

Crisis of Modernity in ‘The Second Coming’ and ‘*AdbhutAndharEk*’ (A Strange Darkness)

Ali Akber

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Dhaka International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Keywords:

Darkness,
Spirituals mundi,
Exploitation,
Plunder,
Anarchy

Abstract: Both William Butler Yeats and Jibanananda Das experienced the British subjugation in their respective countries and were deeply concerned with the plague of the modern society. ‘The Second Coming’ is Yeats’ one of the greatest poems. Here he laments over the pathetic condition of modern people who ‘fall apart’, with systems collapsed and spiritually bareness for which he foresees the upcoming endless cruel danger in the form of sphinx rather than the hopeful second coming of the Jesus Christ. Whereas, Jibanananda Das envisions the polluted picture of the society of Bengal in his short poem ‘*AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)*’. Das’s portrayal of the society here is dominated by the evil people who are devoid of efficiency, morality, honesty and sympathy. The influential evil people of the society are treading down the good fellows. Thus, the society is in the eminent darkness where the evils rule supreme. Now in this paper, there will be an attempt to make a comparative study of ‘The Second Coming’ by William Butler Yeats and the poem ‘*AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)*’ by Jibanananda Das.

Both William Butler Yeats (13 June 1865–28 January 1939) and Jibanananda Das (17 February 1899 – 22 October 1954) were the prominent poets of modernism. They were the poets from two different countries. Yeats was an English poet of Irish nationality while Jibanananda was the Bengali poet. William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet, dramatist, and prose writer and one of the greatest English poets of the early modern age. Yeats was directly engaged in politics of Ireland and straggled for its independence. Though his endeavor of Irish independence got its success, he was highly pessimistic with his verses which encompass the political restlessness of whole Europe. He is identified as ‘the counterpart of the parallelism of American conservatism as in T S Eliot and Ezra Pound.’ Actually, Pound had immense influence on Yeats becoming more modern with his concision and imagery but Yeats never gave up his adherences to the traditional form of verses. He maintained a keen interest in mysticism throughout his life. With the maturing of his age, his poetic output also became richer (Bougler, 1967).

Yeats’ poem ‘The Second Coming’ is with the serious crisis of modernism. Here he deals with the severe anarchy and disorder prevalent in the modern European society on the verge of World War-I. Yeats is so cynical that he finds no way of solution in the near future rather he got vision a horrible consequence waiting for the modern people. On the other hand, Jibanananda Das is probably one of the most influential Bengali poets. He is considered one of the precursors, introducing modernist poetry to Bengali Literature. He was at a period which was influenced by the saturating romantic poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. Though his unfamiliar poetic diction, choice of words and thematic preferences slowly won the Bengali readers. Ultimately, it is after his demise, Jibanananda became the defining essence of 20th century Bengali poetry of modernism. Das’ poem ‘*AdbhutAndharEk (A*

Strange Darkness)’ also deals with the humanitarian problem which he symbolically expresses as a strange darkness prevalent in the modern society. To him the problem is created by the selfishness of the dishonest influential power mongers who override the innocent sages (Benerjee, 1986).

Thus, both the poems ‘The Second Coming’ and ‘*AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)*’ have thematic resemblances but Yeats and Das are from two different nations. They have different contexts and traditions. There will be ample scopes to have a comparative study between W. B. Yeats and Jibanananda Das with their respective poems. The objectives of the paper are to find out the vivid picture of European contemporary society as depicted in W. B. Yeats’ famous poem ‘The Second Coming’ in comparison with the exact nature of contemporary Bengali society as depicted in Jibanananda Das’ poem ‘*AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)*’. In this research there will be primary and secondary sources. W. B. Yeats poem ‘The Second Coming’ and Jibanananda Das’ poem ‘*AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)*’ are considered my primary sources and all criticisms, reviews, interviews, articles etc. regarding the poems are considered secondary sources.

In 1919 when Yeats was 44, wrote his visionary poem ‘The Second Coming’. This poem made him one of the most prominent contemporary cultural figures though he was already well-established as a poet, theatre director, politician and esoteric philosopher. Yeats claimed in a letter to his friend in 1936 that this poem is the prediction of the arrival of a rough beast in the form of Nazism and Fascism in Europe creating chaos and upheaval. Yeats himself experienced unprecedented slaughter in World War-I and the executions of several Irish Nationalists struggling for freedom, the severe upheaval caused by the Russian revolution. Thus, ‘The Second Coming’ became tapping into the zeitgeist.

The poem opens with a symbolic image of falcon flying away from its master. People were especially in the medieval period using falcons or hawks to track down animals at ground level. But here the image is cynical in that sense that the falcon has gotten itself lost by flying so far away that it is out of the control of its master. Thus, the image suggests the collapse of traditional social arrangements in Europe at the time. The tone marches towards more seriousness in the very second line where he openly hits that all is dispersed, no unity is prevalent rather the whole world is full of anarchy, "the ceremony of innocence is drowned." The good people are without confidence but the evils are with full forces. The lamentation of the speaker here reaches its peak. Finding no consolation, he envisioned a second coming but to our utter despair this second coming is not the second coming of Jesus Christ with the hope of emancipation rather he imagined a sphinx in the desert, the mythical animal engulfing the society as a whole. The speaker remains troubled though the vision ends "darkness drops again. The speaker is now in consciously confident that the reality of the horrible vision is on coming. He is determined that by the motions of “a rocking cradle,” the “stony sleep” of twenty centuries have been made a nightmare. Even there is no hope for the nation waiting for the emancipation from the Jesus’s secret land Bethlehem. Rather to our utter despair he is afraid that the very sphinx or the monstrous beast will emerge from the secret land in Bethlehem. Now he is prophesizing the second coming of Christ, to warn people in their attitudes which makes “The falcon cannot hear the falconer”. If the modern people do not change themselves and do not behave in a better way, then it will lead to the second coming of Christ which is almost near to the end of this chaotic and anarchic world that many people have lost themselves in terms of social, spiritual and religious aspects of life (Muhammad, 2015).

A^mZAvaii GK

A^mZAvaii GK GimtQ G- c_{ll} exfZAvR,
 hviv AU meipTiq tewkAvR tPrtLt` tL Zviv;
 hvf` i u` tq tKrtbv tclj tbB- c_{ll}Z tbB- Kia/vi Avtj vob tbB
 c_{ll} exAPj AvRZvt` imeivgk^Qovoi|
 hvf` i Mfxi Av`vAvtQAvtRvgtbj| i c_{ll}Z
 GLtbihv` i KvtQ `rfmeKejg tbnq

gnZmZ" evimZ, iKsemkí A_ emvabv
kKb l tkqtj iLv" AvRZt` iü` q(Das, 1954)

– Translation by Clinton B. Seely
(A Strange Darkness)

A strange darkness has come upon the world today.
They who are most blind now see,
Those whose hearts lack love, lack warmth, lack pity's stirrings,
Without their fine advice, the world today dare not make a move.

They who yet possess an abiding faith in man,
To whom still now high truths or age-old customs,
Or industry or austere effort all seem natural,
Their hearts are victuals for the vulture and the jackal (Seely, 1990)

The poem 'AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)' laments how the cruel and the heartless people have come to assume power, while the compassionate and the virtuous faces are prosecuted. Jibanananda Das, the most popular poet of Bengali literature, wrote about an eternal compilation of an experience of human beings. When the crisis of civilization is intense, this poem of Jibanananda Das has become relevant. In the practical life, the cosmic happiness is enjoyed, the concept of subtle human feelings is practiced. The efforts of establishing mastery have always been with enormous ambition, people have always been passionate and have lost their lives by submitting themselves to these ambitions. People have passed the limits of humanity to establish dominance over others. The rule of darkness came upon mankind in our beautifully sublime world. Going out of the light of a true-hearted love-day, we come to a strange darkness, in the era of exploitation, oppression and plunder.

This darkness has no knowledge of wisdom on earth, love has no power, the world is governed by heartless, loveless, ignorant, loathsome and selfish people. They are surrounded by flattery and flattering people who have made this darkness growing more by miss-interpretations. Those who practice truth, who practice honest art, who still believe in themselves and others, teach us to love, there is no respect, honor and dignity in the world for them. They have ever been crucified in the era. Sometimes Cruel humanity in disguise tears into their hearts. Thus, the poet Jibanananda Das wrote the untrue truths of poetry in the context of his own era. When civilization comes in crisis, mankind will lose the direction of his greatness - these footpaths of poetry will seem relevant.

Both the poems lament on the crisis of modernity with highly pessimistic tone finding no solution. W. B. Yeats talks over the anarchy prevalent before the beginning of the first world war. He takes the political setting of the Ireland subjugated by the British people but his subject and presentation have great appeal which is universal in tone. Whereas, Jibanananda Das is a Bangali poet who takes the setting of Indian subcontinent after Second World War. Das highlights here basically the political exploitations by the ruling ones. Here he shows that the honest and sympathetic people are not evaluated rather oppressed, suppressed and depressed but those who are cruel, hardhearted, corrupted are on the lead.

Yeats touches his poem with religious vigor of Christianity to heighten the least possibility of emancipation of mankind. He looks at future but envisioned with more hopelessness of ceaseless dangers. But Das presentation lacks mysticism rather it is with pure realistic touch with pure worldliness. He classifies mankind as the good and evil. His observation is that the world is not altogether rotten rather the good, sympathetic, aesthetic, sagacious or insightful people are still there but they are not in the lead rather are treaded down by the evil persons. The good are not rewarded but the evils though they are undeserving, captured all the power. He discovered that this is the cause for the endless misery of mankind. "Yeats noticed the Scientific, democratic, fact accumulating heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre and prepares not to the continuation of itself

but the revelation of as in a lightening flash of the civilization that must slowly take its place.”(Ceryo, 1995)

The basic problem of modern world detected by Yeats is anarchy caused by the misunderstanding of the world-leaders. No compromising attitude of them is evident. Again, the subjects or the citizens are not obedient. To him ‘the falcon’ or the citizens do not obey ‘the falconer’ or the ruler. The world is now out of order. The good deeds had less opportunity to be bloomed as the evils dominate the world. Thus, Yeats’ detected problems are from a broader canvas of the whole world while Jibanananda’s poem upholds the powerful evils which dominate the society forcefully. Here the general people of society are mostly good but they are not given any chance to scatter their goodness as the society is dominated by the selfish, cruel, unsympathetic and incompetent people. Thus, to Jibanananda the cause of darkness of mankind is simply artificially created by the dominating selfish evils but the common people is not altogether rotten. In this regard Das’ treatment seems to be limited in a social territory. The theme of which may be termed as ‘social injustice’. Whereas, Yeats’ observation is wide and encompasses the whole world at least the whole Europe. Yeats found the society rotten as a whole and the solution of which is impossible. The theme of which may be termed as ‘anarchy and disorder’.

The tone of Das presentation in this poem is of a rebellious hero who observes the social injustice in order to raise a movement against it. He upholds the causes of the problems prevalent in the society, the subsequent consequences of the victims and throws a fiery voice against the selfishly oppressive subjugation which needed to be extinguished.⁷ On the other hand, Yeats’ tone is of an old philosopher who is highly hopeless observing the problem of the modern world and he is so cynical observing the fact that he finds no possible solution to the emancipation. His cynicism goes so high that there is no possible hope of near future which he can dream rather the future seems to be more horrifically dangerous. The didactic nature of the speaker is evident as if he were adopting a religious voice to warn people to return towards their moral values and religious traditions otherwise it is sure to be engulfed as a whole. Thus, the visionary aspect of prophecy is evident in Yeats.

To clarify the nature of the problems, Das makes the successful use of images of ‘strange darkness’ and ‘blindness’. He heightens his critical tone to its peak using the bestial image of ‘vulture’ and ‘Jackal’ (Ceryo, 1995). These images suggest the nature of selfishness of the ruling agents in a very clear way. On the other hand, here Yeats also makes highly purposeful usages of several symbolic images. At the very outset, the collapse of the authority and society is symbolized by the ‘gyre’. The ‘falcon’ symbolically represents the people, the society or the age and the ‘falconer’ represents the core of the moral sense binding people together. Thus, the references to the ‘falcon’ and ‘falconer’ wonderfully visualize the highly disordered situation of the modern world which is hardly possible to be reordered. Again, the vision of ‘Sphinx’ as it is presented as ‘A shape with lion body and the head of a man.’ Its cruel sight is narrated as ‘A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,’. Thus, the narration immediately fills our mind with chilling horror. ‘Blood-dimmed tide’ is the representation of WW-I. Finally, ‘the rocking cradle’ that is a symbol of the cradle of Christ at the Bethlehem. This is how Yeats successfully upholds the untold present sufferings and impending dangers of the mankind. Thus, in using symbol Yeats seems to surpass Jibanananda Das.

Linguistically, Yeats and Das is highly distinctive in their respective poems. Both the poems are very short but Das’ poem is shorter containing only eight lines and in a single stanza form while Yeats’ poem is of twenty-two lines divided into two stanzas where first stanza contains eight lines and the second is with fourteen lines. Both the poems are in free rhymes but Das seems to be more melodic in nature. Whereas, Yeats poem is in the English tradition of Blank verse or free verse. There is serious missing of end rhyme and phonological rhythm. There are coincidental rhymes in two couplets, first in the opening couplet ‘gyre’ and ‘falconer’ and second in the middle of the second stanza “man” and “sun”. The nature of iambic pentameter is highly rough. Again, the meters are so loose and contain frequent exceptions. The stressed syllables predominate. Apart from this, the poem

is full of literary devices such as, alliterations, assonances, onomatopoeias, metaphors etc. The uses of hard and stressed words lessen the effect of lyricism and elevate the poem to the level of high modern tradition. The stylistic analysis of 'The Second Coming' composed by W.B. Yeats reveals the following stylistic significances at different levels of language organization. The phonological level, the lexical level, the syntactic level and lastly the semantic level can get the whole idea the above levels carry within. It is the collapse of the world by 'The Second Coming'. It could be another thing than the effect of the wars Yeats lived in; something personal in his life stimulated him to write such negative and bitter poem (Khader, 2016). On the other hand, in the poem 'AdbhutAndharEk (A Strange Darkness)' Jibanananda Das also follows the tradition which is found in the poems of modernity. The uses of harsh words lose our breathes but the movements are smoother than that of Yeats. The words are simpler and shorter which add more lyrical lilt than that of Yeats' 'The Second Coming.' Again, sometimes the second Coming is alleged of its obscurity of thematic presentation expressed by the linguistic devices. His uses of unusual symbolism make the poem difficult to understand easily by the average readers. In this regard, Das' language is more convincing as he uses the images from our surroundings.

Thus, the crisis of so-called modernity is suggested by the linguistic devices also. The anarchy of the modern world is successfully highlighted by the irregularity of the stanza patterns and the missing of both internal as well as end rhymes. The uses of hard and stressed words wondrously uphold the severity of modern crisis. We may terminate saying that as they are almost in the same era and deal with the common theme of modern crisis, they have great affinities in them. But they are from two distant countries and treat the subjects with different outlooks which establish their respective individualities. In the poem 'The Second Coming' Yeats is like a religious leader warning the people to come back to the religious values and morality otherwise humanity and orders of the world is bound to be destroyed as a whole. On the other hand, like romantic poets Shelly and Byron, Jibanananda Das is here as a rebellious hero criticizing the social leader whose selfish dominions cause endless misery to the common man. The termination of this injustice is demanded immediately. Linguistically, Das' poem is with more simplicity and lyricism. Again, Yeats' treatment of subjects surpasses the local issues of Ireland rather it is with the large canvas of the whole world where as Das' representation is somewhat local in nature. Thus, Yeats is in the modern era with modern tradition while Jibanananda Das is also in the modern era but seems to be with somewhat romantic tradition.

References

- Boulger, J. D. (1967). *Yeats and Irish Identity*. Thought, XLII, p185-213.
- Banerjee, D. (1986). *Jibanananda Das- Bikaash Protishthaar Itirbitta (tr: A chronicle of development and achievements of Jibanananda Das)*, Bharat Book Agency, Calcutta.
- Norton Anthology*, Third edition. W.W. Norton and Company. USA
- Shivraj, S. (2012) "A critical Study of W.B. Yeats 'The Second Coming'". *Review of Research*, 1(VII)/April; 12pp.1-4.
- Muhammed A. (2015). *An Interpretation of the Modern World Through W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1919) and T. S. Eliot's "Sweeney Erect" (1919)*, *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, 3(6), 142-145.
- Das, J. (1954). *Kavita (KaeZi)*. Kolkata, India.
- Seely, C. (1990). *A Poet Apart: A literary biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das*, University of Delaware Press, Newark.
- Cervo, N. (1995). *Yeats's "The Second Coming"*. *The Explicator*, 53:3, 161.
- Khader, T. D. (2016). *William Butler Yeats' "The Second Coming": A Stylistic Analysis*. *IUG Journal of Humanities Research*, 24(1), 52-25.