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The General Will of Rousseau in P.B. Shelley's *To a Sky-Lark*

Sabindra Raj Bhandari, *PhD*

Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Corresponding Author: Sabindra Raj Bhandari; Email: bhandarisabindra@gmail.com
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Abstract

This article explores Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical concept of "the general will" in P. B. Shelley's poem "To a Sky-Lark". The concept of "the general will" is a stage of uniting oneself with the will of all while enjoying personal will at the same time. It is the consensus of the will of all, and remains as the only way to be free from the narrow tutelage of this world. It is the perfect and ideal stage with the celebration of harmony. Similarly, the poem "To a Sky-Lark" unveils and expounds the intensity of the skylark as the source of happiness and bliss that spreads the fragrance of natural freedom. Its melody and song have the power to unite the whole human being at one point in the singularity of happiness by discarding personal will and desires. Likewise, the poem radiates the genial ideals of democracy, harmony, and solidarity. Shelley's skylark and its melody weave the will of the whole humanity to liberate it from the constructed bondages and limitations. In this regard, the skylark becomes the emblem of "the general will" as projected by Rousseau. This study applies the paradigm of qualitative research and textual interpretation method with the theoretical lens of Rousseau's "the general will" to explore its ideations in the poem.

Keywords: Bliss, democratic spirit, freedom, natural state, personal will, will of all

Introduction

This article interprets Percy Bysshe Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark" from the theoretical perspective of "the general will" (Law, 2013, p.171) developed by philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Shelley, in the poem, projects skylark as the

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consensus of happiness and joy. The bird becomes the nexus of all worldly feelings, enriched with the democratic spirit and the will of all. The speaker of the poem sees how the enchanting music and song from skylark's domain can sweep out worldly pains and tribulations. One pulverizes the personal will and realizes worldly happiness by uniting with the whole. In the same way, Rousseau's philosophy of "the general will" consolidates all the personal will in a uniting point of a general will. This is the point of agreement where all different and variegated patterns of people's desires and will come into an integrated form. One starts to attach to others, creating a unifying whole. Thus, Shelley's poem enriches and enlarges Rousseau's philosophy of "the general will".

P. B. Shelley is a great romantic poet. Besides his many literary works, he is popular for his odes. The ode is "a lyrical poem which expresses exalted or enthusiastic emotion in respect of a theme which is dignified, and it does so in a metrical form which is as a rule complex or irregular" (Goodman, 2002, p. 173). "To a Sky-Lark" is a popular ode by Shelley as it beautifully expresses the ideas of liberty, happiness and liberation from human bondage to enjoy the bliss of the natural stage. The poem originated in a natural setting as described by Mary Shelly, P. B. Shelley's wife: "It was on a beautiful summer evening, while wandering among the lanes whose myrtle-hedges were the bowers of the fire-flies, that we heard the carolling of the skylark. . . ." (as cited in King-Hele, 1984, p. 227). It was the evening in 1820 near Leghorn. Natural phenomena incited him to compose this poem. As a result, the poem is free from any artificiality and hackneyed gross perceptions. It includes all the spirit of romantic ideals like "feelings, imagination, experience and yearning" (Gaarder, 1996, p. 346). In the combination of all romantic spirits, the poem has attracted the adulation of readers and critics from every age. To unveil these concepts, this article answers the following research questions:

1. What are the concepts of "the general will" that are consolidated in "To a Sky-Lark"?
2. How does the skylark become the emblem of liberty, happiness, and democratic spirit that Rousseau's "the general will"?

This study reveals how Shelley's poem "To a Sky-Lark" bears the spirit of freedom, liberation and "the general will" as projected by Rousseau.

Literature Review

The poem has been hailed in different arenas. Barcus (2003) takes the reference of great poet Wordsworth who praises Shelley as the poet of "greatest native powers in poetry of all the men of this age" (p, 2). Shelley has been praised

and adulated a lot because his works never fail to arouse the elicitation. Many critics have condensed their impressions of this poem. The great novelist Hardy muses on Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark":

The dust of the lark that Shelley heard,
And made immortal through times to be; -
Though it only lived like another bird,
And knew not its immortality. (as cited in King-Hele, 1984, p. 230)

These lines substantiate the strength of Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark". The real bird has been transformed in eternity with the power of imagination and yearning because Shelley wants to create an emblem for the whole of humanity. That's why, King-Hele (1984) regards this poem as the most famous among Shelley's poems. As its popularity is not limited for the time being, the poem always invites a new revisiting from a touch of novelty.

"To a Sky-Lark" bears its value even in the present-day world. Garrett (2013) shows the significance of this poem and views that the poem has attracted most poetry readers and anthologists of our time. It is because of the depth of reality of the world it holds. The gravity of the poem finds its intensity in the thoughts of critics like Peterfreund (2002). He clarifies:

The skylark, like the figure of the eagle in *Adonais*, and like the eagle-like Jesus and Socrates in *The Triumph*, represents an idealized liminality, under the terms of which language and the language-using poet return to a close proximity with the informing Power responsible for poetry's music and emotional force, yet maintain the status of discrete utterance and retain that music and emotional force. (p. 272)

Peterfreund's comments highlight the diversity of Shelly's "To a Sky-Lark". The skylark resembles the eagle-like figure that represents victory and the flight from the earthly parameters and limitations. The poem, in this aspect, expresses "the idealism of poet and the human longing for a happiness which will endure making the poem perennially interesting" (Goodman, 2002, p. 179). If the idealism expressed in the poem determines and even stands for human happiness, then there must be meeting points between Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark" and Rousseau's concept of "the general will" postulated in *The Social Contract*. Even though the poem encompasses the real ideations of Rousseau's philosophy of "the general will", no study has explored the connection between Rousseau and Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark". That's why, this study proves its significance by examining how the beautiful poem expressed the reality of practical philosophy that deals with the politics of the world.

“To a Sky-Lark” by Shelley expresses Rousseau’s political philosophy of “the general will”. Shelley and Rousseau both expose that ultimate joy and bliss in the freedom of the natural stage is not fixed by the parameters of social bondages. The bird stands as an emblem for “the general will” at which point personal wills are represented in their total forms. The happiness of others becomes the source of one’s happiness. This is the point to bringing harmony and integration in society and worldly life.

Methods and Procedures

This article provides a new interpretation and perception by relating Shelley’s poem to the political philosophy of Rousseau. That’s why, it implements the qualitative approach and interpretive paradigm. Flick (2021) views that this is the time of pluralization of world views. The qualitative approach can only expose the relations between the different perceptions. That’s why, the time has come to explore and interpret new obscurity, prioritizing the new subject matter. In this regard, the quest of “the general will” in “To a Sky-Lark” bears its justification. The paper similarly applies the interpretive paradigm to unmask the democratic ideals of “the general will” in Shelley’s poem because according to Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015) varied interpretation is the essence of the interpretive paradigm and it relies on the belief that reality finds its value in the subjective perceptions and their interpretations. After the application of this paradigm, a new world view has been constructed by perceiving that the poem also expresses reality by scintillating the aesthetic pleasure as well. The present paper interprets only seven stanzas from Shelley’s poem “To a Sky-Lark” and they have been selected with the method of purposive sampling. Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015) opine that this sampling method only includes the related aspects while excluding the others. Out of twenty stanzas, only stanzas like one, six, seven, fifteen, eighteen, seventeen, and twenty-one have been considered from the poem to expound on the theme of the “the general will”. The theoretical and supporting concepts of “the general will” have been derived from secondary sources like book reviews and related criticisms to establish the arguments and warrants.

The power of freedom and liberty plays a pivotal role in Rousseau’s philosophy. His great political work *The Social Contract* opens with a view of the democratic spirit that humans should enjoy the situation human beings are facing. The book opens, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One man thinks himself the master of the others, but remains more of a slave than they are” (as cited in Russell, 2013, p. 632). This view consolidates that when human beings emerge from the natural to the social stage, they have to depend on each other because humans cannot fulfill their needs solely at this stage. This is an unavoidable pattern,

but this level of dependency fosters inequality and gives the signals of conflict and instability as well. So, people have to establish an authority with a mutual agreement among them that may establish peace and security. This is the basic need for the formation of political institutions, Rousseau(2013) says, “which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before” (as cited in Law, 2013, p. 169). He recommends the construction of an association that reflects the common voice of the members who are associated with it. However, this institution of mutual agreement grounds inequality with the force of power and law because the mutual agreement favours the people who possess wealth, power, and intellectual capacity as well. It leads to the situation of exploitation of the powerless. This is the point where he formulates the philosophy of “the general will” that outlines freedom for all.

The discussion leads to the point that differentiates “the general will” from “the will of all”. Then what is the basic difference between “the general will” and “the will of all”? Rousseau (2020) substantiates this in his *The Social Contract* as he says:

There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will. The later looks only to the common interests, the former considers private interest and is only a sum of private wills. But take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and the remaining sum of the differences is the general will. (as cited in Grayling, 2020, p. 254).

The above passage clarifies that the will of all just considers the personal will and cannot encompass the will of the whole. On the other hand, in “the general will,” one finds the expression of the totality where the personal will is expressed.

The differences between the two can be elucidated with a good example. Law (2013) describes the difference between “the will of all” and “the general will” giving a very beautiful example. He explains:

Suppose individuals would like to pay as little tax as possible. Paying zero tax is what every individual would prefer. This is the will of all. However, a zero rate of taxation would be catastrophic for the state as a whole because public services would cease to function. So a zero tax rate, while the will of all, is not the general will. The general will is for whatever rate of tax is best for society as a whole. (p. 171)

Thus, “the general will” activates for the best interest of society. It is a meeting point for the collective interests of the people of a society. A legitimate state operates “the general will”, and to enjoy freedom is to obey the spirit of “the general will”. In Rousseau’s (2013) words, it is a stage of being “forced to be free” (as cited in Russell, 2013, p. 633). By saying so, he contrasts two dimensions of freedom that human enjoys “in the state of nature—‘natural freedom’—with the kind one enjoys in a legitimate state – ‘civil freedom’” (Grayling, 2020, p. 254). This is the essential point of Rousseau’s philosophy of “the general will”.

Rousseau’s philosophy of freedom also attracts further discussion on two aspects of liberty namely negative liberty and positive liberty. Law (2013) justifies the dichotomy between these two poles of liberty:

Negative liberty is the “freedom to pursue your own desires without external hindrance---no one prevents you from doing what you want or forces you to do something else. *Positive liberty* is when you are able to recognize and lead the kind of life that you ought to live—one that a rational person would choose to live” (p. 174).

The above discussed concepts radiate that the enjoyers of negative liberty resemble those who are only concerned with fulfilling their desires and appetites. On the other hand, true liberty, for Rousseau (2013), “is a kind of positive liberty—the kind of civil liberty we gain when we allow ourselves to be governed not by our individual wills, but by the *general will*” (as cited in Law, 2013, p. 174). This recurs the theme that while enjoying our own liberty, we should concern about the liberty of others. In a broader sense, one should think that seeing other in oneself is the best way of enjoying the true spirit of freedom because this world is the dwelling place of not only for the human beings, but also for all creatures. All these ideations of freedom and liberty are better exposed and expounded in P. B. Shelley’s poem “To a Sky-Lark.”

Results and Discussion

The forthcoming sections unveil Rousseau’s philosophy of “the general will” in P.B Shelley’s poem “to a Sky-Lark”.

Shelley’s Skylark: An Epitome of Rousseau’s Natural Freedom

Shelley (1986) opens his poem by posing a skylark as his messenger that could awaken the world from its normality. That’s why, in the first stanza of the poem, he apostrophizes the bird as “Hail to thee, blithe Spirit” (To a Sky-Lark, p.732). It signifies the bird is the source of maximum joy and bliss because it was a “Bird that never wert” (To a Sky-Lark, stanza1; p. 732). It must have been from

heaven or near to heaven. It does not simply sing, but pours its enchanting melody “In profuse strains of unpremeditated art” (To a Sky-Lark, stanza1; p. 732). He supposes the bird as a meeting point for human beings to find the perfect source of joy and happiness. If they assimilate within it, they can find peace and security. From the very beginning, the speaker epitomizes the bird as the point of consensus where the consciousness and will of the people merge. It is the idea that finds its perfect blend in the concept of “the general will” postulated by Rousseau. By delimiting the power of the will of all, we enjoy the freedom. In this stage, as Rousseau(2013) says, “we are forced to be free” (as cited in Russell, 2013, p. 633), which is a metaphysical stage. The speaker of the poem suggests that we go beyond the realm of common rationality when the mess of mere thinking vanishes and the human becomes natural. The concept of “the general will” clarifies that by enjoying “civil freedom” (Grayling, 2020, p. 254), one can be in full swing to perceive “the natural freedom” (Grayling, 2020, p. 254). In this regard, Shelley’s “To a Sky-Lark” encompasses the common voice of human beings who, though living in the institutionalized state, can realize the happiness and joy of the natural stage. Rousseau (2013) in his “Discourse on Inequality”(Rousseau, 2013) holds the belief that “Man is naturally good, and only by the institution is he made bad” (as cited in Russell, 2013, pp. 625-26). The bird skylark, being the “Blithe Spirit”(Shelley “To a Sky-Lark”, 1986, stanza1; p. 732), becomes the essence of the natural stage of human beings.

The structure of the first stanza is so intricately woven to expound this theme. King-Hele (1984) describes, “The four short lines match the quick wing-beats of the lark’s hectic climb, and the long final Alexandrine represents its easier descent” (p.228). Thus, the skylark transfers the celestial glory to the terrestrial world because “That from Heaven, or near it, Pourest thy full heart” (Shelley “To a Sky-Lark”, stanza 1;1986, p. 732). It is an angel or Messiah to liberate the world with its message to uplift the human condition. So the speaker hails the bird with enormous joy as the epitome of “the general will”.

The idea of the “general will” becomes much more intense when the speaker visualizes the skylark in a quite different situation than that of a human being living in this world. Since we are in the bondages of chains, the skylark breaks them and enjoys the natural freedom in the state of nature. For the poet, writes Goodman (2002), “it is the hope that he will be heard ultimately. And he feels that he may achieve this sooner, if he can capture the skylark’s fine, careless rapture” (p.179). In this sense, the poet disregards the will of all and feels that the rapture of the skylark could provide serenity to the human being as “the general will” of Rousseau. In the sixth stanza, Shelley (1986) mentions:

All the earth and air

With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud

The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflow'd. ("To a Sky-Lark", p.733)

The speaker relates the joy of the skylark with the natural world. The entire atmosphere of the world is rejuvenated with "thy voice" and music. The song is mesmerizing that "Heaven is overflow'd", and how can the earth escape from it? Such encompassing voice, the source of liberty and freedom, is there to bridge the diverse will of the humans living here on the earth. One transcends the thought as it halts in this stage because one becomes a natural human. Rousseau (1961) also justifies, "I venture to declare that a state of reflection is contrary to nature; and a thinking man ('an intellectual', as we would now say) is a depraved animal" (as cited in Durant, 1961, p. 260). It radiates the point that to debunk the bondage of institutional tutelage, one needs to be free from it and merge in the ponderous glory of the natural state where will of all becomes one and then becomes "the general will". At this crucial juncture, Shelly's skylark becomes the paragon of "the general will".

For Shelley, the skylark categorizes heartstring pattern because its song becomes a soul of joy and bliss. Its natural beats become the lyre where different polarities of vibrations go beyond the phenomenal domain and synthesize with each other giving a unified melodious tune. This is also the ideations of Rousseau's "the general will". The negative liberty that seeks one's benefits transforms into positive liberty where one sees the other in the self. When one realizes the other, the rays of positive coexistence shine with all their intensity. Shelley (1986) glorifies the skylark in the seventh stanza:

What thou art we know not;

What is most like thee?

From rainbow clouds there flow not

Drops so bright to see

As from thy presence showers a rain of melody. ("To a Sky-Lark", stanza7; p. 733)

The skylark goes beyond the earthly parameters. That's why, the poet, as in the opening line, repeats that we earthly beings are not familiar with the identity of the kind of the skylark. It is far, but its affinity is with us. It is not perceived, yet

it is felt. It is the source of ultimate bliss because of this metaphysical quality as described by Tzu (1988), regarding the essence of Tao, “Its rising is not bright; Its setting is not dark” (p.14). This totality of the skylark illumines the human beings to realize their common interest by discarding their private interest. To justify this point, King-Hele (1984) views, “We are given another taste of inter-sense imagery here and in some of the answers to the question. . . Shelley saw thought as a glorious illumination breaking our all-too-common mental torpor” (p. 229). Only the humanly thought provocation cannot realize this point. To assimilate in the natural freedom, one must not be enslaved by gross passions; rather, as opined by Rousseau (2013), “Our natural feelings . . . lead us to serve the common interest, while our reason urges selfishness. We have therefore only to follow feeling rather than reason to be virtuous” (as cited in Russell, 2013, p. 632). To be virtuous is not to be an ignoramus about the skylark because from “thy presence showers a rain of melody (“To a Sky-Lark”, stanza 7; p.733). This melody is the melody to make us virtuous. It has a great symbolic implication.

The Skylark as a Harbinger of Peace and Joy

Shelley, in his poem, sees the skylark as the source of joy and liberty. To expose happiness of the skylark, he contrasts it with the condition of humans in this mundane world. Exactly like Rousseau, Shelley also focuses the anxiety and tribulations of this human-made world and its culture. Rousseau (1961) argued that “culture is much more of an evil than a good” (cited in Durant, 1961, p. 260). For him, the delimitation of the rapid growth of intellect and reason simply makes human clever and mischievous. So, feelings and even instincts remain reliable for him. This is the point where Shelley merges his ideas with Rousseau. His entire odes including “To a Sky-Lark”, meditate on the power of feeling, emotions that lead him to an affinity with pantheism. The fifteenth stanza exposes this profundity:

What objects are the fountains

Of thy happy strain?

What fields, or waves, or mountains?

What shapes of sky or plain?

What love of thine own kind? What ignorance of pain? (“To a Sky-Lark”, p.734)

These series of queries expose the dichotomy between the world of the skylark and this world where civil rules and norms dominate. These questions muse on the different kinds of the joy of the skylark while analyzing the human condition. The poet is projecting that the bird is from the other realm which has its “happy strain”.

It is the domain of “love of thine own kind,” the showering of joy and glory and freedom from tribulations, fear, “ignorance of pain”, and decay. Shelley disfavors the dominance of hard intellect and the bondage of this civic society. That’s why, he wrote *Necessity of Atheism*. As a result, he was expelled from Oxford and even his country. Doesn’t this strength of rebellion express the true intensity of Rousseau’s claim that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (as cited in Russell, 2013, p 532)? This is the reason they both want to materialize the power from the natural world that must become the harbinger of happiness and liberty.

The dichotomy between the joy of the natural world and this mundane world finds its crux in the poem when Shelley expresses the bitter reality and the profound truth of this world. MacEachen (1996) elucidates that Shelley believes in two lines of truth. The first one is an attempt to fix his satisfaction by writing about nature and her patterns. This is a relative one. The second one is quite important as he wants to find the secret of the skylark’s happiness. That secrecy of the skylark’s happiness becomes the common source of happiness for humankind. This is another important point where he speaks about Rousseau’s philosophy of individual will and “the general will”. If Shelley wants to disseminate Skylark’s happiness to the whole world, then it is the form of “the general will” that he sees in the form of nature. He analyses the condition of humans in the eighteenth stanza by contrasting it with the happiness of the skylark expressed in the fifteenth stanza. Shelley (1986) says:

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. (“To a Sky-Lark”, stanza 18, p.734)

This stanza provides the striking reality of the world. Looking “before and after” is the stage of analyzing the past and anticipating the future. Even the part of the joy that is “our sincerest laughter” encompasses the pain unlike the joy of the skylark that is beyond expression. The unsurpassable joy, love and happiness of the skylark come face to face with the situation of dilemma and paradox that dominates the entirety of our world. The last line of the stanza paradoxically expounds the reality. The sweetest songs of human beings always bear tragic thoughts because life itself is tragic and full of pain, vicissitudes, and ups and downs. Describing the intensity of the above stanza, Peterfreund (2002) writes, “The very sapience that languages human song consigns that song not only to temporality and materiality but also

meaning and individuation. To “look before and after” is to realize one’s distance from future and past by reason not only of mortality but of personhood as well” (p. 274). We cling in between the materiality and temporality, and the distance and diverse duality between the past and future. So, we let pains, tribulations, and impermanency rule here in human made society.

The poet always rules and builds the array of the worlds. They have their creations which always surpasses the materiality of the world. That’s why; Shelley (1986) in his “A Defence of Poetry” says, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (p.792). It signifies that poets create the truth of that wave the path for the morality of the world. They too bear strange power to prescience the reality of the world. In this regard, Shelley claims that poets are equally responsible to drive society as the philosophers and great politicians like Rousseau and others. Like philosophers, poets too envision and nurture the world throughout the multiple crossroads of the time. When we just see the contrast between the fifteenth and eighteenth stanza, it is not hard for us to realize that like Rousseau, Shelley too holds the belief in divisions. They have the meeting poet regarding the diverging patterns of natural freedom and civil freedom as well as individual will and “the general will”. Still, Shelley has to be acknowledged, regarding the other aspects. Abrams (1986) gives a foundational comment on Shelley’s philosophy about the world and above. He says, “Shelley found congenial the Platonic division of the cosmos into two worlds—the ordinary world of change, mortality, civil, and suffering, and the criterion world of perfect and eternal Forms, of which the world of sense-experience is only a distant and illusionary reflection” (p. 663). These divisions find the real essence when we just heed the seventeenth stanza of Shelley’s “To a Sky-Lark”:

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream? (p. 734)

The differentiation between the mortal world and the world beyond it justifies Abram’s comment about Shelley. Tarnas (2000) opines that the ideas are real for Plato because “it is crucial to the Platonic understanding that Forms are primary, while the visible objects of conventional reality are their direct derivatives” (p. 6). In the above stanza, Shelley makes the point that the world of the skylark is beyond the realm of mortal world. That’s why, its music can be compared to a singular consciousness that can give a release from the bondage of mundane concern.

Then what does the poet want from the skylark? This is the most crucial aspect of the poem. No doubt, the poet wants to form a knot of total consciousness or singularity in the message delivered by skylark. That message would perfectly tie up the whole world into a point. The personal will and ego sweep away and one realizes the other's role in the totality of existence. That small bird will answer the most complex question that has deluded humanity. King-Hele (1984) rightly judges, "The lark has no reviewers, slanderers or creditors to trouble him, and we heed his song" (p. 229). At the crux of the optimism and joyful stage the poet requests the bird in the final stanza of the poem:

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow

The world should listen then, as I am listening now. ("To a Sky Lark", p. 735)

Shelley wants the skylark to teach only the "half the gladness" that has been enjoyed by the bird because it is a "blithe spirit." He projects that in that gladness all the world would find happiness disregarding personal will and accepting "the general will". It is the stage of positive liberty as projected by Rousseau. Only the perceptions of "harmonious madness" produce the rhythm of natural freedom. In the rhythmic beats of natural freedom, "to sing like the skylark involves relinquishing human identity and the language in which it is expressed. To learn 'half the gladness' reposing in the skylark's 'brain' is to relinquish the order of the human brain and thereby to create a poetry that is nothing other than 'harmonious madness'" (Peterfreund, 2002, p. 274). In this way, the skylark has become the metaphor for the exemplification of Rousseau's "the general will", where personal desires are eliminated and the collective will, desires, and actions give rise to a collaborative dance for the whole humanity.

Profound knowledge sheds its radiance when two different patterns merge. This study merges the political theory of Rousseau with Shelley's poem "To a Sky-Lark". Booth et al. (2016) highlight that additional implication in concluding part is an equally important aspect of research paper. Sometimes, philosophical catchphrases and ideas prove to be abstract and complex, making them inaccessible to the general public. When the abstraction and complexity of philosophy find a better exemplification with a simplified interpretation, everyone will be benefitted from the foundational aspect of knowledge. In this aspect, this paper gears up to view everything critically with a new perception. It better justifies that truth is one;

only the manifestations are different as expressed in Rig Veda (1.64.46) which says, “Truth is one, the wise call it by many names” (as cited in Goldberg, 2010, p.10) In essence, Rousseau philosophizes Shelley’s spirit of happiness in some natural stages while Shelley romanticizes Rousseau’s “the general will” with aesthetic pleasure. Thus, philosophical complexity can be revisited with a symbolic interpretation as the bird skylark in Shelley’s poem remains an emblem of Rousseau’s “the general will”.

All these interpretations and dynamics enhance the development of a prescience to interpret and reinterpret diverse subject matters so that they can be bridged. This can lead to harmony where the symphony of knowledge and wisdom flowers ceaselessly.

Conclusion

Shelley’s “To a Sky-Lark” expounds Rousseau’s philosophy of “the general will.”The poem consolidates the idea that skylark epitomizes the source of happiness and it remains beyond the tribulations and pains of earthly pros and cons. It is the spirit of joy and bliss, and the music that it pours from its world enlivens the message to sweep the misunderstandings of the world. “The general will”, as a mutual understanding, incorporates the personal will as well. The song of the bird becomes the meeting point for all the diverse desires that run in our world. When we set aside our desires and wishes for the happiness of others, we respect the general point of happiness. The impact of positive liberty shines in at that crux of realization. Besides, it is another way of enjoying natural freedom. This culmination of Rousseau’s philosophy sincerely finds its expansion in the intensive pattern of Shelley’s poem. The skylark carries the natural agenda that can uplift the human condition that has been routed with the mess of human-constructed institutions. The music and song of the skylark, with its angelic and genuine vibes of nature, can break the chain and bondage that liberates humans from institutionalized and hackneyed situations. The skylark becomes the messiah who opens the gateway to beatitudes. Since the core pattern of “the general will” radiates the collaborative dance, Shelley in his poem expects half of the gladness of the skylark that would invigorate the harmonious beats of a song. That would be the stage where all could enjoy collaborative and cooperative dance by merging the personal will into “the general will” with the genial spirit of democracy. Shelley’s poems demands further interpretations from other political philosophers like Montesquieu, Voltaire, and John Locke.

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