CHAPTER FOUR

THE POET AS A REVOLUTIONARY

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.

(Shelley, 'To a skylark')

If poetry aims at fashioning men
It is also an heir to prophecy.

(Iqbal, Javid Namah)
In his famous work *Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler distinguishes between three cultures, the Apollonian, the Faustian and the Magian. He borrows the first two terms from Nietzsche and Goethe respectively and owes the third to interpretations of the Far-East, Tarseneic and Arabian history and Sanskrit literature.

Magian culture is based on a belief in a mystical relationship between man and the universal forces. Apollonian culture is objective in outlook believing that space exists 'out there' and can be objectively measured and divided. Faustian culture is an inward-looking and personalized culture and its world-view is characterized by a desire for the infinite and a strong impulse for ceaseless striving. This emphasis on striving is what in some ways distinguishes the nineteenth century from the eighteenth and it is one of the central elements in mature Romanticism.

This sense of striving and a surge after the ideal, although prophesied here and there by some men of the previous age, is characteristic of the 'new' man of the nineteenth century. It appears in the revolutionary ferment which characterizes the philosophy and the literature of the age. It appears in the replacement of the neat universe of Buffon by an activist universe of
becoming, as evolution shapes scientific thought. It
appears in the Romantic paintings of Turner and William
Blake as well as literary works like Wordsworth's Prelude, Goethe's Faust and Shelley's
Prometheus Unbound.

From this point of view the nineteenth century
Romantic Movement can be seen as the literary counterpart
of the social revolution founded in Rousseau's slogan,
"Man is born free but is everywhere in chains." Then
Victor Hugo defined Romanticism as "liberalism in
literature" he was emphasizing this aspect of the
Romantic Movement. That Romanticism was an all-embracing
concept and involved revolutionary changes in social and
political fields as well as in the field of literature
is clear from the turn that it took in France. The
Romantic Movement was strengthened not only by the
champions of the Romantic spirit like Rousseau but also
by rationalists like Voltaire, Diderot and the
Encyclopaedists to the extent to which they helped in
formulating the concept of the 'Rights of Man'; Rousseau's

1 Quoted by Lilian Furst, Romanticism (London: Methuen
role, however, is highly significant in accelerating the philosophy in Europe.

Unlike Condorcet and Godwin, Rousseau did not believe in the efficacy of reason to make man and human society perfect. He believed that cold reason had never accomplished anything; only emotion could be relied upon. He declared that whenever he thought he was likely to be wrong; it was only when he felt that he was correct. Thus he rejected the values of the age of Reason and provided a philosophical basis for emotional indulgence. Unlike Hobbes he believed that man was not by nature selfish but benevolent and good-natured and it is only society and civilization which corrupt him. In education, therefore, he advocated the method of least interference in the growth of a child. In literature, through his La Nouvelle Héloïse (The New Eloisa) and the Confessions, he spread the vogue of sentimentalism and revived a sensitive interest in beauties of nature which is so characteristic of the Romantic Movement. On the whole his achievement justifies Goethe's eulogy that "in Voltaire we see the end of a world; in Rousseau the beginning of a new one."^2

Rousseau's thought was the most potent of the influences that paved the way for the French Revolution on its theoretical side. The revolution itself was a political manifestation of the Romantic spirit and gave a great impetus to the growth of the Romantic Movement in Europe. Personages like Garibaldi and Jefferson exemplify the Romantic cult of the ego in the political sphere as men like Byron, Beine and Victor Hugo exemplify it in the arts.

The enthusiasm with which the English Romantic poets greeted the French Revolution reveals that they looked on it as the fulfilment of their own Romantic yearnings and the herald of the golden age of their dreams. It is clear from their initial reactions that they identified themselves, almost involuntarily, with the cause of the Revolution. The fall of Bastille aroused such a wave of enthusiasm in Blake that he turned to write an epic poem, The French Revolution, on the subject in which the Revolution was hailed as the beginning of the end of the long nightmare of injustice and tyranny known as human history. The 'starry harvest' of six thousand years (Blake's description of the interval between creation and apocalypse) was about to be reaped. A Messianic age of liberty was to set in and mankind was
to unite like a single man to live in a new heaven and
new earth. To Wordsworth it seemed that human nature
was being born again as "France was standing on the top
of golden hours."\(^3\) Not content with lending only moral
support to the Revolution, Wordsworth went to France in
1791 and spent a whole year there working with the
revolutionaries. Speaking of those hectic days, he
writes in Book XI of *The Prelude*:

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
> But to be young was very heaven!\(^4\)

When England declared war on the Revolutionary France in
1793 Wordsworth, like Blake and Coleridge, was highly
shocked. In Book X of *The Prelude* he tells us both of the
shock and his exultation on the triumph of the revolutionaries
in the Battle of Flodshoote.

Shelley's revolutionary thought was apparently more
strongly influenced by the French Revolution than by his
theoretical readings. In one of his letters, he recommended\(^5\)

\(^3\) *The Prelude*, vi. 11. 339-341.

\(^4\) 11. 105-106.
French Revolution to Byron as "the master theme of the epoch." Unlike Wordsworth or Coleridge he never lost faith in the efficacy of revolution and in the ultimate victory of good over evil although he would not approve of all that happened in the name of the French Revolution. His revolt of Islam envisages the French Revolution as a bloodless overthrow of monarchy without vengeance for the past wrong. Byron was himself the type of the new man that emerged on the scene under the impact of the French Revolution. In his cult of the self, his love of adventure and his rejection of the established ties he exhibits something of the gigantic defiance of a Prometheus.

**Revolution and the Romantic Temperament.**

All this goes to prove that the Romantic temperament has a natural affinity with the spirit of revolution and rebellion. It is dissatisfied with the existing conditions and aspires for an idealized order, a golden age, generally hidden in the womb of future. It is, therefore, essentially, unconventional and breaks with the tradition in some

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significant sense although the break is not always a complete one. The Romantic rebel is reconciled to things only when he invests them with a mystical or metaphysical mystery and symbolic significance. In other words he accepts things not as they are but in so far as they are symbolic of something beyond them. He tries to awaken others to the glory of the ideal order by communicating his vision to them or concentrates sometimes on the world within him to satisfy his craving for the ideal order and seek peace for his soul. This accounts for the preoccupation of the Romantic artist with the themes of rebellion and revolution, of the creation of dream-worlds and of struggle for development. In Romantic art and literature we see the finite trying to grasp the infinite, "the moth" in Shelley's words, trying to fulfill its "desire for the star." An examination of some of the works of the major Romantic poets will throw into bold relief the various strands of this revolution-rebellion-dream-world complex of ideas. Let us look at Wordsworth's Prelude, Byron's Manfred and some other works woven around the Promethean theme.

The Prelude

The Prelude has very rarely been approached as a revolutionary document but a close reading of the poem
reveals that like Goethe's Faust it draws together most of the forces of the two parallel movements of revolution and Romanticism, the one political and the other aesthetic and philosophical, that were at work in the early nineteenth century. The poem consists of fourteen books. Parts of the poem were written before 1800 but most of the poem was written in 1804-1805. The poem is in two versions, the 1805 version (the poem as Wordsworth read it to Coleridge) and the version of 1850, which may be taken as saying what the poet wanted to say as he revised it himself. The poem has for its subject no less a theme than Man, Nature and the Universe, a theme for which Urania's help is considered insufficient and the prophetic spirit is invoked. The yearning for the beyond is clear from the invocation. The poet prays:

 mayor life

Express the image of a better time,
More wise desires, and simpler manners; — nurse
My heart in genuine freedom; — all pure Thoughts
Be with me. 6

Books I-IV tell the story of the poet's infancy, boyhood
and youth; Book V deals with the development of his imagination; Books VI-VII deal with his Cambridge days, his going to London and his approach to maturity; Book VIII, while continuing the story, looks back at the narrative and explores its meaning; Book IX-X are mainly concerned with his residence in France and the description of the hope and disillusion produced by the French Revolution; and Books XII-XIV give us a description of the development of his theory of imagination and his view of Nature, Reason, Love and Intuition.

The poem is one of the greatest of the confessional poems which explains the interaction between human soul, God and the cosmos like the Confessions of St. Augustine, Dante's Divina Comedia and Tennyson's In Memoriam. Like most of the autobiographical poems again it is frequently false to fact. It is a review of Wordsworth's life by a Wordsworth who had drastically changed his opinions about men and society in the course of his life. It is a Wordsworth who passed from Godwinism to a passionate advocacy of the Church as England's saviour, a Wordsworth who was made Poet Laureate in 1843 and became a firm believer in Burke's conservative philosophy of history. Naturally he tries to present his life as having been consistent and not as a record of the varying stages of rebellion he had passed through.
The Prelude of 1850, in particular, is the picture that Wordsworth wanted to bequeath of himself to the posterity. This, however, does not diminish its value as an example of development through striving. Besides being a treasurehouse of various kinds of sublime and ennobling experiences that the poet had during his life — landscapes, persons, remembered events (e.g. a poor French peasant girl leading a cow, the bust of Newton at Cambridge, the stealing of a boat, the morning-light shining on mountain-peaks, a small boy hooting at the owls, the poet's own life as an alien in Revolutionary France and so on and so forth), The Prelude speaks of the first taste that the poet had of egalitarian life in the simple democracy of his dalesmen. It records his bitter experiences with the people of the upper classes and their inhuman treatment of the lower class people. It reflects his deep sense of anguish at the smugness of the church fathers, particularly that of Bishop of Llandaff, who were opposed to revolutionary changes. It also records the sense of remorse that overtook Wordsworth on his returning from France leaving the revolutionaries to their fate, and the poet's gradual acceptance of Burke's philosophy of tradition and development.

Besides being a record of the evolution of a poet's thought through struggle, The Prelude also reflects his aspiration for an ideal world different from the dull and
drab world of daily experience. This is communicated through the succession of visions and dreams in the poem. These may have been remembered or just invented or expanded by memory but all point to the poet's striving for a perfect world. Notable among these are the vaguely remembered childhood experiences representing a pro-natal world of innocence and purity; the episode when he steals the boat and has mysterious fears of being followed described in Book I; the sense of possessing two consciousneses (Book II); the dream about an Arab (Book V) which reflects Wordsworth's aspiration to become a poet like Shakespeare and Milton; and a curious visionary experience on Mount Snowdon which brings him in touch with Infinity.

**Manfred**

Byron's *Manfred* like Victor Hugo's *Hernani* and Schiller's *Die Räuber* is an example of the Romantic genius in rebellion. In Goethe's view *Manfred* was an improvement on Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide. It relates the story of a man (Manfred) who lives in self-exile in an Alpine castle with some servants. He is tortured by remorse for an inexplicable and mysterious crime. He has somehow caused the death of his sister Astarte about whom he says that "I loved her, and destroyed her" — a sentiment which foreshadows many of the psycho-analytic poems of Browning.
like 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess'. To get rid of the agonizing sense of remorse, Manfred uses his abnormal powers to call forth the spirits of the heaven and the earth to help him. They come and grant him sovereignty and power over the elements but they are unable to grant him oblivion. One of the spirits appears in the form of his sister and he collapses. In a later scene he attempts to commit suicide but is saved by a hunter. In another scene he stubbornly refuses to obey the spirits of the heaven and the earth which he is advised by the witch of Alps to do arguing that he cannot obey those whom he commands. He then resolves to invoke the spirit of his dead sister but for this he has to visit the dreadful hall of Arimanes (Ahriman or Satan). He refuses to bow even before this dreadful monarch but calls forth his beloved's spirit with the help of Nemesis but she refuses to grant him either forgiveness or love and prophesies that he would die the next day. Next day he welcomes death refusing the importunate entreaties of an abbot to reconcile himself to Christianity and to the society of other men telling him "Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die."

Manfred is a Faustian figure who rebels against human finitude. In the story of the play, echoes of the Faust
legend are suggested by Manfred's possession of superhuman powers, the role of the spirits in the play, the resemblances between Byron's Astarte and Gretchen, and Manfred's general contempt of humanity. Byron insisted that he had neither read Marlowe's Dr. Faustus nor knew anything of Goethe's Faust. Goethe's Faust, it may be noted, had not been translated till then and Byron knew no German. Manfred is nonetheless a Faustian figure in being the embodiment of the Romantic spirit of rebellion. Consciously or unconsciously, the Romantic artists, like the Renaissance artists before them, were drawn to the Faust legend as a manifestation of the spirit of quest and adventure and human aspiration for boundless knowledge and power. Manfred exhibits a strong and awe-inspiring will power which he identifies in the first act with "the Promethean spark, the lightning of my being" and which wins him the admiration of even the demon world of Arimanes. Like Nietzsche's superman he is contemptuous of the crowd:

I disdained to mingle with
A herd, though to be leader —— end of wolves.
The lion is alone, and so am I 7

The final assertion of his independence and contempt of

others is spoken to the spirit who has come to summon him to death. He asserts that the spirit has no power over him and that he is his own destroyer and will be his own hereafter.

**The Prometheus Theme**

Like the Faust legend, the Prometheus myth is one of the favourite themes of Romantic writers. In antiquity it had many variants but the central idea is the defiance of Zeus by Prometheus. Zeus binds him to a distant mountain top and sends an eagle or several vultures to prey on his liver. The consumed liver is restored to him every night so that the torture continues. Zeus, the tyrant of gods and men, hopes that unable to endure the pain any longer, Prometheus will reveal the secret of his (Zeus') fated overthrow. In the hands of the Romantics Prometheus becomes a secular saviour replacing Christ. He is the incarnation of the will to defy all kinds of tyranny, a firm believer in the ultimate downfall of despotism and a proponent of the idea that mankind is capable of indefinite progress in favourable circumstances without the aid of Christian revelation. Three notable expressions of the Prometheus theme are Goethe's unfinished *Prometheus* (1773), a lofty address by Byron entitled 'Prometheus' (1776) and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).
Goethe's work is in three acts and remains unfinished. In the first two acts we see Prometheus conversing with gods and goddesses and what remains of the third act is a long monologue by Prometheus, an independent poem and a great revolutionary document. It fuses together Goethe's readings in philosophy and his repudiation of all theological systems. God and the universe are seen as soul and body and man as the expression of natural force who creates gods in his own image. Prometheus asserts that Zeus has nothing to do with the earth and should cover his heaven with clouds. The gods live a miserable life, subsist as they do on the prayers and sacrifices of men. No god has aided Prometheus and, therefore, he is not bound to honour any of them.

In Byron's address Prometheus becomes a source of inspiration for man to be a revolutionary and rebel against all that is tyrannical. Byron addresses Prometheus thus:

Thou art a symbol and a sign
To Mortals of their fate and force;
Like thee, Man is in part divine,
A troubled stream from a pure source;
And Man in portions can foresee
His own funeral destiny;
His wretchedness, and his resistance,
And his sad unallied existence;
To which his spirit may oppose
Itself — an equal to all woes —
And a firm will, and a deep sense,
Which even in torture can desory
Its own concentrated recompense,
Triumphant where it dares defy,
And making Death a victory. 8

Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* is a passionate affirmation of the revolutionary faith that mankind can be liberated from tyranny. The subject had been treated before by Shelley in *Queen Mab* (1813) and *The Revolt of Islam* (1818). In *Queen Mab* all authority of one being over the other — be it the authority of the king, the priest or the capitalist — is considered to be the root of all evil:

...The man

Of virtuous soul commands not nor obeys. Power
like a devastating pestilence pollutes whatever it touches. 9

Authority ought to be resisted if evil is to be combated. The poem, in its presentation of the conflict between good and evil, is the first, though somewhat vague, expression of Shelley’s revolutionary attitude.

8 *Poetical Works*, p. 96.

This attitude is more clearly expressed in The Revolt of Islam where Leon and Cythna and other patriot revolutionaries oppose the tyranny of the king and his priestly allies with love and forbearance. The poem recalls the liberals from despair in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna telling them that the struggle between good and evil is an eternal phenomenon of human history. This conflict is symbolised in the poem by the combat of the snake and the eagle where the snake symbolises what is good and noble and the eagle symbolises what is hateful and ignoble. The forces of truth and falsehood and justice and tyranny are ever at war and whenever they strike, whenever "the snake and the Eagle meet — the world's foundations tremble."

For a maturer expression of Shelley's revolutionary philosophy one has to turn to his lyrical drama Prometheus Unbound. Shelley drastically modifies the Prometheus myth as it is found in Aeschylus. In Aeschylus's trilogy Zeus and Prometheus ultimately reach a reconciliation but this did not suit Shelley's philosophy as he writes in the preface to Prometheus Unbound:

I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of

10 Poetical Works, p. 48.
the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary.\textsuperscript{11}

In the preface Shelley also compares his hero with Milton's Satan and considers him to be "a more poetical character" than Satan, "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends."\textsuperscript{12}

As a drama \textit{Prometheus Unbound} does not have great merit but as a revolutionary poem embodying Shelley's philosophical ideas it is of great importance. Shelley does not care to individualize his characters; they remain representations of abstract ideas. Prometheus represents human desire to do good and to suffer for it as Jupiter stands for all that is evil — tyranny, obscurantism, denial of love and reason and other forces of destruction. Prometheus' companions, Ocean's daughters — Panthea, Ione and Asia — are Faith, Hope and Love. In the play evil is ultimately defeated by itself; Jupiter is overthrown by his own offspring, Omoegaron but not before

\textsuperscript{11} Poetical Works, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{ibid.}, Poetical Works, p. 201.
he has inflicted a lot of suffering over others, nor before
a stiff resistance has been put up against him. Shelley's
play is not therefore a mere prophecy to say that evil is
bound to perish but an invitation to struggle. According
to him, evil does not breed its own destroyer but active
human participation is required to complete the process of
its destruction. Man has to interfere in the march of
history to ameliorate his lot. Shelley has thus outgrown
his belief in the natural amelioration of human lot under
a mechanical process, the belief which he held at the time
of writing Queen Mab. He has discarded his faith in what
he called 'Necessity', 'the mother of the world', the
Universal Force which looks after the interests of the
universe including the human world. Struggle is necessary,
and evil too without which there can be no struggle. This
is the burden of Demogorgon's address to Prometheus at the
end of the play:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.13

13 Poetical Works, p. 264.
The Poet in the Messianic Role

The Romantics envisaged a very potent social role for a poet and tried to realize this ideal in practical life. Blake believed that the essence of man is creativity, living a life in accordance with the dictates of Imagination, a life of genuine freedom and emancipation. To live a life of Imagination is to be an artist, a poet, and for Blake art is the supreme reality of life, it is life itself:

A poet, a painter, a Musician, an Architect; the Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian. You must leave Fathers and Mothers and Houses and lands if They stand in the way of Art
Prayer is the study of Art
Praise is the practice of Art
Fasting & C., all relate to Art
The outward ceremony is Anti-Christ
The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination,
That is, God himself.14

Thus art is Blake's religion and Imagination is the supreme deity.

Blake himself lived this kind of a life — a life of true and uninhibited freedom and creativity and aspired

14 'The Lacon' in Complete Writings, p. 776.
for a social order in which every individual could live this kind of life. From his early age he lent his unstinted support to all movements working for freedom and emancipation. As a young man he took a keen interest in life in London in all its aspects. At this stage he was an ardent revolutionary and helped Tom Paine to escape from England with his life. America, inspired by the American War of Independence, is an impassioned plea for liberty and the Visions of the Daughters of Albion pleads for sexual revolution. The French Revolution expresses his sense of thrill on hearing the news of the Fall of Bastille.

An incident that took place at a quite ripe stage of Blake's life reveals of what mettle this born revolutionary was made. When he was living in Felpham (1801-1803) in the employment of Hayley, he lived in a pretty cottage whose surroundings inspired some of his glorious heavenly visions. Once when he went out into his garden, the enchanting haunt of his angels and fairies, he found a soldier there and lost his patience. The soldier had been called in by the gardener to assist him. When he declined to leave on Blake's orders, Blake threw him out with main force. The soldier charged him with sedition and had his employer not intervened, Blake would have been punished for treason.

As we turn to Wordsworth we note that his Preface to Lyrical Ballade attaches primary importance to the social
function of poetry. "A poet is a man speaking to men." and this defines the nature of his responsibilities towards his society. In a significant passage of the Preface, Wordsworth speaks of the role of a poet in the modern scientific and industrial society. His function is to save modern man from atrophy of imagination without the help of gross and violent stimulants. This is particularly needed at a time when "a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating power of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor." Wordsworth was acutely conscious of his role as a poet-prophet. In a letter to George Beaumont he wrote:

"Every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered a teacher or as nothing."

Wordsworth's practical life was in tune with this profession of being a teacher. He tried to practise whatever he


16 Ibid., Prose Works, p. 129.

believed to be morally right for himself and for others. His life, right from its serene beginning in his childhood surroundings through a stormy youth up to a conservative old age, is the life of an acutely socially-conscious poet.

Of all the Romantic poets, Shelley was the most ardent advocate of the messianic role of a poet. Right from his early boyhood when he started brooding on the nature of poetry, he was convinced that only poetry could salvage humanity from its moral and imaginative torpor. A born rebel, he was moved by such a strong passion to reform the world that he could not see a poet apart from being a revolutionary. So strong was his faith in the efficacy of revolutionary reform that he never fell into despair, like Wordsworth or Coleridge, on the aftermath of the French Revolution. To prophets of despair he offered his message of the renewed revolutionary faith, the belief in the goodness of the creative and sympathetic imagination. The partial failure of the French Revolution only confirmed his passion for reform. The French Revolution had been dominated by faith in reason. The results showed that reason has not the power to inspire heroic faith. It must, therefore, be replaced by the creative and redeeming imagination. Poetry must replace or enrich technology. A new order should be ushered in, which is governed by imagination and where the hero is the
poet-prophet who shows in his own character and ideals his vision of future and leads others towards it. Such a hero is celebrated in all the long poems of Shelley like *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound*. In his lyric 'To a Skylark', the bird is significantly compared with a poet:

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears
it heeded not. 18

And Shelley was himself one such poet-hero as he projected in his poetry. He combined in himself the roles of a poet and a revolutionary and used poetry as a weapon, like his West Wind, "to quicken a new birth" and to convince the world that if winter comes, spring cannot be far behind. From his early childhood he was dissatisfied with the things as they were. When at Oxford he was drawn to the rationalist revolutionary thought of which Godwin was the most outstanding spokesman in England. It was about this time that he wrote his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* which led to his expulsion from Oxford.

18 *Poetical Works*, p. 597.
After his expulsion from Oxford Shelley fervently supported the cause of Irish Republicanism. An Address to the Irish People and Declaration of Rights, both published from Dublin, sum up his revolutionary message. Both of them show that Shelley was not simplistic in his revolutionary views. They suggest that reforms should be thought of only after a careful survey of people's opinion and universal adult suffrage should not be blindly granted to people. Another pamphlet, An Address to the People On the Death of the Princess Charlotte, written in the same year, 1817, is a rhetorical reproach to the people of England for publicly mourning the death of Princess Charlotte while they ignored the cruel execution of some Yorkshire labourers for their revolutionary activities.

In 1819 Shelley wrote yet another prose-treatise on the subject of revolution entitled A Philosophical View of Reform. The initial portion of this treatise parallels Ode to Liberty in sketching the history of the sentiment of liberty. Later it reviews the American and the French Revolutions and their beneficial effects on revolutionary movements in the world. Shelley predicts the beginning of a new age of freedom not only in Europe but also in India, China, Egypt, Persia and other areas. At a time when there was no organized zionism, Shelley foresees that the Jews may reassume their ancestral seats and there may be a revival
of culture in Syria and Arabia after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. He attaches particular importance to the revival of a literary tradition in England for its implications for a revolutionary change and gives the first statement of his doctrine that poets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. This was to appear in a more elaborate form a year later in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821):

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.19

These theoretical statements of Shelley's revolutionary ideas were illustrated by his great revolutionary poems (this is not to say that the poems are merely that) ending with *Hellas* (1822). This last revolutionary drama of Shelley was inspired by the Greek War of liberation from the Turkish yoke. The play presents to us the maturest statement of the

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poet's revolutionary ideas and looks forward optimistically to the restoration of mankind. The chorus sing at the conclusion of the play:

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn;
Heaven smiles and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.20

The Revolutionary Thought of Iqbal

The revolutionary thought of the Romantics had deep impact on Iqbal as a poet. Every student of Iqbal is aware of the tremendous revolutionary fervour that characterised both his life and work but it is significant that it was Iqbal's first-hand contact with the West that awoke in him this passion for revolution. Potentially this passion was always present in him as is revealed by his restless temperament and dissatisfaction with the life around him, but there is little or no trace of it in the poetry that he wrote before 1905, when he went to Europe for higher studies. The poetry that he wrote before 1905, particularly the ghazal portion of it, is conventional both in theme and language.

20 Poetical Works, p. 472.
The only novel feature in this bunch of short poems and conventional ghazals is the appearance of free renderings of a few Romantic lyrics.

During his stay of over three years in Europe, Iqbal studied at Cambridge and Munich. The two greatest Western influences on his thinking and poetic practice were the German and English Romantic movements. Among the Germans he was particularly influenced by the revolutionary thought of Nietzsche and the poetry of Goethe, Heine and Herder. In his introduction to the Bayan-i-Nashriq (The Message from the East) which he wrote in response to Goethe's West-Ostlicher Divan (West-Eastern Divan) he talks approvingly of the German Romantics, particularly of the Oriental Movement in German literature. Among the English Romantics Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley exercised the greatest influence on him.

Iqbal's contact with the West led him to a critical review of the whole of the Oriental literature. In his biography of Iqbal, Dr. Javid Iqbal reports him as saying:

In 1905 when I came to England I had begun to feel that the Oriental literature, in spite of its apparent allurements and attractions, is devoid of the message of hope, courage, impulse to action and a zest and passion for life.  

Although Iqbal was not satisfied even with Western literature as he found it and although his later work is as critical of the West as of the East, yet he found that the literature of the West was much more encouraging and life-giving than that of the East. After his return from Europe we find him preoccupied with the revolutionary idea for the whole of his remaining life. All of his major works appeared after 1908 and each of them, in one way or the other, deals with the subject of revolution. His is a comprehensive message of revolution asking for a total revaluation of man and his institutions and covering both the negative and the positive aspects — the destruction of the undesirable world-order and the reconstruction of a new order in its place.

Iqbal envisaged a very high destiny for man who, in his view, was gifted with a potential for infinite development. He interprets the Quranic statement that God created man as his vicegerent on the earth to mean that man's ultimate goal is to reach nearest to God by reflecting in his behaviour the attributes of godhead. This is a place denied to all the rest of the creation including the angels, the purest creatures of God. The rest of the creation serves God instinctively and involuntarily and enjoys no freedom of choice as man does. Man's most distinctive characteristic is this freedom of choice; he has been allowed to realize his latent potential through voluntary endeavour and it is
this which places him above all creation except God:

\[
\text{مَثَلُهُ وَفَاعِلَتُهُ}
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The rise of the clay-made man frightens the stars

Lest should who feel

That this fallen star acquire the stature of the full moon.

According to Iqbal, man can reach the heights for which he is destined only when he understands aright his position in the universe and builds his personality on the basis of this understanding. The most important fact about human personality is that it is an indivisible unity, an organic whole and not a duality of spirit and matter. A culture based on the wrong premise of the duality of human personality is bound to be lopsided and suicidal for mankind. Iqbal believed that this wrong conception of human personality was at the root of the unrest of the modern West and the decline of the East. While the materialistic West was unduly inclined to the 'body', the mystically inclined East, largely tended to ignore the demands of the 'body' for those of the 'spirit'. Iqbal was therefore dissatisfied with both

22 Bal-i-Jibril in Kuliya, p. 302.
and visualized the birth of a new man and new culture based on the premise of man being a harmonious and indivisible unity.

Iqbal's Criticism of the West

Iqbal’s criticism of the West has sometimes been misconstrued as the result of what is seen as a deep-rooted prejudice in him against the Western civilization. In fact he was neither a blind admirer of the East nor an unreasonable critic of the West:

I assert only that which appears true to me;
I am neither the simpleton of the mosque nor the son of civilization.

His agonizing perception of the evils of British imperialism might have lent a sharper edge to his criticism of the West, but he was never blind to the positive aspects of the Western culture. His criticism of the West was, in fact, like that of Wordsworth — directed at its materialistic basis which narrows the vision of man and makes him earth-bound. The

23 Bal-i-jibril in Kuliyat, p. 313.
various theories and sociopolitical systems springing from the womb of Western materialism are strengthening this materialistic outlook in man and making him more and more impervious to the spiritual essence of life.

Nationalism, one of the offshoots of Western materialism, has divided mankind on the basis of nationality, race, colour and language and led to internecine warfare between different nations of the world. It has also bred a biological and utilitarian morality which justifies the oppression of the weak by the strong and constitutes the basis of imperialism and makes expediency the standard of right and wrong. Anything that serves the national interest is ipso facto right and that which is harmful to it is ipso facto wrong. Iqbal has chosen Machiavelli, the chief exponent of the utilitarian nationalistic ethics, as one of the main targets of his attack:

That Florentine worshipper of falsehood, whose antimony blinded the eyes of men, wrote a treatise for the emperors.

24 Iqbal's reference is to The Prince by Machiavelli.
And sowed the seeds of warfare in the earth.
His religion makes nation a God
And his thought makes admirable that which is despicable. 25

Socialism, in all its various forms, is the apotheosis of the demon of materialism. In Iqbal's view it is nothing but the worship of the belly. In spite of Iqbal's admiration for the constructive side of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 which destroyed several oppressive and tyrannical institutions, Iqbal could not accept its naked materialism. He felt that there was no essential difference between socialism and capitalist democracy as both were based on materialism:

Both of them, I see, immersed in water and clay
Both are effulgent of body and dark of soul.

To Iqbal secularism is the rationalization of the worship of 'body'. It directs all human effort on the betterment of this world and this life regardless of the price that it exacts for it in terms of the sacrifice of moral and spiritual values. He believed that the materialistic

25 *asar-i-Khudi* in *Kuliyyat*, pp. 78-79.
26 Javid Namah, in *Kuliyyat*, p. 306.
civilization of the West has disturbed the delicate balance that ought to be maintained between the spiritual and secular aspects of life in favour of the latter. This has closed on man the way of harmonious and all-round development. Iqbal writes:

Absorbed in the 'fact', that is to say, the optically present source of sensation, he is entirely cut off from the unplumbed depths of his own being. In the wake of his systematic materialism has at last come that paralysis of energy which Huxley apprehended and deplored. 27

The East could have come to the rescue of the West but Iqbal observes that it has itself started treading the path of the West. For centuries together it had been in the grip of life-denying systems which preach self-denial and renunciation. Islam, which had come as a message of hope and life, was later eroded by Eastern mysticism and neo-Platonism. The enervated East has quietly laid down its arms and accepted unquestioningly everything that came from the West. Iqbal painfully realized that neither Western materialism nor escapist mystical systems of the East can save humanity and observes:

27 Reconstruction, p. 188.
Neither the technique of medieval mysticism nor nationalism nor atheistic socialism can cure the ills of a despairing humanity. Surely the present moment is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in need of a biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter.  

In Iqbal's view this religion is Islam, not because it is his ancestral religion but because he finds the healthiest religious teachings of the Orient enshrined and systematized in it. The distinctive feature of Islam is its rejection of the duality of spirit and matter and its capacity to build a harmonious and progressive civilization. It is not religious prejudice but the sincere realization on the part of the poet of the mission of Muslim ummah. When Prof. Nicholson wrote to Iqbal that his revolutionary message seemed to be addressed to Muslims alone, Iqbal wrote in reply that in order to revolutionize the world it was

28

Reconstruction, p. 189.
essential that a particular millah (community) should set an example for it and it was his belief that the Muslims were best qualified to fulfil this mission. He, therefore, calls upon Muslims to rise to the occasion and restore to life his beloved Orient to start with and then rescue the West. This is one of the most recurrent themes of all his poetry and has been given a special treatment in his Mathnavi pas chi Bayad Kard.

The full title of the poem is Mathnavi pas chi Bayad Kard Ay Aqwan-i-Sharg ("That Then Should be Done O peoples of the East"). The poem starts with the diagnosis of the malady that has afflicted the East, which is the blind acceptance of materialistic ideals of the West and loss of self. A symptom of the disease is the worship of the dry-as-dust 'reason' and turning away from the path of love (Ishq) and Iqbal announces at the very outset:

سیاہ ہاتھ بے ایکم از دوالت عشق
کہ در حرم خطرے از باپت فقت

I am raising a new army from the realm of love
And haram (the holy realm) stands in danger of rebellion from reason.

Kuliyaat, p. 388.
The Muslims are criticized for their inaction which is rooted in their idea of predestination/blind fatalism. Islam as a belief was actually meant for making the believers bold and fearless as had been demonstrated by the practical lives of the early Muslims:

Submission to God's will does not lead to a state of inaction but invests men with boundless energy as he deems himself to be the instrument of God's will and overcomes all kinds of fear and cowardice. It is men like that who change the course of history and bring new worlds to birth:

A believer derives his strength from determination and trust (in God)

If he lacks these two attributes he is a non-believer.
As he loses himself in God's will
The believer becomes the decree of God
A world with four dimensions and a blue firmament
Spring forth from his pure bosom.

Renunciation of the world is not the way of the believer:

オ ある者は、世界を捨てようとした者、止む

The true renunciation is to subjugate this ancient
temple.

To overcome it is to free oneself from it
And to transcend the station of water and clay.

To acquire worldly wealth for a lofty purpose is different
from worshipping wealth:

If wealth is acquired for purposes stipulated by
religion,

"How blessed is such a wealth!", says the prophet.
If you fail to perceive this wisdom
Then you are the slave and your master is gold and silver.

32
_Kuliyaat_, p. 397.

33
_Ibid.,_ p. 401.
According to Iqbal, the tragedy of the modern west is that instead of subjugating the world it has let itself be dominated by an insatiable gold-hunger:

Europe is unaware of this position; its eye does not see with the light of God; it does not distinguish between fair and unfair; its wisdom is raw, its deeds defective. One nation in Europe preys on another; one sows the crop, another reaps the harvest. Their wisdom is robbing the weak of their bread and extracting the life and soul from their bodies. Modern civilization is the rape of mankind; it tears mankind in the guise of trade and commerce. Unless this civilization is turned upside down science and culture and religion will remain unripe and fruitless.

Like wealth, knowledge and science have also become instruments of destruction in the hands of the materialistic West.

Kuliyat, pp. 401-2.
Materialism has debased knowledge in cities
and deserts

Gabriel has been converted into the Devil
The science of the Europeans has a naked
sword on its shoulder
And labours hard to annihilate mankind.

This secular and materialistic civilization has so mesmerized
the world that there is no hope of salvation unless the spell
is broken. In this Iqbal turns with hope to the 'spirit of
the East':

The spirit of the East ought to be infused in the
body of western civilization
So that it offers the key to the door of reality.

Notable among other poems of Iqbal which deal
specifically with the subject of revolution are his two
Urdu poems, Shikwah aur Jawah-i-Shikwah (Complaint and its

35 Kuliya, p. 410.

36 Ibid., p. 410.
Answer) and *Tulu-i-Islam* (The Rise of Islam). The former is an objective assessment of the ills that stand in the way of Islamic revival whereas the latter looks forward to the restoration of the East in the near future. Iqbal felt that the process of revolution in the world had started with Luther's movement in Germany and the French Revolution and will be completed with the rejuvenation of the Orient.

In *Masjid-i-Qurtabah* the poet sings:

Germany has experienced the tumult of Reformation which obliterated the vestiges of the past
And declared the innocence of the church-father
to be an error,
And set afloat the fragile boat of free thinking.
The French eye too has seen the Revolution which metamorphosed the Western world.
The Turks who are hoary with the worship of the past are also relishing the taste of rejuvenation.
The soul of the Muslim is again in ferment
It is a Divine secret which the tongue cannot unveil.

*Kulliyat*, pp. 391-2.
The new order dreamt of by Iqbal is to be born out of a combination of the West's scientific knowledge and the wholesome spiritual values of the East. This alone can restore the harmony and balance to life and save modern man from ruin. This thought is communicated through Saeed Halim Pasha in *Javid Namah*:

For the Westerner life's proper equipment is Reason while for the East the secret of the universe lies in love.

Reason knows truth through Love
While it strengthens the foundations of Love.
When Love and Reason embrace each other
A new world is born.
Arise and lay the foundations of a new world
By combining Love with Reason.

**Poetry as Prophecy**

In regard to the role of a poet in the process of revolution, Iqbal has himself exemplified it amply in his poetry, his theoretical statements about the function of
poetry and in his practical life. Defining the social role of poetry, he describes the poet variously as 'God's own pupil,' \[39\] 'the seeing eye,' \[40\] and 'the pulsating heart' \[41\] of a community. Goethe in the chapter on Mahomet in his *Noten und Abhandlungen* \[42\] contrasts the poet and the prophet. Both of them are inspired and enthused by one God, but whereas the poet trifles with his gift, enjoying it himself and making others enjoy it, the prophet fixes his eye on one single goal and makes people rally round it and produces a revolution. Iqbal, like Shelley, believes that the poet is a prophet and poetry is history-making prophecy:

\[
\text{خپر را تفویدم گر از گریست}
\]

\[
\text{شامی گرول یاسپوری ست}
\]

If poetry aims at remaking man
It too is an heir to prophecy.

\[39\] *Kuliyaat* (Urdu), p. 53.

\[40\] Ibid., p. 61.


\[42\] Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, pp. 59-60.

In spite of Iqbal's confession that he was a mere 'idealist' and 'visionary' and 'a crusader in words' who could never become 'a crusader in action', \(^44\) he tried to realize his ideals in actual life. He was associated for the whole of his life with Unjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore, and it was in its annual sessions that some of his best poems, like Nala-i-vatim, Taswir-i-Dard, Shikwah, Shama aur Shair, and Khiz-i-Rah, were recited for the first time.

During his stay in England he founded a quasi-political pan-Islamic association. \(^45\) After his return from Europe we find him constantly engaged in various social activities. He was associated with the Association of Kashmiri Muslims, All India Kashmir Committee, All India Muslim Conference and All India Muslim League. In 1926 he was elected a member of the Punjab Legislative Council. In 1931 he attended the Second Round Table Conference as a member of the Indian delegation. In the same year he attended a meeting of the World Muslim Congress. \(^46\)

\(^44\) See his Presidential Address to All India Muslim Conference, Lahore (1932); Also Kullyat (Urdu), p. 291.

\(^45\) Zinda Bud, I, 145.
agAAs he visited Afghanistan, at the invitation of the then Afghan government, with Sir Ross Masood and Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi. This tour inspired some of his finest poems including his persian mathnavi, "Musafir" which again deals with the subject of revolution. Speaking of the revolutionary nature of the Godman, the poet says:

God's true servant is an heir to the prophets; He cannot adjust himself to a world fashioned by others.

In order to create a new world He pulls down the fabric of the old.

In the fervent dynamism of his life as well as in the revolutionary, ardour of his work Iqbal is indeed a spiritual heir to the English Romantics.

45 Kuliyat, p. 418.