

NON-DUALITY AS A METHOD OF READING: BEYOND BINARY LOGIC

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Abstract: The article investigates the application of non-duality as a method of reading texts beyond the framework of binary logic. Traditionally, literary criticism has heavily relied upon binary concepts such as subject/object, self/other, male/female in order to structure meaning and examine systems of hierarchical exclusions. Although both structuralist and post-structuralist approaches have made significant contributions to understand the nature of these structures, the critical investigation often remain grounded in the logic of opposition itself. Drawing on a selective reading of Advaita philosophy, this paper introduces non-duality as a method of interpreting texts that neither denies difference nor treats it as absolute separation. It foregrounds interconnectedness, continuity, relationality and coexistence within literary texts. Furthermore, the article distinguishes non-dual reading from deconstruction by arguing that it seeks to rethink separation as temporary rather than essential. Non-duality, thus, may be understood as a complementary analytical lens that can expand the scope of traditional forms of literary criticism beyond rigid oppositional structures.

Binary oppositions are pairs of opposing ideas in which each concept is identified in relation to the other, often with one term privileged over the other. These oppositions organise our understanding of the world around us. They construct our language and thoughts, influence our social structure, behaviour and our identities. For example, traditionally, men have been associated with strength, rationality, and the public sphere, while women have been confined to weakness, emotionality, and the private sphere, even though these roles are far more fluid in reality. Similarly, social hierarchies are formed on the basis of oppositions such as civilised and primitive or rational and irrational, although these dichotomies are neither rigid nor permanent but continually intersecting and overlapping with each other.

Historically, oppositions such as mind/body, subject/object, culture/nature, self/other, and other related oppositions have structured philosophical investigation, social theory and literary interpretation. Meaning is often constructed through contrast and identity is shaped by exclusion or differentiation. Such structures offer conceptual clarity and logical coherence; however, they also naturalise rigid categories, stabilise hierarchies and constrain understanding by treating difference as fixed and self-contained.

Structuralist thought illuminates how systems of meaning depend on differences. Ferdinand de Saussure believes the meaning of a linguistic sign is determined not by its essence but by relations with other signs within a structure of differences (Saussure 120). According to this framework, language functions as a system of relations in which meaning is produced by distinctions rather than inherent reference. This perspective, in literary criticism, enables critics to detect hidden patterns of opposition, symbolic systems and relational structures inscribed in the text.

Nevertheless, the reliance on binary opposition also reveals some limitations. Interpretative frameworks that define meaning and identity in terms of opposition may emphasise separation and hierarchy rather than relationality and interdependence. Jacques Derrida challenges the stability and independence of binary oppositions and demonstrates that each term depends on what it excludes (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*). Thus, signification cannot be definite but is always deferred through difference. Likewise, Michel Foucault analyses how systems of knowledge generate categories and distinctions that govern thought and social reality (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*). Judith Butler further complicates the stability of identity categories by suggesting that identities are performed rather than inherent (Butler, *Gender Trouble*).

Although these critiques destabilise binary structures, they still often operate within the conceptual frameworks of opposition. The act of interpretation often begins with recognising the binary itself and then demonstrating its

instability or internal hierarchy. In doing this, critical enquiry, then, can be caught up in the very oppositional logic it seeks to oppose. Consequently, literary interpretations may become hierarchical and conflict-oriented instead of relational and interconnected.

This limitation implies the necessity of a methodological reorientation of literary reading. Indian non-dual thought, especially Advaita Vedanta, can provide one possible model for the change of direction. Advaita acknowledges difference and multiplicity; however, it declines to treat difference as absolute and independent. Non-dual thought, therefore, does not dismiss the lived experience of plurality. Differences continue to operate within social, linguistic, and psychological spheres, but they are not viewed as entirely independent or self-sufficient. This approach becomes especially relevant to the analysis of literary texts which often represent identities and relationships as fluid, relational, and constantly evolving. Consequently, this analytical approach enables critics to examine continuity within difference instead of reducing complexities of literature to rigid oppositional structures.

The purpose of introducing non-dualism as a reading model is neither to assert metaphysical clarity nor to dismiss the contribution and significance of Western theories, but to encourage focus on relation, evolving identities and continuity over rigid structures. Non-dualism, therefore may function not as a theological doctrine but as a methodological lens of interpretation to redirect critical attention.

Binary Logic and Its Limits in Critical Reading

For a long time, binary logic has been the central organising principle in literary criticism. Many interpretative frameworks analyse texts by distinguishing opposing terms and tracing hierarchies inscribed within them. Such approaches improve analysis through the identification of patterns of dominance, exclusion and marginalisation in literary and cultural representation. For example, within structuralist analysis dualistic reasoning operates as the fundamental element for understanding a text. Culture is seen as a system of differences, where meaning is produced through difference. By examining these distinctions, it uncovers patterns that otherwise might stay hidden.

Post-structuralism, on the other hand, challenges such opposition, but its attention continues to centre on binary opposition. Deconstructive thought also highlights the instability of oppositional frameworks, and yet they start with the same binary structures they aim to destabilise.

Western critical thought has relied on oppositional frameworks. Even theories which aim to dismantle hierarchies often remain caught within the logic of separation and division. As a result, the focus of critical analysis may primarily be structured around conflict and antagonism. For instance, a feminist reading may examine a text through the conflict between male and female, whereas a Marxist reading may emphasise class-based struggle, and a postcolonial reading may organise interpretation around coloniser and colonised. These approaches continue to hold historical and intellectual significance because they uncover underlying systems of inequality, domination and exclusion operating within the texts and social structures.

However, these analytical frameworks risk becoming reductive when they try to oversimplify ambiguity, contradiction and complex identities to fit into fixed oppositional structures. As the binary continues to serve as the primary mode of analysis, interpretation may often remain focused on instability, reversal and subversion rather than interdependence and relationality, and texts that do not fall into clear categories might be reduced to align with established modes of interpretation.

These limitations are especially evident when a literary text emphasises ambiguity, distinctions or ethical intricacy. Often characters who exist in contradictory positions cannot be easily classified according to any particular ideological perspective. On the one hand, the same literary text may demonstrate elements of domination at work, and on the other hand complicate the distinctions upon which such structures rely. Nevertheless, oppositional models of interpretation sometimes prioritise analytical clarity at the expense of interpretative openness, and thus reduce the

complexities of literary works into identifiable structures of opposition. It does not mean that such critical approaches are invalid, but the strict adherence to binary systems of classification may limit other possibilities of studying coexistence, continuity and relations between the elements of literary texts. Moreover, it is possible that binary systems may encourage a critical stance that interprets literature in terms of contradiction and division. Although, conflict remains an important component in literary theory, not all connections within the text have to be understood only in terms of opposition. Emotional attachment, shared vulnerability, moral responsibilities, memory and dependence often transcend such rigid binaries. Therefore, a methodological approach which takes relationality and other aspects of literary complexity into consideration may identify the multidimensional nature of literary meaning that cannot be fully explained by oppositional approaches.

This implies a need for methodological reorientation that goes beyond oppositional logic without ignoring difference altogether. In this context, non-duality may provide a productive interpretative lens that shifts attention from strict opposition to interconnectedness and relational continuity.

Non-Duality in Indian Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification

A. Clarifying Non-duality

Taking the earlier discussion into account, it is worthwhile to consider Indian non-dual philosophy as a possible interpretative approach to conceptualise oppositions in more relational terms. However, before discussing non-dualism as such a method it is necessary to understand what non-dualism is from the perspective of Indian philosophy. In Sanskrit, the term '*Advaita*' literally means 'not two', referring to the absence of separation or duality. Yet, neither does it assert that everything is identical nor does it deny the presence of difference. Non-dualism does not negate the diversity of the world. Instead, it questions the idea that difference must exist in the form of absolute separation. Thus, non-dualism should be understood not as the elimination of distinction but as critique of rigid separation.

Although Advaita philosophy is often portrayed as mystical and world-negating in character since the colonial era and early Orientalist studies, this school of thought never claims the non-existence of the world. Rather, it suggests that error lies in the manner of apprehending reality. What seems disconnected and self-contained is, in fact, a misperception of reality. In his commentaries on the *Adhyāsa Bhāṣya*, Śaṅkarācārya describes this condition as *avidyā* (ignorance) due to which reality appears fragmented and autonomous. (Shankaracharya, *Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya* 1-8). He repeatedly emphasises that *Ātman* and *Brahman* are not separate, which suggests that the differences we see are part of a broader relational continuity (Shankaracharya, *Ātma Bodha*).

Non-dualism, at a conceptual level, brings about transformation in our knowledge and reality. The existence of difference itself is not the central issue here, but the misapprehension of its nature. This misapprehension does not lie in perceiving their difference but in the assumption of their independent existence. In other words, appearance and reality are not completely opposed to each other; rather their relation requires careful interpretation (Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*). Therefore, when applied to literary criticism, non-duality invites critics to examine how meanings arise in relation to one another, rather than through isolated conflict.

The application of non-dualism in this article remains significantly selective and methodological without being theological. It does not aim to reconstruct the entire philosophical system but to draw attention toward a conceptual approach that highlights relation, fluidity and co-creation.

B. How Non-Dual Reading Changes Interpretation

A non-dual way of reading does not simply reverse the binaries or to privilege an excluded term over the other. Instead, it asks how seemingly contradictory categories emerge through relational processes that resist complete

separation. Meaning emerges through relational interactions rather than isolated identities. Such a method thus addresses ambiguity, transition and interdependence in textual representation.

For example, instead of viewing nature and culture as two separate categories, a non-dual reading would explore how each term shapes and transforms the other. Similarly, rather than seeing self and other as completely separate identities, the focus would shift toward continuity, relational formation and interconnectedness. Thus, the analytical approach moves from conflict alone to shared structure and continuity.

Such an approach to texts may also transform our perception of literary tension. In oppositional frameworks contradictions usually tend to manifest themselves primarily in terms of conflict between distinct categories or positions. A non-dual reading, by contrast, may see a state of contradiction as a symptom of overlapping realities, indistinct boundaries or incomplete separation between experience and identities. Therefore, the ambiguity found in literature can continue to be productive without necessarily being understood in terms of fixed interpretative closure or rigid oppositions. A non-dual method of reading may thus encourage critics to adopt a slower and more relational form of criticism. Rather than structuring meaning right away within hierarchical and exclusionary frameworks, the critic explores modes of transition, coexistence and interconnectedness in the text. Meaning in literature emerges not only through antagonism but also by relations that unsettle strict conceptual boundaries.

Non-dual reading opens up space for liminality and fluidity within the text. Social structures, characters and identities often exist in states of transformation defying absolute categorisation. Oppositional frameworks may simplify such complexity by confining literary representation into strict divisions. However, a non-dual approach allows contradiction and multiplicity to coexist without collapsing into hierarchy or antagonism immediately.

This framework can be helpful especially for understanding contemporary literature, where identities and social realities often seem fragmented, unstable or relationally formed. Instead of structuring interpretation around domination and exclusion non-dual reading examines the dynamic connection through which meaning is produced.

Such an approach also calls for epistemic humility. Interpretation often depends on categorisation to achieve clarity. But this clarity may obscure more nuanced relations in the text. A non-dual reading suspends such urgency to categorise. It makes room for ambiguity, not because it fails to interpret but because it seeks to engage the multilayered meanings in the text.

This type of method also allows the critic to maintain unity and difference together without collapsing them into one another. Unity is not understood as homogeneity, and difference is not understood as absolute separation. Instead, they are seen as existing side by side in a non-hierarchical manner. The textual element may cohere and simultaneously retain internal differences and tension.

C. Non-Duality and Deconstruction

Non-dual reading shares some of the concerns of post-structuralist criticism in its rejection of stable and self-sufficient concepts. Derrida's deconstruction makes evident that binary oppositions are unstable because each term derives meaning through its relation to the other (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*). Thus, deconstructive reading destabilises hierarchies of meaning and reveals the tension behind conceptual opposition.

However, non-dual reading is not identical to deconstruction in its interpretative approach. Whereas deconstruction exposes the instability in oppositional terms, non-dual analysis shifts the focus from instability to relational continuity. The primary concern here is not merely the collapse of binaries, but rather the possibility that separation itself is provisional rather than fundamental.

In this respect, non-duality does not simply aim to expose contradictions or endlessly defer meaning. On the contrary, it explores the formation of such categories through interconnectedness and non-absolute relational structures. The

interpretative focus, therefore, becomes less about dismantling oppositions and more about understanding interconnectedness. This perspective broadens the potential of literary criticism by allowing critics to explore relations without reducing complexity to hierarchical rigidity or perpetual instability.

Illustrative Textual Example

A brief example may help to clarify what non-dual reading entails in contrast to conventional oppositional reading of literature. Traditionally, oppositional readings interpret literary relationships in terms of polarities such as self/other, male/female or civilisation/wilderness. A non-dual approach, on the other hand, would be less concerned with demonstrating the instability of the opposition than with understanding the interconnectivity of apparently separate identities. Most characters in literature learn about themselves through social interaction, memory, relationships or emotional attachment. Instead of viewing self and other as entirely distinct identities such reading would consider continuity and relationality through which identity emerges within the text. This kind of reading does not dissolve tension or difference; instead, it redirects focus toward relationality and coexistence beyond rigid separation. Such a reading, therefore, leaves the complexity of literature open rather than reducing them to an either/or conceptual divide.

This may prove significant in narratives involving trauma, intimacy, memory or displacement where identities are often constituted in relation to others rather than as isolated individuals. Characters may form their identities through relations of social dependence, shared history and emotional attachment with others. In such cases, it is difficult to perceive identity as completely autonomous since selfhood itself is constituted through interaction and relational continuity. For instance, the portrayal of family relationships in literature often complicates the distinctions between individuality and collective identity. Personal desires, obligations, memories, emotional legacies become closely intertwined. Likewise, stories which deal with marginalisation, colonialism or migration often expose identities shaped by cultural overlap and shared historical experiences rather than by fixed conceptual categories. Thus, a non-dual analysis enables critics to explore how literary texts engage with fluidity of identity, relations and coexistence.

Conclusion

The persistent presence of binary logic in literary criticism articulates both its analytical strength and limitations. Although this framework has played a significant role in literary criticism, philosophy and cultural systems, it has also reinforced conceptual divisions that restrict interpretative possibilities. Therefore, it is necessary to explore alternative modes of interpretation which may address the complexities without being dependent on fixed divisions.

The article argues that non-duality, when engaged selectively and methodologically, can offer an effective alternative in the field of literary criticism. With reference to certain aspects of Indian Advaita philosophy, it can be said that non-duality as a methodological approach acknowledges the presence of difference while at the same time encourages relational and non-hierarchical thinking. Without denying plurality or contradiction, it reorients the analytical approach from rigid opposition toward coherence, relationality and interconnectedness.

A non-dual approach to textual reading invites scholars to explore how meanings, categories and identities are produced relationally. Rather than framing interpretation solely around ideas of domination and conflict such an approach draws attention to relationality, continuity and coexistence. This way of approaching texts may be particularly valuable in the context of contemporary literary works in which identities and social realities often resist rigid categorisation.

It is important to note that in this article non-dual approach has not been suggested to replace the existing theoretical frameworks. The importance of binary logic in comprehending hierarchy, power and discourse is undeniable. Non-duality, in this context, acts as a complementary lens of interpretation that expands the scope of critical analysis beyond rigid binaries. Therefore, the significance of non-duality does not lie in affirming metaphysical certainty, but

in opening possibilities for rethinking interpretation itself. With this shift from separation to relation literary criticism can perhaps be more responsive toward complexity, fluidity and interconnection through which meaning emerges.

Non-dual reading's methodological significance rests upon the ability to generate interpretative space beyond strict binary conceptions. In other words, it recognises that literary meaning is not exclusively constructed around dualistic structures. Instead, it emphasises relational modes of identification, categorisation and experience. This does not mark the limit of critical enquiry, nor does it reject the necessity of examining issues of power, hierarchy and dominance. Rather, it expands the scope of critical reading by acknowledging that literary texts often extend beyond the limitations of conceptual binaries. In contemporary literary scholarship where issues of fragmented identity, cultural hybridity, ecology and ethics of coexistence have become central to interpretative practice, non-dual reading may provide a valuable critical intervention. Its value does not lie in its ability to provide an alternative approach to existing critical theories but in prompting criticism to reconsider the nature of relation, interconnectedness and continuity in literature.

Ultimately, the concept of non-duality is not introduced as an ideological imposition but as an interpretative tool that will allow literary interpretation to transcend the confines of binary thinking. This shift, therefore, facilitates a more flexible and nuanced approach of textual analysis.

References

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