

Shelley's Romantic Passion in 'Ode to the West Wind': Its Impact on Farrukh Ahmad

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Abstract: *The paper intends to explore a parallel between Shelley and Farrukh Ahmad through a minute analysis of some of their celebrated poems pregnant with romantic passion. 'Ode to the West Wind', which has been considered as one of the most significant poems of Shelley, conceives his utmost romantic idea that corresponds to the romantic spirit of Farrukh Ahmad expressed in 'Jhod' and 'Boishakh', two of his famous poems. In 'Ode to the West Wind' Shelley urges the west wind to destroy the aged old society full of corruption and injustice and at the same time pleads it to preserve the society by spreading the seeds of new hope and regeneration. So does Farrukh Ahmad in his 'Jhod' and 'Boishakh'. Though their beliefs and ideologies are not alike, they have taken the west wind as an emblem of destroyer and preserver.*

Although Shelley is basically a romantic poet, his romantic view is distinct from the other romantics of English literature. Unlike other romantics, he was not immersed in the beauty of nature, rather he was imbued with the spirit of rebellion against all evils of the contemporary corrupt society in which men were enchained in the dungeon of royal despotism. He minutely observed that his contemporary society was directed by the feudal savageness and imperfect civilization and so he strongly voiced for reforming the society (Shelley 1813).

Being greatly influenced by the philosophy of Plato, Godwin, and Rousseau, he urged the people of England to be united in a plat form to uproot the tyranny from the society. This call for unity is echoed in his poem 'Song to Men of England':

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Sow seed but let no tyrant reap
Find wealth let no impostor heap
Weave robes let no idle wear
Forge arms in your defense to bear. (21-24)

His romantic dream for a new world free from suppression and oppression surpassed the limit of England and spread over the globe. Many leading poets of Bengali Literature were greatly inspired by the wave of Shelley's romantic view. His romantic passion is reflected in many Bengali poems.

Shelley wrote 'Ode to the West Wind' at Caseine Garden, an idyllic place near Florence. Later on, this poem was published in 1820 with *Prometheus Unbound*. Ode is a kind of lyrical poem that admires or sings a person or thing with a rich tone of impulse. Here in this poem Shelley invokes to the west wind regarding it as destroyer and preserver of a society. The tempestuous west wind was blowing with strong gust while writing the poem. The poet was induced with the charms of the wind and at the same time responded to the west wind through this fantastic poem. He, then, appealed to the west wind for destroying the existing corrupt and shaky society with its devastating breath and at the same time urged it to preserve the society by its creative power. In a note to the ode Shelley (1820, p 188) said, "This poem was conceived and chiefly written in wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once wild and animating."

In an essay on Shelley published in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, Herford says, "the poem originates directly in that impassioned intuition which is the first condition of poetry; the wild autumn wind sweeping through the forest possesses his imagination and becomes a living symbol of the spiritual forces which regenerate the fading or decadent life of nation bringing succour and 'alliance' to forlorn heroic spirits, scatter their burning words, "like ashes from an unextinguished hearth", among mankind. Nowhere does Shelley's voice reach a more poignantly personal note or more perfect spontaneity."(p 30)

The west wind is addressed as destroyer and preserver. Though on the surface it seems to be destructive, it basically creates and rejuvenates the dead woods and groves by spreading various seeds on the earth. In the very first line, the poet hails the west wind:

O wild wind, thou breathe of autumn's being
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing. (1-3)

In the succeeding lines, he again labels the west wind as destroyer and preserver:

Wild Spirit, which are moving everywhere
Destroyer and preserve, hear o hear! (13-14)

Here in the first stanza we see, personifying the west wind, Shelley describes its activities: it drives dead leaves away as if they were ghost fleeing a wizard. The leaves are yellow and black, pale and red, as if they died of infectious disease. The west wind carries seeds in its chariot and deposits them in the earth, where they lie until the spring wind awakens them by blowing on a trumpet. When they form buds, the spring wind spreads them over plains and on hills.

In the second stanza a magnificent imagery is drawn. The small pieces of cloud pour like dead leaves. The west wind drives cloud along just as it does dead leaves after it shakes the clouds free of the sky and the oceans. These clouds erupt with rain and lightning and the ocean leaps to leave itself.

At the time of writing the poem, the poet was acutely romantic and enthusiastic; swelling up with dreams and so, he wanted to be:

If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee. (43-44)

The ode speaks for an immense reformative zeal, which Shelley has been cherishing for a long time. In the fifth stanza, the poet request the west wind to make him his lyre as the west wind's powerful currents turn the woods into a lyre. The poet further implores the west wind to drive out his dead thoughts to quicken a new birth:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth. (63-63)

These lines are very significant as they carry the symbolic tone of rebellion against the aged-old thoughts that prevails in the society. Shelley through these lines strongly revolts against the contemporary society full of injustice, corruption, persecution, savageness etc. Actually in these lines, he urges the people down-trodden to stand erect and unite to destroy the base of despotism.

Finally he concludes the poem with self-contentment that winter is followed by spring:

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (70)

A west wind is a wind that blows from the west, in an eastward direction. In Western tradition, it is usually considered the mildest and most propitious of the directional winds. The wind blows with strong gust and destroys the fading plants and at the same time it spreads seeds and causes the river overflow and thus it deposits silts on the fields to help crops grow better. This west wind is so taken by Shelley as an emblem of optimism and so is hailed to destroy the old order of the existing society and thus to accelerate a new birth.

Boishakh is the first month of Bangla year when the tempestuous wind blows from the west to the east direction and plays havoc in the society. The Bengali poets use the month as metonymy for the tempestuous wind because Boishakh is merely a month; it neither can destroy anything nor can create anything. Though they have written poems on the title, they basically point to the wind that blows from the west. Here lies the relation between west wind and Boishakh.

And the term 'Jhod' refers to the summer storm which is also known as 'Kalboishakhi'. This 'Jhod' also comes from the west and causes a huge damage to the nature but soon after the storm over; a new life is seen in the woods laden with buds and flowers. Therefore, though the three terms are apparently anomalous, they are basically birds of a same feather.

Farrukh Ahmad, the great literary icon in the history of Bengali Literature, was profoundly influenced by Shelley's romantic tradition in literature. Syed(1995, p26) said, "In early life Farrukh was influenced by the romanticism of Shelley and Keats." Farrukh Ahmad was chiefly a

poet of Islamic Renaissance (Ahmad, S.2006). Like Shelley he was romantic but his romantic dream was distinct from Shelley, in that, in Shelley's romantic world God is absent, on the other hand, Farrukh dreamed of a society based on Islamic Monotheism and so his romantic ship moved towards the unknown harbor of God. Shelley was reformative and daringly voiced against the existing aged old society and called upon his people to hammer the society and at the same time to adorn a new society free from corruption and discrimination. This is echoed in his 'Song to Men of England', "Forge arms in your defense to bear". (24)

Farrukh Ahmad took shelter in the shade of poetry to reform the society. With the help of rhetoric devices: allegory and symbol he pointed to the golden bygone of Islam. His dictions, imageries, myths and metaphors centre round the Arabian world and remind us the glorious past of the Muslim.

'Ode to the West Wind' and 'Jhod' are thematically and structurally similar. Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* comprises five stanzas, each consisting of fourteen lines. On the other hand, '*Jhod*' comprises seven stanzas, each comprising fourteen lines. Here lies the structural similitude. To Shelley, west wind is the emblem of destroyer and preserver in the sense that it destroys the things of the society and at the same time regenerates the society by spreading the seeds of new hope and optimism. It is evident from the following lines:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; Destroyer and preserver;
hear, oh hear! (13-14)

These lines are strikingly similar to those of Farrukh Ahmad's 'Jhod':

হে বন্য বৈশাখী ঝড়! হে নৃশংস, নিষ্ঠুর
বিশাল বলিষ্ঠ সত্তা, আজীবন অভ্যস্ত সংগ্রামে
তোমাকে ঘিরিয়া জাগে জীবন-মৃত্যুর দুই সুর! (২৯-৩১)

O wild summer storm! Destructive, cruel
Enormous bold spirit,
Two tunes of life and death awaken encompassing you. (My translation)

Shelley has dubbed *west wind* as the *destroyer and the preserver*. Probably Shelley knew the Hindu gods Siva, the destroyer and Vishnu, the preserver, from *Hindu Pantheon*. (Moor1910)

Farrukh also termed *Boishakhi jhod* as the *destroyer* and the *preserver*, for it destroys the fading leaves, trees and houses and regenerates them by spreading silt and seeds.

In the last stanza, Shelley regard *west wind* as the ‘trumpet of prophecy’, which marks the rich tone of optimism that the poet cherishes in his bosom. The poet, thus, intends to rejuvenate human kind by the help of a metaphor, that is, “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” Likewise, Farrukh, in the concluding stanza, believes that the absolute destruction heralds a new era, a new life in this world. The last two lines are quite corresponding to Shelley:

চরম ধ্বংসের শেষে আসে নব সৃষ্টির আহবান
তাইতো পরম কাম্য এ বিপ্লব; এ ঝড়ের গান. (৯৭-৯৮)

The absolute destruction is followed by The call of a new creation
And so this tempest and revolution is absolutely expected. (My translation)

‘Boishakh’, another significant poem of Farrukh belongs to *Kafela*. The poet, in this poem, is bold enough to hail ‘Boishakh’, the first month of the Bengali almanac, when the summer storm comes from the west with strong gust of wind and destroys the fading things of nature. And so Farrukh enthusiastically regards Boishakh as the leader of demolition:

ধ্বংসের নকীব তুমি, হে দু'বার, দুর্ধ্বষ বৈশাখ
সময়ের বালুচরে তোমার কঠোর কণ্ঠে শনি অকুণ্ঠিত প্রলয়ের ডাক.(১-৩)

Leader of annihilation, O indomitable, turbulent Boishakh
In the sandy beach of time,
I hark the unstinted call of your destruction. (My translation)
These lines sound like those of Shelley in *Ode to the West Wind*:
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth! (Line 63-65)

To uproot the discrimination from the society a revolution is imminent and this revolution must be accomplished by the west wind. Actually through the symbol of west wind, the poet here urges the people of the

society to bring about a cataclysmic change. The great critic Compton-Ricket (1912, p84) says, "to renovate the world, to bring about utopia is his constant aim and for this reason we may regard Shelley as emphatically the poet of eager".

Shelley throughout his life dreamed of an ideal world without evil, suffering and misery. The maxim of French Revolution *Equality, Liberty and Fraternity* was his main objective in this regard. "Ode to West Wind" expresses the poet's intense suffering at the tyranny of life and his great hope in the bright future of humanity. The poem symbolizes three things; freedom, power and change. Clutton Brock, his great critic says:

"For Shelley, the forces of nature have as much as human beings have for most of us, and he found the same kind of beauty that we find in the beauty of human beings in the great works of art."
(<http://www.cssforum.com>)

Similarly, we have seen Farrukh Ahmad as dreamer of an ideal world free from injustice, disparity, incongruities, and based on equity and freedom. But he was not imbued with any European revolution rather he fingers to Khulafaye Rasheda through the various Arabic terms and idioms.

সুখ-বিলাসীর স্বপ্ন ভেঙ্গে যাক, ভেঙ্গে পড়ুক কারুণ্যের সঞ্চিত মৌচাক (৬৭)

... ..

তোমার ধ্বংসের সুরে অনাগত সৃষ্টি স্নেহে মন তাই উধাও বৈশাখ. (Last line)

May the dream of epicurean break down
And break down the long preserved hive of *Karun*.....
In the tune of your peril and future dream of creation
Mind is lost. (My translation)

Here 'Karun' is a figure in the history of Islam, who was the stingiest man. Almighty Allah had turned all his wealth into stone as a sign of punishment for his parsimony, because piling up wealth without helping the destitute is strictly prohibited in Islam. That is why, he urges Boishakh to break the hives of wealth built up by the blind capitalist.

The summer storm is identified as the tempest of humanity in his another poem 'Nishan', where he urges his people to bring the tempest of humanity in order to mark the signature of life in the bosom of sky:

তুমি আনো সাথে মানবতার সে নির্ভীক ঝড়
প্রলয়াকাশের বুকে দাও জীবনের স্মারক
ঝড় বৈশাখে জাগো নির্ভীক...(১১০-১১১)

Thou bring with you the brave tempest
And put the sign of life in the sky of annihilation
And wake up in the tempest of Boishakh. (My translation)

Shelley and Farrukh, the two poles standing apart, have made an abstract bridge between them through the bricks of literature. Shelley's view is to have a revolution in the society with a view to reforming it by the spirit of the French Revolution. On the other hand, Farrukh Ahmad was simultaneously a romantic and idealist, who started his literary journey as a romantic but ended it as an idealist (Syed 2009). His poetry found life and inspiration from Tawhid (Azraf 1963). However, both of them romantically dreamed of an ideal society and have come out successful in writing poems on the west wind.

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