

## The Elements of Romanticism in Indian English Literature

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### Abstract

Romanticism, a literary movement that began in the late 18th century in Europe, significantly influenced Indian English literature. Emphasizing individualism, emotion, nature, and the sublime, Romanticism found a unique expression through Indian writers who adapted these themes to reflect their cultural contexts. This research article delves into the elements of Romanticism in Indian English literature by examining the works of key authors such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, and Toru Dutt. Through detailed analysis, this study explores how these writers incorporated Romantic ideals to express their visions, emotions, and identities.

**Keywords:** Romanticism, English literature, Pre-Independence and post-independence literature

### Introduction

Romanticism, characterized by its emphasis on individual emotion, the beauty of nature, and the exploration of the sublime, originated in Europe as a reaction against the industrial revolution and the Enlightenment's focus on reason. In India, Romanticism took root during the colonial period, offering a literary framework that allowed writers to explore their personal and cultural identities amidst the backdrop of British rule.

Indian English literature, which emerged as Indian writers began using English to express their thoughts and creativity, became a unique blend of Western literary traditions and Indian cultural elements. The Romantic movement, with its focus on introspection, nature, and the sublime, resonated deeply with Indian writers, leading to a rich body of work that reflects the complexities and nuances of Indian life and thought.

This article examines the incorporation of Romantic elements in Indian English literature, focusing on the works of prominent writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, and Toru Dutt. By analyzing their poetry, prose, and other literary forms, this study aims to understand how these writers adapted Romantic themes to articulate their unique perspectives and experiences.

### Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet of the Sublime

Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European Nobel laureate in Literature, is a seminal figure in Indian English literature. His works exemplify the Romantic spirit through their profound connection with nature, exploration of the sublime, and emphasis on individual emotion and introspection. Tagore's poetry and prose reflect a deep engagement with Romantic ideals, which he adapted to express his unique cultural and philosophical insights.

In his celebrated collection of poems, "Gitanjali" (Song Offerings), Tagore's exploration of the divine and the sublime resonates with the Romantic emphasis on transcendent experiences. The poems in "Gitanjali" reflect a mystical union with nature, a central theme in Romantic literature. Tagore's portrayal of light as a divine force that illuminates the world and the soul is a quintessential Romantic motif. For instance, in one of the poems from "Gitanjali," he writes:

"Light, my light, the world-filling light,  
the eye-kissing light,  
heart-sweetening light!  
Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the  
center of my life;  
the light strikes, my darling, the chords of  
my love;  
the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter  
passes over the earth."

This passage exemplifies the Romantic celebration of nature and its spiritual significance. Tagore's depiction of light as a divine and omnipresent force reflects the transcendentalist ideals found in the works of European Romantics like William Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Tagore's novel "The Home and the World" further illustrates his engagement with Romantic themes. The novel explores the personal and political turmoil during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, focusing on the inner lives and emotional struggles of its characters. Tagore's portrayal of Bimala's inner conflict between her love for her husband Nikhil and her attraction to the revolutionary leader Sandip captures the

Romantic preoccupation with individual emotion and moral ambiguity.

"I cannot tell why this simple thing, that the right is the right and the wrong the wrong, cannot come to my mind in this clear way."

Tagore's ability to depict the complexities of human emotion and the moral dilemmas faced by his characters highlights his Romantic sensibility. His works reflect a deep engagement with the sublime and the spiritual, providing a rich, nuanced portrayal of the human experience.

### **Sri Aurobindo: The Philosopher-Poet**

Sri Aurobindo, a prominent figure in Indian English literature, combines Romantic elements with his own philosophical and spiritual insights. His poetry and prose often delve into the sublime, the mystical, and the metaphysical, echoing Romantic themes while also incorporating Indian spiritual traditions.

Aurobindo's epic poem "Savitri" is a monumental work that reflects his Romantic vision. The poem's exploration of love, destiny, and the divine is imbued with a profound sense of the sublime. In the following lines from "Savitri," Aurobindo captures the Romantic ideal of a transcendental experience through the beauty of nature:

"The calm delight that weds one soul to all,  
The key to the flaming doors of ecstasy,  
The wide unbroken arc of mystery's trance,  
The rhythm of the Intolerant hush and the  
passion of the great vast,  
Eternal moments of eternity's calm."

Aurobindo's language conveys the transcendental and mystical experiences central to Romanticism. His use of imagery and metaphysical concepts reflects a deep connection with both the natural world and the spiritual realm, blending Romantic ideals with his unique philosophical vision.

In addition to "Savitri," Aurobindo's essays and philosophical writings, such as "The Life Divine" and "Essays on the Gita," reflect his engagement with Romantic themes. His exploration of the divine and the human soul resonates with Romantic ideals while also incorporating Indian spiritual concepts such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. This fusion creates a unique literary voice that is deeply rooted in Indian culture and reflective of Romantic ideals.

#### **Sarojini Naidu: The Nightingale of India**

Sarojini Naidu, often referred to as the "Nightingale of India," is known for her lyrical poetry that beautifully blends Romantic themes with Indian cultural elements. Her works celebrate nature, emotion, and the beauty of everyday life, reflecting the Romantic emphasis on individual experience and the sublime.

Naidu's poetry is characterized by its vivid imagery, musical quality, and emotional depth. In her poem "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad," Naidu captures the vibrant colors and sounds of an Indian market, infusing it with a sense of wonder and beauty. The poem's vivid imagery and musical quality exemplify Romantic aesthetics:

What do you sell, O ye merchants?  
Richly your wares are displayed.

Turbans of crimson and silver,  
Tunics of purple brocade,  
Mirrors with panels of amber,  
Daggers with handles of jade.

Naidu's celebration of the mundane and her attention to sensory details reflect the Romantic fascination with the richness of life and nature. Her poetry often elevates ordinary scenes to a level of extraordinary beauty, embodying the Romantic ideal of finding the sublime in the everyday.

In her poem "The Queen's Rival," Naidu explores themes of love, longing, and emotional intensity, characteristic of Romantic poetry. The poem's exploration of personal emotion and its lyrical quality highlight Naidu's Romantic sensibility:

The queen has a rival, the night is agleam  
With the splendor of arms, the flash of a sword;  
But no army marches, no pennons stream,  
No wars of the world in her court are abhorred.

Naidu's ability to blend Romantic themes with Indian cultural elements creates a unique and rich literary voice. Her focus on the beauty of everyday life, individual emotion, and the sublime reflects the deep influence of Romanticism on her work.

#### **Toru Dutt: The Pioneering Romantic**

Toru Dutt, one of the earliest Indian poets to write in English, is another significant figure who infused Romantic elements into her works. Her poetry reflects a deep engagement with nature, mythology, and

personal emotion, hallmarks of Romanticism.

In her poem "Our Casuarina Tree," Dutt uses the image of a tree to evoke themes of memory, loss, and the passage of time. The poem's emotional depth and lyrical quality are characteristic of Romantic poetry:

Like a huge Python, winding round and round

The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,

Up to its very summit near the stars,

A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound

No other tree could live. But gallantly

The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung

In crimson clusters all the boughs among,

Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;

And oft at nights the garden overflows

With one sweet song that seems to have no close,

Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

Dutt's vivid descriptions and emotional resonance highlight the Romantic preoccupation with nature and the sublime. Her ability to imbue natural elements with deep emotional significance demonstrates the influence of Romanticism on her work.

In her collection of poems, "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan," Dutt draws on Indian mythology and folklore, blending them with Romantic themes of heroism, love, and the supernatural. Her poem "Savitri" retells the ancient Indian legend with a Romantic sensibility,

focusing on the emotional depth and moral courage of its heroine:

"And so she grew in loveliness and grace,

In wisdom and in stature, till her fame

Like music on the wings of air was borne,

And all the land re-echoed with her praise."

Dutt's fusion of Romantic themes with Indian mythology creates a rich and evocative literary landscape. Her focus on nature, emotion, and the sublime, combined with her engagement with cultural heritage, reflects the deep influence of Romanticism on her work.

### **The Fusion of Romanticism and Indian Cultural Contexts**

The incorporation of Romantic elements into Indian English literature reflects a unique fusion of Western literary traditions and Indian cultural contexts. Indian writers adapted Romantic themes to express their personal and cultural identities, creating a rich and diverse body of work that reflects the complexities and nuances of Indian life and thought.

### **Nature and the Sublime**

One of the central themes of Romanticism is the celebration of nature and the sublime. Indian writers have used nature as a powerful symbol to explore spiritual and emotional experiences, reflecting both Romantic ideals and Indian philosophical traditions.

In Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, nature often serves as a conduit for spiritual experiences and transcendence. In "Gitanjali," Tagore's portrayal of nature as

a divine presence reflects the Romantic ideal of the sublime:

"When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes."

Tagore's depiction of nature as a source of inspiration and divine connection echoes the Romantic celebration of the natural world and its spiritual significance.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" uses nature to convey transcendental experiences and the sublime. His vivid descriptions of the natural world reflect the Romantic ideal of finding the divine in nature:

"A vast unanimity ended life's debate,  
The war of thoughts that fathers the universe,  
The clash of forces struggling to prevail  
In endless Time."

Aurobindo's portrayal of nature as a realm of transcendence and spiritual unity reflects the Romantic fascination with the sublime and the mystical.

### **Individual Emotion and Introspection**

Romanticism's emphasis on individual emotion and introspection resonates deeply in Indian English literature. Writers have used the Romantic focus on personal experience to explore their inner lives and articulate their emotional and spiritual journeys.

Sarojini Naidu's poetry often delves into themes of love, longing, and personal emotion, reflecting the Romantic preoccupation with individual experience. In her poem "The Palanquin Bearers," Naidu captures the emotional depth and lyrical quality characteristic of Romantic poetry:

Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,  
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;  
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,  
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.

Naidu's focus on the emotional and sensory experiences of her characters highlights the Romantic ideal of exploring individual emotion and introspection.

Toru Dutt's poetry also reflects the Romantic emphasis on personal emotion and introspection. In "Our Casuarina Tree," Dutt uses the tree as a symbol of memory and loss, conveying deep emotional resonance through her vivid descriptions:

But not because of its magnificence  
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:  
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,  
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,  
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.  
Blent with your images, it shall arise  
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!

Dutt's ability to convey profound emotion through her descriptions of nature and memory reflects the Romantic focus on individual experience and introspection.

### **Mythology and the Supernatural**

Romanticism's fascination with mythology and the supernatural finds a unique expression in Indian English literature, where writers draw on rich cultural traditions to explore these themes.

In "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan," Toru Dutt retells Indian myths and legends with a Romantic sensibility, focusing on the emotional and moral dimensions of these stories. Her poem "Savitri" highlights the heroic and supernatural elements of the legend, reflecting the Romantic fascination with the extraordinary and the sublime:

"A sudden tremor ran through Savitri,  
The while her heart beat faster. 'Wife,' he said,  
'Behold me dead. I live because of thee,  
My love, my life, by thee is captive led.'"

Dutt's ability to blend Romantic themes with Indian mythology creates a rich and evocative literary landscape that reflects both cultural heritage and individual creativity.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" incorporates elements of mythology and the supernatural to explore themes of love, destiny, and the divine. His portrayal of Savitri's journey reflects the Romantic fascination with the mystical and the transcendental:

"A power of Silence in the depths of God;  
She shares the eternal calm and smiles at Time."

Aurobindo's use of mythological and supernatural elements to convey spiritual and emotional experiences highlights the Romantic influence on his work.

### **Conclusion**

The elements of Romanticism in Indian English literature represent a unique fusion of Western literary traditions and Indian cultural contexts. Writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, and Toru Dutt have incorporated Romantic themes to explore their personal and cultural identities, creating a rich and diverse body of work that reflects the complexities and nuances of Indian life and thought.

Through their celebration of nature and the sublime, exploration of individual emotion and introspection, and engagement with mythology and the supernatural, these writers have contributed to a vibrant literary tradition that continues to inspire and resonate with readers. The Romantic elements in their works highlight the enduring influence of Romanticism on Indian English literature and its ability to adapt and evolve in response to different cultural and historical contexts.

As Indian English literature continues to grow and evolve, the legacy of Romanticism remains a powerful and enduring influence. The themes of nature, emotion, and the sublime continue to inspire writers and readers, ensuring that the Romantic spirit remains a vital and dynamic force in Indian literature.

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