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Revolutionary Life-force in Shelley and Nazrul: A Comparative Study of their Poetic Vision

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Abstract: This comparative study represents the innovative thoughts and ideas of the renowned poets Percy Bysshe Shelly and Kazi Nazrul Islam. They are the two poets of two different periods and different cultures. Shelly was a short-lived, distinguished romantic poet of England. On the other side, Nazrul was a modern Bangladeshi poet. Shelley and Nazrul share a rebellious spirit in their writing styles. Both poets exude revolutionary zeal, with Shelley infusing his poems with elements of revolution and Nazrul embodying rebellion himself. They both tackled social issues and crises in their work. This study focuses on the revolutionary elements in their poetry through a literature review and textual analysis of some of their well-known poems. The findings reveal that both Shelley and Nazrul employed poetry as a medium of revolution, advocating for human rights, equality, religious harmony, and social justice. Their writings challenged oppression and envisioned a world where freedom and dignity prevail.

Keywords: Life-force, revolutionary zeal, concern for humanity, religious and social unity

Introduction

Poetry is an art that preserves the world in its particularity. Wordsworth (1802) states that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, where emotions recollect its tranquility. These lines are valid in the context of Kazi Nazrul Islam, a legendary Bengali poet and musician. He is known for his poetry and iconoclastic attitude in writing, which he has inflicted in most poems. He is famous for his poetry, music, and nonconformist deeds. Being a revolutionary, he pioneered poetic works espousing intense spiritual rebellion against fascism and oppression. Because of his revolutionary poetry and national activism, the people called him 'Rebel Poet'. Being a Bengali, he was named *Bidrohi Kabi* (Rebel Poet). He has done great work in Bengali literature, for which he is still respected. Nitu and Khan (2017) pondered that Nazrul actively challenged religious extremism, condemning it as inherently malevolent and fundamentally contrary to the true essence of religion. His vigorous assault on extremism and mistreatment of women provoked condemnation from Muslim and Hindu fundamentalists. On the other hand, Percy Bysshe Shelley is frequently hailed as a rebel poet because of his bold beliefs and spirit of revolution. Cazamian (1965) considered that Shelley belongs to that rare species of mankind whom reason and feeling convert revolutionaries in the flush of youth who remain so for the rest of their lives. His works regularly call for social and political reform and question accepted conventions. In his poems, Shelley advocates for change and freedom, demonstrating his contempt for oppression, injustice, and tyranny. A critical poet in the Romantic literary movement and a ray of hope for revolutionary thinking, Shelley is known for his unwavering pursuit of justice and truth and his daring presentation of his convictions. However, this comparative study aimed to explore the nature and revolutionary zeal in the poetry of Shelly and Nazrul in a critical way. Based on the criticism of the poems of P.B. Shelly and Kazi Nazrul Islam,

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several critical essays and analyses were published in the shapes of books and literary journals, which are very useful as supporting materials for further progress of this study.

Methodology

The primary data of this study was gathered from the analysis of selected poems by Percy Bysshe Shelley and Kazi Nazrul Islam, as included in various courses at the honors and master's levels in Bangladesh. This papers followed a qualitative approach, which facilitates an in-depth consideration of the themes, literary techniques, and socio-political contexts of these poets' works. A literature review was conducted to examine existing scholarly discussions on Shelley and Nazrul. This included the study of critical compositions, journal articles, and academic papers that offer insights into the poets' ideological frameworks, stylistic innovations, and thematic concerns. By engaging with relevant literary critiques and theoretical perspectives, this research establishes a foundation for analyzing the selected texts. Additionally, textual and thematic analysis was employed to critically analyze the poems. This involved a close reading of the texts to identify recurrent motifs, philosophical underpinnings, and stylistic devices that shape the poets' revolutionary and humanistic visions. Comparative analysis is also integrated to highlight the intersections and divergences in their literary expressions. The study further considered several secondary sources, including books and peer-reviewed journals accessed from university libraries and online databases. These resources augment the reliability of the study by broad academic context and interpretative framework used in the analysis.

Shelley as a Revolutionary Poet

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a Romantic poet, is also called a rebel for his idea of revolution in his poetry. As The French Revolution dominated all politics in those years, unlike Wordsworth or Coleridge, Shelley never abandoned the revolution's ideals. His poems portrayed the flame of revolution, terror, war, and disease. His long poem, *The Revolt of Islam*, written at the height of his powers, is clear on one matter above all else- that the ideas of progress, which inspired the revolution, will triumph once again. It was stated in Christoph's (2008) article that in the first paragraph of his *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley opposes reason. Its principle of analysis of the imagination, with its principle of synthesis, then goes on to argue that poetry, as the expression of the Imagination, is "connate with the origin of man."

In *Ode to the West Wind* (1820), Shelley is seen as a rebel who wants a revolution. He desires social change, and the West Wind symbolizes change. Shelley says,

> Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
> Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

The West Wind acts as a driving force for change and rejuvenation in the human and natural world. And it is the symbol of revolution. In the last two stanzas, Shelley speaks directly to the wind, asking for its power to leave him like a leaf or a cloud and make him its companion in its wanderings. He asks the wind to spread his thoughts worldwide so his ideas awaken the youth. At the poem's end, he is seen as very optimistic when he says his revolutionary ideas must bring a change and establish a new order.

Shelley's revolutionary zeal is also found in the *Ode to A Skylark*. According to Shelley, the bird, Skylark, that pours spontaneous melody from heaven and soars higher and higher can never be a bird. In the opening stanza, the bind is seen as a 'blithe spirit' that 'pours thy full heart/ In profuse strains of unpremeditated art'. The words 'Pourest thy full heart' mean that the bird pours out its heart in song, and with 'In profuse strains of unpremeditated art,' Shelley refers to the spontaneous flow of music from the Skylark. There is nothing artificial in its music; it overflows profusely from its heart.

Shelley says that as a spirit of revolution, it spreads its revolutionary message as the moon spreads its beam. He says,

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

The poet wants to experience half the gaiety of the bird, and then he would sing with such excellent poetic ecstasy that the people of the world listen to him. He says,

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.

Thus, the message of Shelley's revolutionary poems embodies his revolutionary ideas.

Rebellious Themes in Kazi Nazrul Islam

Being a Bengali, Nazrul was very much influenced by Rabindranath Tagore. The other creative genius of Bengali Literature Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, also inspired him. His literary career began with publishing his prose work, 'Baunduler Atmakahini' (Life of a Vagabond) in May 1919. But with the publication of 'Bidrohi' (The Rebel) in 1922, he became well renowned and got name and fame. And it is considered as his most famous work. Through this poem, he was taken seriously by the Indian literary classes, and he was recognized as a writer with a deep spirit. He was considered a rebel writer whose impact was ruthless and fierce. Nazrul's 'Bidrohi' was an epoch-making work for Modern Bengali poetry that reveal his insightful spirit (Huda, 2000).

I am the unutterable grief,
I am the trembling first touch of the virgin,
I am the throbbing tenderness of her first stolen kiss.
I am the fleeting glance of the veiled beloved,
I am her constant surreptitious gaze.

Here, he shares the views of New Critics' sense of poetry as a primordial, world-creating form of language, the view that poetry enacts experience rather than constituting a discursive amount of expertise. Being rebellious, he has also used rebellious language in the poems for which he has been highly appreciated:

I am the burning volcano in the bosom of the earth,
I am the wildfire of the woods,
I am Hell's mad terrific sea of wrath!
I ride on the wings of lightning with joy and profundity,
I scatter misery and fear all around,
I bring earth-quakes on this world!
I am the rebel eternal,
I raise my head beyond this world,
High, ever erect and alone! (Chowdhury, n. d.)

The above stanza from his poem reveals the depth of his rebellious nature. It is so because of the circumstances and according to the country's needs. It was when India was under British rule, and the people wanted to eliminate them. There was also a need to inspire them, and Nazrul tried his best to motivate and inspire the masses through his writings. His rebellious poem, 'Bidrohi', published in the magazine *Bijli* (Thunder) in 1922, has rebellious language and a theme and became very popular among the masses. He seems to agree with the views of Mathew Arnold in his famous book of criticism, The Study of Poetry. 'Poetry,' according to Arnold (1880), is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and beauty. In his poems, Nazrul portrayed a rebellious attitude with beauty and sensitivity. In his writings, if he has shown destruction, he has also portrayed preservation. Inspired by the success of his poems, he published

his first anthology of poems, *Agniveena* (Lyre of Fire), in 1922. The anthology was also a huge success. He also did his best in other genres of literature, i.e., short stories, prose work, and essays. He published his first volume of short stories, the *Byather Dan* (Gift of Sorrow) and *Yugbani* (The Message of the Age), an anthology of essays, in 1922.

Concern for Humanity

Besides being rebellious, Nazrul was very much concerned about the country's social, economic, and political system, which is the reason for poverty and misery. He had a deep concern for his people, and this is reflected in his poems. His poem *Daridro* (Pain or Poverty) shows his pain for the people of his country:

O poverty, thou hast made me great.
Thou hast made me honored like Christ
With his crown of thorns. Thou hast given me
Courage to reveal all. To thee I owe
My insolent, naked eyes and sharp tongue.

This shows that his poems also had a social message, his love for the people of his country, and his sensitivity. Like Nazrul, P. B. Shelley was deeply concerned about social injustice and the suffering of the oppressed. His poetry reflects a strong revolutionary spirit, advocating for freedom, justice, and human dignity. In *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), written in response to the Peterloo Massacre, Shelley calls upon the people to rise against tyranny:

Rise like Lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew—
Ye are many—they are few!

Similarly, in his poem *England in 1819*, he critiques the monarchy and ruling elite for exploiting the common people, portraying them as 'leech-like' figures draining the nation's vitality. He criticized the economic and political systems that perpetuated poverty and suffering. In his poem *England in 1819*, he paints a bleak picture of England under corrupt rulers, where the monarchy and aristocracy thrive while the common people suffer:

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king,
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn, —mud from a muddy spring,
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow. (Shelley, 1819)

Here, Shelley criticizes the monarchy and the ruling elite, portraying them as parasitic entities draining the life out of the suffering nation. This aligns with Nazrul's fierce condemnation of injustice and his advocacy for the common people.

Both Poets also greatly respected women and believed them to be equal to men. This was a revolutionary thought at that time when women were considered marginalized. He shows his respect for the women in his poem, *Nari* (Women):

I sing of equality
I don't see any difference
Between a man and a woman.
Whatever great of benevolent achievements
There are in this world,
Half of that was done by woman,
The other half by man. (Sonali, 2020)

This shows that he was a liberal man and not gender-biased. His revolutionary thoughts and his respect for women are depicted in his poem, *Barangana* (Prostitute), in which he has created a storm

in society by addressing a prostitute as a mother (Islam, 2010). He believed that every woman should be respected, whether she is a prostitute or a mother. According to Bano (2011), in one of her articles, his poems also have a social message, as well as his love for the people of his country and his sensitivity. He also greatly respected the women and believed them to be equal to men.

Similar to Nazrul, Shelley was an advocate for women's rights and gender equality, a revolutionary thought in his time. His essay *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813) and his association with Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist ideas shaped his progressive views. In his poem *The Cenci* (1819), he highlights the oppression of women through the tragic story of Beatrice Cenci, a woman who suffers under the tyranny of her abusive father. He exposes the patriarchal structures that confine women and calls for their liberation. Additionally, in *Queen Mab* (1813), Shelley envisions an ideal society where gender equality prevails:

Can man be free if woman be a slave? (Shelley, 1813)

This rhetorical question underscores his belief that true liberation can only be achieved when both men and women are treated as equals—a sentiment strongly echoed in Nazrul's feminist poetry, such as *Nari* and *Barangana*.

Nazrul's poetry and songs explored the philosophy of different religions. He hated fanaticism and was a great advocate of religious unity. He wanted people to be liberal in religion. He devoted many works to expounding upon the principle of human equality. Many authors understand poetry as an 'expressive' of the human soul. Mill (1860) pondered that poetry, when it is such, is truth; and fiction also, if it is suitable for anything, is truth: but they are different truths. The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul; the truth of fiction is to give an accurate picture of life.

Influence of War and Revolution

Shelley was a true-born child of the French Revolution, and the spirits of that revolution found expression in his poetry. Throughout his life, he dreamt of a new society and world free from tyranny and exploration. He led a ceaseless war against the existing political, social, and economic institutions. Kazi Nazrul Islam's passionate opposition to British colonial rule in India is frequently reflected in his poetry and songs. His songs, including *Bidrohi*, were anthems of resistance that moved many people to join the fight for independence by pleading for justice and freedom. He became a well-known figure in the anti-colonial movement because of his steadfast devotion to the revolutionary cause. Chowdhury (2021) pondered that 'Bidrohi' is still relevant today, where global fear tactics have shunned the voices of the common man.

Religious Unity and Balance

Shelley's revolutionary attitude was constructive in the long run. In his preface to *The Revolt of Islam*, he pointed out that he wanted to kindle in the bottom of his readers a virtuous enthusiasm for liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor prejudice can ever wholly extinguish among humanity. In another work, *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley made his hero arch-rebel and compared him with Satan of *Paradise Lost*. In this poem, there is a return to the belief that Earth shall share in the Emancipation of man.

Religious issues were also prominent in Nazrul's writings, and this issue prevailed over other issues in his later life. Nazrul appeared as another writer who expressed his parity in every religion. He mixed Islamic devotional songs with Bengali folk music. This was Nazrul's outstanding creation, which helped him achieve more. Poet Nazrul expressed his devotional writings in detail. With these very crystalline words, it is worth noting that Nazrul is a poet and a true humanist.

As creative, socially conscious, and politically engaged poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Kazi Nazrul Islam have left behind timeless legacies. Like Nazrul and other social justice poets, Shelley was a humanist. Shelley's writing, characterized by its romanticism and revolutionary fervor, frequently questioned social mores and injustices. Nazrul, also called the 'Rebel Poet', inspired cries for social justice, peace, and togetherness by drawing on his observations and experiences of colonial

persecution. In a world where human rights abuse and sectarian violence are commonplace, Nazrul's idea of sociopolitical alliances is still incredibly pertinent. In addition to exposing human rights violations, his poetry promoted justice and equity, establishing the foundation for contemporary social and political reform movements (Schlund, 2013).

Conclusion

To Shelley and Nazrul, revolution was a form of spiritual awakening, marking the beginning of a new life. They traced all forms of societal evil to oppression and slavery, believing that true human development could only occur in an environment of liberty. For them, freedom was not just a political concept but a fundamental condition for human flourishing—freedom from external restraints, whether imposed by tyrannical rulers, rigid societal structures, or religious dogma. As the first watchword of the French Revolution, 'liberty' ignited their imaginative consciousness, fueling their poetic resistance against injustice. The revolutionary fire in both Nazrul and Shelley did not fade but continued to burn throughout their careers, shaping their literary legacy and resonating in contemporary struggles for justice and equality. Future studies can explore the influence of Shelley's and Nazrul's revolutionary ideas on later literary movements and political activism. Additionally, an intertextual analysis of their works in relation to modern revolutionary poetry could offer insights into how their ideals continue to inspire contemporary literary and political discourse.

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