

Tulsi's Bharat and Shakespeare's England : A comparative view of 16th century literary landscapes

Pooja Sharma

Assistant Professor,

Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi

Abstract :

William Shakespeare is a familiar name for Indian students of English literature. However, they often think of the Bard on Western terms and are unable to reconcile Indian perspectives with Shakespearean works and studies. This paper argues that to resolve this dilemma, English classrooms must abandon isolationism and introduce Goswami Tulsidas in a comparative framework. It would give students a chance to explore two contemporary writers who made their mark in their respective parts of the world.

This paper takes a balanced approach to provide a comparative view of the two literary landscapes represented by Tulsidas and Shakespeare, respectively. This paper is based on classroom experience of introducing Shakespeare to undergraduate Indian students by giving Tulsidas as a point of reference. The paper also argues that this comparative view is essential for learners who are instinctively more familiar with Tulsi, than his contemporary Shakespeare, and a comparative reference to Indian literary landscape of the time helps learners locate the historical time frame and gives learners a familiar point of reference.

Keywords :

Goswami Tulsidas, William Shakespeare, Bharat, India, England.

Introduction :

In August 2018, a prominent Indian publisher created a storm on social media platform X (then Twitter) when she wrote, "So when Shakespeare was writing, who was writing in India? I can't think of an early modern Indian writer?"¹. The Tweet sparked a debate on the gap in education

that post-colonial studies had failed to address in India. It was a sad commentary on elite Indian literary circles where Shakespeare had become a natural point of reference and Tulsidas was hard to remember.

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