

An Analysis of Orientalist Discourses in Robert Southey's *The Curse of Kehama*

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Abstract

This article examines Robert Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* within the framework of Orientalist discourse, arguing that Southey positions Hinduism as a cultural and religious other in order to consolidate Western superiority. While much scholarship on Romantic Orientalism has focused on canonical figures such as Byron and Moore, Southey's engagement with the Orient remains comparatively underexplored. In *The Curse of Kehama*, Hindu rituals are represented as irrational, primitive, and demonic, and Hindu deities are ridiculed for their bodily forms and mythic narratives. Such depictions reveal Southey's alignment with colonial ideologies that sought to legitimize British rule in India through the denigration of native traditions. By situating Southey's text in the intersection of Romantic literature, missionary zeal, and imperial expansion, this article demonstrates how his depiction of the Orient contributes to the cultural justification of colonial domination and highlights the role of religion in shaping Romantic Orientalist narratives.

Keywords: Orientalism, colonialism, Hinduism, Romantic literature, Robert Southey, *The Curse of Kehama*

Robert Southey'in *Kehama'nın Laneti* Eserindeki Oryantalist Söylemlerin Bir Analizi

Öz

Bu makale, Robert Southey'nin *The Curse of Kehama* (Kehama'nın Laneti) adlı eserini Oryantalist söylem çerçevesinde inceleyerek, Southey'nin Batı'nın üstünlüğünü pekiştirmek için Hinduizm'i kültürel ve dini bir öteki olarak konumlandığını savunmaktadır. Romantik Oryantalizm üzerine yapılan birçok çalışma Byron ve Moore gibi kanonik figürlere odaklanırken, Southey'nin Doğu ile kurduğu ilişki nispeten daha az araştırılmıştır. *The Curse of Kehama*'da Hindu ritüelleri mantıksız, ilkel ve şeytani olarak tasvir edilmekte; Hindu tanrıları ise bedensel görünüşleri ve mitolojik anlatıları üzerinden alaya alınmaktadır. Bu tür tasvirler, Southey'nin yerli gelenekleri aşağılayarak Britanya'nın Hindistan'daki egemenliğini meşrulaştırmaya çalışan sömürgeci ideolojilerle aynı çizgide olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Southey'nin metnini Romantik edebiyat, misyonerlik hevesi ve imparatorluk genişlemesinin kesişim noktasına yerleştirerek, bu makale onun Doğu tasvirinin sömürge egemenliğinin kültürel gerekçelendirilmesine nasıl katkıda

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bulunduğunu göstermekte ve Romantik Oryantalist anlatıların şekillenmesinde dinin rolünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Oryantalizm, sömürgecilik, Hinduizm, Romantik edebiyat, Robert Southey, *Kehama'nın Laneti*

INTRODUCTION

Robert Southey, known as one of the Lake Poets and a central figure of the Romantic Period, produced a number of Oriental tales that reveal his sustained engagement with non-Western cultures and mythologies. Works such as *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810) are particularly significant for the ways in which they incorporate and reimagine Oriental elements within the Romantic literary tradition. In *The Curse of Kehama*, Southey frequently represents the religious rituals of non-Christian cultures through imageries of monstrosity, heresy, and violence. In fact, Southey's "dismissal of the very mythology on which the poem is based" (Chatsiou, 2010, p. 34) is evident in *The Curse of Kehama*. Southey's simultaneous reliance on Hindu mythology and his ironic, dismissive treatment of it presents an inherent tension within *The Curse of Kehama*. Such portrayals do not remain mere narrative devices but operate as ideological constructions that position Eastern and indigenous belief systems as antithetical to Western, particularly Christian, norms. By casting Hindu and Native American practices as bloodthirsty spectacles, Southey contributes to a broader Orientalist discourse that defines the cultural "Other" through exaggeration, distortion, and moral degradation. This article, therefore, investigates the Orientalist motives and rhetorical strategies embedded in *The Curse of Kehama*, situating Southey's work within the wider Romantic engagement with the East and examining how the poem both reflects and reinforces the cultural politics of its time.

In *The Curse of Kehama*, Southey's representation of Hindu belief and practice is not limited to satire or exotic embellishment but constitutes a systematic construction of religious and cultural alterity. By portraying Hindu rituals as bloodthirsty spectacles and by presenting Hindu deities as grotesque, powerless, or complicit in evil, Southey defines Hinduism in stark opposition to Christianity, which the poem implicitly upholds as rational, moral, and redemptive. These juxtapositions extend beyond literary imagination: they reproduce the discursive patterns identified by Edward Said (1979), whereby the Orient is represented through distortion and exaggeration in order to stabilize the authority of the West. Southey's Oriental tale, therefore, functions as a cultural text that both reflects and reinforces Britain's colonial ideology, providing moral and theological justifications for imperial dominance. By embedding narratives of monstrosity, superstition, and irrationality into his portrayal of Hinduism, Southey translates political conquest into a moral necessity, thereby transforming poetry into a medium of colonial legitimation.

Before Orientalism emerged as a scholarly subject, English travellers paved the way for shaping the very first impressions of the Orient. Travel literature's influence was significant since it suggested "imaginary utopias, moral voyages, and scientific reporting" (Said, 1979, p. 117). Concerning this, William Beckford, Byron, Thomas Moore, and Goethe were among the salient Orientalist authors of the eighteenth century (Said, 1979, p. 118). British and French painters

depicted the Orient in the nineteenth century, and their visual portrayal of the East gave rise to “the Oriental genre tableau” (Said, 1979, p. 118). For the English, India meant “an actual British possession”; therefore, they identified the Orient with the “material possession” and “material imagination” (Said, 1979, p. 169). The English Romantic artists who travelled and observed India introduced the image of India and initiated an “Indian Renaissance in British Romantic culture” (De Almeida and Gilpin, 2005, p. 57). During the Romantic Period, the Orient emerged as a significant locus of fascination for British writers, providing both imaginative inspiration and a framework through which cultural difference could be explored. Regarding India, De Almeida and Gilpin assert that: “[t]he prospect of India, seen from the outside, became thus a wish to know India from the inside, to find kinship with it” (2005, p. 63). At this point, William Jones was a significant figure in terms of revealing the connection between the Western and the Eastern mythologies. Especially, as Carol Bolton mentions about Jones’ work, the work *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India* contains a detailed analysis of the connection between the Western and the Eastern mythologies (2007, p. 203). As Jones argues:

We cannot justly conclude, by arguments preceding the proof of facts, that one idolatrous people must have borrowed their deities, rites, and tenets from another; since Gods of all shapes and dimensions may be framed by the boundless powers of imagination, or by the frauds and follies of men, in countries never connected; but, when features of resemblance, too strong to have been accidental, are observable in different systems of polytheism, without fancy or prejudice to colour them and improve the likeness, we can scarce help believing, that some connection has immemorially subsisted between the several nations, who have adopted them [...] (1876, p. 1)

In his work, Jones frequently juxtaposes deities from Western and Eastern mythologies. This act of comparison, while framed within Orientalist scholarship, inadvertently destabilizes the presumed superiority of Western mythological figures. This comparative perspective not only shapes the image of the East but also redefines the cultural self-perception of the West, a dynamic that is central to the Orientalist discourse. Western Orientalists conveyed Indian religion in their image while simultaneously suggesting an opposite reflection of that image (King, 2000, p. 336). In this way, Orientalist depictions of Indian religion reveal that the East was used as a contrasting image through which the West redefined itself. Western Orientalists established the image of Hindus according to their “presuppositions” (King, 2000, p. 336). While they identified the image of “the Westerner” with features such as “modern, egalitarian, civilised, secular, rational, and male”, they pronounced definitions such as “tradition, primitive, hierarchical, uncivilized, religious, irrational and effeminate” for the Indian (King, 2000, p. 337). However, Hinduism promotes peace since it avoids stereotypical judgements and tolerates any theology as long as its caste system remains unharmed (Jaiswal, 1991, p. 29). Furthermore, Hinduism demonstrates an incredible “flexibility” in adapting to all religious and philosophical concepts (Jaiswal, 1991, p. 21). Orientalist writers frequently overlooked the flexible and tolerant character of Hinduism, instead they portrayed it as rigid and dogmatic, thereby constructing an imaginary view of both the religion and India itself. Orientalist approaches and utterances frequently distort truths and “reconstruct” the image of the Orient (Said, 1979, p. 122). Ultimately, such Orientalist portrayals reveal more about

Western ideological agendas than about the true nature of Hinduism, highlighting the power of discourse in shaping cultural perceptions and sustaining colonial narratives.

1. ORIENTALIST DISCOURSES IN ROBERT SOUTHEY'S *THE CURSE OF KEHAMA*

In the Romantic Period, Oriental and pseudo-Oriental tales gained popularity in England since Galland's *Arabian Nights* was translated into English and influenced Romantic authors immensely (Berndhard-Kabisch, 1977, p. 85). This influence is evident in the increasing incorporation of exotic landscapes, supernatural beings, and mythological parallels into English literature, features that can be observed in works ranging from Byron's *The Giaour* (1813) to Southey's *The Curse of Kehama*. The title of Byron's *The Giaour* derives from the Turkish word "gavur," which designates "the infidel" or "non-believer," a term historically used in the Ottoman context to describe Christians. Byron's adoption of this term is significant, for it not only foregrounds the East/West religious divide central to the narrative but also exemplifies the Orientalist tendency to exoticize the Other by appropriating culturally loaded designations. The very title, therefore, sets the tone for a text that dramatizes the conflict between Christian and Muslim identities within an Orientalist framework. Such narrative strategies not only satisfied the Romantic fascination with the marvelous and the unfamiliar but also constructed a cultural lens through which the Orient was represented as mysterious, excessive, and frequently irrational. In this way, Orientalist texts contributed to an aestheticized distortion of Eastern traditions, simultaneously idealizing and demeaning them within a Eurocentric framework. Robert Southey contributed to the shaping of Victorian attitudes about "political revolution, social change, and morality" (Meachen, 1979, p. 590). Southey mirrored the stereotypical expressions of his contemporaries and insistently embraced themes of colonialism and nationalism in his works (Meachen, 1979, p. 590). In his *Madoc* (1805), Southey portrayed an encounter between a Welsh Christian and "New World Amerindians" (Fulford, 2005, p. 36). In *Madoc*, Southey alludes to the Welsh legend ("The Discovery of America"). According to the legend, Madoc, one of the illegitimate sons of King Owain Gwynedd, discovers America and convinces others to accompany him to America after returning to Wales ("The Discovery of America"). In the preface of *Madoc*, Southey explains that he aims to represent the superstitious practices of Mexican people when Spaniards discovered them (Southey, 1853a, p. 4). In his *Madoc*, Southey employed rituals of human sacrifice and cannibalism in his romance:

The women wailed and wept, the children turned,
And hid their faces on their mothers' knees.
He to the Queen address his speech, then looked
Around the children, and laid hands on two,
Of different sexes, but of age alike,
Some six years each: they at his touch shrieked out;
But then Lincoya rose, and to my feet
Led them, and told me that the conquerors claimed
These innocents for tribute; that the Priest
Would lay them on the altar of his god,
Tear out their little hearts in sacrifice,

Yea, with more cursed wickedness, himself
 Feast on their flesh! — I shuddered, and my hand
 Instinctively unsheathed the holy sword. (Southey, 1853a, p. 44)

In these lines, by portraying Mexicans as fiendish creatures and conveying the notion that these heathens must be stopped, Southey justifies the idea of Evangelisation¹ even if it means by the sword. Again, Southey refers to similar wicked rituals in his *Thalaba, the Destroyer* with his Muslim hero (Fulford, 2005, p. 36). This time, the poet employs a black magician who commands a demon to bring the corpse to communicate with him (Southey, 1853b, p. 32). *Thalaba* is a significant Oriental tale since *Arabian Nights* became Southey's main source of inspiration (1853b, p. 5). According to Carol Bolton, "Southey combined his knowledge of Islam with his own religious precepts to construct an Orientalist fantasy" (2003, p. 229), a formulation that underscores his interpretive stance toward the Orient. Southey's representations reveal how he selectively appropriated Eastern traditions in order to reinforce Western cultural and religious superiority, a tendency that reflects broader patterns within Romantic Orientalism. After having completed his *Thalaba*, Southey wrote *The Curse of Kehama*, (originally of *Keradon*), a Hindoo romance (1810) (Haller, 1917, p. 236). The moral tone of Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) influenced some of Shelley's and Keats' epic narratives (Berndhard-Kabisch, 1977, p. 85).

In his narrative poem, Southey draws attention to the fanaticism of Hindu believers. By employing sacrificial rituals, Southey conveyed the bloodthirstiness and barbarism of Hindus. Despite Southey's attempt to depict stereotypes of good Indian and bad Indian, his romances considerably contributed to the construction of an imperialist ideology (Fulford, 2005, p. 36). Southey became a prominent commentator on empire politics and produced notable sources of "infection" which justified their colonisation by asserting Britons' "purity" and "'righteous' authority" (Fulford, 2005, pp. 36-37). As a consequence, in his *Kehama*, Southey combined "Oriental 'extravagance'" with imperial politics and employed his comments on "government and power" (Bolton, 2007, p. 199). As part of the British government's "expansionist policy", the British undertook an "evangelist movement to convert" their Indian subjects to Christianity (Bolton, 2007, p. 199). As Said explains:

[T]he Orient was a place of pilgrimage, and every major work belonging to a genuine if not always to an academic Orientalism took its form, style, and intention from the idea of pilgrimage there. In this idea as in so many of the other forms of Orientalist writing we have been discussing, the Romantic idea of restorative reconstruction (natural supernaturalism) is the principal source. (1979, p. 168)

According to Said, the image of the Orient is reconstructed through the imagination and intentions of Orientalist writers. These writers frequently exploit such narratives to advance their ideological agendas, shaping perceptions of the East to align with Western cultural and political interests. The notion of the holy quest, in particular, functions as a crucial mechanism for constructing a nationalist identity among Western audiences. As a result, Orientalist writings create an illusory vision of the Orient that distorts reality and misleads readers' understanding of Eastern societies. Similarly, in his

¹ A missionary movement which aimed at spreading Christianity by converting individuals or communities.

essays, Southey “demonized” Irish Catholics for being ignorant and superstitious (Fulford, 2005, p. 38), which shows that his otherization is not limited to the Orient. It is evident that Southey systematically marginalized any cultural elements that conflicted with British imperialist values, suggesting a deliberate attempt to legitimize the discourse of empire. In line with broader Orientalist discourse, Southey represents those who differ from the West in ways that reinforce hierarchical distinctions between self and Other, depicting non-Western peoples as occupying a subordinate or marginal position within the narrative framework.

Regarding its notion of imperialism, Southey’s *Life of Horatio, Lord Nelson* was his most influential work in the nineteenth century (1813) (Fulford, 2005, p. 37). Southey suggested his work as a guidebook while “training in imperial duty” (Fulford, 2005, p. 37). Bernhard-Kabisch makes several points about how Western perceptions of India and Hinduism evolved during the late 18th and early 19th centuries:

Here again, Southey also reflected contemporary changes of taste, for Brahmin India had begun to replace rationalist China in the exotic fancies of the West. The opulent creations of India’s religious imagination, hitherto largely dismissed as absurd, effeminate, and obscene forms of superstitions, were now beginning to be described, translated, and interpreted dispassionately, largely owing to the pioneering efforts of Sir William Jones, the discoverer of Sanskrit and founder of the Royal Asiatic Society. Speculation was rife about the relationship between Hinduism and the myths of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Israel, and in particular between the trimourti and the Christian Trinity; and Hindu myth has been repeatedly recommended as suitable machinery for epic. (Bernhard-Kabisch, 1977, p. 98)

In his *The Life of Nelson*, Southey argues that Indians are convenient for working in India since their body is resistant to the challenging conditions of India’s climate (1924, p. 44). Furthermore, he warns the pilgrims about diseases that might emerge by pointing out the “filthy” environment of India (1924, p. 47). With this statement, Southey portrays the British as civilized people living isolated from infection and Indians as uncivilized people accustomed and resistant to infection. By describing the environment as “filthy” (1924, p. 47), Southey conveys not only physical impurity but also qualities associated with moral, social, and civilizational difference.

In *The Curse of Kehama*, Southey’s “Preface” dwells upon the main aim of his work and employs an outspoken Orientalism. In the Preface of *Kehama*, Southey asserts that Hinduism has “the most monstrous” and “the most fatal” fables among all other religions (1901, p. 9). As Kevin Gilmartin mentions, *The Curse of Kehama* draws a “sinister portrait of Hinduism as a violent form of superstition” (2009, p. 644). Southey also underlines that according to Hinduism; the Gods are supposed to accept all kinds of petitions irrespective of the intentions of the ritualist. At this point, Southey explains that the poem essentially dwells upon this concept since Hindu Gods allow wicked people to obtain power. Later, Southey ridicules the irrationality of the tales of Hindu mythology stating that even his work of fiction sounds almost credible. Furthermore, Southey humiliates the deformed bodies of Hindu Gods for having numerous hands and heads. These Gods are not only out of proportion bodily but also, exempt from aesthetical and poetic beauty. The depiction of them is a “clumsy” attempt and a “gross image of divinity” (Southey, 1901, pp. 9-10). From the outset,

Southey adopts a dismissive stance toward Hinduism and its pantheon, advancing his arguments with a clear lack of cultural sensitivity or interpretive empathy.

The narrative poem begins with a funeral ceremony. Ironically, the scene is reminiscent of a celebration because of the sound of instruments and the noisy participants. They repeatedly call out Arvalan's name as if they can wake him from the sleep of death (Southey, 1901, p. 13). Kehama, his father, is the cruel King of the world. Although the master of humankind reminds him that he is not immortal and not exempt from grief, Kehama performs a ritual to wake his son's spirit (Southey, 1901, p. 14). Then, Kehama's ritual begins around the funeral pyre with the accompanying band's participation (Southey, 1901, p. 17). At last, Kehama manages to summon the spirit of his son. Arvalan expresses his troubles and demands his father to rescue him from the torments in Yamen's hell:

ARVALAN
 Art thou not powerful—even like a God?
 And must I, through my years of wandering,
 Shivering and naked to the elements,
 In wretchedness await
 The hour of Yamen's wrath?
 I thought thou wouldst embody me anew,
 Undying as I am —
 Yea, re-create me! —
 Father, is this all?
 This all—and thou Almighty? (Southey, 1901, pp. 18-19)

Kehama's son, Arvalan is a wrathful spirit, and he wants his father to soothe his suffering soul with the agency of revenge. Then, Kehama explains to his son that a peasant named Ladurlad has murdered Arvalan. As a consequence, Ladurlad becomes the victim of Kehama's curse. Ladurlad is deprived of the blessings of nature; he neither feels water nor wind, and even if he attempts to sense water, it shrinks away from his touch. On the other hand, his curse facilitates him to save his daughter's life before she drowns in the stream, which shows that his curse does not only serve evil intentions but also good ones. Furthermore, Kehama's curse makes Ladurlad invincible against the arrows and weapons of the fanatic followers of Kehama. Kehama's evil practice of power indirectly serves the good.

Apart from this, the poet conveys the helplessness of the Hindu Gods against the mortal tyrant, Kehama. Although Kailyal performs her pious rituals daily, sings and dances around the statue of Marriataly, Marriataly can only help Kailyal indirectly:

And now the rooted idol to their sway
 Bends—yields—and now it falls. But then they scream,
 For lo! they feel the crumbling bank give way,
 And all are plunged into the stream. (Southey, 1901, p. 22)

In these lines, the falling statue of Marriataly implies that the goddess cannot protect herself let alone confront the wrathful tyrant Kehama. Similarly, although Ereenia, a male angelic figure, rescues Kailyal from death by the dangerous Manchineel tree, he cannot resist Lorrinite's band of demons because any Hindu god does not arrive there to save him. Southey gestures towards Hindu

Gods' impotence once again. Similarly, in the Swerga, the Heaven, Indra pronounces his concern regarding Kehama's mighty power:

INDRA

Think'st thou I want the will? rash Son of Heaven,

What if my arm be feeble as thine own

Against the dread Kehama? (Southey, 1901, p. 59)

In these lines, Indra confesses his inability to withstand Kehama's power and openly acknowledges his helplessness. This admission serves to emphasize the poet's portrayal of Hindu Gods as powerless against the forces of evil, incapable of protecting the innocent. Consequently, the poet implies that Hindu deities are, whether directly or indirectly, complicit in enabling evil.

Apart from this, Southey imposes the caste system and the notion of inequality in India. While the poet implies India's poverty through Kailyal and Ladurlad, on the other hand, he portrays the excessive wealth of the Orient by depicting the infinite riches of Kehama and his son, Arvalan. As Said argues, the pendulum swings back and forth between these two extreme opposite representations of the Orient (1979, p. 150). On the one hand, since Ladurlad and his daughter Kailyal are peasants, they belong to the lower class. They worship Marriataly, since Marriataly is the goddess of the poor. On the other hand, the wives of Arvalan attend the ritual with their elegant robes adorned with gold and bright jewels, and then, they remove their precious jewellery during the ritual (Southey, 1901, p. 14). Later on, the poet depicts the tyrant king's luxurious lifestyle. The poet depicts Kehama sitting on a golden throne as his eunuchs are waving fans of peacock plums to cool him (Southey, 1901, p. 64). Besides, the hierarchy exists among Gods at the same time since Indra, one of the mightiest Gods, enjoys magic harmony and the God-musician's performance in Heaven, whereas Marriataly is not regarded as a deity by most people. Again, as Said states, Orientalists have demonstrated notions of inequality, richness, and poverty very frequently in diverse fields (1979, p. 150). The familial bond between Ladurlad and Kailyal constitutes a central focus of the narrative. At this point, the poet uses an image of the feudalistic obedient female figure through Kailyal. Kailyal is a dutiful and selfless daughter, who prioritises his father before her well-being. Likewise, Ladurlad does not abstain from any danger to protect his daughter from evil forces. Their familial affection becomes a resistant power against the tyrant Kehama and his vengeful son, Arvalan. In this scene, Southey employs the superiority of familial bonds and solidarity at the same time.

Lorrinite then features prominently in the narrative since Arvalan asks Lorrinite to collaborate with him against Kailyal to complete his revenge. Lorrinite is a wicked witch who has dealt with demons and offered her body to acquire magical power.

She was a woman whose unlovely youth,

Even like a cankered rose which none will cull,

Had withered on the stalk; her heart was full

Of passions which had found no natural scope,

Feelings which there had grown but ripened not;

Desires unsatisfied, abortive hope, (Southey, 1901, p. 86)

In these lines, Southey underlines the dissatisfaction of Lorrinite's passions. The word "abortive" indicates Lorrinite's infertility or her experience of miscarriage. Furthermore, she hates men for not loving her and envies other women. As a result of her hatred, she causes terror by bringing diseases and death upon them to feed her insatiable rage. In the following lines, the poet warns a child about Lorrinite's gaze, that is why, due to her repulsive appearance and deadliness, Lorrinite is reminiscent of Lamia, a female demon who devours children from Greek mythology ("Lamia" 2024). Lorrinite supports Arvalan by sending forth her troops of demons and providing him with a magic chariot that dragons pull. This narrative reflects Said's argument concerning the Western construction of the Orient, as Southey intertwines Eastern and Western mythologies to craft a composite and Orientalist image.

In his narrative, Southey conveys visual representations of India in the meantime. At this point, through Kailyal, the poet reflects the depiction of a dancing girl as a significant subject of Oriental paintings since it suggests "elegance", "mysticism", and exoticism of India (De Almeida and Gilpin, 2005, p. 175). Apart from this, Southey's use of nature is a significant medium in terms of its Orientalism. Essentially, secluded landscapes suggest a "spiritual context that nature [holds]" in early Hinduism (De Almeida and Gilpin, 2005, p. 92). Southey establishes "the machinery of Hindu mythology" by employing "India's banyan trees and cave-temples" to celebrate British colonialism (De Almeida and Gilpin, 2005, p. 57). In *Kehama*, the temple of the Elephant god implies eroticism since it symbolizes "divine fecundity" (De Almeida and Gilpin, 2005, p. 47). The cave of Elephanta became a prominent image of "Romantic sublimity in the Indian prospect" and other temples also attracted Romantic artists such as James Forbes at the same time (De Almeida and Gilpin, 2005, pp. 47-48). The cave of Elephanta is described as an image of "Romantic sublimity" because its monumental sculptures, intricate carvings, and mysterious, cavernous setting evoke awe and wonder in Western observers. Apart from this, while Southey's depiction of bird breeds such as flamingo and peacock imply India's exoticism, wild animals such as vultures, snakes, and tigers emphasize its perilous environment. Moreover, Southey implies the hazardous environment of India by employing a Manchineel tree, known as the deadliest tree in the world. In the same manner, Southey employs a similar narrative in his *The Life of Nelson*:

The Indians happily observed the reptile, and, knowing what it indicated, awoke him. He started up, and found one of the deadliest serpents in the country coiled up at his feet. He suffered from poison of another kind; for, drinking at a spring in which some boughs of the manchineel had been thrown, the effects were so severe, as, in the opinion of some of his friends, to inflict a lasting injury upon his constitution. (1924, p. 46)

By employing the possible scenarios of danger in India, Southey warns the pilgrims about the troubles of India's climate. Apart from this, in the poem, fanatic believers draw attention. A group of "Yogues" capture Kailyal to present her as a bride to Jaga-Naut, the seven-headed idol:

A thousand pilgrims strain
Arm, shoulder, breast, and thigh, with might and main.
To drag that sacred wain,
And scarce can draw along the enormous load.
Prone fall the frantic votaries in its road,

And, calling on the God,
 Their self-devoted bodies there they lay
 To pave his chariot-way. (Southey, 1901, p. 10)

In these lines, the poet underlines how the votaries are exempt from rational thinking and how their fanaticism reaches the level of madness. Besides, “self-devoted” (Southey, 1901, p. 110) bodies of the votaries may refer to rumours about pilgrims throwing themselves in front of the chariot to find “death and salvation” (Bharati, 1963, p. 63). Moreover, Southey hints at these rumours more clearly through Ereenia’s passage:

EREENIA.
 Fear courts the blow, Fear brings the ruin on.
 Needs must the chariot-wheels of Destiny
 Crush him who throws himself before their track,
 Patient and prostrate. (Southey, 1901, p. 58)

As Bharati argues, these claims are false (1963, p. 63). This proves that the poet does not hesitate to employ speculative utterances in his narratives. Apart from this, the poet depicts the monstrosity of Jaga-Naut stating: “For the huge Idol over her, in air, / Spreads his seven hideous heads, and wide/ Extends their snaky necks on every side;” (Southey, 1901, p. 110). According to this description, the idol is a creepy and frightening figure which spreads terror to humans. The readers can easily deduce that the believers attempt to culminate the furious idol by offering gifts. By indicating the Hindu Gods’ defects, Southey attempts to confute Hinduism and declare its falsity.

Towards the end of the narrative, Kailyal becomes the target of Kehama since the fulfilment of his complete sovereignty over Heaven and the Earth depends on their marriage:

There is it written, Maid, that thou and I,
 Alone of humankind a deathless pair,
 Are doomed to share
 The Amreeta-drink divine
 Of immortality. Come, Maiden mine!
 High-fated One, ascend the subject sky,
 And by Kehama’s side
 Sit on the Swerga throne, his equal bride. (Southey, 1901, p. 145)

Kehama threatens Ladurlad with repeating his curse which he has broken unless he does not persuade his daughter to obey “Destiny”. Ironically, Kehama himself challenges this deterministic belief by attempting to overthrow Hindu Gods and occupy their throne. Apart from this, Amreeta is the equivalent of Ambrosia, the drink of immortality from Greek mythology. Upon consuming this drink, Kehama believes he will become a god by overcoming death.

Throughout his *Kehama*, Southey employs chariots extensively. In Hinduism, Ratha-Yatra, the chariot procession is an indispensable part of Hindu festivals (Bharati, 1963, p. 163). The poet employs chariots as mediums of supernatural transportation. While Ereenia and Kailyal board on Ship of Heaven, Arvalan rides Lorrinite’s chariot pulled by dragons. In the poem, chariots become agencies for transportation in Hell. These chariots enable a materialistic journey as well as a spiritual one. Kehama passes through the gates of Padalon, the Infernal Gates to overthrow Yamen, the King of Padalon as a “Man-God” (Southey, 1901, p. 184). In Hell, rebellious demons get excited extremely

and cheer Kehama, rooting for his triumph. In Padalon, Yamen sits on a golden throne that is being carried by the three statues. These three statues introduce themselves to Kehama; the first statue is a greedy stocker, the second is a usurper who has plotted against the ruler to ascend to the throne, and the third one is a fraud who has spread false tales impiously (Southey, 1901, p. 185). Kehama ignores them and proceeds to complete his ritual. Upon consuming Amreeta, the drink of immortality, Kehama and Kailyal die, and Fate emerges as the ultimate mechanism that resolves the turmoil. In the end, Kailyal's fatalistic approach is rewarded at the end of the narrative. Still, her extremely tame nature signifies her irrational and superstitious attitude. Kailyal agrees to do whatever she is demanded and fulfils Kehama's order. Ironically, despite her piety and determinism, Kailyal reluctantly accepts her destiny. Likewise, Ladurlad can sleep peacefully only when he dies. At this point, the poet intends to reveal that Hindu Gods are not potent enough to interrupt evil forces and cannot restore justice themselves. Instead, the poet suggests Hindu Gods as timid, weak, and busy with idling around. In terms of the tale's Orientalist discourse, Bolton comments that:

[In fact, Kehama's downfall is] the contrivance of a Western writer desiring to impose his rational Christian morality on the Indian world of *Kehama*. Southey's fiction is therefore imbued with the controlling ideas of the Anglicist lobby, which also sought to impose a template of British morality, education and religion on the Indian territories. (2007, p. 208)

According to Bolton's statement, the representation of Kehama is significant for understanding how the poet embeds British values within the narrative. In this framework, Kehama's eventual defeat signifies the triumph of Western superiority. As an Eastern monarch, Kehama torments the innocent and murders without restraint, and the prospect of his attaining greater power is portrayed as a direct threat to "the good". At this point, the presence of a force that restores justice becomes essential, embodied in the intervention of a Westerner who disrupts the prevailing injustice. The poet suggests it as the sole option since the power of the good Indians is not enough and argues that India's governmental system favours the evil and their horrendous bloodshed and tyranny. The poet, in this way, constructs an invitation for Indians to embrace rationality and civility rather than persisting in fanatic and traditional practices.

CONCLUSION

In *The Curse of Kehama*, Robert Southey conveys Hindu Gods' flaws, and Hindu believers' fanaticism, superstition and irrationality. The poet renders Hindu Gods as grotesque, repulsive and impotent. In addition, Southey classifies Hindu myths as unsophisticated and exempt from aesthetic concerns. One can easily recognize that several Hindu deities share striking similarities with figures from Western mythology. Indra, for instance, assumes a role comparable to Zeus as the sovereign of the pantheon, while Yama bears a resemblance to Hades as the ruler of the dead. Such parallels reveal a shared mythological structure across cultures. Despite these correspondences, Southey portrays Hindu Gods with disdain, a rhetorical choice that underscores the Orientalist impulse to diminish non-Western belief systems even when they mirror familiar Western archetypes. Besides, the poet emphasizes the irrationality of Hindu believers by depicting them as devotional and frantic fanatics. In terms of Said's hypothesis regarding reconstruction, Southey intermingles Eastern

mythology with Western values. Furthermore, the poet does not abstain from employing rumours and speculations related to the “other”. In addition, Southey benefits from the natural setting in India as a part of the Orientalist narrative. By incorporating natural elements such as wild animals and hazardous plants into the Indian setting, the poet reinforces the supernatural dimension of the narrative and simultaneously configures the Orient as a space marked by exoticism, mysticism, and danger. By portraying Christianity as virtuous and Hinduism as barbaric, Southey implies that the Orient is in need of civilization by western intellectuals. As an orientalist work, *The Curse of Kehama* reflects the colonialist perspective of 19th century British literature and creates a discourse that defends British supremacy by otherizing India and Hinduism. Orientalist discourses impose the image of the East that it has created in its own mind and this image is a point of view that is in the interest of the West, just like in Southey's work.

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