March 25, 1811 was an eventful day in Shelley's life; it was
the day on which the poet was outright expelled from the Oxford University on
the allegation of co-authorship with T.J. Hogg of the pamphlet entitled *Necessity of Atheism*. Posterity has well testified
that this single incident was very important in moulding the future course of Shelley's life. His growing doubts about religion in general and Christianity in particular went a long way in straining his relations
with his father. Earlier his atheistical pronouncements had estranged his first love, Harriet Grove, who was a paragon of beauty. Or it
might be the other way round that his estrangement with Harriet Grove frustrated him beyond re-conciliation and led him to take cudgel
against all shades of tyranny -- religious, institutional and, last but
not the least, parental. He allowed a free play of his imaginative
mind and thought of religion as a tool of social oppression and
political exploitation. The *Devil's Walk* (1812) is a broadside ballad
and is supposed by many to be a sort of prologue to Shelley's first
long poem, *Queen Mab*. The Devil goes forth as natty a beau to make
an on-the-spot survey of the evil activities of his worldly agents:
kings, lawyers, yeomen, bishops and statesmen. The Devil is hypocrisy
incarnate. He wears masks to hide his ugly designs.

He drew on a post to hide his hoof,
He drew on a glove to hide his claw.

(5-6)

Not only the Devil himself, his agents were also maintaining double-standards. Apparently their activities appeared to be altruistic or at least harmless triflings but only the Devil could see the ultimate sinister motives of those agents.

Poor lambskins! were just doing nothing at all
But settling some dress or arranging some ball.
But the Devil saw deeper there.

(28-30)

These apparently insignificant lines go a long way to reveal the depth of Shelley's understandings of the nature of evil. Good never needs any garb, but the evil ever needs. Powerful evil, to be really powerful, need hide its real self to deceive others. Could Eve, by any stretch of imagination, doubt the bona fides of the apparently innocent Satan in disguise? 'The brainless king' is attended by many 'Imps'; he thrives on the news of human blood and so it must be a good place for Satan's agents:

Ah! ah! thought Satan, the pasture is good,
My cattle will thrive here better than others.

(45-46)
They dine on news of human blood,
They sup on the groans of the dying and dead
And supperless never will go to bed.

(47-49)

To our reasonable queries as to who are these agents, where they come from and what do they look like, Shelley tells that they are friends and that they are

Fat as the death-brides on Erin's shore,
That glutted themselves in her dearest gore,
And flitted round Castlereagh.

(57-59)

At that tender age Shelley did attain the maturity of transcending national chauvinism and of realising the evil perpetrated by the British Government (symbolised in the person of notorious Castlereagh) on the people of Ireland through panperization of the Irish and drainage of Ireland's exchequer to fill English coffers. Evil action is always evil though it is committed by the government of one's own country. Satan's agents cannot for long hide their identities and they can be easily recognized from their apparel because in every case the same attire covers the ugly spirit inside.

Far they thrive well whose garb of gore
Is Satan's choicest livery,
And they thrive well who from the poor
Have snatched the bread of penury.

(94-97)
The institution of law is nothing but a mockery and its sole purpose is to give a legal sanction to the illegal acts of exploitation of the have-nots by the have. And consequently, the institution of law functions at the direction of kings and his deputies who are in unholy league with bishops and lawyers.

The Bishops thrive though they are big;
The Lawyers thrive though they are thin;
For every gown, and every wig,
Hides the safe thrift of Hell within.

(100-103)

The poem unmistakably shows Shelley’s growing understanding of the real cause of human misery and the channels of exploitations. It is worth noting that Shelley, even in his adolescence, came to realize how despotic and corrupt institutions were the means of the luxurious life of the rich at the cost of the poor.

The stage is set for his first long poem. 1813 saw the composition of Queen Mab, which is a covert expression of Shelley’s early social and political ideas. The poem, its adolescent zeal for an ideal world notwithstanding, is a clear exposure of Shelley’s absorbing interest in human affairs vis-a-vis social questions. In Queen Mab, Shelley for the first time unmistakably expresses his early political and social ideas. Even a casual reading of Queen Mab will convince the reader that the poet was sincerely interested in human affairs and social forces. We should not lose sight of the fact that by the time Shelley set to work
on this poem, he had developed considerable literary skill and political insight. Being a voracious reader even at that age it is but natural that the thoughts of leading thinkers like Paine, Holbach, Godwin, etc. had gone a long way to enlarge his intellectual horizon and sharpen his artistic sensibilities. But the fact remains that the ideas contained in Queen Mab are "representative of the most advanced school of thought of the age", ¹ the influence of these thinkers notwithstanding.

We meet with some dilemma when we want to understand as to why Shelley wrote this poem and what he intended to communicate through this poem. Our problem is lessened if we do not doubt the sincerity of Shelley's intention as conveyed to Miss Elizabeth Hitchener through his letter dated December 10, 1811, when he says that he intended Queen Mab "to be by anticipation a picture of the manners, simplicity and delights of a perfect state of society, the still earthly". It is a historical view of "the Past, the Present, and the Future" ² with "long and philosophical notes" ³ appended to it.

But we are still confronted with the question as to why Shelley needed the garb of such a poem for the propagation of his thought. Since Queen Mab is alleged to be Godwin versified, it seems that the prose style would have been more suitable. Shelley himself threw some light when he declared that he took advantage of this technique as it was the safest

² Shelley to Thomas Hookham, August 18, 1812, Vol. I, p.324.
way of "propagating my principles which I decline to do syllogistically in a poem." We can find some justification of Shelley's technique if we take his first wife Harriet Shelley seriously when she wrote that the poem was considered to be "too much against every existing establishment." Of course the subsequent developments support Harriet's contention. We know that the Government was deeply alarmed at the ideas contained in it and, accordingly, a Bill was filed against Shelley; he was openly charged with having "blasphemously derided the truth of the Christian Revolution and denied the existence of God as the Creator of the universe."

In December 1812 Shelley wrote to Hookham, "Subjoined is a list of books which I wish you to send me very soon. I am determined to apply myself to a study that is hateful and disgusting to my very soul, but which is, above all studies, necessary for him who would be listened to as a mender of antiquated abuses; I mean that record of crime and miseries, History." The study of History was disgusting to his very soul but even then he read history with wonderful perseverance. He read history, his dislike notwithstanding, because his was a crusade against the greatest and oldest of all problems -- the problem of evil. But to try to mitigate evil one needs to have a clear idea of the nature and origin of evil. It was very clear to Shelley that to even touch the fringe of the problem of evil one need have a reasonably thorough

4 Ibid.
knowledge of human activities in different ages. And for attaining that range of knowledge nothing could help more than History. It is simply an irony that such a profound scholar and a lover of knowledge among English poets should be damned as ethereal, subjective and evanescent and ineffective. Matthew Arnold claimed to be the champion of classicism. But even he failed to appreciate Shelley, who was the most classical of all Romantic poets of the second generation. Matthew Arnold and Shelley were curiously the two extremely divergent products of the same traditional British educational system, the only difference is that Shelley, while rebelling against the system, tried to break his lance with the dons while Matthew Arnold championed the system and made idols of the teachers. Believing in the theory of original blissfulness of Man, Shelley tried to probe into the mystery as to how such a privileged creature could fall to such a depth. But an optimist like Shelley could not get himself reconciled to the deplorable 'Present' of mankind. And hence the appeal of Volney to him. Believing in Volney's theory and having Volney's Ruins as his guide, Shelley reveals the sins by which fell the empires of antiquity and like Volney, he looks to a glorious future when mankind, having learnt his lesson at last, after repeated failure, should establish the kingdom of Heaven on earth.

If the yesterday of man was so good how could his today become so bad? How could the pristine glory of mankind vanish so quickly? Shelley opines that it was owing to the corrupt institution which was
nothing but the making of man. Priests and monarchs are the two types of evils complementary to each other. They are the two types of tyrants determined to oppress mankind with all the arsenals in their armory. If the priests stand for spiritual tyranny, monarchs represent physical tyranny. The spirit shows the soul of Ianthe the ruins of dead empires, Palmyra, Egypt, Athens, Rome and other empires reared on human blood and misery, worshipping demon-gods.

... oh! They were fiends:
But what was he who taught them that the God
Of nature and benevolence had given
A special sanction to the trade of blood?

(Queen Mab; II; 154-157)

Shelley's interpretation hints at twentieth century's penetration when he unmasks the benevolent(?) monarchs and exposes their nefarious designs at the cost of humanity. Shelley permanently tears the myth of the divine theory of kings. To Shelley monarchy was nothing more than a recognized manner of exploiting the masses under deceptive legal and religious sanction. The kings' thirst for grandeur and pleasure leads them to senselessness and shame but ultimately the burden falls on the toiling and starving multitudes. Monarchs are no better than parasites who suck human blood and are earthquakes of the human race who proudly tread over 'prostrate millions' and gratify their passions

6 Oh, many a widow many an orphan cursed
The building of that fame; and many father,
Worn out with toil and slavery, implored
The poor man's God to sweep it from the earth.

(Queen Mab; II; 141-144)
for monumental glory by exploiting the working people.

Monarchy and aristocracy, in unholy alliance, robbed the poor of their happiness and changed the world into 'thorny wilderness'. It is not only a positive evil but also the root and epicentre of many more evils. One such evil is war. 'From kings, and priests and statesmen, war arose'. The king may appear to be very happy but in fact it is just the reverse. He is unhappy and is surrounded by his troops. He is "neither free nor happy ... the fool whom courtiers nicknamed monarch; heedless of the curse of the fatherless and grief of the friendless". His very existence is miserable. He himself is a prey to base appetites and consequently smiles at the groans of the sufferers. Naturally peace is farthest from him because peace is something which come from within and no amount of material pleasures can bestow one with peace. This is a unique development and a very significant state of affairs because here we see that both the subject and the king, i.e., the exploited and the exploiter suffer alike though on different planes. Shelley here takes a very modern view of the problem and asserts that both suffer because they are creatures of precedence and custom.

... No - it is not strange,
He, like the vulgar, thinks, feels, acts and lives
Just as his father did; the unconquered powers
Of precedence and custom interpose
Between a king and virtue.

(Queen Mab; III; 351-355)

9 Carl Grabe; op.cit., p.108.
'Tell me what company thou keepest, I will tell thee what thou art', goes the proverbial saying which in plain terms means that a man is known by the company he keeps. The constant companion of the kings are the courtiers who spring from vice, treachery and wrong. They are gilded flies that fattens on corruption. Shelley tries to explore the origin of their existence and he categorically asks:

Whence, thinkest thou, kings and parasites arose?
Whence that unnatural line of drones, who keep
Toil and unvanquishable penury
On those who build their palaces, and bring
Their daily bread -- from vice, black, loathsome vice;
From rapine, madness, treachery, and wrong;
From all that genders misery, and makes
Of earth this thorny wilderness; from lust
Revenge and murder...

(Queen Mab;)

But will this state remain for ever? Will the humanity always be exploited by the monarchs and their sycophants? Shelley cannot approve of such a dismal picture of the future. So he immediately declares, loud and bold:

... And when reason's voice
Loud as the voice of natures shall have waked
The nations; and mankind perceive that vice
Is discord, war and misery; that virtue
Is peace, and happiness, and harmony;
When man's mature nature shall disdain
The playthings of his childhood; its authority
Will lose its power to dazzle; its authority
Will silently pass by; the gorgeous throne
Shall stand unnoticed in the regal hall
Fast falling to decay; whilst falsehood's trade
Shall be as hateful and unprofitable
As that of truth is now.

(Qeen Nab, III; 382-394)

But this qualitative change will not come out of nothing or overnight. The silent and self-effacing work of the virtuous men would prepare the ground for this change. The virtuous man who, great in his humility as kings are little in their grandeur and who, 'neither commands nor obeys' and leaves a deathless memory which causes kings to tremble. 'Nature rejects the monarch; not the man; the subject, not the citizen'. It is not Nature but man that is wholly responsible for human woe. Of all of Nature's works every creature is happy, sans the outcast 'man'.

... The Universe
In nature's silent eloquence, declares
That all fulfil the works of love and joy
All but the outcast, man. He fabricates
The sword which stabs his peace; he cherisheth
The snakes that gnaw his heart; he raiseth up
The tyrant, whose delight is in his woe;
Whose sport is in his agony.

(Qeen Nab)

While tracing the development of Shelley's thought and literary skills, various influences are traced. But curiously enough one very paramount influence -- the influence of Indian thought -- is ignored. But it can be said with emphasis and argued to logical end that Indian thought exerted considerable influence upon him throughout his life --
profoundly in his formative years and discernably in his later years.

Shelley was a voracious reader and he collected his materials from eclectic sources. This confounded Shelley's critics down to the present day. Reviled in his own day, castigated by Arnold and rejected by Eliot, Shelley has been defended as a psychological type by Herbert Read. He is one in whom "his countrymen least recognized their own image." For want of a more exact word, his manner of thought has been called 'Platonism'. Less scholarly writers portrayed William Godwin as Shelley's spiritual father. Dr. Brailsford declares that it would be no exaggeration to say that Godwin formed Shelley's mind, and that Prometheus Unbound was the greatest of Godwin's works. Without underestimating the importance of such opinions it can be modestly said that the Indian influence on Shelley did not receive the recognition it deserves.

While Shelley was born, though the French Revolution loomed large on the political horizon, just then another cultural revolution of no less significance was taking place in the discovery of the oriental thought by the Occident. In the penultimate decade of the eighteenth century Sir William Jones landed in Calcutta; Charles Wilkins translated Bhagavadgita; and Duperon translated Zendavesta. All these opened a window on ancient thought and coloured Shelley beyond recognition. Dr. Lind about whose influence on him Shelley said

10 Spender: *Shelley*; 1952, p. 5.
that he owed for that man, far more, than he owed to his father,...
also helped in arousing oriental interest in Shelley. Dr. Lind had
a first hand experience of this land of Elephants and the colossal
figures of 'Brahma', 'Vishnu' and 'Siva'. This accounts for the
curious mythological interest of Shelley in India's past which in turn
fascinated him in Southey's Thalaba and Curse of Kehama. All these
happened while Shelley was still in Eton.

After his Eton days Shelley went to University College,
Oxford. This was the college where William Jones worked and breathed
his last (April 27, 1794). Thanks to the tenacity of the widow of
Sir Jones, Shelley could come into a first hand contact with Jones's
works. In 1804 was published the Life and Works of Sir Williams.
This book excited much interest at Oxford. In all probability Shelley
had gone through the pages of this book. There is also evidence that
Shelley was interested in Indian lore which Sir William Jones had
discovered. Echoes of Sir Williams' Hymn to Camdeo can be heard in
Shelley's letter to Hogg (Jan. 21, 1811). "Had I then be sacrificing
at the alter of the Indian Camdeo, the god of mystic love, you, I am
sure, will never become an unreflecting votary at its shrine". Shelley
had been reading Jones during his stay at Oxford and after his expulsion
from Oxford, we are told that Jones's works "were among the books that
Shelley ordered at Talyralt." It may be mentioned here that his
first important poem -- Queen Mab -- written during 1811 and 1812 was

13 Hughes, The Nascent Mind of Shelley; 1947, p.165.
presumably inspired by an Indian story — The Palace of Fortune — by Sir William Jones.

A very forceful charge is often labelled against Shelley that while composing Queen Mab, he had eaten much more than he could digest and that is why this ambitious poem is replete with contradictory ideas. Shelley's random and haphazard reading from eclectic sources combined with his super-human zeal to eradicate evil from the fabric of human existence account for his curious tracing of the origin of evil and contradictory solutions for ushering in the millennium. If we are to treat his earlier statements with weightage then we are to accept that evil is not inherent in Nature but is the creation of man. The child is by nature good and innocent but is dipped, trained and schooled in evil by the forces of tradition of bigotry. Carl Grabo points to this apparent contradiction when he says, "Man alone is the outcast from loving nature, yet he now declares that nature herself animated to the last atom 'comprehends a world of loves and hatreds'. All is soul but in the soul exists love and hate. Evil, then, cannot be man's creation solely but is inherent in the soul itself, which is Nature."^14 In a desperate bid to exonerate Shelley or to understand him more sympathetically, Grabo further says, "Shelley would seem here to be fumbling for an expression of Manicheism, resolving the universe to a conflict of the two everlasting principles, 'Ahriman' and 'Ormuzd'. Or again, he may be wrestling with the problem posed

14 Carl Gerbo, op.cit., p.110.
by the Platonists: how to account for the presence of evil in a world which is the creation of the wholly perfect one? The impact of this weightier Philosophy upon the naive metaphysics of Godwin creates no more than confusion and a blinding cloud of dust.... The interest of Queen Mab is not in any answer to such ultimates, -- a task too great for any youth however great a genius, but in revealing the philosophic material with which Shelley’s mind was stuffed."15

Shelley was a visionary; a dreamer of dreams not because he failed to see or lacked in courage to face life as it is. It was because, unable to bear the ugly sight "he turned to utopian visions of what the world might be."16 True, he sought the root of evil more profoundly in his later works but the fact remains that "manifestation of that evil he saw clearly from the beginning".17

15 Ibid.
16 Carl Grabe, op.cit., p. 111.
17 Ibid.