

The Metaphysics of Pain: Troubadours, Catharism, Buddhism and John Keats

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The metaphysics of pain in the West is fore-grounded upon the doctrine of dualism as expounded in Platonism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Catharism and Kantian thought. There is no denying the fact that the Western sensibility is essentially dualistic, and right from the early Greek philosophy of Heraclitus, Empedocles and Pythagoras down to Plato, St. Augustine and Kantian aesthetics, the duality between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ (Heraclitus), ‘harmony’ and ‘discord’ (Empedocles), real and ideal (Plato), flesh and spirit, ‘city of God’ and ‘city of man’ (St. Augustine) constitute the core of Western thought. While subscribing to the dualistic theory, the Greek philosophers emphasize the fact that the whole world is flux, and that change and mutability characterize our existence (Stace: 44-74; Burnet: 51-55). Everything being transitory by nature, and permanence being a far cry in the world of mutability, pain and suffering are caused by separation and frustration, non-fulfillment of desires and, more predominantly, by the realization of the transience of life. While emphasizing the dichotomy between good and bad Eros in *Symposium* (180c-185c), Plato in fact points to the eternal clash between the ideal and the real. His idea is more forcefully pronounced in *Phaedrus* (244-265b) wherein he states that temporary allurements of a beautiful body creates dissatisfaction the moment one realizes that the world of sense perception is essentially mutable (Taylor: 51).

In the Oriental tradition, on the other hand, Buddhism enjoins that life is essentially full of misery and suffering (*dukkha*). Though Buddha didn’t speak specifically about any metaphysical doctrine of sin, he located the cause of suffering and pain in the ignorant craving (*avidyā*) precisely because it is ignorance about the ultimate Reality that causes all suffering. The Buddhist concept of suffering and pain can be correlated with the cult of pain professed by Catharism and the aesthetics of Troubadours, the court poets of mediaeval France who professed the art of *amor courtis* (courtly love) grounded upon the aesthetics of separation and suffering. Troubadour concept of love is essentially an ever-increasing desire fomented by suffering in separation and as such its philosophy is fore-grounded upon dualism that rejects physical pleasure and possession of the object of love. The romantic aesthetics of pain in the West is philosophically built upon the Platonic and Troubadourian

aesthetics on the one hand, and can be negotiated with the Buddhist concept of pleasure and pain on the other. In the backdrop of the above discussion on duality, the poetry of the English romantic poet John Keats can be revisited in the light of the Buddhist and Troubadourian aesthetics of delight and pain with special emphasis on his *Odes* and the *Fall of Hyperion*.

I

Buddhism, like *Sāṅkhya* system of Indian philosophy, characterizes life in terms of impermanence and suffering (*dukkha*). Buddhism comes closer to Catharism in this regard. The Cathar philosophy developed between 12th and 14th century in Southern France is grounded upon the doctrine of dualism – one that forwards the argument that the visible world is created by the Evil and that the path of liberation is shown by the benevolent God to soul already enmeshed by Satan in the body. The Cathars know, like Buddhists, fairly well that the beautiful things and objects of the visible world cause suffering and pain precisely because they are transitory and more particularly bear the stamp of their evil creator. The Cathars, often acclaimed as Christian dualists contesting Roman Catholic Church, are called Buddhists of the West. They subscribe to the Buddhist thought of impermanence (*anicca*), insubstantiality (*anatta*), illumination and enlightenment. To both Buddhists and Cathars, life is flux, and whatever rises must have a fall thereby vindicating the very fundamental fact that existence is an unending process of rise, growth, decay, dissolution and death. In this sense, our existence is an unending cycle of growth and decay, integration and disintegration. While emphasizing the frailty and insecurity of life, Buddhism further enjoins that there is a void at the center of existence which is a result of the insubstantial nature of life. The Cathars are called Buddhists insofar as they share with Buddhism the thought that life is full of suffering, and that desire is the cause of all sufferings. It is the problem of suffering that prompted both Buddhists and Cathars to go in quest of enlightenment (*nibbāna*).

While emphasizing the dichotomy between integration and disintegration, Buddha’s first sermon proclaims that ours is a world where birth and youth, aging and sickness, despair and death are full of *dukkha*. Suffering being inherent in the very fabric of life, the sermon further states, a person experiences it through five factors: ‘grasping’ (*upādāna-skanda*), material form (*rūpa*), ‘feeling’ (*vedanā*) experienced both physically and mentally, ‘cognition’/‘recognition’/ and interpretation, constructing activities shaping characters (*sanskāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*). The second sermon which is a sequel to the first, detects the cause of all suffering (*samudaya*) in ‘desire’ whereas the third sermon is devoted to eradication of suffering (*nirodha*) through desiccation of desire. Cessation of *dukkha* in Buddhism consists in detachment, renunciation of worldly pleasure and unconditional surrender of passion to meditation, self-control and sacrifice with pity and compassion for the ailing mankind. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is *Nirvāṇa* which can be attained by transcending the cravings through total destruction of the fire of attachment, hatred and delusion and the questions of birth, aging and death (Harvey: 60-61). *Nirvāṇa* is the cessation of all

dulḥka and it points to a life of enlightenment beyond death which is experienced in the state of *Tathagata* (perfect).

While professing the Cathartic doctrine of purity and sexual abstinence, the Troubadours of Southern France, however, grounded their aesthetics of pain and suffering in 'desire'. Andrea Capellanus, an authority on the theory of courtly love, enjoins that "Love is an inborn suffering and an ever-increasing desire (Capellanus: *The Art of Courtly Love* ,) which is finally chastened through ordeals of suffering, and then spiritually directed towards enlightenment through an elaborate paraphernalia of worship, service, sacrifice and meditation upon the beloved lady (domna), the lady Sophia (Lady Philosophy) in Troubadour poetry. No doubt , desire for the beloved is the starting point in courtly love, but through constant burning, suffering, swooning ,service and sacrifice for the beloved, the lover is chastened and elevated spiritually to the position of a saint- a stage in which his baser desires are transmuted into pure and divine emotion bereft of carnal passion and physical possession. It is a stage in which the lover-saint desires nothing, but the blessings of the beloved domna for which he surrenders himself totally to her in suppliant knee which is strongly reminiscent of the *bhakti* tradition of medieval Vaishnavism in India and the idea of 'feudalization of love' and midon(domna)-vassal relationship of the castle lady and the medieval knight so powerfully presented in the Provençal lyric poetry (cansos) of the Troubadours like Arnaut Daniel, Bernart de Ventadorn and Raimbaut de Aurenga. Troubadour philosophy is in this respect more akin to Tantric Buddhism that celebrates the power of *Śakti* rather than the Orthodox Buddhism. However, one fundamental point to be noted here is that Troubadours foregrounded their aesthetic on the Cathartic philosophy of separation of the soul from God and the Buddhist concept of suffering and spiritual illumination/elevation through an elaborate process of discipline and control.

II

John Keats, often eulogized as a poet of warm world of senses celebrating the poetry of Earth as 'never dead', seems to have been influenced by Cathartic-Troubadourian aesthetic of dualism on the one hand, and the metaphysics of pain as adumbrated in Buddhist philosophy on the other. His interest in Provençal thought, medieval knighthood and Troubadour concept of separation, suffering in love and a haughty domna(mistress) can be discerned in the poems like *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *The Eve of the St. Agnes* that celebrates an ideal world of romance and ecstasy. Though his friend Shelley used to call him a 'Greek' because of his copious references to and heavy leaning towards Greek mythology and aesthetics, Keats too built up his spiritual home in the romantic and supernaturally surcharged setting of the Middle Ages and, surprisingly, in the myriad forms of beauty, religion and philosophy of India on the other. His interest in Indian thought in the backdrop of cultural confluence between the East and the West therefore needs an elaborate discussion.

It is a fact that cultural interaction between the East and the West has been a continuous phenomenon, and that it is more predominantly so since Alexander's

invasion of India in 327 B.C. which facilitated dissemination of Hindu and Buddhist thoughts in the West. Alexander himself learnt lessons in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy from one Kalanos, an ascetic from Taxila, and his concepts of 'world-religion' and 'world government' were in fact grounded upon the Vedic message of peace (*Śānti*) and one family on *the Earth (vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam)*. Megasthenes, who came to India as the ambassador of the Greek prince Seleucus, gave to the West in his *Indica*, an interesting account of the socio-cultural condition of Ancient India, whereas the Buddhist work *Milindapanha* records that the city of Alexandria was a confluence of different cultures, including Hinduism and Buddhism, as it was regularly frequented by merchants from India. Prof. E.R. Dodds (1936:11) emphatically observes that the Greek culture arose against the oriental background, and that India, the fount of Asiatic consciousness, had always played an active role in this regard. With the fall of Alexandria in 642 A.D., the cultural interaction between the East and the West fell into the hands of the Arabs, and the Arab scholars, invaders, merchants and traders tended to negotiate between the two worlds by introducing Indian silk, spices, cotton and precious stones into the European market. During the rule of Abbasid Caliphs, the Arab court was frequented by Greek and Hindu merchants and scholars, and several Sanskrit texts, both secular and sacred, were translated into Arabic and then to Latin and French for their easy reception in Western Europe (Nicholson, 1977:361). Among these texts, mention may be made of *Arabian Nights*, *Panchatantra* and *Buddha Jatakas*. But this commercial relation and cultural negotiation suffered seriously following the fall of Constantinople in 1458 A.D., which hampered the cordial commercial transaction and cultural relation between Muslims and Christians. With the advent of the Renaissance, the silk route was replaced by the sea route through which the struggle for Indian market by the European nations began ,and the Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, French and finally the British – all fought for possessing India, the land of beauty and gold.

During the Renaissance ,be it court or countryside, city or parliament, people talked everywhere about sea and adventure ,trade and commerce ,Indian silk and jewel ,Arabian scent and oriental wealth. In the mouth of Antonio, Shakespeare in his *The Merchant of Venice* (1.1.ii,270) tells us about England's commercial connection with the East including India ,which is further evidenced from his picture of the cargo of spices and bales of silk(1.i,33-35). Whereas Christopher Marlowe evinced a keen interest in Indian gold, pampered jades of Asia, Oriental pearl, mines and metals in *The Jew of Malta*(1.i.30-32) and *Dr. Faustus* (1.i.79-80) ,Shakespeare in *The Troilus and Cressida* (1.i.103-105) conceives of Troilus an adventurous merchant, and Cressida, an Indian Pearl: 'Her bed is India; there she lies a pearl!' Even as Marlowe and Shakespeare evinced keen interest in Indian wealth, silk, stones and metals, John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard were inspired by the Indian heroic themes of high passion, courage and adventure characterizing the Moghuls, and wrote heroic tragedy. Dryden's *The Indian Emperor* (1665) and *Aureng Zebe* (1675) and Howard's *The Indian Queen* (1664) bear brilliant testimony to this fact .What is remarkable to note here is that the

Renaissance writers were influenced by the interesting travelling accounts of Greek, Arabian, Italian, and French travellers like Megasthenes, Marco Polo, the French Bernier and the Venetian Ibn Batuta, and by the various translations of Sanskrit and Buddhist texts, which continued to exert tremendous influence during 18th and 19th centuries as well.

Ever since the publication of the English prose translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1785) by Charles Wilkins, *History of Hindustan* (1793) by Thomas Maurice, *The History of Hindostan* (1768) by Alexander Dow, *Hindu Pantheon* (1810) by Edward Moor, *The Curse of Kehama* (1810) by Robert Southey and the monumental translations of various Sanskrit texts besides very many Asiatic research papers contributed by the famous Orientalist Sir William Jones, there started an Indian Renaissance in England. In the introduction to his book, Dow provides a detailed account of the Hindu mythology, Hindu pantheon and various schools of Indian philosophy like Nyaya, Sankhya, Vedanta, Buddhism and Jainism. K.G. Srivastava in his remarkable research work *Bhagavad Gita and the English Romantic Tradition: A Study in Influence* (2002:129) emphatically observes that “much before Wilkins and Jones, he had provided the English men a very authentic account of the achievements of the Hindu mind in the realms of religion and Philosophy”. Robert Sencourt in his powerful book *India in English Literature* (1920 : 285) makes a significant remark that the Orientalists opened a ‘mine’ for the romantic poets. Obviously then the influence of Wilkins, Jones and Maurice on the English romantic poets deserve special mention. John Drew in his masterpiece *India and the Romantic Imagination* (1987:45-80) speaks high of the influence of Jones, Maurice and Wilkins’ translation of the *Gita*, which ‘occasioned excitement’ (Drew:80). Drew further maintains that Thomas Maurice was ‘perhaps the most influential’ in that he discussed the incarnations (avatars) of Lord Vishnu, which influenced both Coleridge and Keats. Time and again, Coleridge alludes to the ‘Brahmin creed’-now in *Biographia Literaria* (1975:77) and the next moment in a letter addressed to his friend Thelwall on 14th of October, 1797: “...I adopt the Brahmin Creed, and say- it is better to sit than stand, it is better to lie than sit, it is better to sleep than wake, like the Indian Vishnu, to float along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of lotus, and wake once in a million years for a few minutes just to know that I was going to sleep for a million of years more.” (Griggs, 1956-71:350). Here Coleridge points to the ‘meditative pose’ and ‘blessed mood’ which is significant for both Hinduism and Buddhism. Coleridge, for that matter Keats, has in all probability borrowed the idea of Vishnu/Vishna from Maurice’s *History of Hindustan*. Significantly, while talking about Avataravada in his letter addressed to George and Georgiana Keats (14th February- to 3rd of May, 1819), Keats, unlike Coleridge, uses the word Vishnu as Saviour and Mediator, and refers to the personified abstraction of gods in mythology, which strongly reminds the reader of the possibility of Keats’s acquaintance with Vedic mythology through Maurice, Coleridge and Jones, who wrote series of hymns to Vedic gods and goddesses in form of translation. Interestingly, Keats’s friend Shelley wrote his “*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*” under the impact of Jones’ nine hymns to deities

like Narayan, Surya, Gayatri, Savitri, Durga, Kamadeva, Indra, Lakshmi and Bhavani. Drew (234) maintains that in Shelley’s *Hymn*, ‘Platonism had been absorbed by the Indian Vedanta tradition’. It is also tempting to analyze Keats’s *Ode on a Grecian Urn* in the light of Vedantic wisdom and Buddhist concept of pain. It is a fact that Keats was very enthusiastic about India, and wanted to undertake a voyage to India; and in *Endymion* (1V.33), he invokes ‘Indian Bliss’, ‘Indian maid’, ‘My sweetest Indian’ and the ‘Ganges,’ the most sacred river of India. K.G. Srivastava (316) asserts that Keats used to attend Coleridge’s public lectures with ‘great enthusiasm’ and therefore his understanding of Buddhism was enriched by Coleridge’s fertile philosophic mind. In his analysis of Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*, John Drew calls it an ‘oriental poem’ (206) and the emperor a Buddhist; and draws references to Kashmir, the Paradise on the Earth and to Tantric Buddhism in which there are concepts like ecstasy and Great Bliss (*Mahā Sukha*). Paradise in Buddhism is sitting enlightened on a lotus, and Kubla Khan’s dome is in fact a pointer to the abode of bliss. Srivastava argues that Keats ‘knew some of the doctrines of Buddhism’ (310). In his letter to his friend John Hamilton on 19th of February, 1818, Keats talks about a stage of ‘ripeness in intellect’ and a spiritual passage for illumination which is decidedly Buddhist. By referring to thirty two palaces of delight, and a happy voyage towards illumination and ecstasy (‘what delicious diligent indolence’), the romantic poet indicates in all probability the concept of Nirvana or Bliss in Buddhism. Srivastava interprets that the thirty two palaces are admittedly drawn from the philosophy of Buddhism insofar as they point to the thirty two signs of an illumined soul as adumbrated in *Lalitavistara* and *Buddhacharita*. Each of these signs signify a palace of delight which Keats wishes to attain. Keats, Srivastava opines (310), may have gathered the idea about various palaces of delight from Edward Moor’s *Hindu Pantheon* (1810).

III

John Keats was perhaps the most romantic of all the younger English romantic poets, and his romanticism was, in most part fore-grounded upon a kind of weird sadness. This is all the more evident from the undercurrent of nameless melancholy and numberless woes that are experienced by Keats under the overpowering influence of the pain and miseries of the world as depicted in his odes and *The Fall of Hyperion*. The odes, which strike us as the crown of Keats’ achievement, are serious musings on the dichotomy between the ideal and the real, between permanence and impermanence strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist message that mutability and impermanence characterize our existence. It is our ignorance (*avidyā*) and ignorant craving that cause all suffering. It is in our sheer spiritual ignorance that we dream/think that “a thing of beauty is a joy forever” (*Endymion*). In “Ode on Melancholy” Keats is painfully aware of the transience of life and beauty:

She dwells with Beauty—
Beauty that must die

Like a Buddhist, Keats is fully aware of the fact that life is full of sorrows and sufferings, and that joy on the earth is nothing but ‘aching pleasure’, a desperately

fragile and transient thing. In ordinary/visible sense, suffering encompasses birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, lamentation and distress and is further extended to suffering caused by lack of personal fulfillment and separation from the desirable object/person. Thus says The Buddha:

“Being united with what is not liked is suffering, separation from what is liked is suffering, not to get that one wants is suffering” (P. Mishra, *An End to Suffering* 191).

The suffering that Buddhism attests, is both physical and mental. The sufferings of Keats’ brothers (George and Edward) from tuberculosis are physical, whereas Keats’ own frustration and lack of fulfillment in love in separation from Fanny Brawne is mental. And this awful state of frustration and separation can be poignantly expressed in terms of the Troubadourian concept of ‘passion’ as suffering in separation from the “la Belle Dame Sans Merci” (the beautiful lady without mercy). The physical and mental states of suffering have been poignantly presented in “Ode to a Nightingale” through an apt contrast between the ecstasy of the soul represented by nightingale on the tree and the physical pain experienced by the poet –listener rooted on the ground. In Upanishadic scheme of thought, there are two birds on the tree in every human form: one that enjoys (body) physically and suffers, and the other that observes and remains ecstatic in detachment from the ‘forbidden fruit’ of the tree. The nightingale is, therefore, an ‘immortal bird’ that knows not the bitter bread of suffering and that doesn’t taste the ‘hemlock’ of the world disease epitomizing birth, youth, old age and death. The poet’s heart aches and a sort of drowsy numbness pains his ‘sense’ as though ‘hemlock’ he has drunk to sink towards Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology signifying death. At the same time, Keats comes closer to Buddhism in that every human being is born to this world where intense desire for consummation of passion results in despair and loss of paradise. To him, ours is a horrible world:

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan,
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

(Ode to a Nightingale; III.4-10)

The lines quoted above succinctly state the Buddhist message that suffering hovers at every door because no happiness is long lasting. Since desire is the root of all sufferings, Buddhism enjoins that one should renounce desire, and for that matter love, because separation from beloved causes suffering. As stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Buddhism also reiterates the same truth that desire breeds attachment (*sangāt saijāyate kāma*), and non-fulfilment of desire leads to anger, frustration and suffering. Desire is by nature like fire, and once one desire is fulfilled, human beings go after one

hundred and one desires and in the process, suffering is multiplied because permanence and lasting fulfillment of desire is an anathema in this world of mortality. In Troubadourian aesthetic, therefore, separation is preferred to possession in romantic love, because the moment the beloved is possessed, true longing ceases to be, and the true lover lands in hell and violates the very vital theory of courtly love that ‘blindness’ is a bar to love. In “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, Keats therefore proclaims the Troubadourian theory of love epitomized by the urn:

Bold lover, never never canst thou kiss
... Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair !

While singing to the tune of Buddhism, Keats intensely realizes that impermanence characterizes worldly existence, and that ‘human love’ is prone to suffering. Therefore, he searches for an ideal world of permanence, now in nightingale and the next moment in the Grecian urn that epitomize ecstasy and permanent bliss. In both the odes under discussion, the romantic poet oscillates between ideal and real, between permanence and impermanence, and his metaphysical quest for permanence and spiritual illumination/enlightenment is evident from the telling contrast between ‘heard melody’ and ‘unheard music’ with a desire to escape the world of pain and suffering to land up in the world of ecstasy and eternal joy epitomized by the ‘urn’ and the nightingale. This is strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist concept of renunciation and detachment from worldly pleasure. Keats’ presentation of the urn as an ‘unravished bride of quietness’ and a ‘foster child of silence and slow time’ justifies his increasing awareness of the transitoriness of worldly things and his longing for sweeter ‘unheard music’ (music of the soul from within?) because heard music is ephemeral and is played to the pleasure of the ‘sensual ear’ only. The romantic poet cherishes eternal happiness which is more forcefully conveyed in the third stanza of “Ode on a Grecian Urn” with its repeated emphasis on ‘happiness’ which is far above ‘all breathing human passion’ that frustrates one to remain aggrieved with a ‘high sorrowful’ heart, a ‘burning forehead’ and a ‘ parching tongue’: ‘Ah, happy happy boughs !’. Surprisingly, the word ‘happiness’ is repeated six times in the stanza which justifies Keats’ longing for eternal bliss strongly reminiscent of the Troubadour concept of jois (joy) attained by the blessings of the beloved goddess on the one hand, and the Tantric concept of the abode of bliss (*mahāsukha*) on the other. This is further evident from his irresistible desire for ‘More happy love! More happy, happy love!’. Keats’ desperate quest for permanence as against impermanence can be located in his love of art and Nature, epitomized by the ‘urn’ and the ‘nightingale’ respectively. He equates the urn with eternity and mystifies it because the ‘silent form’ has the miraculous power to tease us out of thought, although it is nothing but a ‘cold pastoral’. Keats’ maddening haunt after permanence is evident from the very opening stanza of “Ode to a Nightingale” where ‘pain’ is contrasted with ‘happiness’, epitomized by the song of the nightingale:

Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness.

Strongly reminiscent of a Buddhist's preparation to renounce the world of pleasure is the poet's desire to be 'away! away':

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known
The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Analyzed in terms of Buddhism, the above lines point to the most fundamental fact that Keats wishes to attain *Nirvāṇa*-illumination and enlightenment- in the land of the nightingale that epitomizes immortality and perfection, ecstasy and illumination. Therefore, he desperately wishes to forget the 'embalmed darkness' that signifies ignorance (avidya) as against spiritual illumination and light. The land of *Nirvāṇa* knows no death and hence the immortal picture of the bird of Eternity:

Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread the down

Self annihilation constitutes a significant aspect of Keatsian aesthetics/metaphysics which is grounded upon the dialectics of pleasure and pain and the poet asserts that immortal poetry arises out of human suffering alone thereby vindicating the philosophy of Buddhism, Catharism and Troubadourism. In his "Sleep and Poetry", Keats is deeply aware of the futility and transitoriness of the sensuous perception of beauty. What is worth noticing about the poet is the way he embraces sacrifice and prefers to brave the spectacle of human suffering. He is not a sentimental weakling to be cowed down by the sufferings in life. With his matured vision characteristic of a man of dispassionate action as characterized in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Keats proposes to respect pleasure and pain with detachment and is inclined to live through sacrifice. To live well is to die well, and to die well is to necessitate the concept of living well. The Keatsian metaphysics of pain therefore entails that there is pleasure in drinking away, like Lord Siva, the hemlock of life and the world:

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human heart.

To Keats, as it is for the Troubadours, pain is pleasant, and therefore in 'The Fall of Hyperion' he emphatically proclaims that immortal poetry arises out of human suffering alone:

None can usurp this height, returned that shade,
But those to whom the miseries of the world.
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

(The *Fall of Hyperion*, 147-49)

Even in a poem like *Hyperion* which was supposed to be written as an escape into the remote world of Greek mythology from the misery of nursing the poet's dying brother, Keats tended to express an experience of agony and suffering relished by Saturn and raised the perennial question of how such unhappiness and agony were to be endured by immortals. Keatsian aesthetic in *Hyperion* reveals his deeper insight

into the tragic aspects of life. Beauty is not only the fountain-source of 'joy' and 'truth' forever, it is also intertwined with pain and suffering. An experience bereft of sadness belongs to an inferior order of beauty, and as such a true votary of beauty, should search the 'most-soul searching sorrow' in the very 'Temple of Delight'. The path to real beauty lies therefore through the realm of sorrow. And obviously in *Hyperion*, beauty is perfectly blended with sorrow in the picture of Thea:

But oh: how unlike marble was that face.
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self

Behind Keatsian aesthetics of pain, here one locates the stamp of the Buddhist ethics that emphasizes pity (*karuṇā*) for suffering (*dukkha*) and sympathy for every form of sentient life. The commandments in Buddhism call upon humanity not to kill, not to harm, but to feel pity and become perfect and this view is incompatible with world negation. In his unfinished poem *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* (I. 154- 60), Keats echoes the Buddhist principle of pity and compassion and holds that the work directed towards the wellbeing of humanity is the surest path to salvation.

It is the problem of suffering that prompted both Buddha and John Keats to go in quest of the 'temple of delight' (*mahāsukha*) and *Nirvāṇa* (Enlightenment) respectively. Needless to say, Buddhism takes recourse to a systematic course of ascetic discipline which encompasses chastity and sacrifice, humility and non-violence, vegetarianism and compassion, detachment from the material world and promotion of pacifism. But Keats' metaphysical quest to overcome the anguish and suffering of the impermanent world aimed at social making and self-abandonment. In his letter to George and Georgiana Keats (April, 1819), he rejects the Christian concept of 'valley of tears' and accepts 'vale of soul-making' which is more akin to oriental thought; and to him, there are different stages through which a soul passes/ progress while discovering misery and suffering through experience. Keats compares the progress of soul to 'chambers in a mansion' and it is through the progressive journey by crossing different chambers that the soul finally attains the highest stage of the 'temple of delight' (mansion) and gets illumination after having recognized the burden of the mystery of life and the world. Strangely enough, the 'temple of delight' in Keatsian aesthetics can be correlated with his ideas of 'thirty two places of delight' which reminds an Indian reader of Keats, of the thirty two qualities of a great man (*mahāpurusa*) as described in the context of lord Buddha in *Lalitavistara*, and of the 32 palaces/ places of human body (Srivastava: 310) where the Saiva saints / tantrics use sandal paste for making the places holy and esoterically surcharged with spiritual significance. Be what it may, the objective/ goal of Keats' metaphysics/ aesthetics of pain is loss of self-hood (*mamabhāva*), and self-awakening through suffering. While correlating Keats' 'pleasure thermometer', with Zen awakening (Satori), Richard P. Benton (1966 : 33-47) maintains that Keats' metaphysical quest is fore-grounded upon gradual loss of self-hood through suffering and detachment and that Keats realised the ideal Zen state of being that

means transcendence of the dichotomy between pleasure and pain, between self and the not-self (Benton : 47).

Interestingly, it is also highly probable that Keats derived inspiration, for this idea, from the concept of maintenance of the world-order (*lokasaṅgraha*) as advocated in the *Gita* (III.20) Similarly, the emphasis on selfless work, sacrifice and well-being of the world in *Gita* and Buddhist texts finds its dignified presence in *The Fall of Hyperion* where the poet glorifies selfless people. Like the ‘*Indian karmayogi*’ a selfless man can attain perfection (*siddhi*) symbolized by the shrine of goddess Moneta:

Who love their fellows even to the death;
Who feel the giant agony of the world;
And, more, like slaves to poor humanity
Labour for mortal good.

And through the rejection of narcotics and suicide as the ways to escape sorrows and sufferings, the poet of *Ode on Melancholy* registers his resistance to the temptations which melancholy brings in its train:

No, no! not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf’s-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-barries,
Nor let the beetle, not the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, or the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow’s mysteries

Robin Mayhead observes that the resistance to temptation here is in line with ‘moral fortitude’ in order to keep ‘one’s sorrows in check’. This is strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist therapy of overcoming pleasure and pain with the help of the boat of discipline in the complex river of life. The journey is in the words of Zimmer “from the shore of spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*), desire (*kāma*), and death (*māra*), to the yonder back of transcendental wisdom (*vidyā*), which is liberation (*mokṣa*) from this general bondge”(1969: 475). In course of this arduous journey, Keats seems to suggest that one should not seek easy escape from sorrow and that one should feel and experience ‘the wakeful anguish of the soul’ calmly and patiently, and then proceed progressively for the highest moment of transcendental illumination.

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