



The Impact of French Revolution on Romantic Poets

Dr. Mohammad Rizwan Sheikh

M.A.(English), M.Phil.,B.ed., Ph.D., Assistant Professor

ABSTRACT

The French Revolution was a series of violent political and social upheavals that rocked France between 1789 and 1799. It overthrew the French monarchy and installed a Consulate. The Revolution inaugurated the golden era for mankind in general. Its ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity remained as sources of inspiration for the European Liberals in the nineteenth century. The political thought of Rousseau remained the basis of political democrats of Europe. Rousseau's thought prefiguring the major trends, which were to converge in the Romantic Movement, he glorified nature, including human nature, favoured feeling and emotion as against reason and formalism.

KEYWORDS

Revolution, Monarchy, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Introduction:

The French Revolution brings out Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The Principle of equality as adumbrated during the French Revolution greatly inspired the people all over Europe. Mankind was thought as one brotherhood. Thus, equality became a cardinal principle of social and political thought. Liberty was another significant tenet of the French Revolution. The revolution itself was a revolt against the oppression of the feudal monarchy in France. The Bastille fortress, built during the fourteenth century, had become a dreaded symbol of oppression and exploitation. After the fall of Bastille, it's a rise of Wordsworth and Coleridge as the inaugural of a new dawn. The revolution have been seen an impact on romantic poet of the new era.

Aim and Objectives:

The Main Objective of the article is as follows.

- To know the impression on thinking of the romantic poet of the same era.
- To understand that the revolution inaugurated the golden era for mankind in general.

Hypothesis:

The romantic poets of the same age are profoundly influenced by the French Revolution.

Research Methodology Used:

The research is based on the secondary data collected through various resources like journals, books, and web sites.

Robert Burns and the French Revolution:

Robert Burns is usually hailed as a pre-romantic poet. Yet he lived during the Romantic period and as such he should be included among the Romantic poets. He was a strong supporter of political reforms in Scotland. In his political ideas he was inspired by the French Revolution. In 1792, as an excise-man, he took part in the capture of a smuggler's ship, and when its armament was put for auction he bid for and purchased four small cannons, which he sent as gift to the French people fighting against the repressive and authoritarian regime. He often attended gay evenings organized in Scotland by the supporters of the various campaigns for political reform where people delighted in proposing seditious toasts. A favourite toast of Burns was : " To the last verse of the last Chapter of the Book of Kings. "

W. Wordsworth and the French Revolution:

When the French Revolution occurred Wordsworth was only nineteen. He inhaled the invigorating air of the changed atmosphere and exclaimed:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven."

Wordsworth tended to regard the French Revolution as a matter of course. It seemed to him quite logical that a half-starved peasantry, oppressed and ill – treated for so many years by the aristocracy, should eventually stand up and overthrow those people that had crushed it so mercilessly.

Wordsworth's attachment to the French Revolution was not simply ideological; it was emotional as well. But the later events –the Terror and the rise of Napoleon was gagging the ideals for which the French Revolution stood. He was rudely shocked by these later events and he abandoned his revolutionary faith and sympathies. This led Browning to brand Wordsworth a turn-coat and an opportunist. But the fact remains that Wordsworth was, at that time, torn between two loyalties: his patriotic loyalty to Britain and his humanitarian loyalty to the rights of man. This confusion was treated by Wordsworth in his autobiographical poem, The Prelude in great details.

S.T.Coleridge and the French Revolution:

Coleridge was profoundly influenced by the French Revolution and the revolutionary enthusiasm of Wordsworth. When the Bastille was thrown open and the prisoners released to bask in the sunshine of freedom he wrote:

"Liberty the soul of life, shall reign
Shall throb in every pulse, shall flow thro' every vein."

Stopford A. Brooke remarks, "Almost all his best poetic work is co-incidental with the Revolution; afterwards everything is incomplete. The weakness of will was doubled by disease, and trebled by opium, and his poetic life, even his philosophic work, was a splendid failure." It was in the fitness of things that Coleridge should feel ashamed when England declared War on revolutionary leaders was even earlier than that of Wordsworth.

Byron and the French Revolution:

By the time the younger Romantics came on the scene the full significance of the French Revolution was lost to the people in general. Byron was only one year old when the French Revolution broke out. Naturally he could not have the revolutionary enthusiasm of Wordsworth. But being a true Romantic he was against all sorts of tyranny and oppression. He was deeply and abidingly influenced the revolutionary philosophy. Although the political fallout of the French Revolution was considered disastrous by Byron, yet he was impressed by its social ideas.

He was a scion of a noble family yet he was against privileges. He idolized the common man in his poetry.

P.B.Shelley and the French Revolution:

It was Shelley who was touched by the idealistic aspects of the French Revolution. His imagination was fired more by the abstract ideas than by political events. He could not tolerate any imperfection anywhere and naturally could not believe that there was any imperfection in human nature. To him all governments were tyrannical. To him the sound of the very word "king" smacked of evils; he said that the word 'king' has poison in it, is sperm of what makes life foul, cavernous and abhorred. "THOUGH Shelley was not born until three years after the event, says Ernie Troy, "had he been able to take his stand, though he hated 'the terror', it would have been with the Jacobins, who represented the lower-middle class, and the artisans. "

John Keats and the French Revolution:

The life-long creed of Keats was beauty and he proudly remarked that "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." There was never a more ardent lover of beauty than Keats had been. But this love of beauty led him to ignore the harsh realities of life. Most of the poets of the romantic era came under the impact of the French Revolution but Keats remained a great exception. Stopford Brooke, in this connection, remarks; "The ideas that awoke the youthful passions of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, that stirred the wrath of Scott, that worked like yeast on Byron and brought forth new matter, that Shelley reclothed and made into a prophecy of future – the excitement, the turmoil, the life and death struggle which gathered round the Revolution – were ignored and unrepresented by Keats.... In Keats the ideas of Revolution have disappeared. He has, in spite of a few passages and till quite the end of his career, no vital interest in the present, none in man as a whole, none in the political movement of human thought, none in the future of mankind, none in liberty, equality or fraternity, no interest in anything but beauty. "This led Brooke to conclude that Keats was a pure poet who was just not interested in anything else but beauty.

Conclusion:

Romanticism was an age in which a group of ideas, a web of beliefs and assumptions held sway. None of the Romantic poets fully expressed all of those ideas, but each believed in enough of them to set him apart from earlier writers. The age was highly emotional as well as imaginative. The Romantic poets acted through inspiration and intuition it is the main influence of French Revolution. And everyone therefore believed in democracy, humanity and possibility to achieve a better life. In this way, The French Revolution inaugurated the golden era for mankind in general.

The political thought of Rousseau remained the basis of political democrats of Europe. His famous saying, "Man is born free and he is everywhere in chains" came as a challenge to the old order. In this way, the revolution has been seen as an impact on romantic poet of the new era.

REFERENCES

- A.C.Bradley- Oxford Lectures on Poetry,Oxford, 1965. | • J.R. Caldwell, John Keats' Fancy, Cornell University Press, 1945. | • Bhabitosh Chatterjee, John Keats—His Mind and Work, Orient Longman, 1971. | • Robert Gittings, John Keats, The Living Year, Faber, 1923. | • J.M. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, Oxford,1963.