

Nazrul's *The Rebel* versus Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*: Revolution and Freedom

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Abstract

In the course of the study, this paper tries to make a justification of the revolutionary zeal which is prevalent throughout two legendary lyrics “Ode to the West Wind” and “The Rebel (Bidrohi)”. Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” and Kazi Nazrul Islam’s “The Rebel (Bidrohi)” demonstrate the role of the poet as the voice of change and revolution. The two poems are superbly fabricated on their creators’ credo “destruction” and “creation” revolting against old customs, society and authority, and vice versa ushering in the new establishments. Both poets rebelled against British rule. One did this against his own nation and another was against colonials. They are rebels and visionaries of change through the spirit of revolution, though it is not expressed in same ways. The rebel in “The Rebel (Bidrohi)”, is a powerful young man and the reformer, in “Ode to the West Wind”, the focus is an old man who is seeking help. Both use much imagery and metaphors from nature, religious books, myths and history to visualize the spirit of revolution which is the weapon of freedom against individual, political, economic and religious slavery. They were actually harbingers of Renaissance humanism. Hence, their voice of revolution and change have been universalized for all people of all ages who are deprived of their rights.

Key words: Creation, Destruction, Freedom of the People, Spirit of revolution

Introduction

Both Kazi Nazrul Islam and Percy Bysshe Shelley have been recognized as poets of revolution and change for their poems, predominantly, “The Rebel (Bidrohi)”, and “Ode to the West Wind” and are sometimes compared to one another in literary discussions regarding revolutionary spirit and rebel poets. Percy Bysshe Shelley was a Renaissance man of 19th century England. Like other Romantic poets of the age, he was also influenced by the humanistic

doctrine of Italian renaissance and by the ideals (e.g. liberty, equality, and fraternity) of French revolution. Shelley's "Ode to West Wind" is the great work of English literature. In this poem, Shelley has invoked the west wind to come to help him in his reformatory activities against all kinds of oppressions, inequalities, bondages, ignorance, and the hypocrisy of the higher class against subaltern. For his writing of political pamphlets to support the rights of common people, he had to stay in exile in Italy until his death to avoid government persecution and the poem "Ode to the West wind" was created at that time from a bleeding heart addressing the west wind to spread the bloody message of reformation all over the world as the poet himself was unable.

On the other hand, the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam emerged as the eminent renaissance poet of the 20th century Bengali Renaissance. At that time, Bengal was under British rule. The British ruled the Indian subcontinent along with many other parts of the world (e.g. Canada, United States of America, and Africa). In India, Nazrul was the first poet to protest against British authority and be sent to prison. Nazrul not only struggled against external colonialism and poverty but also revolted against internal bondages, e.g. the misunderstanding of orthodox Muslims, the tyranny of Maulavi, and the prevailing communalism between Hindus and Muslims in India. In his writings, he has advocated for humanism. He was very imaginative like Shelley, and a worshipper of beauty. The world has watched the rising of an evil planet around the dazzling sun of British rule in the publication of Nazrul's authoritative poem 'The Rebel'. For this poem, Nazrul is called "Bidrohi Poet". Anyone who reads this poem feels the flow of spirit of revolution in his vein. Both Shelley and Nazrul provided similar revolutionary messages in their poems, though they were from different political and social settings. Both were visionary of revolution. They believed in the same Renaissance humanism.

There are also some dissimilarities, e.g., a subtle distinction in their use of 'thou', and 'I'. Nazrul's "I" has multitude features. The poet here worships the "self" using pronoun "I" which integrates both destructive and creative forces of the universe. Nazrul has used such contrastive binary images and symbols to describe "I" which is full of mystic power of Indian mythology. "I" will not bow to anyone. Thus, "I" acts as the stimulator to build a rebellion by shaking the feelings of the reader. However, both creations have provided the same message for freedom of individuals against tyranny, inequality, superstition, corruption, racism and exploitation. In spite of having some dissimilarities, "Nazrul is called the Shelley of the East (Ahmed, 1959)". There are some reasons for such comparison.

Renaissance and Revolutionary Zeal for Freedom in Nazrul

The Bengal Renaissance was a social reform movement that emerged in Bengal, a region of undivided India, during the 19th and early 20th centuries under British rule. The Bengal Renaissance is generally regarded as having its origins with Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775–1833) and reaching its culmination with Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). There have been numerous individuals who carried specific elements of unique intellectual and creative contributions. Nineteenth-century Bengal was a remarkable fusion of religious and social reformers, scholars,

literary luminaries, journalists, patriotic speakers, and scientists, collectively shaping the essence of a renaissance and symbolizing the shift from the 'medieval' to the 'modern' era. It was also different from the European Renaissance, since the Europeans did not face a challenge of subjugation by foreign rulers. The British subjected the Indian subcontinent to exploitation for two centuries. They weakened the entire system and destroyed the peoples' social, economic, political and cultural life. British rule in India altered the course of the country's history. The British arrived in India at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This was the period when the British East India Company was founded in India to disassemble the Dutch monopoly on the spice trade.

Over time, the East India Company expanded its influence and began governing the country. However, its policies were not accepted by the Indians, who united to revolt against the company. This resulted in the downfall of the company, and the administration of India was taken over directly by the Queen. Then, the British took control of several important states and established their own laws and policies. Gradually, yet swiftly, the entire Indian subcontinent fell under British control. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British had introduced railways, the telegraph, and postal services in India. This was an effort to establish their rule in India for the long term. The British inaugurated the first railway line from Howrah in Calcutta to Raniganj in Bihar. The introduction of the telegraph and postal services made communication across the country more efficient.

Through a series of ruthless wars between 1757 and 1857, Britain managed to assert its dominance over the Indian subcontinent. The British East India Company had a large export business that served as its source of profit, and to sustain the export of valuable materials from India to England, they sought to secure permanent dominance in India. During Sepoy Rebellion (1857), the remaining independent Indian states had been captured by the British. As a result, the Company exported vast amounts of gold, jewels, silver, silk, cotton, and numerous other valuable goods to England each year. In exchange, they brought inexpensive cotton fabrics and industrial goods from England to India. The company's profits were used to improve public and private infrastructure in Britain and to expand British colonialism in Asia and Africa

To increase and control British territories, the East India Company kept a strong army of 257,000 Sepoys (native Indian soldiers, known as Sowars in cavalry units), which were led by 40,000 British officers trained at the East India Company College in Addiscombe, the company's military school in England. The economic consequences of British rule were devastating for Indian social life. The Industrial Revolution led to the destruction of local and traditional products. Consequently, many independent local producers lost their livelihoods and fell into poverty, unable to compete with the inexpensive goods from Manchester

Ruhul Alam Siddique said (2011, March 6), "Nazrul Islam was Bangladesh's national poet and a great source of inspiration for the people of his country. He was a multifaceted creative individual who rebelled against injustice and a mass-oriented person who inspired

workers to fight against oppressive forces. His fiery writings roused anger against the British, as a result of which he was put into jail. He was a secular man, a passionate advocate for religious harmony, and kept promoting inter-faith harmony, particularly between Hindus and Muslims". It is again stated, "His revolt, it is important to remember, was aimed not only against the foreign rulers, but against oppression of all kinds - social, economic and political. Nazrul Islam was not a nationalist, although he knew that national liberation was the first step towards the liberation of the masses from social and economic oppression" (Chowdhury,2006). His works, often of a universal nature, were embraced by all. Indians used Nazrul's works in their resistance against British rule, while after independence, Pakistanis utilized his works to support Pakistan against India. Later, during the Liberation War of 1971, Bengali-speaking East Pakistanis used his works to support their cause and oppose Pakistan.

There were also internal handicaps in India e.g. communal clash, caste system, dowry system, and the domination of orthodox mullahs. Therefore, intellectual enlightenment was not sufficient, there were also necessities for social and political enlightenments. To stabilize their (British) control over India, the British applied their formula "Divide and Rule". Thus, they created division between Hindu and Muslim; higher class and lower class; and Bengali and Non-Bengali, etc. to continue exploitation in India. Kazi Nazrul Islam has risen like a comet in the cloud-cast sky of undivided Bengal to speak for all. He has spoken for both Hindus and Muslims and written for the shelter of homeless people; for the rice of starving people; and against the hypocrisy of mullahs. Nazrul did not have any political vision. He wanted to drive away the foreign rulers from his country. Among all those humiliations, and suppressions of humanity, the advent of Nazrul was like the rescuer of man as an angel. He taught them to claim for equal rights and tried to establish the dignity of man. In fact, Nazrul wanted to unite all humanity irrespective of their creed, caste, gender and race.

French Revolution and Spirit of Freedom in Shelley

The politician, philosopher, social reformer, and poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in the middle of England's socio-political turmoil. The British Empire lost its American colonies in 1776. The American Revolution caused lasting influence on the minds of liberal people. Following the path of American Revolution, the common people of France revolted against monarchy and overthrew the King Louis XVI. That created great horror all over Europe. The government of Great Britain was also scared of a mass revolution within the country. There was a reaction among common people in support of French Revolution. They also felt for freedom of mind and individual existence. Their struggle was not against foreign rule but it was against internal slavery, lack of safety and the rights of common people. Older Romantics poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey welcomed the radical ideologies of French Revolution. Shelley's England was wounded by the despotism of its evil progenies. Upper class people had seized the whole power and property of the country while a vast crowd was leading a degrading life. The Church was one of the governing classes of suppressor. There were discriminations in

the distribution of wealth. For this reason, Shelley has to go against his own people who belonged to upper classes.

Shelley was himself a member of an aristocratic family. But he did not enjoy the privileges of his class. Rather he talked for common people, and for humanism. His mind was bled by watching the dehumanization of Irish people. He was enthusiast for Catholic emancipation in Ireland. Shelley published pamphlets, and arranged meeting in support of Irish causes. He tried to wake up people for a revolution. There was government indictment against the publication of any democratic propaganda. In order to avoid persecution, Shelley had passed a long period of his life in exile in Italy until his death by drowning in 1829.

Shelley's heart was wounded by the Peterloo Massacre on 16 August 1819. He wrote a political poem "The Mask of Anarchy" in 1819 on Peterloo Massacre (which is regarded as the first modern statement of the principle of nonviolent resistance), asking for freedom. But "The Mask of Anarchy" was not published during his lifetime. It has been stated that the failure of the publication of "The Mask of Anarchy" has caused Shelley to write "Ode to the West Wind". This poem is also a lamentation of Shelley's failure to help the injured people of Peterloo Massacre as he was in Italy at that time. Shelley's life was spent pursuing a vision of freedom; a longing for a new society free of all sorts of prejudices and conventions. He wanted to rectify the society, and to remove the class distinction. Shelley's philosophy was not totally fruitless. His philosophy of destruction and creation later influenced many reform activities, and contributed to the construction of modern progressive England.

"Ode to the West Wind" includes Shelley's consciousness of the revolution for change and again his feelings of impotence and inability as he was in exile in Italy from England. But this lyric also highlights his historical insight, his foresight of coming reform as well as hope for freedom. So, he has employed the binary image of natural cycle side by side, i.e. birth-death; destruction-creation; old-new; winter-spring, etc., because destruction and decay during winter are essential to clean up the earth and free the space for new beauty. Though Shelley was depressed by his helplessness against corruption and the suppression of Irish people and massacre of Peterloo, he was a positivist, foreseeing the corruption and massacre as a necessary part of reform and peace. Shelley is not fatalist as Keats is in 'To Autumn'. Shelley's "West Wind" pictures natural change to sketch social reform metaphorically. In this way, Shelley hails himself as a messenger of inspiration through words like the west wind's breath which has both destructive and creative spirit and as a poet of new vision who challenges old.

Influence of Marxism in Nazrul and Shelley' Poetry

Karl Marx was a 19th century German thinker, economist, and sociologist whose works laid the foundation for modern communism. He (Marx) talked for the working class and for humanism. He opposed oppression and capitalist nations with his sharp and impactful writings.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was the first Bengali poet who have come from the proletariat and raised his voice for the independence of colonial India in 1922 (Azfar, 2020). Nazrul Islam was influenced by his friend, comrade Muzzaffar Ahmed. Nazrul Islam's poem "the Rebel (Bidrohi)", published in 1921, has been characterized as anticolonial poem because of its tone, and for its thematic and structural novelties. Nazrul said,

Proclaim Hero

Proclaim: I raise my head high!

Before me bows down the Himalayan peaks!

Proclaim, Hero,

Proclaim: rending through the sky,

Surpassing the moon, the sun, the planets, the stars

Piercing through the earth, the heavens, the cosmos,

Ripping apart the Almighty's throne

Have I risen, the eternal wonder of the creators of the Universe (lines1-9)

Here, Nazrul identified the people of colonial India with "I" (Hoque and AlQahtani, 2024). These people were subjugated by the British. They lost their identity and developed a sense of alienation (Fanon, 2004). Here, Nazrul described those alienated people as hero and inspired them to hold their head high. Nazrul's "I" represents the colonial oppressed people who were inspired to oppose the subjugation of the colonized and seek the path for freedom.

In his seminar paper for the inaugural Annual Kazi Nazrul Islam Lecture, Langley (2007) highlighted the aims of Nazrul's poetry as "the empowerment of individuals and groups; the actual promotion of diversity itself; and the affirmation of the moral in human life and societies." Tanzin Sultana (2020, 69) analyzed Nazrul's poetry as anticolonial and divided Nazrul's works into five categories of resistance: "the Asserting Resistance in Nazrul's ... struggle against the British Empire, the struggle against exploiters, the struggle against class distinction, the struggle against social inequality, and the struggle against communal riot". Marxism is visible in Nazrul's works, since he wrote for the working class and protested against the ruling class. Nazrul said in "the Rebel"

Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel,

Shall rest in quiet only when I find

The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed

Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling

Bloody sabres

Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet, (lines 142-146)

Conversely, Percy Bysshe Shelley was also influenced by the ideologies of Karl Marx (1818-1883). Shelley spoke out against the bourgeois. He wrote for the working class of England who were ill-clothed, ill-fed and ill-educated. Overall, Shelley wanted to free the working class from the tyranny of the corrupt governments, and the priests. Shelley advocated for equality and equal freedom for all in the society. His positive ideology is expressed in the poem “Ode to the West Wind”

The trumpet of prophecy! O Wind

If winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (lines 69-70)

Like Nazrul, Shelley also called the working class to wake up and rebel against the oppression to build up a new society where equity, truth, love and justice will govern the world.

Discussion of the Poems “Ode to the West Wind” and “The Rebel (Bidrohi)”

“The Rebel” and “Ode to the West Wind” are in the genre of lyric. They may be termed as songs, too. Nazrul’s “The Rebel”, is a self-glorification, when the rebel says to himself, ‘Say, Valiant, /Say: High is my head!’(1-2). On other hand, Shelley’s, ‘Ode to the West Wind’, is a prayer to the spirit of west wind, the poet calls the west wind, ‘O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being’(1). Shelley has started his poem with a mild expression, but Nazrul’s approach has loftiness, and roughness. It is the way of speaking which is seen in the speaking of God to men in the holy Quraan, or in the holy Bible. In the study of both poems, there is a description of cosmic journey. In “The Rebel”, the rebel claims:

Say: Ripping

apart the wide sky of the universe

Leaving behind the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars,

Piercing the earth and the heavens.

Pushing through Almighty’s sacred seat (lines 6-9)

This is a text of anti-colonialism. The poet belonged to a colonized territory. In the disguise of aestheticism, the poet has claimed his own territory. The rebel is the poet himself. He is ferocious and he is the mightiest man. The rebel dares to defy the “Almighty”, or the colonial authority. That is why, he can say, “Pushing through Almighty’s sacred seat”. This kind of

writing is visible in other colonialist texts, e.g. African writer Césaire's anti-colonial poetry, Yeats's poetry of decolonization, and Fanon's counter narrative of anti-imperialist decolonization, etc. Imperialism begins when one loses one's land. Then they become humiliated in their own land. The winner of land begins to exploit the loser. So, imperialism is a form of geographical violence. Through this poetic recourse, Nazrul tries to recover his land from the British ruler.

Similarly, Shelley has set his poem sequentially in earth with graves, plains, and hills. Thus, poem is in five parts. In the first section, Shelley presents his double vision of the west wind: it heralds winter, death and decay, but at the same time out of this destruction will come 'new life'. It is like a beautiful woman who gives birth to a cute baby and loses her beauty for regeneration. So, revolution is necessary for reformation. In stanza one (Ode to the West wind), Shelley says, "the winged seeds, where they lie cold and low, / Each like a corpse within its grave, (7-8)". Here it seems that the poet imagines the seeds have wings. The reason is that the seeds are carried away from one place to another by seasonal wind in order to sprout planets. Here it is told that the west wind as the force of autumn shifts away the seeds in their grave, which is cold, and dark place once time. Again, the same west wind as the force of spring helps the seeds to come to life. The same spirit can have opposite binary images. One is violent, and the other is supportive. Moreover, the poet utters, 'Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill/ (Driving sweet buds like flock to feed in air)/ With living hues and odors plain and hill' (10-12). Here the poet imagines that the west wind as the shepherd is caring the buds like flock. Buds are visualized as sheep, which are being mildly stirred by the caressing of western breeze. It is also said that sweet buds are being feed in the air. Here the buds are seen as birds. It is natural when birds fly in the sky; they feed on air. The stanza covers the space of air, 'in the steep sky'. Here west wind dominates the sky. The upper part of the universe is in motion. Heaven is loosing clouds as trees are shedding leaves. The surface of sky is filled up by the 'Angels of rain and lightning' (18). 'Rain and lightning are harbingers of coming storm. They are really angels, or prophets of destruction. Clouds are compared with locks or hair. Likewise, to describe the fierce image of the coming storm, these hairs are told to be the hairs of mad Maenad (the crazy devotee of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, revelry, and vegetation). Her uncontrollable visage demonstrates the demonic force of the announcing storm. She is another metaphor for stating the theme of destruction and creation. The third stanza has been set on the sea. Here the ruling spirit of the west wind is upon the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams

The blue Mediterranean, where he lay

Lulled by the coil of his chrystalline streams, (lines29-31)

Sea has been personified here. The west wind will awaken blue Mediterranean from its sleep, which has been sleeping under the enchantment of the spring wind. The sea knows the

voice of the west wind. Here Shelley has structured his poem within four elements of creation: earth, air, water, and fire (the last element comes when there is the reference of lightning in the second stanza, and ashes and sparks in the last stanza). At the beginning of section 4, Shelley gathers together the main images of the poem- leaves, clouds, and waves- and introduces a speaking voice, an 'I', a personal focus and source for the poem's address to the wind. Shelley's lament at the end of this section comes close to self-pity. Overall, this lyric is a plea to the wind (mighty power) for liberation.

It has been already discussed that Shelley was unable to do anything for the helpless people of England. His mind was bleeding for his inability. It seems that the poet is in his autumn now. He has been broken down by "A heavy weight of hours", once who was untamed, swift, and proud like that of the west wind. Shelley thought that west wind was free. But the poet had no freedom like the west wind. West wind has both destructive and creative power, as Shelly says in the stanza four:

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;

If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;

A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free (lines 43-46)

Thus, Shelley has broadcasted his ideology of destruction and creation using the binary images of nature as W.B. Yeats has focused this cycle of nature in his famous poem, "The Second Coming". Shelley's philosophy of destruction and creation has also been used by Nazrul in his great creation, "The Rebel".

Like Shelley, Nazrul has also focused on the different binary images of contradiction. He once says, "I am the burning volcano in the bosom of the earth/ I am the wild fire of the woods, / I am Hell's mad terrific sea of wrath" (116-118) and utters, "I am Orpheus' flute, / I bring sleep to the fevered world" (122-123). In this way, Nazrul has disclosed his balancing caliber. This technique displays the contradictory states of the reality like life and death, light and darkness, creation and destruction, movement and stillness, love and hatred, etc. These binary images exist side by side and one is essential for another. The rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam was against all kinds of barriers. The main policy of imperialists was "divide and rule". In order to capture power, they had created division between Hindus and Muslims, Bengali and non-Bengali, and higher class and lower class. Nazrul wanted to establish the identity of one unique human being. So, he adapted mythical imagery from all religions. He has used at the same time Khuda (Creator according to Islam), Bhogowan (Creator according to Indian Vedic belief), Natoraj (Shiva, the Indian god who makes wild dance to destroy with a view to creating new), Israfil (the angel who would blow the final whistle to destroy the world as per Islamic belief), Taji borrak (the mighty celestial horse that took Prophet Mohammad to Allah), Uchchaishrava (A white sea horse, the

vehicle of Indra). The poet is invincible in his forceful destruction. This destruction is for great beauty and love. It is the general process of displacement of old for new. He has emphasized on the globalization of human identity. Having built up a new universe, Nazrul will fly “the flag of triumph at the world”. This is the triumph of all humanity. Besides these, Nazrul will use Orpheus’s flute (Greek mythological figure) to remedy the illness of mother earth.

Nazrul’s ideology, which was built in “The Rebel”, was totally fruitful. British finally left India (Haider, 2016). On the course of war of freedom, Bangladesh has been freed from Pakistani rulers by Mukti Juddha. Afterwards, Nazrul was made the national poet of Bangladesh. Nazrul was the visionary of freedom. He focused on the future based on the past experiences. Talukder said (2016), “If we go through T. S. Eliot's famous book entitled Tradition and the Individual Talent, it becomes clear that without taking elements from the past it is impossible to explore the present and focus on the future”. Nazrul dreamed for a better society which will be free of British rule, free of injustice, communalism and oppressions. Nazrul was unconsciously influenced by the Revolutionary ideology of Western Romantics Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. His two poems “The Rebel (Bidrohi)” and “The Comet (Dhumketu)” roused the sense of sleeping proletariat of India. Nazrul is a born rebel who risks his life for the mass people of India.

Conclusion

The two poems “The Rebel” and “Ode to the West Wind”, are the reflection of revolution against tyranny, inequality, superstition, corruption, racism, and exploitation of colonizers and the aristocratic against the colonized and the subaltern. Though there is a perceptible contrast between the two social political aspects of their respective creators, who were born in the middle of socio-political pandemonium in their own societies. Certainly, they were blessed by a conscious mindset and extra perception ability. For that reason, they could access the problem of society. In order to give birth to the new society; they had borne a philosophy of “destruction and creation”. It means the destruction of old for the sake of building a new one. It would be a painful and daring process. In fact, that sacrifice would be necessary for the suffering humanity to carry out ultimate betterment. It is the system of nature. This is the subject of Nazrul’s “The Rebel” and Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”. As a reformer and messenger of the society, both have seen revolutionary spirit as driving force for change. Revolution is the weapon of reformation. Without revolution, freedom cannot be achieved, whether it is political or social or individual. Poems like ‘Ode to the West Wind’ and ‘The Rebel’ are full of revolutionary fervours using metaphorical languages as the creators wanted to awaken the mass from the sleep and make them carry over the vision onwards. Thus, these creators are social activists, reformers, and nurturers of new seeds of revolution, inspiring freedom across generations.

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