

A GLIMPSES OF RASA IN JOHN KEATS'S "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE"

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Abstract:

This research paper offers a cross-cultural analysis of John Keats's celebrated Romantic poem "Ode to a Nightingale" through the lens of Bharata's Rasa Theory from the Indian aesthetic tradition. The poem is examined for its evocation of major Rasas such as Rati (passion of love), Hasa (mirth), Shoka (sorrow), Krodha (anger), Utsaha (heroism), (aesthetic love), Bhaya (fear), Jugupsa (disgust) and Adbhuta (wonder). The present research paper explores how Keats's poetic imagination and sensory depth parallel the Indian emphasis on emotional flavor (rasa) to achieve aesthetic pleasure in the sensitive reader (sahridaya).

Keywords: Rasa Theory, John Keats, Ode to a Nightingale, Romanticism, Aesthetics, Bharata, Adbhuta, Jugupsa

Introduction :

John Keats (1795–1821), one of the central figures of English Romanticism, is remembered for his intense sensual imagery and exploration of beauty, mortality, and transcendence. His poem —Ode to a Nightingale (1819) exemplifies these themes. While studying the poem in the light of Rasa (Bhava), it must know what rasa theory is. The Rasa Theory provides a foundational framework from Bharata's Natyashastra in Indian aesthetics for analyzing emotional experience in literature and drama. This paper attempts to associate these two cultural traditions by analyzing Keats's poem through Rasa Theory, illustrating how the poem can evoke various emotional responses in alignment with classical Indian aesthetic categories.

Overview of Rasa Theory The conception of —Rasa is the most important and significant contribution of the Indian mind to aesthetics. The study of aesthetics deals with the realization of beauty in art, its relish or enjoyment, and the awareness of joy that accompanies an experience of beauty. Rasa is a unique word or concept in any other language. Rasa Theory, as articulated in Bharata's Natya Shastra, posits that the principle of art lies in its ability to evoke emotional states in the audience. The term —rasa literally means —juice or —flavor, signifying the distilled essence of emotion that the spectator experiences. Bharata identified eight Rasas, later expanded to nine:

1. Shringara (love, beauty)
2. Hasya (laughter)



3. Raudra (anger)
4. Karuna (compassion, sorrow)
5. Bbbhatsa (disgust)
6. Bhayanaka (fear)
7. Veera (heroism)
8. Adbhuta (wonder)

These emotions evoke a variety of responses in the audience and form the emotional core of the performance. Rasa arises from a combination of three elements: Vibhava (determinants) are crucial elements that evoke emotions (Bhava) and ultimately lead to the experience of Rasa (aesthetic flavor) in the audience. Vibhava are classified into Alambana Vibhava (the main subject or object that evokes the emotion) and Uddipana Vibhava (the exciting or stimulating circumstances surrounding the main subject). When these are experienced by a sensitive audience (sahridaya), rasa is fully realized.

Keats's Poetic Vision and Aesthetic Sensibility:

The poem of Keats is known for sensuousness and aestheticism. Keats strongly believed in —Negative Capability, the idea that a poet should be comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. His poems often create a wave of mood and emotion and readers remain in it rather than think rational. This impact of the poem aligns closely with the Rasa aesthetic, which emphasizes the emotional effect of art on the reader or viewer, not its moral or intellectual message.

Rasa Analysis of “Ode to a Nightingale”

The opening stanza of the poem revels in sensory richness:

—My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I
had drunk. |

Here, the poet himself exposes the nightingale and its song as supreme power of divine that serves as the vibhva (stimulus) for the speaker's longing. The imagery of flowers, wine, and summer evenings contributes to the mood of romantic beauty. The speaker yearns to escape into the nightingale's world, free from human world of sorrow and suffering.

Throughout the poem, especially in the third and fourth stanzas, the speaker meditates on death, sickness, and the transience of life:

—Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies; / Where but to think is to be
full of sorrow. |

These reflections invoke Karuna rasa, here poet compares mortality of human and immortality of the bird. It shows centered on human suffering and the awareness of mortality. The contrast between the eternal nightingale and the ephemeral human life deepens the sense of sorrow and helplessness.

—Fair youth, beneath the trees, / Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss, / Though winning

near the goal this line evokes ‘Sringara Rasa’. The poet artistically expresses the superiority of the pictures on the urn over their parallels in life in the second and third stanzas. Third stanza of the poem also exposes the emotion turns mournful when the poet describes the vain glory of human life: —All breathing human passion far above,/That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed. These lines are pictured as contrasts to —More happy love! More happy, happy love! / Forever warm and still to be enjoyed,/Forever panting and forever young. The scenes of happiness portrayed in the preceding lines convert the effect of the Karuna Rasa implied in the poet's description of the fruitless destiny of the human life to an exalted level. Here Sringara Rasa is contradicted with Karuna rasa and it is through the power of suggestion that Keats attains this antithetical emotional ambiance.

In the later stanzas, the poem transitions from intense longing and sorrow to philosophical contemplation:

- Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
- Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: — Do I wake or sleep?

The mood is one of detachment, stillness, and calm acceptance. This tranquil state, free from desire or anguish, reflects *15a101nta rasa*, which is often considered the culmination of spiritual or aesthetic experience.

What struggle to escape? What pipes and tumbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

These lines introduced with an interrogative tone contain the wonder of the speaker over the variety of pictures on the urn. The *Sthayibhava* here is *Vismaya*-(wonder) and the *rasa* suggested is —*Adbudhal* or the sense of wonder. Though these statements are presented in a rhetorical

mode, the very suggestive sense, the emotional elements and Keats' ingenuity in dealing with such subtle shades of human mind makes it a vivid descriptive passage.

The imaginative escape into the bird's world is suffused with awe and marvel:

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee, / Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards.

The surreal merging of dream and reality, mortality and immortality, evokes *adbhuta rasa*. The reader experiences wonder at the mystical, transcendent quality of the bird and the speaker's vision.

By reading —*Ode to a Nightingale* through *Rasa Theory*, we observe a shared universalism in literary aesthetics: both Romanticism and Indian poetics emphasize emotional resonance. *Rasa Theory* allows readers to appreciate Keats not merely through Western critical paradigms (form, theme, symbolism) but as an immersive emotional and aesthetic experience.

Conclusion:

John Keats's poetic imagination in “*Ode on a Grecian Urn*” mirrors the emotional precision of *Rasa theory*. While Keats did not consciously adhere to Indian aesthetics, his poetry nonetheless creates emotional *rasas* that align with *Bharata's theory*—particularly

Śṛṅgāra, Karuṇa, and Adbhuta. These stanzas exemplify how universal aesthetic experiences can transcend cultural traditions, opening pathways for comparative literary criticism between Eastern and Western poetics.. Bharata's Rasa Theory provides an effective intercultural tool to interpret and appreciate the aesthetic power of Keats's work. Such an approach reveals the transcultural nature of poetic emotion and enriches the global dialogue between literary traditions.

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