

Universal Appeal of *Kobor* Comparing to Western Elegies

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Abstract: The paper endeavors to comprehend the liberal humanism of literature in respect of time and place. Poets, whether eastern or western, being the emotional class, present the natural, simple and ordinary things in some extraordinary manners with their literary intellect, linguistic genius, and philosophic depth. In every language, there is mourning for the dead; especially presented by the poets in their elegies, the poems of lamentation. In fact, an elegy is not just a few lines with some mere mourning or lamentation for the dead; rather, it mirrors life of the common people. In this regard, elegies of all languages have a universal connection with each other. Considering all these, the present study reveals to set an attachment of Jasim Uddin's poem *Kobor* with *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* by Thomas Gray, *Lycidas* by John Milton and *Adonais* by P. B. Shelly. Both in the western elegies and in the Bengali poem *Kobor*, the eternal philosophy of arrival and departure of human being is vividly presented.

Introduction

In literature, elegy means a somber, forlorn or nostalgic poem, especially a funeral song or a lament for the dead. Elegy is not just a heartache expressed by five letters but an entire humanity encapsulated inside its meaning. It is obvious that through a funeral song, the poet mainly concentrates on the mourning for the dead, virtues of that dead person and ends up with a philosophic and aesthetic resignation. In this study it is widely discussed that no matter what the language is but the fact is applicable for all elegies in different languages such as English, Bengali etc. For example, Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, Shelly's *Adonais*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* in English and *Kobor* by Jasimuddin in Bengali. It is prominent that all of them brought their social issues along with the grief. Thomas Gray's poem *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* extols death, but not in any dramatically magnificent terms, neither in any overwhelming sentimentality. He talks of the church graveyard, where the ordinary mortals are buried. The setting is rural, pastoral, evoking the eternal tranquility. It is an exquisite mixture of the somber mood with the serenity. And

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now, if we put some light on Jasim Uddin's poem *Kobor*, through some of his composed lines, the rude rural picture would become dramatic to us. The speaker, here, not only mourned for the loss of his nearest and dearest ones but also depicted the early marriage and dowry system as the social issues of the rural Bangladesh. So, it is prominent that funeral poems are not only meant for lamentation, rather they also represent the society. This work reveals a comparative study among the presentations of Jasim Uddin in comparison with Thomas Gray, John Milton and P B Shelly to find out the emblematic liberal humanism and the universal qualities in Jasim Uddin's poem. Our main objective is to bring out the liberal humanism reflected in the works of these poets.

Literature Review

Thomas Gray's Poem *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, P.B.Shelly's *Adonais* and John Milton's *Lycidas* are considered the greatest masterpieces of English Literature. On the other side Jasimuddin's poem *Kobor (Graves)* is also considered one of his best works in Bangla Literature. Though there is a great deal of works on Gray's, Shelly's and Milton's elegies, there is little work on Jasimuddin's Poem *Kobor (Graves)* which is considered the greatest elegy in Bangla literature. Rehman (2012) and Shrestha (2014) showed great interest in Thomas Gray's elegy from different linguistic, literary, philosophical and stylistic perspectives which were really supportive for the study. Garvey (2013) also opined high about the phonology and aesthetics of diction in Gray's elegy. Hanford (1910) did a remarkable study on Milton's *Lycidas*. Heffernan (1984) tried to find out the elements of grief from *Adonais*. Limited articles workwas also done on Jasimuddin along with the translated version of *Kobor*. But there is scarcely any work previously done on the comparative study on the western elegies of Gray, Milton and Shelly with Jasimuddin's poem *Kobor*. So, this study may contribute to the arena of comparative literature.

Methodology

The current research has followed the secondary data analysisby collecting materials and organizing the main ideas while conducting the study. The study applied a comparative analysis along with conceptual analysis and used transliteration of Jasim Uddin's poem*Kobor*. Different literary articles, critical compositions and journals, and websites information are gathered for related study materials, in order to be acknowledged in the related topics.

Jasimuddin's*Kobor*: A Look into the Bucolic Society

Jasimuddin, the pastoral poet or '*Polli Kobi*' (rural poet) of Bangladesh is famous in illustrating the classical nature, beauty and life of the people of Bengal. His full name is Jasim Uddin Mollah. He was an eminent poet of Bangladesh. His poems were written in simple form. When he was a university student, he wrote the poem *Kobor (The Grave)*.Jasimuddin himself has said that the greatest experience of his life was village life. *Kobor* is one of greatest poems by Jasim Uddin. It is an elegy where an old village dweller is talking to his grandson about the dead people of his own family. This old man is the witness of so many deaths of his nearest and dearest ones. He lost his beloved wife, his son, daughter in law, daughter and his granddaughter. While mourning for them, at the same time throughout his description, the picture of the contemporary society becomes so much vivid to the readers. The old speaker Dadu starts his mourning for his adored wife who was very small at the age of her marriage. This is an important feature of the rural society of Bangladesh where the system of early marriage is prominent. Due to social and economic reasons, many village girls of this country had to go to their in-law's house during their childhood. They do not even understand the meaning of marriage, family, etc. Though they get married, they cannot avoid their childish attitude and thus they enjoy the age by playing. The speaker says:

*"Atotuku tare ghoreenecinu sonar motonmukh,
Putulerbiye venge gelo bole kendevasaitobuk."*

Then he talks about his son who was a farmer by profession. This old man's son died due to illness who did not get the minimum medical care. This death caused a great impact on his wife. The speaker stated the fact to the young boy that,

*"Tomarbaaperlangol-joal du hate jorayedhori,
Tomarmaye j kotoikaditosara din rat vori."*

Eventually the mother of this boy also died. Then the speaker moved his grief to his loving granddaughter. It is the age-old rural tradition that the villagers of Bangladesh, by getting their daughters married, surrender them (daughters), to some comparatively rich or well-off families without thinking of their (rich families) mentality that how they will deal with the daughters. Here, the speaker of the poem, the old grandfather, handed over his granddaughter to a famous family with the hope that she would be happy in her married life, but ironically her in-laws were found very rough and arrogant. They did not torture her physically but they tormented her by insult and harsh words as the old man narrates to his grandson: "*Hate tejodionamarito tare shoto j maritohote.*"

Thus, the mental retribution from the groom's house made this old man's granddaughter mentally ill, and ultimately, she died. Then he depicts the death of his loving daughter who died due to the poisonous bite of snake. All these unexpected deaths made this old man so tired and weak that he is now wishing to taste the death so that he can be reunited with his departed family members. As he is from the Muslim religion, his wish mingles with the religious touch:

*"Mojidhoite azan hankiseborosokoron sur,
Morjibonerr o j keyamatvabitecikotodur."*

So, we say, Jasim Uddin has mingled elegy within the pastoral life and society of the poor people of Bangladesh.

Melancholy in *Kobor* and *Adonais*

Adonais is a long poem with a subtitle of 'An Elegy on the Death of John Keats'. P. B. Shelley had invited Keats, a romantic poet to visit with him in Italy. Keats died of tuberculosis at an early period of his poetic career at the age of twenty-six. In relation to the conventions of the pastoral elegy, *Adonais* is the fictive name that Shelley gives to John Keats which means God or Lord in Hebrew. In Jasim Uddin's poem *Kobor*, Dadu also laments for the death of his five kinfolks depicting their good deeds and memories of different events with a cumbersome heart to his grandson, his only living companion. Shelley turns his grief from *Adonais* to 'we' who must survive on and "decay/ Like corpses in a charnel," and after a series of stanzas (39-49) in which he celebrates the better-off and fuller time that *Adonais* must now be experiencing, the poet turns out to be sentient that he is in Rome, itself a city rampant with visible accounts of failure and putrefy. Moreover, Keats lies in the Protestant cemetery where Shelley's three-year-old son is buried also; and yet, as if mocking all despondency, a "light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread." Nature does not despise death and decay, he sees; it is humans, who fright and hate in the midst of life,

"What Adonais is, why fear we to become?"

Here Shelly makes the most profound profession of faith in the everlasting and transcendent to be found in all English poetry. Death that is not the enemy and the source of human despair. "Follow where all is fled," he urges, and he goads his own heart into having the courage to face not extinction but "that Light whose smile kindles the Universe." This poem is one of Shelley's many inconsolable confessions of his melancholy and one of his most blatant death wishes. In the last three stanzas of the poem, Shelley turns to himself. He asks himself why he should want to cling to life any longer. His hopes are gone,

*"A light is pass'd from the revolving year,
And man, and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither."*

Likewise, Jasim Uddin's speaker Dadu is also waiting to join his relatives. In the same viewpoints, Shelly concludes by portraying a melancholic scene and imagining Adonais to be a part of "the white radiance of Eternity". Thus, both of the poets render the hard reality of death and meaninglessness of this worldly life showing the importance of eternity and spirituality. They both portray a melancholic scene inside readers' heart successfully.

Epigrammatic outlooks of *Lycidas* with *Kobor*

If we compare Jasim Uddin's most famous poem *Kobor* with Milton's *Lycidas*, the standard by which English elegies are inevitably judged we find that Jasim Uddin is no less than Milton. The most persuasive parts of *Kobor* are equal to the most eloquent parts of *Lycidas*. Jasim Uddin is concise in composing the 118 verses where Milton is also meaningful in his 193 lines. Milton's poem begins with the speaker lamenting the huge task before him (memorializing his friend), and then invoking the muses. Then, the speaker reminisces about how the speaker and a guy named Lycidas were shepherds together. Sadly, it turns out Lycidas is dead with these lines:

*"But O the heavy change now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn."*

In this regard, Jasim Uddin's *Kobor* starts the lamentation more promptly for the death of his wife with his grandson than that of Milton's mourning for his friend. Milton first gives an account of introduction of three stanzas then starts mourning for the death of his friend Edward King. But Jasim Uddin portrays a melancholic scene from the beginning of his poem of his wife who had died thirty years ago and whose grave has been getting wet with dadu's tears in these years.

*"Ai khane tor dadirkobordalim-gachertole
Tirish bocor vijayerekheci dui noyonerjole."*

The development of the two poems seems lucid and coherent. Though Shelley's consolation section could hardly have been very consoling to Keats' relatives and friends. Milton and Jasim Uddin believe in heaven where there is eternal peace. They both hold the themes of death, relation, sadness, man and the natural world. *Lycidas* was written partly as a tribute to Edward King, one of Milton's college friends, and so it celebrates their friendship idealistically.

In *Kobor*, Dadu mourns for his five soul mates of his family who left the world and Dadu, the protagonist of Jasim Uddin prays for them with a grief-stricken heart as if God bequeaths them the heaven. *Lycidas* is the best-known elegy of English literature and *Kobor* is the best elegy of Bengali literature. Thus, we detect some crucial similarities between Milton's elegy and Jasim Uddin's Elegy.

***Kobor* and Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: Low Mimetic Mode**

A frequent thematic pattern is one in which ordinary things are contemplated until they seem extraordinary. If high mimetic literature may be the thought of representing a displacement from the concepts that helped shape the literature of the romantic mode, then low mimetic literature may be the thought of representing a still further displacement. The low mimetic interests itself in the creativeness and wisdom of nature, and of human beings as a part of nature, both of these resembling the Creator Himself. Characteristically, in Low mimetic literature the author adopts the persona of one interested in the concerns of common people.

Kobor is such a Bengali thematic poem of Low mimetic mode with the theme of death. Here, the characters are much more ordinary. We find the protagonist Dadu in the poem with some excellent dramatic monologues and the only silent listener is his grandson. Both of them are the rural characters of poet's country. We find the picturesque of all the death scenes as Dadu has told to the

listener. We can comprehend and realize much about the sorrows of Dadu to have many deaths but he is still alive. They have come to the graveyard to pray for late souls and recall the memories when they were alive. This is the reality that everybody will die but this is the hard reality to see such deaths before eyes for Dadu. The poet has given a realistic representation of life in the poem and depicted the thoughts of common people with some bitter experience of life about death through the character of Dadu. So, we can consider *Kobor* as the poem of Low mimetic mode having an imperative theme of death.

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard is also a thematic poem of Low mimetic mode. This poem is about death also. Here, we find some vivid pictures of rural people's life. From the very beginning of the poem we get a picturesque of the closing of a day with the sound of ringing bell. With this picturesque we are also led to sadness. Gradually there prevails a grave silence all around. The only sounds that can be heard are the humming sound of beetles and the musical sound of inviting sleep of the bells fastened round the necks of sheep.

The imagery of the poem is vivid and highly suggestive. Gray carefully generates the setting of the poem in order to set the mood of mourning from the beginning. Then Gray describes the cause of bereavement. He refers to the forefathers who lived and died in a small village and now are buried at the churchyard. No one is burning the hearth fire for them anymore. No housewife is trying to take care of him after he gets home from work in the evenings. No little kids are yelling, when he gets back from work. No little kids climb up onto his lap for kisses that would make their siblings envy them.

*“For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.”*

Then he shows a possibility among those dead villagers that there might have a few persons who could have been a great poet or a great ruler if they were not poor. Gray sings for the unsung heroes, like the guys buried in the churchyard without monuments or 'trophies', and both the gems and the flowers are metaphors for people who do awesome stuff that doesn't get recognized

He describes the simple tombs raised at the graves and the raw verses engraved on them. Then he again passes on to generalization saying that all human hearts have the desire to be remembered after death. This inherent human desire explains the reasons of the speaker's same desire.

In the last few stanzas, the poet presents his own portrait and shows his melancholic mood with the hard reality of death as Dadu shows in *kobor*. The poet has given a vivid picture of reality and its rational manifestation with these lines:

*“One morn I missed him on the customed hill,
Along the heath and near his favourite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;”*

The poem ends with a three-stanza epitaph. The epitaph reminds that he was a melancholic scholar, very generous, honest and sympathetic in heart. The epitaph ends with his deep faith in God's mercy.

*“No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)
The bosom of his Father and his God.”*

Death is here depicted by the poet from the universal points of view. The poet shows the ordinary characters and thoughts of common people making it of extra-ordinary. Thus, this elegy becomes a thematic poem of Low mimetic mode.

Conclusion

Elegy is not only a poem where the poet expresses his woe for the dead. Rather elegy is the brief account of the contemporary society of the poet. Though the poet directly never reveals anything about his society but this is his style where he articulates both the mourning for the dead as well as the representation of his contemporary society. The rural poet of Bangladesh, Jasim Uddin portrayed a prominent picture of the disadvantaged and superstitious rural people of Bangladesh within the grief for the death of his nearest and dearest ones such as Shelly, Grey and Milton did in their elegies. So, it is obvious that elegy is not just a poem to mourn and pay homage for the dead; rather it is also an introduction of the poet's current society as well, no matter what ever might be the language. And, that makes the famous rural poet of Bangladesh, Jasim Uddin a successful Bengali marker to have a universal applaud in presentation of his poem. Through this, to sum up, we get into the point of universal appeal of literature.

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