

AFFECT OF SYMPATHY IN ROMANTIC ABOLITIONIST LITERATURE

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Submitted by
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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

We certify that this dissertation entitled "Affect of Sympathy in Romantic Abolitionist Literature" was prepared by Dipak Raj Joshi under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examination by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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APPROVAL LETTER

This dissertation entitled **Affect of Sympathy in Romantic Abolitionist Literature** was submitted by **Dipak Raj Joshi** for final examination to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English**. I, hereby, certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality and has therefore accepted for the degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kushum Shakya".

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Date: *Nov. 23, 2024*

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "Affect of Sympathy in Romantic Abolitionist Literature" is my own work and it contains no materials previously published. I have not used its materials for the award of any kind and any other degree. Where other authors' sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Dipak Raj Joshi

Date:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with Romantic abolitionist literature that triggered structural consciousness and played significant role in bringing about transformation in traditional racial mindset about slavery in the late eighteenth century British society. It makes exploration into abolitionist literature written by high Romantic writers, women abolitionist activists, and narratives written by ex-slaves between 1780s and 1830s England through textual analysis approach. Textual data from the selected primary texts— Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; Wordsworth's "To Thomas Clarkson", "To Toussaint L'Ouverture", "September Ist, 1802", *Humanity*, and *The Prelude*; Cowper's "The Morning Dreams", "Pity for Poor Africans", "Sweet Meat Has Sour Sauce", "Negro's Complaint", and *The Task*; Cowper's "The Little Black Boy" and "The Chimney Sweeper"; Southey's *Poems Concerning Slave Trade*; Yearsley's "Poem on Inhumanity of the Slave Trade"; More's "Slavery, A Poem" and "The Sorrows of Yamba"; Robinson's "The African" and "The Negro Girl"; Barbauld's "Epistle to Wilberforce"; Shelley's *Frankenstein*; Gronniosaw's *Narrative of the Most Remarkable*; Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*; and Prince's *History of Mary Prince*— have been exhaustively discussed and analyzed. Relevant critics have been quoted for justification of the argument. Affect theory provides the theoretical light for the analysis of underlying meaning, since it posits alternative framework for understanding social world of literary production better by investigating overpowering emotions in the production of the text. Affect theory unravels the patronized subjective knowledge what is traditionally established as truth. It can answer contemporary problems and hold capacity to restructure social meaning by digging the deep rooted affects to the surface. So, theoretical notions by Peter Goldie, Peter Marchand, Margaret Witherrel, Martha

Nussbaum, Sara Ahmed, Brian Massumi, Suzanne Keen, Joseph Campana, Linda Grasso, and Stephanie Arel have been utilized in the dissertation.

Anti-slavery literary creation reflected sympathy, moral religious sentimentalism, new rhetoric of sensibility, and Romantic sympathy as abolitionist persuasive techniques. Postcolonial critics fail to notice true benevolence in the abolitionist discourse rather see alternative guise of the shifting capitalism. This line has been extended in order to unravel the politics of the affect of sympathy in the discourse. Why did the British writers turn against slavery and slave trade so unexpectedly, especially after 1780s? Is it out of compassionate humanitarianism or because of the shift in economic thought and revisionary strategy to prioritize new approach to economic extension in the changed context after Britain's defeat in North America, or to direct black sentiment to the benevolent English? In spite of the predominance of sympathy element in the abolitionist discourse why there is not much thrust on the improvement of the status of the slaves? The objectives of this study have been to scrutinize the socio-economic embeddings of the aesthetics of sympathy and its relationship to the question of slavery and to analyze the politics of sympathy as it circulates through the Romantic era literary domain and into the larger sphere of public debate.

The analytical scrutinizing leads to the conclusion that the abolitionism's turn to the affect of moral sentimentalism intends to make the reader of the time acquiesce in accepting colonial guilt as the spiritual politics of quietism, thereby averting the possibility of a violent reaction both from the hapless victims and some victimizing group. The affects of outrage, disgust, horror, and shame were evoked in the white anti-slavery texts so that the ugliness of imperialism and the concomitant slavery were criticized without really writing them off. In particular, the affect of sympathy was resorted to for the accumulation of moral strength for the

perpetuation of imperialism. This study is significant within the context of existing literature in order to deal with problem literature worldwide properly and scrutinize the politics associated with it.

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