

East-West Romanticisms: Understanding Indian Romanticism through *Chhayavad* - A Study in Comparative Indian Literature

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Abstract

According to Arthur o' Lovejoy "the romanticism of one country may have little in common with that of another; that there is, in fact a plurality of romanticism of possibly different thought complexes". With the advent of a 'modern' kind of poetry in Hindi Literature, many speculations were made with regards to the influence, that Western literary movements have had on Indian literature. In the spectrum of this speculation, the *Chhayavad* movement of Hindi Literature gained momentum as an Indian synonym of Western Romanticism. Where, few scholars believed that the *Chhayavad* movement was simply a reaction to the didactic Dwivedi *Yug* and had nothing to do with the Western Romanticism, others felt that *Chhayavad* was an Indian kind of Romantic Movement as it was influenced by the tender writings of Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali, which were in turn Influenced by English romanticism. This paper tries to do a comparative study of the western Romantic Movement (keeping in mind, its preoccupations with poetry as an expression of imagination, individual freedom and the conception of nature) and the Indian Chhayavad movement pioneered by SuryakantTripathi Nirala. It looks at the poems of Jayashankar Prasad and Sumitranandan Pant, and tries to trace the trajectory of Romantic Movement in Hindi Literature taking up the concepts of lyricism and mysticism, along with their use of nature in developing a poetic movement. This paper will help us to look at the relations, not only between India and the West, but also at the relations between two Indian languages, i.e., Hindi and Bengali, while tracing Tagore's influence on Hindi *Chhayavadi* poets. This will finally help us in establishing the plurality of romanticism, talked about above and will lead us to the understanding of, how genres and movements of literature travel over different cultures making them their own and leading to newer innovations as a result of these interactions.

Keywords: *Chhayavad, Romanticism, Hindi Literature, plurality, East -West*

Lovejoy's investigation on various manifestations of Romanticism led to the belief that the word itself had come to stand for numerous things and hence in itself, it meant nothing. According to him one of the ways to solve the controversy behind the word *Romanticism* and its use was to think of Romanticism in the plural sense and to recognise that one country's *romanticism* may have very little commonality with that of the other. The 'Ism' itself was born in Germany. The word 'romantic' came to be associated with a literary movement by the late nineteenth

century, when it was first applied as 'Romantique' by Hyppolite Taine (Casalaiggi, Fermanis, 2016), to a group of eighteenth and nineteenth century writers, which was extended from French to English literature, making link with its German pioneers. It came to be seen as an academic field by the twentieth century. Wellek remarks that this poetry was synonymous for all the writers of its time, who had similar beliefs about nature, imagination, the relation between man and nature, mysticism, emotions, use of symbols, images, myths and so on, but varied from their

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predecessors. (Wellek, 1949,p.20).

About the same time a similar movement was bubbling in the Indian literary scenario, specifically in Hindi literature. This was called *chhayavad*. "*Chhayavad* is an important period term in the history of Hindi Literature, which dominated the literary scene from 1920 to 1937", (Pachaori,1978,p.247). It was pioneered by the poets Sumitranandan Pant and Suryakant Tripathi Nirala. The succeeding flag bearers of the movement were Jaya Shankar Prasad and Mahadevi Verma.

Despite some similarities that existed between the two movements, English Romanticism and Hindi *Chhayavad*, like "individual liberty, revolt against physical and ritualistic barriers, love for beauty and the tendency to express oneself" (Roy Choudhory, 2001, p.61), there are considerable distinctions between the two movements precisely due to a difference of socio, political and cultural contexts.

According to Shobhana Bhattacharya, English romanticism came in the wake of the American and the French Revolutions along with influence from the Industrial Revolution. These had caused wars, migration, a class divide, along with urbanization and feelings of despair, fear and anger. These emotions took vent in the Romantic verses and labelled their writers as war poets (Bhattacharya, 2006,p.5). The idea of romantic poetry to be symptomatic of feelings and emotions, the idea that lyric poetry was the epitome of Romanticism, the idea that the poet comprised of the creative genius and that his poetry allowed him to "transcend the material world", were the popular perceptions of the Romantic movement. (Casaliggi, Fermanis, 2016).

Chhayavad on the other hand was understood in very different light within the Indian contexts. Some claimed that *Chhayavad* began in the early twentieth century which was seen to be a troubled time due to its positioning between the two world wars, epidemic of influenza, the dreadful strike of unemployment decorated with the chaos of the economic depression. (Rosenstein, 2003, p. 5). Others claim that it emerged as an imitation and influence of the Western Romanticism. Further few claim that it was inspired from the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. During the course of this paper, I try to juggle with these different believes by attempting a study of two *Chhayavadis* namely Jayashankar Prasad and Sumitranandan Pant, and some English Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. With this I will try to trace the relations between a literary movement of the East and the West in tandem with their commonalities.

Romanticism versus *Chhayavad*

The preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* among the Romantics

was seen as synonymous to the Preface to *Pallav* for the *Chhayavadis*. (Das,2015,p. 200). "*Chhayavad* like its other sisterly Romantic movements of the West...was born as a reaction against the preceding age called the Dwivedi period, named after eminent author Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi." (Pachaori,1978,p.247). This age had laid an excessive strain on the moral aspects of life, making it analogous to didactic literature of the West. Due to this forced didacticism, the poets started finding it more and more difficult to maintain a contact with the human consciousness. As a reaction the *Chhayavadis* emerged with literature that dealt with the minute details of life and gave them a chance to represent the day to day preoccupations of a common man with respect to his ordinary life. "*Chhayavad* was a romantic movement in its main approach, character and style, but with a difference. The historical forces which subtly inspired and shaped it were the cultural renaissance, modern knowledge, struggle for independence, the demand for freedom from bondage, and human dignity." (George,1984,p. 361)It incorporated ideas of cultural tradition, individual freedom, human values, meaning of life, imagination and idealism, which are all symptomatic of the outbreak of this movement in the Hindi literary scenario.

Many criticisms against the poetry of *Chhayavad* were that they were seen to be alienated from its immediate environment and instead of depicting the reality the poets engaged in a kind of idealistic world, whose beauty was embedded in nature and full of natural symbols, which not only withdrew one from their immediate problems but gave vent to an expression of emotions in the artistic realm with a kind of mystic and metaphysical spirituality associated to it. There was a constant struggle for individuality, for humanitarian ethos which tried to break free from tradition and delve into the realm of the sublime. According to some critics:

By the early twentieth century, inspired by a spiritual and continuous interaction with Western and English literature, Indian literature begins to incorporate new themes and issues... the changes in modern Indian literature were perhaps mainly a matter of imitation at first, but soon innovations and adaptation ensued; the language and expressions of literary creation in all major languages was transformed.

(Dev,Tiwari,Khanna,2006,p. xxi)

Chhayavad shared features like exploiting the supernatural, and "sensuous descriptions of landscapes" with its western counterparts .(Rosenstein,2003,p.6)It was a fact that the degree of preoccupation with nature and the landscape was extremely high in the context of the romantic poetry, but many poets like Wordsworth , Coleridge, Shelley and

Keats believed that these descriptions weren't merely there for the sake of it but served a larger purpose as symbolic representations of human feelings and provided stimuli for the poets creative genius. (Abrams, Harpham, 2011, p. 186) In a similar vein the Chhayavadis looked at nature "as a vital spirit that informs the soul of every living human being". (George, 1992, p. 154) Poets like Wordsworth were using their poetry to describe memories of lost landscapes, such that were disturbed with the coming of the various revolutions, the formation of the newer cities and the industrialization of the places which disturbed the calm in the poet. Therefore there was an immediate need to return back to the normal, the natural, close to heart in order to be able to turn back to that which was once taken for granted by man. To add to it Wordsworth in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads proposed that a poet must use language that was easily understood by the common man and simple day to day things should be presented in an unusual manner. He contested the use of fixed metrical forms of poetry and tried to break free from the classical tradition of writing, which for him, was nothing more than pretentious terminology, forced upon the reader, to establish a sense of elitism and hence always maintain a distance between the poet and the reader.

In a similar vein, Chhayavad that emerged against the Dwivedi Yuga, was an attempt at a newer form of language, i.e the Khari Boli. Bhrajbhasa was replaced by Khari Boli, in order to bring complex philosophy close to the contemporary life. Such that, language could be, made sense of, with, reference to the life around both, the poet and the reader. "Conventional syntax and rhetoric failed to express new sensibility and hence there was the necessity for a new language" (Das, 2015, p. 201) The influence of the Western Romantics on the *Chhayavadi* poets is accepted as Roy Choudhary quotes Sumitranandan Pant from Sathvarsh Ek Rekhanan:

I longed for adopting Kalidasa's aesthetic sense Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Tennyson were the poets of 19th Century who influenced me deeply. Variety of style in Keats' Poetry, strong imagination of Shelley, vibrant love for nature what the essence of Wordsworth's poetry unprecedented personality of Coleridge, sense of suggestion... found in Chhaywad Tennyson made my sense of poetry more nourished extensive and subtle. The artist in me tried throughout my life to translate the features of these poets in Hindi poetry.

(Roy Choudhary, 2001, p. 56)

Chhayavad and Tagore

During the transition from Dwivedi Yug to *Chhayavad*, Tagore had received a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. At this point he had become a bridge between Indian and the

West. "His impact in changing the direction of all Indian poetry towards modern romanticism and humanism has been profound. Tagore's influence on Hindi was, however, subtle and indirect in the form of change in perspective and poetic values" (George, 1984, p. 361)

According to many critics *Chhayavad* appeared at such a time when works of Wordsworth and Shelley had become accessible to the Hindi elite "partly directly and partly through the poetry of Tagore". (Rosenstein, 2003, p. 6). Some of them believed that as a term it came from the Bengali literature as it was typified like Tagore's Gitanjali and in turn drew links from English trends of "phantasms and symbolism" (Ritter, 2011, p. 220), while others believed it to have grown out of its own necessity wherein it wanted to distinguish them from both the mystical and the nature poetry. But nevertheless their preoccupations with human emotions, individuality, poet's quest and expression all became highly inspired from the beauty of the nature, bringing them obliquely close to Tagore in near sight, and the English Romantics in far sight. Some of these poets like Pant had had direct contact with Tagore, as he had met him before 1920. "Most of the *Chhayavadi* poets..., like Thakur, expressed their mysticism in short lyrics. Those who knew Bengali poetry were aware that Thakur's Bengali poetry was closer to nature and life than the English Gitanjali." (ed. Gonda, 1978, pp. 31-32)

Mahadevi Verma on the other hand claimed that *Chhayavad* had emerged out of its own necessity with its own peculiar features, negating all claims of a Western or a Bengali inspiration/imitation. Sisir Kumar Das remarks that "It is interesting while the 'modern' poets in Bengal were proudly declaring their allegiance to European poetry, the Chhayavadis, Mahadevi in particular, was anxious to dispel all suspicions regarding its foreign relations..." (Das, 2015, p. 202).

Preoccupations of Tagore's concept of art and poetry can be directly compared to what was seen by the Chhayavadis as their objective. Tagore claimed that there was a world, which was real to man and could be seen and felt only when one connected with their emotions. Man cannot define art in other than by experiencing it as a felt reality. Art is superfluous and cannot be contained in its utility. "Efflux of consciousness of his personality requires an outlet of expression. Therefore, in Art, man reveals himself and not his objects". (ed. Devy, 2004, p. 141 (Tagore, 1917)) Tagore's ideas further seem to be inspired by Wordsworth's idea of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", which makes one wonder that these claims might just be true. Since these comparisons are based on Bengali versions of Tagore poetry, it is out of the scope of this paper to make those connections, (since I do not have a legibility of Bengali) and can be left for further speculations.

Jaishankar Prasad and Sumitranandan Pant

In the Hindi scenario, Jaishankar Prasad (1889-1937) emerged as a poet around 1909. Prasad as compared to his other contemporaries had not been receiving much of an acknowledgment as a poet, as opposed to as a dramatist, nevertheless, his poetry collections like *Ansu*, *Lahar* we find ever more resemblances to the Romantic vein in terms of the language used and the sense of introspection. One of his *Lahar* poems "*Us Din Jab Jeevan Ke Path Mein*" is a good example to see how inner realization and introspection are embedded in Prasad's thoughts. His poem when read literally seems to depict the basic need of love and happiness in a man's life whose unavailability makes him feel like a beggar, but the moment life's path crosses such circumstances that one feels overwhelming joy, its heart feels content, that's, when even hopelessness becomes hopeful. The kind of imagery that Prasad uses is reflective of the classical tradition of Indian psyche. "The theme of the poem probably alludes to Buddha's metaphysical research and self-experience of joy and agony ... Like Prince Siddhartha holding the begging bowl and asking for alms in a strange city, the poet, unconscious of his youth, sets out on the journey of his mission in the city of his heart." (Pachauri, 1978, p. 255) This mission is further seen to be extended in Prasad's poem *Kamayani*.

Prasad's epic poem *Kamayani* became the watermark of *Chhayavadi* poetry, written, right before his demise. "The story of *Kamayani* is the psycho-biological journey of man through time and space." (George, 1984, p. 361) According to Gaefke:

The main structural motif of the poem is obviously that of a cosmic journey by which a human being is led to visionary insight. This was a popular motif with English romanticists, and one may take it for granted that the extraordinary preference for the epic in 20th century India was caused by the example of the 19th century English poetry. The conception of mythos as an archetypal truth about human existence was also an important element of romantic poetry in England, where epic poetry was seen as an expression of the "Zietgeist". But in contrast to the romantic exaltation of the individual in Shelley, Keats and others, Prasad's Manu does not realize his human possibilities or represent an attempt to conquer crippling barriers; instead Manu's search is for the revelation of a cosmic order in which he can see himself as part of the playful creation of Shiva.

(Gaefke, 1978, p. 31)

These subjects, like the poetic persona of *Us Din Jab Jeevan Ke Path Mein*, or Manu of *Kamayani* may either be the poets themselves or other people, but they no longer remained

a part of the normative society. They had a different aim in life and went on in the paths of life to experience or realise something great. These figures almost appear like Byronic Heroes who may be turned into an exile or an outcast due to their in acceptance of authority, or a certain higher, spiritual quest and zest for life.

Moving on to Sumitranandan Pant, he is said to be among the true representatives of his times, unlike Prasad, who looks back at the classical tradition. Pant's personality derives an influence from Gandhism, Nehruism and Marxism. *Ucchvas*, *Pallav*, *Veena*, *Granthi*, *Gunjan*, *Yugant* and so on were being appreciated for their closeness in depiction of the imagination. The images and the writing style has a canny resemblance to English romantics, as he himself claims that he tried to follow their footsteps. Let us take some examples. His poem *Vasant Shri* (1918) from the collection *Pallav* is remarkable in its resemblance to Keats' *To Autumn* (1819). Both the poems use the beauty of the seasons and personify them in the form of a female. Autumn on one hand is like a lady "sitting carelessly on a granary floor", whereas *Vasant Shri* is a young girl playing around in the fullness and greenery of her surroundings. Where autumn is described by human activities like reaping, gleaning, winnowing and making cider, *Vasant* is described by *krida* (playing), *haas* (laughter), *kautuhal* (curiosity), *pujan* (praying) and so on. The preoccupations with the activities of autumn where on one hand depict the uneasiness of Keats, that of *Vasant* depict the calmness of Pant. Pant's pre occupations and influence of nature and his wish to take inspiration from the nature in order to experience his own personality is extended in his other poems. His poem *Yachna* (Request) (1919), where he addresses a figure in absentia to give him the qualities of being sweet in his acts, polite in his words and so melodious, so that he be able to drive away the poison of even a venomous serpent. This figure in absentia seems to be the nature, the landscape around him, to whom he pleads a kinder existence. Many critics believe that Pant's poetry, was in remembrance of his mother whom he lost in a very young age, and then sought her blessings in Mother Nature. "The companionship of mother nature and the love for her, what was available to Pant since his early childhood life, that was indelible imprint on his poetry." (Roy Choudhary, 2001, p. 54). He tried to find meaning of life through nature as is evident through his poem, *Maun Nimantran* (1924). He tried to establish a connection of humans to nature, and realised how silently, each component of the nature around us had something to say, something to teach us. He experienced a sense of mystic beauty, a spiritual unity with nature and the creator, the omnipresent and the omnipotent. In what comes out as the understanding of Pant's nature is synonymous to Wellek's recommendation. "All romantic poets conceived of nature as an organic whole, on the analogue of man rather than a concourse of atoms- a nature that is not divorced from aesthetic values, which

are just as real (or rather more real) than the abstractions of science" (Wellek, 1949, p.23). The above poems illustrate a sense of commonality between the East and the West along with a unique identity of *Chhayavadis Romanticism* among the plurality of Romanticisms.

Even now a proper extensive understanding of East-West relationships, in a comparative perspective is full of gaps due to unavailability of translated material, and a lack of Literary History which draws commonalities among similar literary movements around the world. Nevertheless, from the above analysis, we have been able to establish that Romanticism as a movement exists in plurality around the world and so has its analogy in Hindi Literature in *Chhayavad*. This paper touches just the tip of an iceberg that is still hidden in Literary History. With deeper introspections we will be able to find further relations between literary movements of the East and the West.

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