

## REVIEW PAPER

# The language of Keat's poetry : An analysis in the light of *rīti* *siddhānta*

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## ABSTRACT

Indian Poetics is an embodiment of the discoveries related to the ways and means of the linguistic expression. The creative use of language is one of the much discussed issues in Indian poetics. Indian aestheticians have made several exploratory, but penetrating; contributions on many issues, having a distinct bearing on language in literature, that still confront modern scholars. They hold that literary beauty ensues from formal and structural features of a composition. According to them, it is this creative use of language that is capable of arousing the interest of an appreciative reader of fine taste and is sufficient for the aesthetic experience. These *ācāryas* have examined the creative use of language from various standpoints as *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure), *alamkāra* (poetic figure), *rīti* (style), *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *aucitya* (propriety) and erected their theoretical edifice on the firm foundation of poetic activity. As the title suggests the present paper aims at giving an overview of the *rīti siddhānta* of *Ācārya Vāmana* as well as the paper also explores how this literary theory related to phrasal organization can be applied to alien literature to get the so called aesthetic pleasure or *saundarya*, the basic function of literature reading.

**Key Words :** Theory of Style, Indian Poetics, Linguistic expression.

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Indian aestheticians have convincingly explained of the role of the creative use of language in literature and have examined it from its various standpoints as *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure), *alamkāra* (embellishment), *rīti* (style), *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *aucitya* (propriety). The present paper gives an overview of *rīti*, how it has been treated in Indian poetics, from the point of view of the creative use of language in literature.

Etymologically, the word '*rīti*' which originates from the Sanskrit verb '*rī*', has two components *rī* (verb) + *rin* (suffix) and literally means the path by which one means to travel. The synonyms for *rīti* are *prasthān*, *panthāh*, *paddhati*, *gati*, *way*, *mārga* etc. In poetics, it is indicative of the various phrasal organizations, used in poetic writing,

which imparts beauty to the poetic expression with the combination of some other poetic components as *rasa*, *guṇa* and *alamkāra*. *Ācārya Vāmana* (8<sup>th</sup> century) commands the credit of founding the *rīti* school and proclaiming *rīti* as the soul of poetry, "*rītirātma kāvyasya*" (रीतिरात्मा काव्यस्य) (*Vāmana* I: 2. 6) i.e. "the *rīti* is the soul of poetry" and explains this *sūtra* in the *vr̥tti*: "*rītirnāmeyamātmā kāvyasya. Śarīrasyeveti vākyaśesh*". (*Vāmana*, I: 2. 6. *vr̥tti*.) (रीतिर्नामेयमात्मा काव्यस्य । भारीरस्येवेति वाक्य शेषः ।) which means '*rīti* is to the *kāvya* what *ātmān* is to the *śharir*'. In order to realize the significance of *Vāmana*'s conception of the soul of *kāvya*, it is necessary here to study the etymology of the terms *ātmān* and *rīti*, respectively. The word *ātmān* is

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believed to have been derived from the root ‘at’ meaning to move constantly or from the root ‘an’ meaning to live, or perhaps from both. The term ‘*rīti*’ is derived from the root ‘ri’ meaning to move. The identity of *rīti* with *ātmān* becomes complete with the consideration of Vāmana’s metaphor of *guṇas* as *praṇas*. Just as the *ātmān* is the *kāraṇa śharīra* of a person, *rīti* is the *kāraṇa śharīra* of a *kāvya*. Emphasizing *rīti* as the soul of *kāvya*, he defines what *rīti* is and explains the nature of *rīti* in the *sūtra* and the *ṛtti*: “*viśiṣṭā pada-racanā rītiḥ.*” (विशिष्टा पदरचना रीतिः ।।) (Vāmana . I: 2. 7), “*viśeṣavatī padānām racanā rītiḥ*” (विशेषावती पदानां रचना रीतिः ।।) (Vāmana . I: 2. 7. *ṛtti*) which means “the particular arrangement of words (*i.e.* inflected nouns, pronouns and adjectives together with conjugated verbs) is called *rīti*.” it can be described that the specialty of organization of words and phrases, or the specialty in framing of phrases is *rīti*. Thus, the *rīti siddhānta* (theory of style) of Āchārya Vāmana is based on the creative use of language in consonance with the use of *samāsas* or compounds. Emphasizing *rīti* as the soul of *kāvya*, he elaborates his conception of *rīti* by relating it to the poetic excellences, or qualities, called *guṇas* and says “*viśeṣo guṇāmā*” (विशेषो गुणाम्ना) (Vāmana . I: 2. 8) which means “this particularity consists of the *guṇas* or poetic qualities *i.e.* the particularity (*vaiśiṣṭya*) of arrangement, again, rests upon certain definite composition of the different *guṇas* or fixed excellences of composition”. In a word, the *rīti* leads to the creative use of language in poetry by emphasizing on the phrasal and verbal organization. This organization is divided into three ways by Āchārya Vāmana which he conceives to be the basis of three *rītis* and this is evident from the following *sūtra*: “*sā tridhā vaidarbhī, gaudīya pāñcālī cetī*”. (सा त्रिधा – वैदर्भी गौड़ीया पांचाली चेति ।।) (Vāmana . I: 2. 9) which are *vaidarbhī*, *pāñcālī* and *gaudī*.

The first *rīti vaidarbhī*, is a *rīti* based on the use of the *asamās* *i.e.* the phrasal organization, devoid of compounds. It has *mādhurya* (melody) which generates special delight by liquefying the reader’s psyche. It also includes the use of phonemes and syllables suitable to produce rhythmic effect, especially the repetition of the same vocal class- nasal, semi vowels and short syllables with a total absence of hard consonants. It is experienced more and more in compositions delineating the *sāmbhoga śrngāra* (erotic sentiment due to union), the *vipralambha śrngāra* (erotic sentiment due to separation), the *karuna* (sentiment of pathos), and the *śānta rasa* (sentiment of quietitude). The second *rīti* is called the *pāñcālī*, a *rīti* based on use of the *madhyama-samāsa* *i.e.* the phrasal organization, made up of small compounds. It pervades the entire mind of the reader immediately even as fire catches the dry fuel. It consists

of *prasāda guṇa* (the excellence of perspicuity) particularly. This excellence is produced by the phrases which are easily understandable. It well accords with different *rasas* which are helped in their arousal due to it. The last type of *rīti* is *gaudī*, a *rīti* based on the use of the *dirgha-samās* means the phrasal organization made up of long compounds. It has *ojas* (elegance) which excites and inflames the psyche, expanding it. It attains prominence in the delineation of *vīra* (heroic sentiment), *bībhatsa* (sentiment of disgust) and *raudra* (sentiment of anger). It is generated by the repetition of plosive bilabial /p/, /b/, affricate palato-alveolar /dz/ /tʃ/, plosive alveolar/t/, /d/, fricative dental / θ/ /ð/, fricative alveolar/s/ /ʃ/.

To sum up, *rīti*, as the crowning principle in poetic expression, mainly depends upon the fact how the meaning of *kāvya* (poetry) is imparted in consonance with *rasa* (sentiment). The answer, in a word, lies in the oblique use of:

- Phonetic level - rhythm, rhyme, and meter facilitated by phonemes and syllables;
- Lexical items— usage, synonym, transference, adjective, pronoun, compounds, particle and verb etc.
- Grammatical items—tense, case, number, person, voices, affixes etc.
- Structural items or word powers—denotation, connotation, suggestion etc.

The *rītis*, thus, are mainly being characterized by the variety of phrasal organization *i.e.* the organization having small compounds, long compounds or being without compounds To test how valid the *rīti siddhānta* of Indian poetics would be for an alien literature, would entail the application of it to the works in a non- Sanskrit language. English poetry, especially the Romantic poetry could here be studied and assessed in the light of Vāmana’s *rīti siddhānta*. Among the Romantic poets, Keats fondly employs a series of compounds in his poems to enhance the beauty of the poetic expression. That’s why the application of *rīti siddhānta* of Indian poetics to his poetry affirms how creatively he has used all the three *rīti* of Āchārya Vāmana with a view to increase beauty, enhance qualities, depict nature, heighten feelings, delineate the action, activities and circumstances, expose internal state, delineate character, describe physical beauty, exhibit objective, depict scene, characterize spontaneous movements and put thoughts in tune with feelings. The artistic use of *rītis* in his poetry is found not extravagant and superfluous but quite purposeful in producing a striking and charming effect in it according to the theme and mood of the particular poem.

Being a master of music and senses, Keats is a conscious artist in the matter of producing musical effects and it is because of this well known feature of his poetry

that it abounds in the examples of *vaidarbhī rīti*. It is in pursue of his theory of melody that a masterful use of verbal figures as- assonance, interplay of phonemes and repetition, which imparts the quality of melody, is quite discernible in his narrative poems and odes. About this quality of Keats, Benjamin Bailey has aptly said:

“One of Keats’s “favourite topics of discourse”, was “the principle of melody in verse” – particularly “the management of open and close vowels.” Keats’s theory was, that “the vowels [in a line] should be so managed as not to clash with one another so as to mar the melody, - and yet that they should be interchanged, like differing notes of music to prevent monotony.”

(Bate 414)

As melody (*mādhurya*) and sweetness are the first and foremost qualities of *vaidarbhī rīti*, he has consciously employed all the needed resources in his language to make his verse musical. The use of vowel patterns for the purpose of melodious effect is quite conspicuous in the following lines quoted randomly from his poems:

#### The short and long vowel pattern:

(a) That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, (“Ode to a Nightingale”, 1-19)

(b) Away! away! for I will fly to thee, (“Ode to a Nightingale”, 1-31), both these lines quoted from the “Ode to a Nightingale”, exhibit the artistic use of vowel patterns to achieve *mādhurya guṇa*. The use of “short- long- long-short, short-long-long-short-long” in the example (a) and “short- long- short-long-short-long- short-long-short-long” in the example (b) enhances the musical effect of the lines and makes them more rhythmic.

#### The continuation of short vowels:

(a) Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud, (“Ode on Melancholy”, 1-12)

The example cited from “Ode on Melancholy” exhibits the continuation of short vowels followed by short and long vowels systematically. Besides imparting the rhythm, the pattern used by the poet here is also quite appropriate and suitable to the mood and meaning of the line. The continuous use of short vowels here represents the instant and sudden action.

#### The progressive use of long vowels is appropriately used to support a quiet and somber mood:

(a) To take into the air my quiet breath; (“Ode to a Nightingale”, 1-54)

Here the poet has artistically used the combination of long-long-short-long-short-long-long-long vowels to exhibit the calm, quiet and somber desire of the speaker.

#### Vowel interplay and repetition:

(a) I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, (“Ode to a Nightingale”, 1-41)

In this line the interplay of vowels enhances the musical effect between the starting and ending of the line. The /a/ sound of “cannot” interplays with “at” and the /ee/ sound of “see” interplays with “feet”.

(b) Saying, “Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place; They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!”  
(*The Eve of St. Agnes*, 1. 98-99)

Here also the rhythmic effect of both lines is enhanced by the use of continuing vowel repetition. The initial /a/ sound of “saying” matches with the initial “they” of second line, similarly the sounds of “hie” and “night”, “from” and “whole” and “place” and race” also make the both lines possessing the quality of *mādhurya* because of the same vowel sounds.

(c) And bid old Saturn take his throne again, (*Hyperion* Book I. 250). This lines is also imparted the musical effect by the employment of vowel repetition and interplay in the words “and”-“Saturn”, “bid”-“his” and “old”-“throne”.

As far as the *pāñcālī rīti* is concerned, which is found in the composition having comprehensible compounds consisting of five or six words with the prominence of *prasāda guṇa* and suitable to all the *rasas*, Keats’s poetry abounds with indeclinable compounds and epithets imparting a peculiar richness and colorfulness to his poetry. Walter Jackson Bate has noted this quality in the style of Keats. His comment on the subject, which elaborates the idea clearly, goes like this:

The contribution of these epithets to the richness of *Hyperion*, the *Eve of St. Agnes*, and the *Odes* is one of imagery rather than sound. Yet it is an intricate part and manifestation of the same striving for a concentrated intensity and a luxurious completeness of presentation from which the material and phonetic character of these poems took rise, and as such it merits at least incidental and brief illustration.

(Bate 96)

Keats’s poetry is full of imaginative phrases, compounds and epithets, which have the power not only to delight the aesthetic sense of the reader but also to surprise his intellect by their aptness and also being helpful in conveying the intended meaning because of their power of suggestion and music. That is why the reader encounters a lot of fine examples of *pāñcālī rīti* in his poetry. Keats fondly employs a series of adjectival phrases, compound expressions and hyphenated epithets in his poems to enhance the beauty of the poetic expression. In poem “Calidore: A Fragment”, a series of adjectives, heaped together, imparts beauty to the expression. This series includes “cool blue sky”, “pleasant green”, “black-winged swallow”, “white canopies of lilies”, “light Blue Mountains”, “the white dove”, “purple clouds”, “green tuft island”, “the glow of the wild

cats eyes”, “the silvery stems”, “a trumpets silver voice”, “the white swans” and “the glad setting sun in gold doth dress” and so on. In another poem “To Some Ladies” there are adjectives like “pinions of silver”, “the bright golden sounds of the ocean” and “the emerald waves”, which make the expression delightful and charming. In fact, his poetry bears a miraculous use of adjectives. A few more examples are given in the following stanzas from his poetry:

- (i) Light feet, dark violet eyes and parted hair;  
Soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy breast  
Are things on which the dazzled senses rest?  
Till the fond fixed eyes, forget they share.

(“Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain...” 1.15-18)

- (ii) The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!  
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hands, and softer breast,  
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semitone,  
Bright eyes, accomplish’d shape and languorous waist!  
 (“The day is gone and all its sweets are gone” 1.1-4)

The first example quoted here is from the poem, “Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain...” and is replete with the adjectival phrases, “Light feet”, “dark violet eyes”, “parted hair”, “soft dimpled hands”, “white neck”, “creamy breast”, “the dazzled senses” and “the fond fixed eyes”. These adjectival phrases along with the end rhyming “hair-share” and “breast-rest” not only impart beauty to the lines but also make them more musical and melodious. All these phrases having the excellence of perspicuity, exhibit the *pāñcālī rīti*.

In the same way the second stanza from, “The day is gone and all its sweets are gone” is also replete with adjectival phrases, “sweet voice”, “sweet lips”, “soft hands”, “softer breast”, “warm breath”, “light whisper”, “tender semitone”, “bright eyes”, “accomplish’d shape” and “languorous waist”. These are only a few examples to exemplify the use of adjectival phrases in Keats’s poetry which has the abundance of such phrases. In fact, his poetry bears a miraculous use of adjectives. One thing is noteworthy here that most of his adjectival phrases bear the adjectives of quality in abundance in comparison to the adjectives of quantity, number and interrogation. In his adjectives of quality, he is particularly fond of using “y” ending adjectives which affirm his originality and creative power and fulfills the purposes of metre. A few “y” ending adjectival phrases and epithets picked up at random from his poems are “a leafy luxury”, “the bowery clefts”, “leafy shelves”, “leafy nests”, “streamlet’s rushy banks”, “sunny beam”, “dewy roses”, “bloomy grapes”, “balmy pain”, “flowery nest”, “pillowy silkiness”, “gloomy shades”, “breezy sky”, “milky brow”, “dreamy melody”, “pipy hemlock”, “feathery whizzing”, “the silvery setting”, “feathery sails”, “drowsy song”, “sleepy frown”, “wooly fold”, “wintry moon”, “silvery-pyre”, “surgey murmurs”, and “motherly cheeks” etc. Besides these “y” ending adjectival phrases, the

reader also has a glimpse of “ing” formed adjectival phrases in his poems as- “half-smiling lips”, “over-looking towers”, “over-hanging bough”, “well wooing sun”, “soul-soothing quiet”, “low-creeping strawberries”, “fresh-budding year”, “half-sleeping fit”, “far-piercing spears”, and “lawn-shading palms”, etc. These “ing” formed adjectival phrases fulfill the purpose of music, rhythm and melody in his poetry and thus while reading such expressions the reader feels to be far away from the stale, artificial and bombastic diction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry.

Besides, the use of adjectival phrases, Keats has also used a number of compound epithets formed by adding past and present participles to attain intensity and strength in his poetry. “soft-conched ear”, “sapphire-regioned” “half-seen mousiness”, “light-footed damsels”, “green-tufted islands”, “the large-eyed wonder”, “weed-hidden roots”, “over-hanging boughs”, “rain-scented eglantine”, “azure-lidded sleep”, “full-throated ease”, “deep-delved earth”, “purple-stained mouth”, “laiden-eyed despair”, “soft-couched ear”, “cool-rooted flowers”, “gray-hair’d Saturn”, “black weeded pools”, “keen-eyed astrologers”, “faint lipp’d shells”, “deep-damask’d wings”, “sunburnt mirth”, etc.

As poetry is being described the revelation of personal experiences, the prominence of *karuṇa rasa* in Keats’s life clearly reflects in his poetry that’s why the reader dominantly finds the use of *vaidarbhī* and *pāñcālī rītis* in his poetry. It is because of this fact that the reader encounters a little matter written in *vīra*, *raudra*, *bhībhatsa* and *bhayānaka rasas*. But, wherever Keats has used these *rasas* the description is governed by the *gauḍī rīti*. The long narrative *Hyperion* is prominently governed by all these *rasas* whereas the other poems like *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* and his odes all have here and there the glances of these *rasas* and thus the examples of *gauḍī rīti* are found in his poetry. The *gauḍī rīti* became a generic name for a particular kind of pompous diction, abounding in alliteration and long compounds. Lack of comprehensibility, over-ornamentation of diction and wordy tumult (*akṣarāḍāmbara*) are also some other features which places any literary diction into the category of *gauḍī*. The repetition of affricate palato-alveolars /tʃ/ & /dʃ/, dental fricatives /ð/ & /θ/, the fricative alveolars /s/ & /z/ and the fricative labio-dental /f/, /v/ and glide bilabial /w/ suggesting harshness, cruelty, movement, discomfort, noise, violence, conflict, windy, explosive and speedy motion dominates the description exhibiting *gauḍī rīti*. A few examples of long compounds consisting of all the above mentioned harsh phonemes exemplifying *gauḍī rīti*, cited randomly from Keats’s poetry are “The ponderous syllables, like sullen waves/ In the half-glutted hollows of reef-rocks,/ Came booming” (*Hyperion*. II: ll. 305-307), “The many heard, and the loud revelry/ Grew hush; the stately music no more breathes;” (*Lamia* II: ll. 262-263),

“And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire, /That scar’d away the meek ethereal Hours /And made their dove-wings tremble.” (*Hyperion*. I: ll. 215-217), “And all around her shapes, wizard and brute/ Laughing, and wailing, groveling, serpentine, /Shewing tooth, tusk, and venom-bag, and sting! / O such deformities!” (*Endymion*. III: ll. 503-506), “I approach’d a flame’s gaunt blue, /That glar’d before me through a thorny brake” (*Endymion*. III: ll. 495-496), “Ah! woe betide!— The latest dream I ever dreamt /On the cold hill side.” (*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, ll. 34-36).

To put the whole matter in a nutshell: the *rīti siddhānta* of Vāmana is based on the use of phrasal organization in poetry which gives sweetness, elegance and perspicuity by intensifying the meaning of *kāvya* imparted in consonance with *rasa* assisted by the repetition of words including the devices of rhythm, rhyme and meter facilitated by phonemes and syllables. The assessment of Keats’s poetry in the light of Vāmana’s *rīti siddhānta* makes it quite evident and conspicuous that his poetry is guided, consciously or unconsciously by all the varieties of *rītis* enumerated by Indian aestheticians. Keats, being very particular about his words, compound words, phrases and sentences, uses them

for meaningfulness as well as melodious charm. No word is unnecessary, no phrase is superfluous. He is also adept in painting word-pictures of various physical states like weariness, haste numbness, thirst cold, languor etc., mental states like joy, sorrow, hope, memory, forgetfulness, indolence and emotions like love as well as abstract concepts like beauty, melancholy and fancy and this power of phrasal organization provides a suitable ground for the analysis of the creative use of language in his poetry.

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