



Revisiting the Luminary: Nazrul Islam's Enduring Legacy in Bengali Literature

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Abstract: *Kazi Nazrul Islam is a prolific writer who maintains his status as a “Rebel poet” in both Bangla and international literature. He was a Muslim author, singer, and poet who encouraged Indians to struggle against British colonialism through his poems. This serves as evidence of Nazrul’s radical views against oppression. In an effort to quell the rebellious movements, he got various works of literature banned by the British government. His well-known essay against Britain, Bidrohi, catapulted him into the public consciousness right away. Nazrul’s poetry had a pivotal effect in uniting the oppressed and giving them a strong sense of nationalism throughout the period of insurrection and political instability. He abandoned British and joined Swadeshi. He has written a number of songs that young people might sing to inspire a deep sense of patriotism and nationalism. His writings were strongly opposed to exploitation, communalism, imperialism, colonialism, fundamentalism, and foreign rule. The British authorities ordered him to stop writing and imprisoned him. Nazrul voiced his opposition to the persecution by going on a forty-day hunger strike and writing the Rajbandir jibanbondi. His works were replete with revolutionary ideas that inspired the spirit of independence in even the most marginalized groups of people. The British authorities became wary of Nazrul as a result. This essay attempts to comprehend some of Kazi Nazrul Islam’s most well-known poetry, songs, essays, and anthologies among his furious works.*

Keywords: *Poetry, Literature, Song, Anthology, Colonialism, Rebellion.*

The poet Kazi Nazrul Islam is regarded as Bangladesh’s national poet. The essence and aesthetic of Bangla literature and music have undergone dramatic transformation because to him. Nazrul was a poet and musician who lived in the 19th century. He eventually rose to prominence as Bangladesh’s national poet and transformed Bangla literature and music. Because of his anti-British writing, he was sent in prison. He contributed a great deal of poetry and articles to the fight against the British. He wrote against the brutality, exploitation, injustice, and oppression that were practiced throughout India. Because he cared about the workers and farmers who lacked land, Kazi Nazrul Islam used his writing to combat social injustice. The Russian socialist revolution of 1917 had an impact on him in this regard. The author Kazi Nazrul Islam is well-known for his works, including Bidrohi (The Rebel). Since this poem was initially published in 1921, Kazi Nazrul Islam has gained a formidable reputation. He wrote numerous more revolutionary poems, songs, and short tales after writing his poem Bidrohi. As a result, the poems, songs, and anthologies of Kazi Nazrul Islam are the most crucial and noteworthy compilations to examine his strong literary works in Bangla literature.

Poetry is an attempt to portray human emotion and present its inclination to the ethereal realm. In line with Words Worth, “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, where emotions recollect its tranquillity”.¹ In the context of Kazi Nazrul Islam, these statements are incredibly appropriate. His well-known revolutionary poems demonstrate his extraordinary qualities. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bengal, was a man with unquestionably iconoclastic views in addition to being a poet who inspired youth and the general public to resist injustice. Brooks Cleanth contended,

Poetry is a unique kind of experience, which can never be capture in the kind of discursive description which constitutes a heresy of paraphrase. Poetry is redemptive, in that it returns to us a more refractory original world, an ontologically distinct experience which offers a simulacrum of experiential fullness in the world outside of the text.²

Brooks’s clever remarks delve into the remarkable qualities of Kazi Nazrul Islam. His poetry is the fundamental source of his impulsive disobedience. His unwavering beliefs in nationalism and patriotism rendered him redeemable, leading him back to the triumph of mankind and the establishment of justice. Outside of his writings, he has shown himself to be a unique individual who

¹ J.S. Mill, „Thought on Poetry and its Varieties“, in Dissertations and Discussion, Politics, Philosophy and History, London: J.W Parker and son, 1859, p.5.

² Brooks, Cleanth. “The Well Wrought Urn”. Leitch 1353-1366, p.22.



embodies a rebellious spirit. According to Mill, “fiction also, if it is good for anything, is truth; but they are different truths.” Poetry, on the other hand, is true when it is truly true. Poetry’s fundamental purpose is to portray the human soul, whereas fiction’s true purpose is to depict life as it truly is. It is also relevant to Kazi Nazrul Islam’s literary works through Mill’s comments. Through his amazing poems about love, poverty, revolt, women’s rights, etc., Kabi Nazrul conveyed the reality of life. He has painted an accurate picture of society and worked to improve both society and the globe at large.

In Bangla literature, Kazi Nazrul Islam is recognized as a pioneering rebel poet. The majority of his written works center with revolution. He has advocated for the current wave of intense literary works. The people dubbed him “Rebel poet” for his revolutionary poems and patriotic activism. He was also referred to as Bidrohi Kabi (Rebel Poet) because he was Bengali. Kabi Nazrul made a name for himself in Bengali literature as a poet of rage against all forms of injustice, oppression, and exploitation meted out to the helpless Bengalis in India. Nazrul was a man of revolution who harbored a deep animosity for the British Raj’s establishment in India. Through his poetry, notably Bidrohi, Bhargar Gaan, and the well-known Dhumketu, he demonstrated his unwavering effort to criticize the Indian government of the British Empire. His goal was to release his nation from British colonial rule. In order to achieve his objective, he had to do acts of patriotism and revolution, which meant overcoming obstacles that resulted in his repeated incarceration by British authorities. He continued to write his ferocious works even after serving time in prison. Rajbandir Jabanbandi is his writing. His revolutionary writings elevated him to the status of a man of truth as well as a liberation fighter, as he worked to rid the oppressed and subaltern population of the delusion of British control.

The publication of Kazi Nazrul Islam’s prose work, Baundler Atmakahini, in May 1919 marked the beginning of his literary endeavors. In July of the same year, Nazrul completed and had his second poem, Mukti, published in Mussalman Sahitya Patrica. With the release of “Bidrohi” in 1922, this poem became his most well-known and enduring work of rebel poetry. One of the best poems in Bengali language, Bidrohi focused on the unifying theme of revolution. During Nazrul’s era, an unstoppable revolt against all forms of oppression was established. Nazrul’s work was characterized by strong language, which was evident in his poems. A few well-known quotes from Bidrohi have left readers in disbelief forever.

I ride on the wings of lightening with joy and profundity,
I scatter misery and fear all around,
I will bring earth-quakes on this world!
Weary of struggles, I the great rebel,
Shall rest in quiet only when I find
The sky and the air free of piteous groans of the
Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling bloody sabres
Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet,
I am the rebel eternal,
I raise my head beyond this world and,
High, ever erect and alone!³

The intensity of Nazrul’s disobedient spirit is shown in the sentences above. In reality, he wrote this poem after witnessing the conditions in his native country. And he composed such a powerful poem in response to the needs of the nation. When the Indian people desired to be free of British control during that time. Nazrul made an effort to uplift people via his works. Because of these deeply embedded lines for revolution, the Rebel poet distinguished himself from other current poets of his era and rose above the commonplace. Nazrul was renowned for his rebellious language, which he heavily employed in his poetry, in addition to being a dissident poet. In 1922, the poem “Bidrohi” was featured in the magazine “Bijli.” When Gandhi ji launched the non-cooperation movement to drive out the British empire from India, Nazrul’s poem Bidrohi inspired the populace to be courageous and passionate about destroying the foundations of the British Raj. Following his portrayal of Nazrul’s poetry with a sensitive aesthetic appeal, he began presenting his first poetry anthology, Agniveena, in 1922. Nazrul had success in other literary genres, including as essays, prose pieces, and short stories. In 1922, he released the Byather Dan and Yugbani, an essay anthology, which was his first collection of short stories.

Kazi Nazrul Islam actively opposed all forms of injustice that were encroaching on society. Nazrul campaigned against British colonialism, fundamentalism, communalism, and society’s prejudice and unfairness toward the underprivileged, women, and those who were considered outlaws through writing, journalism, and political activity. After searching through his books and newspaper, the British government imprisoned him. However, Nazrul continued his revolutionary work and wrote Rajbandir Jabanbandi. He then embarked on a 40-day hunger strike to express his disapproval of the harassment. In addition to his reputation

³ Rafiqul Islam, Kazi Nazrul Islam: An Anthology, Bangla Academy; Dhaka, 1990, p.11.



as a revolutionary poet, Nazrul was deeply troubled by the rich people's societal unfairness. Upon observing the problem of poverty in his community, he felt depressed. He thought deeply about the individuals who were suffering from poverty and suffering. Thus, his writings mirrored all of these important concerns. One of Nazrul's social awakening poems, Daridro, expresses his sorrow for the people of his nation.

My insolent, naked eyes and sharp tongue.
Thy cursed has turned my violin to a sword...
O proud saint, thy terrible fire
Has rendered my heaven barren
O my child, my darling one
I could not give thee even a drop of milk
No right have I rejoice.
Poverty weeps within my doors forever
As my spouse and my child
Who will play the flute.⁴

This poem has done a fantastic job of conveying the social message as well as the author's deep love and concern for the people of his nation. Similar to this poetry, Nazrul has composed another important poem that honors women's rights. One of the best poets for demonstrating respect and establishing equality between the rights of men and women is Nari.

I don't see any difference
Between a man and a woman
Whatever great or benevolent
That are in this world achievements
Half of that was by a woman
The other half by man.⁵

These statements regarding women's respect demonstrate unequivocally that Nazrul was concerned about women's rights and treating them with respect, and that he was not limited to the world and affairs of men. Nazrul firmly thought that women should be granted the same rights as males in the globe. At the period, when women were viewed as menial human beings who only worked inside the home to give birth to their children and take care of their husbands, this idea went beyond revolution. During that period, women who were marginalized used to do this. Nazrul made an effort to cheer them up and give them optimism about life. Another powerful poem is Birangona, in which Nazrul refers to the Birangona ladies as a group of women deserving of admiration and social respect by referring to them as "mothers." A barrage of condemnation for Birangona arrived throughout society as a result of this remarkable declaration. Unlike other modern writers, Nazrul had distinct views. He believed that all women, regardless of whether they are prostitutes, deserve respect. His beliefs were pertinent since he said that their circumstances made them become prostitutes. Just as no one is born to be a spoiler or a murderer, neither are women born to be prostitutes. Nazrul's scathing essays flowed out like an assault on society's preconceived notions about prostitutes. He thought the right thing about the prostitute and shared that incident with the world. Nazrul's poem Birangona demonstrated his regard for prostitutes. He states:

Who calls you a prostitute, mother?
Who spits at you?
Perhaps you were suckled by someone
As chaste as seeta...
And if the son of an u chaste mother is 'illegitimate'
So is the son of an unchaste father.⁶

This is how Nazrul treats the group known as prostitutes with respect and care. He undoubtedly supported women's independence, as his poetry made abundantly evident. One of the main topics in Nazrul's writings was religion. In his later years, this problem began to take precedence over other problems. Kazi Nazrul Islam took on a different literary persona in order to convey his equality within all religions. He combined Bengali folk music with Islamic devotional chants. This was Nazrul's incredible invention, which helped propel him to greater success. Nazrul searched for Hindu devotional music in addition to Islamic

⁴ Priti Kumar Mitra, *The Dissent of Nazrul Islam: poetry and History*, New Delhi, OUP India, 2009, p.33.

⁵ Moniruzzaman, Mohammad, "Interaction of cultures and Kazi Nazrul Islam". In Mohammad Nurul Huda, *Nazrul: An Evaluation*, Dhaka: National Institute. 2000, p.67.

⁶ Abdul Hakim, *The Fiery Lyre of Nazrul Islam*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1976, p.87.



devotional songs using Bengali folk music. such Kirtans, Bhajans, and Shama Sanget. He has combined Hindu and Islamic principles. The concepts that Nazrul created by fusing Islam and Hinduism were this fusion. He consistently campaigned for the unification of Muslims and Hindus and disliked fanaticism. Because Kabi Nazrul wrote his devotional works in such detail, he was able to communicate his views on religious concord in an editorial for Joog Bani,

Come brother Hindu! Come Musalman!
Come Buddhist! Come Christian! Let us transcend all barriers, let us forsake
Forever all smallness, all lies, all selfishness and let us fall
Brothers as brothers. We shall quarrel no more.⁷

It is clear from these incredibly perceptive remarks that Nazrul is a great humanitarian in addition to being a poet. By giving each of his four boys a name that is both Hindu and Muslim, he demonstrated his equality with religion. Krishna Muhammad named his first son, followed by Arindam Khaled, Sabyasachi, and Kazi Aniruddha for his fourth son. Nazrul was steeped in Hinduism, Sufism, and folklore, which helped him formulate his theory in an unconventional manner.

Nazrul used clever language to convey his love, freedom, and revolution in his writings. He was inherently tolerant and disapproved of all forms of discrimination based on caste, gender, class, or religion. He was against the world of anarchy and a liberal. As a writer, he made every effort to convey all of his knowledge and awareness of life-related issues. He was a trailblazer in the world of writing. In addition to presenting a number of well-known poems, songs, short stories, and essays, Nazrul also introduced Bengali Ghazals, a whole new genre of Bengali literature. The 4,000 songs he wrote are referred to as Nazrul Geeti. In Bangladesh and India, Nazrul is still well-known for his extraordinary Nazrul Sangit. His name is revered and remembered with pride by everybody. The contribution of Kazi Nazrul Islam to world literature is significant. He was regarded as the pinnacle of Bangla literature, including poetry. Nazrul was the world's inspiration, and his writings continue to be so for people of various backgrounds and time zones. His passionate writings would continue to captivate us in the future, not just with Bengali literature but with literature in general.

The national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, is referred to as the “Rebel poet” both domestically and internationally. His poetry, short stories, songs, and essays are a powerful expression of his ardent battle against injustice and all types of oppression. In contrast to other modern poets, Nazrul has crafted vivid rhythms and iconoclastic ideas that are both revolutionary and mouthwatering. His topic matter and word choices were unprecedented in Bangla poetry history. He rose to great fame by incorporating social and political themes into his poetry. In addition, Nazrul was regarded as a poet who pioneered novel literary endeavors like the blending of Muslim and Hindu cultural traditions. Nazrul possessed exceptional skills in fusing Arabic and Sanskrit with Bangla verses. Nazrul created the strong basis for the history of world literature and fed nearly all the streams of Bangla literature.

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