poetry. The vigour, the curiosity, the nationalist feeling for a free nation state, seems pertinent in 20<sup>th</sup> century Odia romantic poetry. So there is a constant interaction going on in the romantic poems as a particular moment in history. The Odia past undermined or subverted the English original. To beget a new literature the English poetry was an occasion; it was a context which became a pretext for their creation. In west, the love for nature results a constant revolt against Christianity versus nature; Christianity opposes nature because devils created and nurtured it. Many English romantics, hence, became Pagan and Hellenistic in their approach. But for Odia Poets nature was god which they prayed and celebrated.

Romanticism in Odisha formed the spiritual keystone of national unity and identity. The writers describe romanticism in terms of spiritual dominance because the historical underpinning, which was colonial by nature, immersed and plagued the literature of the period. It was a period of crucial significance for the character of Odia literature. It ushered a revolution in literary language, literature and poetry reached its highest caliber.

The paper deals with two poems; *To a Skylark* by Shelly and *To the Cuckoo* by Wordsworth; in both cases the bird is a singing voice that rambles from place to place and mesmerized the poet who listened it. The only concern of the poet is the beauty of nature and natural elements throughout the poem; he does not bother the external social or cultural milieu. When the above two poems reach the landscape of Odisha; the mentality of the poet tainted with changed socio cultural setting, the former becomes *Banpriya* and the later becomes *Kokila Prati* by Nandakishore Bal, addressing to a same bird *koili*. He gave the same name to two birds as the above birds in Odisha are not from two different species but one. So he took the commonality of them as singing birds and considered them as *koili*. We now divert ourselves, for a while, to discuss the importance of cuckoo in Odisha context. The habit of using 'cuckoo' by Odia

poets in poetry counts back to *Sarala age* till *modern age*. The cuckoo acts as a messenger- carrying the news of grief of separation; from mother to son; from wife to husband; from lover to beloved. Upendra Bhanja, an eminent *Riti* poet depicts the role of cuckoo in his *Baidehisa Bilas*. Goddess Sita, the wife of mythical Lord Ram, being imprisoned by Ravan the villain of Ramayana, lamented and sent the message to her husband by cuckoo.

The role of cuckoo increased in modern age, despite carrying the message of severance it carried the message of social reform, political freedom and invoked cultural tradition of ancient Odisha. English poetry presents the Cuckoo or Skylark, in a different tone unlike the Odia poetry.

Addressing Skylark, Shelly says it a 'blithe spirit' rather than a bird, for its song comes from heaven and gives bliss. He describes the journey of skylark, from higher to higher at last becomes unreachable to poets reach. If the West Wind was Shelley's first convincing attempt to articulate an aesthetic philosophy through metaphors of nature, the skylark is his greatest natural metaphor for pure poetic expression, the "harmonious madness" of pure inspiration. The skylark's song issues from a state of purified existence, a Wordsworthian notion of complete unity with Heaven through nature. The joy of that uncomplicated purity of being, motivates its songs, and combines it with a hint of melancholy or of the bittersweet, as human joy so often is. In his language, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought". The skylark's unimpeded song rains down upon the world, surpassing every other beauty. The song inspires metaphor and makes the speaker believe that the bird is not a mortal bird at all, but a "spirit," a "sprite," a "poet hidden / In the light of thought."

In that sense, the skylark is almost an exact twin of the bird in Keats's "*Ode to a Nightingale*"; both represent pure expression through their songs, and like the skylark, the nightingale "was not born for death." The nightingale inspires Keats to feel "a drowsy numbness" of happiness that is also like pain, and that makes him think of death; the skylark inspires Shelley to feel a frantic, rapturous joy that has no part of pain. To Keats, human joy and sadness are inextricably linked, as he explains at

length in the final stanza of the "*Ode on Melancholy*." But the skylark sings free of all human error and complexity, and while listening to his song, the poet feels free of those things, too.

We observe something changed when "To the Skylark" is transformed to *Kokilaprati* in Odia; it lacks the delight of thought and expression, the elation and ecstasy in the minds of the poet, instead the poet becomes mournful remembering the past of the nation. He is not swayed by the emotion to exist in a world of fairies rather to survive in a pragmatic world. Poet is grieved seeing the cuckoo and exasperated to tell the inner anguish that he had since long. The poet, remembering his childhood and past of the nation, wants the people of the world should be enlightened through the light of knowledge forgetting the rivalry in between. Disregarding the men of the earth as sinful, he suggests the bird to teach them for searching the ultimate Nirvana or solace, instead of pursuing the mundane life. So he regards the bird as an eternal preacher to elevate modern men from the world of drudgery.

Let me argue about the second poem *To the Cuckoo*. This poem has been written in admiration and glorification of the cuckoo. The cuckoo becomes a symbol of beauty, innocence and childhood for the poet. The poet hears the cuckoo singing in a garden when he was lying on the grass, immersing himself in nature. Her song reminds him of the golden days of his childhood. Calling the cuckoo a happy stranger, the poet remembers emotions in him that he has not visited since his childhood. He bears and enjoys her song; but is unable to see her. The cuckoo is more like a wandering voice than a bird to him. The cuckoo's double-cry seems to travel rapidly from hill to hill. Sometimes, it seems very near and sometimes very far away. The poet calls on the cuckoo but this is vain as he cannot trace her out. The poem presents a beautiful contrast between the poet and the cuckoo-the poet lives in the past, the cuckoo lives in the present. It ends with Wordsworth commenting that the bird is blessed and deserves to be in a mythical earth, where it resides.

*Kokilaprati*, on the other hand, a translation of *To the cuckoo* is symmetric in meaning and

thematic expression. But one thing that can be marked is the setting of Odisha which is different that from England. Bal is quite reminiscent of the grain fields where he sleeps and dreams of the bird but Wordsworth is still on the plain-the same grass land. The movement, from past to present and vice versa that we find in Wordsworth, is unwavering for Bal; it seems as if he is talking in present tense but pretends to move to past. Cuckoo in fact is treated as blessed eternal bird from heaven that needs worship.

By trying out the reception of romantic lyrics in Odia literature, I got to know how comparative literature secretly plays a pivotal role when one work is translated to other. The prominence and scope of comparative literature is felt when a work, a literary genre, an epoch take a shape in another socio-cultural milieu. Comparative literature is not only a phenomenal perspective rather it is a mind set. In the above essay, it is evident that when an age of one literature is adopted in another literature, we find some features from the source literature and the major influence of the socio-cultural-mythic tradition of the target literature gets changed. If this is the case we can say that the comparative literature is on action.

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