

## The Interplay of Indian and Western Interpretative Traditions in Hindu Literary Thought

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the interplay between Indian and Western interpretive traditions in Hindu literary thought, focusing on texts like the *R̥gveda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Rāmāyana*, and *Śrīmadbhāgavata*. It explores Indian hermeneutics through the folk tradition of *kathā* and *ākhyāyikās*, which popularize philosophical ideas via oral narratives, and the scholarly tradition of *ṭīkā*, including *vārttikas* and *bhāṣya*, which offer systematic exegesis. These approaches root Hindu texts in *dharma* and *ṛta*, sustaining them as dynamic cultural entities. The article critiques Western literary theories—structuralism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism—introduced during colonial times, which provide analytical rigor but often impose alien frameworks, obscuring concepts like *darśana* and *rasa*. It highlights Western biases, such as orientalism and Eurocentrism, which misinterpret texts like the *R̥gveda* and *Bhagavad Gītā*, marginalizing their spiritual depth. Advocating a dialogic approach, the article integrates Indian hermeneutics (*mīmāṃsā*, *dhvani*) with Western methods to enrich understanding while preserving indigenous essence. Through textual analysis with deep insight, the study underscores the need to counter external distortions, ensuring Hindu literary thought remains vibrant and relevant across diverse global contexts.

**Keywords:** *katha*, *mīmāṃsā*, *dhvani*, structuralism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism.

### Introduction

Interpretation has always been at the heart of human intellectual inquiry, shaping how texts, traditions, and truths are understood across cultures. Language is pivotal and serves as both medium and object of interpretation. It is approached in two ways: first-order interpretation views language as a fixed system, directly mapping to objects, forming absolute knowledge with disputes confined to terminology and second-order interpretation treats language as fluid, questioning its terms, meanings, and suitability for objects, making interpretation a linguistic act of *Artha-nirdhāraṇa* (meaning determination) across lexical, grammatical, propositional, pragmatic, and discursive levels.

The Indian linguistic tradition, rooted in *śāstra-paddhati*, surpasses Western linguistics by integrating language with metaphysics, thought, and reality. This relies on understanding language's structure and its ties to thought and reality, evident in Pāṇini's *vyākaraṇa*, Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsā*, and Bhartṛhari's *Sphoṭa* theory. Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* offers unmatched grammatical precision, Yāska's *Nirukta* enriches phonetics and semantics, and Bhartṛhari's *Śabda-Brahman* unifies language with philosophy. Unlike the West's fragmented, empirical focus (Aristotle to Chomsky), India's holistic, exegetical approach, tied to Vedic contexts, provides a deeper, more versatile understanding of language across all levels of interpretation. Both India and the West have cultivated distinct yet intersecting traditions of hermeneutics, each grappling with the role of language, meaning, and intention. While the Western trajectory often foregrounds critical questioning and philosophical debates on signification, the Indian tradition grounds

interpretation within a living *śāstric* and dialogic framework. Indian linguistic thought progressed from empirical studies in the *Prātisākhya*s to the transcendental *Śabda-Brahman*, across four phases:

1. Pre-Pāṇini (up to 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE): Encompasses Śruti texts, early grammarians, and Yāska's *Nirukta*, exploring phonetics, morphology, syntax, sound change, meaning variation, etymology, ambiguity, and figurative language.
2. Pāṇini to Ānandavardhana (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE–9<sup>th</sup> century CE): Includes Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, Patañjali, Jaimini, Śabara, Bhartṛhari, and poets like Ānandavardhana, focusing on grammar, philosophy, and verbal symbolism.
3. Rāmacandra to Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa (11<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century CE): Features grammarians like Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, refining Pāṇini's system, and Hemacandra, applying it to non-Sanskrit languages.
4. Modern Era (19<sup>th</sup> century–present): Includes scholars like Kielhorn and Bhandarkar, who edited classical texts, advancing interpretive scholarship.

This tradition maintains continuity, with early concerns—phonetics, syntax, meaning change, variation, and

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philosophy—persisting. Yāska’s insights into etymology, meaning diversity, and figurative language highlight language variation as a social and historical phenomenon.

The literary and philosophical traditions of India, enshrined in revered texts such as the *R̥gveda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Rāmāyana*, and *Śrīmadbhāgavata*, represent a profound intellectual heritage that has shaped the spiritual, cultural, and social ethos of the Indian subcontinent for over three millennia. These texts are not static relics but dynamic repositories of knowledge, sustained through a vibrant interplay of interpretative practices that span scholarly exegesis and folk retellings. In her well-known book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2009), Wendy Doniger also mentions: “The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, like the Puranas, are not just texts but processes, constantly reinterpreted by each generation” (105). This interplay reflects a unique Indian approach to knowledge, where texts are seen as living entities, continuously reinterpreted to address contemporary needs while preserving their timeless essence.

The sanctity of knowledge is central to the Indian tradition, as reflected in the etymology of Veda, derived from the Sanskrit root *vid* (“to know”), which encompasses both intellectual insight and experiential wisdom. The *R̥gveda*, one of the oldest known texts, exemplifies this reverence through its probing of existential questions, as seen in the “Nāsadiya Sūkta”:

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा पुरो यत् ।  
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्मभुः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम् ॥  
(*R̥gveda* 10.129)

[Neither non-being was nor being was at that time; there was no space, nor the firmament beyond. What covered it? Where? Under whose protection? Was there water, deep and unfathomable?]

This hymn’s metaphysical inquiry into the origins of existence underscores the *R̥gveda*’s depth, challenging Western tendencies to reduce it to primitive mythology. Indian texts are metaphorically described as Kamadhenu (the wish-fulfilling cow) and Kalpavṛkṣa (the wish-granting tree), symbolizing their role as inexhaustible sources of wisdom that nourish individual and societal well-being. This reverence is embedded in cultural practices, such as the worship of Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, and the designation of days like gurūvāra and bṛhaspativāra (Thursday, honoring the guru and Bṛhaspati, the mythical teacher), which highlight the centrality of knowledge and pedagogy in Indian civilization.

The Indian interpretative tradition operates through two complementary modes: the folk tradition, characterized by kathā (narrative) practices and oral ākhyāyikās, and the learned tradition, marked by rigorous scholarly commentaries (ṭīkā). The folk tradition,

exemplified by rural gatherings where Bhāgavata-kathā narrates Lord Kṛṣṇa’s life, transforms divine themes into relatable human stories, making philosophical concepts accessible. The *Śrīmadbhāgavata* illustrates this in the following shloka as:

शृण्वतां स्वकथाः कृष्णः पुण्यश्रवणकीर्तनः ।  
हृद्यन्तःस्थो ह्यभद्राणि विधुनोति सुहृत्सताम् ॥  
(*Śrīmadbhāgavata* 1.2.17)

[Listening to Kṛṣṇa’s stories, which are purifying to hear and recite, he who resides in the heart destroys the inauspicious and befriends the virtuous.]

The vācakas (narrators), often trained in scholarly exegesis, bridge esoteric concepts and everyday language, ensuring that ideas like dharma, karma, and mokṣa resonate with diverse audiences. It emphasizes their role in democratizing Indian thought, creating a shared cultural vocabulary that transcends social divides. This bidirectional interaction between folk and learned traditions allows arguments, examples, and interpretations to flow freely, though the scholarly tradition remains the intellectual anchor.

The learned tradition is systematic, focusing on three core tasks: determining meaning, establishing relevance, and articulating rationality. It categorizes interpretations based on text types—Śruti (revealed texts like the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*), Smṛti (traditional texts like *Dharma Śāstras*), Śāstra (ancillary disciplines like Grammar and Astronomy), and Kāvya/Itihāsa-Purāṇa (poetic and narrative texts like the *Rāmāyana*). Interpretations take forms such as vārtikas, paraphrases, elaborations, vyākhyāna, new texts, and creative folk variants. The ṭīkākāra (commentator), often aligned with philosophical schools like Advaitavāda or Viśiṣṭādvaita, holds a revered position, ensuring texts remain dynamic through cumulative commentary traditions, as seen in Śabara Svāmī’s *Śabara-Bhāṣya* on the *Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra* or Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* on Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*.

The encounter with Western intellectual traditions, beginning in the 18th century with colonial scholars like William Jones and Max Müller, introduced new interpretive lenses for Hindu thought. Müller’s *R̥gveda* editions (1849–1874) and *Sacred Books of the East* series (1879–1910) brought Indian texts to global audiences but often framed them within Western paradigms, such as comparative religion or philology. Edward W. Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) also points out how Western interpretations of Eastern texts often reflect colonial biases, but no direct quote on Hindu textual interpretation was found without further searching. For instance, colonial interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gītā* aligned Kṛṣṇa’s call to action with imperial notions of duty, distorting its dharma-centric ethos: योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय, meaning, “established in

yoga, perform actions, abandoning attachment, O Arjuna, being equipoised in success and failure; equanimity is called yoga" (*Bhagavad Gītā* 2.48).

Since the colonial era, Western literary theories—structuralism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and feminism—have reshaped interpretations of Hindu texts, offered analytical rigor but often clashed with indigenous hermeneutics like *Mīmāṃsā* and *Dhvani*. These Western frameworks, while illuminating, sometimes impose external categories that obscure the *darśana* and *rasa* central to Indian texts. Moreover, Western biases—rooted in orientalism, Eurocentrism, and missionary agendas—have significantly influenced how Hindu thought is perceived, often marginalizing its spiritual and contextual depth. Notably, Carl Jung emphasized the symbolic and psychological depth of textual interpretation, particularly in myths, dreams, and literature. Jung explains: "The interpretation of dreams and symbols demands intelligence. It cannot be turned into a mechanical system and then crammed into unimaginative brains. It demands both an increasing knowledge of the dreamer's individuality and an increasing self-awareness on the part of the interpreter" (39). In a similar vein, Kapil Kapoor's scholarship advocates for a dialogic approach, integrating Western theories with Indian frameworks to preserve the texts' integrity offering insights to illuminate how these traditions enrich our understanding of Hindu literary thought across diverse contexts.

### The Indian Interpretative Tradition

#### (a) The Folk Tradition: Democratizing Knowledge

The folk tradition in India, characterized by *kathā* practices and oral *ākhyāyikās*, serves as a vital conduit for making complex texts accessible. Rooted in *itihāsas* like the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*, the *kathā* tradition has profoundly influenced narrative forms across modern Indian languages, from Tamil *bhakti* poetry to Bengali *maṅgalkāvyas*. The *vācakas*, ranging from learned scholars to local storytellers, translate metaphysical concepts into relatable narratives, ensuring that ideas like *dharma*, *karma*, and *mokṣa* resonate with diverse audiences. For instance, the *Rāmāyana*'s narrative of Rāma's exile is retold in regional languages, incorporating local idioms and cultural nuances, as seen in Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, a Hindi retelling that emphasizes *bhakti* and has become a cultural touchstone. This tradition's strength lies in its adaptability, allowing texts to evolve through oral performances that evoke *rasa* (aesthetic emotion), such as *śānta* (peace) or *karuṇa* (compassion). The bidirectional flow between folk and learned traditions enriches both, as folk retellings draw on scholarly commentaries, while scholarly interpretations incorporate the emotional resonance of folk narratives. For example, the *Mahābhārata*'s complex ethical dilemmas, such as

Arjuna's reluctance to fight, are simplified in *kathā* performances to highlight devotion and duty, aligning with the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s teachings.

#### (b) The Learned Tradition: A Framework for Exegesis

The learned tradition is systematic, focusing on three core tasks: determining meaning, establishing relevance, and articulating rationality. The interpretations are categorized by text type: Śruti Texts: Commentaries on the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* explore metaphysical questions, giving rise to philosophical schools like Advaita (non-dualism) and Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism); The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*'s *tat tvam asi* (6.8.7, "That thou art") encapsulates the non-dual unity of *ātman* (self) and *brahman* (ultimate reality); Smṛti Literature: Texts like the *Manusmṛti* adapt ethical codes to changing social contexts, ensuring *dharma*'s relevance across time; Śāstra Literature: Commentaries on disciplines like Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* define linguistic precision, as in: *siddham tu śabda-saṃskāre* (The refinement of words is accomplished) (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 6.1.1); Kāvya and Itihāsa-Purāṇa: These address poetic nuance, as in the *Rāmāyana*'s portrayal of Rāma: *rāmo vighrahavān dharmah* (Rāma is the embodiment of righteousness) (The *Rāmāyana*, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa). These interpretative forms include *vārttikas*, paraphrases, elaborations, *vyākhyāna*, new texts, and creative folk variants. Most adopt the *ṭikā* form, with the *ṭikākāra* revered for their philosophical insight. As Śaṅkara's Advaitic commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* emphasize non-dualism, while Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita offers a devotional interpretation, illustrating the diversity within the learned tradition. The concept of *śabda* (verbal testimony) as a *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) is central, with schools like *Mīmāṃsā* developing sophisticated methods for interpreting Vedic rituals, ensuring their correct performance.

The learned tradition also engages with ancillary disciplines, such as Yāska's *Nirukta* (etymology) and Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* (aesthetic theory), which articulate the principles of *dhvani* and *rasa*. These frameworks ensure that interpretations are not merely analytical but also evoke emotional and spiritual responses, aligning with the Indian emphasis on holistic understanding.

#### The Commentary Tradition: A Cumulative Endeavor

India's commentary tradition is cumulative, with successive works building on predecessors, creating a layered intellectual discourse. The *Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra* by Jaimini, focused on Vedic ritual interpretation, exemplifies this. Śābara Svāmī's *Śābara-Bhāṣya* provides detailed notes on each *sūtra*, organizing them into *adhikaraṇas* (topical divisions) and addressing arguments for and against the author's views. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's

commentaries—*Śloka-Vārttika* (on argumentation), *Tantra-Vārttika* (on ritual procedures), and *Tuṣṭikā* (on later chapters)—refine Śabara's readings, emphasizing epistemology and linguistic analysis. Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the foundational text of Sanskrit grammar, has inspired a similarly rich tradition. Kātyāyana's *vārttikas* address linguistic evolution post-Pāṇini. Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* expands on Kātyāyana, offering critical insights, followed by Kaiyaṭa's *Pradīpa* and the *Kāśikā-Vṛtti* by Vāmana and Jayāditya, which integrate Buddhist grammatical perspectives. Commentaries are classified as: *Vṛtti* (Descriptive explanations, as in the *Kāśikā-Vṛtti*); *Vārttika* (as in Uddyotakara's *Nyaya-Varttika* on *Nyaya Sūtras*) and *Bhāṣya* (Analytical expositions with *bhāṣya* being more expansive, as in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*). Rājaśekhara's *Kāvya-Mīmāṃsā* delineates further types like *paddhati*, *saṃkṣā*, and *viveka*, reflecting the tradition's nuanced approach. This cumulative process ensures that texts remain dynamic, with each commentary adding new layers of meaning while preserving the original's integrity.

The enduring significance of texts like the *Rgveda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Aṣṭādhyāyī* stems from their role as *pramāṇa* in philosophical schools, where *śabda* is a valid means of knowledge. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* emphasizes this in the following shloka:

तमेव धीरो विज्ञाय प्रज्ञां कुर्वीत ब्राह्मणः ।  
(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.21)

[The wise one, knowing Him, should cultivate wisdom.]  
The Vedas' link to *vid* underscores their experiential nature. Cultural practices, from Sarasvatī worship to the veneration of ācāryas, reflect this reverence, ensuring texts remain dynamic. The concept of *jñāna-manthana* (churning of knowledge), as described by Patañjali, highlights the intellectual ferment that produced texts like the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, influencing disciplines from grammar to philosophy.

## Western Literary Theories: A New Approach to Hindu Thought

### (a) Historical Context: Orientalist Beginnings

As the scholar Kapil Kapoor in his books *Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition* (2005) and *Literary Theory: Indian Conceptual Framework* (1998), ensures that the metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of Hindu thought permeate all strata of society, fostering a shared cultural consciousness rooted in *dharma* (cosmic and moral order) and *ṛta* (cosmic truth). Western engagement with Hindu thought began with 18th- and 19th-century orientalists. William Jones, through the Asiatic Society (1784), translated texts like the *Manusmṛti*, while Max Müller's *Rgveda* editions (1849–1874) framed its hymns as primitive, ignoring their *ṛta*-based cosmology. Kapoor critiques this for imposing evolutionary models,

reducing the *Rgveda*'s metaphysical inquiries to simplistic narratives. Colonial translations of the *Bhagavad Gītā* distorted its message, aligning Kṛṣṇa's call to action with imperial obedience:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।  
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥  
(*Bhagavad Gītā* 2.47)

[Your right is to action alone, never to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor be attached to inaction.]

### (b) Structuralism: Universal Patterns

Structuralism, developed by Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, seeks universal narrative patterns through binary oppositions. Wendy Doniger in her book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2009) applies it to the *Mahābhārata*, identifying *dharma* versus *adharma* oppositions, such as the Pāṇḍavas' righteousness versus the Kauravas' chaos. However, Kapoor argues that Indian texts operate within a *dhvani* framework, where *rasa* transcends binaries. The *Gītā*'s synthesis of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma* resists reduction:

श्रेयान्द्रव्यमयाद्यज्ञाज्ज्ञानयज्ञः परन्तप ।  
सर्वं कर्माखिलं पार्थ ज्ञाने परिसमाप्यते ॥  
(*Bhagavad Gītā* 4.33)

[All actions, O Arjuna, culminate in knowledge.]

### (c) Poststructuralism: Textual Fluidity

Poststructuralism, particularly Derrida's deconstruction, emphasizes textual instability. Ananda Wood in his book *From the Upanishads* (1996) interprets *tat tvam asi* (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7, "That thou art") as destabilizing selfhood. However, Advaita Vedānta posits *brahman* as unchanging:

ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ॥  
(*Īśā Upaniṣad* 1)

[All this—whatever exists in this moving world—is enveloped by the Lord. Enjoy it through renunciation, do not covet anyone's wealth.]

### (d) Postcolonialism: Reclaiming Narratives

Edward W. Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), critiques the West's exoticization of the East. Whereas, Ronald Inden in his *Imagining India* (1990) and Kapil Kapoor in his books challenge orientalist readings of the Vedas as primitive, emphasizing *ṛta*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, yet another notable postcolonial theorist, highlights colonial silencing of subaltern voices. Spivak emphasizes how a postcolonial *varttika* on Hindu texts like the *Upaniṣads* or *Bhagavad Gita* could challenge Western interpretations, amplifying

marginalized perspectives and enriching Hindu philosophy's dialogue with global thought. Spivak critiques colonial uses of the *Gītā*, but Kapoor advocates Śaṅkara's commentaries to preserve its dharma-centric essence.

#### (e) Feminist Theory: Gender Re-examined

Feminist interpretations of Hindu epics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* often impose Western categories, reducing Draupadī to victimhood and Sītā to passivity. Western feminist readings of Hindu epics frequently misrepresent Draupadī and Sītā, overlooking their strength, dignity, and agency. Whereas Indian perspectives highlight their śakti—Draupadī as dharma's voice of protest, Sītā as resilient embodiment of strī-dharma. Indian interpretations emphasize śakti: Draupadī as the fierce challenger of adharma and Sītā as the steadfast embodiment of virtue. Nuanced analysis embraces indigenous frameworks, honoring women as agents of dharma, rasa, and cosmic order. Feminist engagement must move beyond colonial biases, recognizing multiple archetypes where women shape dharma, sustain rasa, and embody cosmic balance.

#### The Impact of Western Bias on Hindu Thought

Western biases, rooted in orientalism, Eurocentrism, and missionary agendas, have profoundly shaped interpretations of Hindu thought, often marginalizing its spiritual and contextual depth. These biases emerged during the colonial era, when European scholars and administrators sought to understand and govern India through their own intellectual frameworks. Orientalist scholars like Max Müller and William Jones, while introducing Hindu texts to the West, often viewed them through a lens of cultural superiority, framing Indian thought as primitive or superstitious. Müller's characterization of the *Rgveda* as nature worship, for instance, ignored its *ṛta*-based cosmology, which integrates cosmic order with metaphysical inquiry. This bias reduced the *Rgveda*'s sophisticated philosophy to a simplistic narrative arguing that such interpretations reflect a Western evolutionary model that places European rationality above non-Western traditions.

Missionary biases further distorted Hindu thought, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Christian missionaries portrayed Hinduism as idolatrous or morally inferior to justify conversion efforts. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, with its emphasis on niṣkāma karma (selfless action), was reinterpreted to align with Protestant work ethics, as seen in colonial translations that framed Kṛṣṇa's teachings as a call to disciplined labor:

न कर्मणामनारम्भान्त्रैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्रुते ।  
न च संन्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥  
(*Bhagavad Gītā*, 3.4)

[Action performed without desire, preceded by knowledge, is called yoga.]

This misrepresentation overlooked the *Gītā*'s spiritual aim of liberation emphasizing its integration of jñāna, bhakti, and karma within a dharma-centric framework. Missionary critiques also targeted Hindu rituals, such as those in the *Atharvaveda*, as superstitious, ignoring their cosmological significance.

Eurocentrism further compounded these biases, as Western scholars applied universalist frameworks that decontextualized Hindu texts. For instance, the *Upaniṣads*' metaphysical inquiries were often compared to Greek philosophy, with scholars like F.W.J. Schelling viewing them as precursors to Western idealism, thus subordinating Indian thought to European intellectual history. Such comparisons ignore the *Upaniṣads*' unique teleology, as seen in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*:

यदा पश्यः पश्यते रुक्मवर्णं कतरिमीशं पुरुषं ब्रह्मयोनिम् ।  
तदा विद्वान्मुण्यपापे विधुय निरञ्जनः परमं साम्यमुपैति ॥  
(*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.3)

[When the seer beholds the golden-hued creator, the Lord, the person, the source of Brahman.]

Post-independence, Western academic biases persisted in disciplines like Indology, where texts were studied through secular or materialist lenses, sidelining their spiritual dimensions. For example, Marxist readings of the *Mahābhārata* interpreted its conflicts as class struggles, overlooking its ethical and spiritual layers. Many Indian scholars critique such approaches for imposing external categories, advocating for indigenous hermeneutics like *mīmāṃsā* and *dhvani* to restore the texts' spiritual context. These biases have had lasting impacts, shaping global perceptions of Hinduism as exotic or backward. However, postcolonial scholars and Indian intellectuals have countered these narratives by emphasizing indigenous frameworks. The *Rāmāyaṇa*'s portrayal of Sītā, often misread as passive, exemplifies the need for contextual interpretation. By reclaiming these narratives, Indian scholars ensure that Hindu thought is understood on its own terms, preserving its spiritual and cultural richness.

#### Synergies and Tensions

Western theories enrich Hindu thought by highlighting narrative patterns, textual fluidity, colonial biases, psychological depth, and gender dynamics. Structuralism reveals narrative structures, poststructuralism underscores interpretive flexibility, postcolonialism corrects orientalist distortions, and feminism highlights gender dynamics. Indian hermeneutics like *mīmāṃsā* and *dhvani* prioritize contextual coherence and spiritual aims, complementing Western rigor when integrated dialogically. For instance,

combining structuralism's analytical tools with *dhvani's* emotive framework reveals both the narrative structure and aesthetic depth of the *Mahābhārata*, while postcolonialism aligns with Indian efforts to reclaim indigenous narratives. The integration of Western and Indian approaches requires acknowledging Western biases, such as orientalism and Eurocentrism, which have historically marginalized Hindu thought. A dialogic approach, as Kapoor advocates, leverages Western analytical tools while grounding interpretations in Indian frameworks, ensuring texts like the *R̥gveda* and *Upaniṣads* are appreciated for their philosophical and spiritual depth.

### Conclusion

The Indian interpretative traditions—folk *kathā* and learned *īkā*—sustain texts as living entities, democratizing and preserving knowledge. Western theories and biases have reshaped interpretations, offered analytical depth but often distorted indigenous nuances. By integrating Indian frameworks with Western insights, we can fully appreciate the richness of Hindu thought, ensuring texts like the *R̥gveda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Rāmāyana* remain vibrant across contexts. This dialogic approach, therefore, honors the texts' spiritual and cultural significance while leveraging modern scholarship, creating a holistic understanding of Hindu literary thought.

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