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Indian Mythology and Culture with Special Reference to John Keats' Letters

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Introduction:

John Keats was one of the greatest poets of romanticism, a pure artist and beauty worshipper-beauty in body, woman, and art. He strongly adored the goddess called the Imagination. But to call him just a worshipper of beauty and imagination would be unwise. He was also a truly religious man with a pure heart and a holy mind. He worshipped many mythological gods of different countries, particularly Greek mythology, and his worship of Apollo is indeed important.

In addition, an engaging interest in Indian philosophy, mythology and culture as a whole is found in his writings. The bewitching beauty and glittering charm of India had attracted the mind and soul of Keats and this is evident from his letter on 31 May 1819 to Miss Jeffrey of Teignmouth, Devon. "In this letter, Keats confessed with utmost honesty and sincerity, "I have the choice, as it were, of two poisons (yet I shouldn't call this a poison), one of which has been travelling to and from India for a few years (235).

It becomes clear from his letter to Georgiana Keats, the wife of his younger brother on 13 Friday, 28 January 1820, that Keats was very interested in political affairs between India and England. In this letter, he mentions the event that took place between Siraj-ud-Bengal daula's and East India Company in Calcutta in 1756. At the same time, Keats was fully sensitive to the dark epic.

Keats' eagerness to know about India- her philosophy and religious ideas- got through



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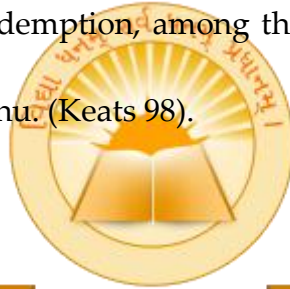
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the works of such Orientalists as Sir William Jones, Charles Wilkins and Colebrooks. That he was interested in Hinduism becomes clear from the perusal of his letter to George ad Georgiana Keats-(3 May 1819). In this letter, Keats evinces his knowledge of the Hindu doctrine of Avatarvada-the theory of Incarnation. :

Why may they not have made this simple thing even more simple for common apprehension by introducing Mediators and Personages in the same manner as in the he (a) then mythology abstractions are personified- seriously I think it probable that this system of soul-making-may have been the parent of all the palpable and personal scheme of Redemption, among the Zoroastrains, the Christians and the Hindoos. For and then Vishnu. (Keats 98).



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Conclusion:

The emphasis in the letter on pagan mythology and the personification of abstractions clearly indicates that Keats was strongly influenced by the translation of the Vedic hymns by Sir William Jones in which the Hindu gods and goddesses were invoked as individuals with endearing attachment. For example, in Vedic mythology, abstractions such as intelligent speech (Vagdevata), the god of rain (Indra) cosmic wisdom (Brahma) the god of medicine (Ashvini Kumara) have been personified as family gods. In addition, the use of words such as 'Hindoo' and 'Vishnu' also shows that Keats was fairly familiar with India's religious beliefs and mythology through Jones's translations. Keats knew very well that Vishnu was the Hindus' saviour God, who had descended on the earth nine times in the past, thereby vindicating in Hindu mythology the



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concept of incarnation (Avatarvada).

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