

Nazrul Jayanti Special



Nazrul's portrait by Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin

Nazrul's Poetry, Nietzscheanism and Man's Centre

by Azfar Hussain

The writer, who teaches English at Jahangirnagar University, indicates the signs and symptoms of a particular kind of Nietzschean intertext in Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry, in his sounds and silences, on the basis of a significant critical clue provided by Rabindranath Tagore himself. The writer also indicates that the not-yet-taken track of Nazrul criticism may begin with what Tagore had to say on Nazrul's poetry more than fifty years ago.

Nietzsche once marked in terms of the archetypal Dionysian trend inherent in the human psyche, as one can see it in his early work called *The Birth of Tragedy*. In other words, for Nazrul Islam, that famous epithet (enjoying enormous currency in the critical marketplace where classicism is glibly merchandized) of Johann Winckelmann — 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' — is crossed out, for Nazrul's simplicity is not

great deal of Nazrul's poetry in terms of Nietzsche's pronouncement: 'I am no man, I am dynamite.' That Nietzschean violence stemming from the inner music and madness of creativity is what can sufficiently be read here in this line, but this violence does not decenter or deny man, or merely 'centralizes' the dynamite: Nietzsche here speaks of man's energy in terms of the metaphor of dynamite. What

of major poems Nazrul wrote reveals that his poetry could be read in terms of what we might call Nietzscheanism. It is also true that a Nietzsche, Nazrul never contends that truth is merely a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms which has become a veritable mantra for those squads of cozy nihilists parroting Nietzsche's ideas, attitudes and aphorisms. Nor Nazrul, in the fashion of Nietzsche, evolves and espouses an aesthetic existentialism that attracted a number of European writers. But, it was Nazrul's unrelenting, unremitting insistence on the re-building and celebration of man, charged with the Dionysian elan and eclat, which shows that Nazrul can be read, at least to an extent, in the light of one of the predominant aspects of Nietzscheanism, namely, anthropocentricity, and this reading can be predicated on Tagore's clue that Nazrul's simplicity has its own violence and vehemence hitherto unknown in Bengali poetry.

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Silence, for Nazrul, was not a disease nor an accident, but a choice — a choice none could make so visibly and intensely as Nazrul himself. The silent poet was thus a struggling poet as Nazrul was.

'noble' in the classical sense of the term, but violent in the sense Tagore indicated. Interestingly enough, Tagore provided this clue to Nazrul criticism more than fifty years ago, but this has not yet been fully taken up for understanding and appreciating Nazrul who has mostly been burdened with stock thematic common places and platitudes. One can certainly read a

we get here is the essential 'dynamization' of man in which Nazrul, too, is interested, and one can here readily cite the instance of the poem 'The Rebel'. True, the world of Nietzsche, the German philosopher of the nineteenth century, is not one that always goes well along with the world of Nazrul who, perhaps, never read Nietzsche, but a close reading of a number

which is violent *per se* in that it enhances deaths, diseases and damages of man; it exacerbates the plight of the poor; it perpetuates pauperization and exploitation, and it finally divides and fragments man. The point which is often lost sight of is that Nazrul, like Tagore, also wanted to move towards a meaningful whole, though it was not as richly and broadly envisaged as Tagore's. And it is this dream and desire for a whole which engaged Nazrul in a constant struggle against death and destruction all throughout his life. The compass and contours of this whole, and also of the struggle indicated, are there at least in 'The Rebel'.

It is this struggle which deserves reading in a new light. The Nietzschean *Urbemensch* or *Superman* is undoubtedly a struggling entity, for he strives to be the great 'One', filling-in and re-dressing various existential and semantic voids and vacuums that characterize the business of living itself. This *Urbemensch* has his own aesthetic and metaphysical vision which keeps him going. It would indeed be inappropriate to say that we have the Nietzschean *Urbemensch* in the *Rebel* of Nazrul, but the spirit of the *Rebel* is not devoid of the struggling strength that this *Urbemensch*, imaginatively and spiritually, evokes and irradiates, for Nazrul's *Rebel* draws up a scheme of breakage involving a strenuous struggle which is itself life made visible. True, Nazrul's *Rebel* lacks the metaphysical grandeur and insignia of Nietzsche's *Urbemensch*, but the limits of his social realities onto which Nazrul kept his vision focussed right from the beginning of his poetic career. Yes, Nazrul's *Rebel* is very much a product of his society, a society which is characterized by poverty, discrimination and exploitation; a society which is torn and tossed by the irresistible evils of capitalism and colonialism, and by communal disharmony, violence, and what Chomsky today calls 'the culture of terrorism'. On can certainly say that Nazrul's *Rebel* is essentially a product of a society which is very much our own, as we live in it today. In fact, the nature of Nazrul's — or the *Rebel's* — struggle and the socio-political parameters within which this struggle emerges turning man into the Nietzschean dynamite amply underline the 'now-and-here' aspect of Nazrul's *Rebel*, perhaps more than Nietzsche's *Urbemensch*, given our context.

Now, it is clear that to speak of Nazrul's violence of simplicity or creative violence is to speak of the strength and aplomb of his struggle exemplified in the moments, milieus, movement and momentum of the *Rebel* who unambiguously aspires to be a 'whole' metaphor for a scheme of things re-created in consonance with the dreams and disasters of man whose creativity is the only guiding principle. It is in this sense that Tagore's clue as to Nazrul's health can be rewardingly read, and the

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Beyond Stereotype

by Waheedul Haque

COLLECTIVE memory, specially in the subcontinent or loosely the orient, goes by archetypes. Which is a mainstay of mythification, something so very urgent and central to the moulding and becoming of a society. This seems to have been replaced in the industrial age by stereotypes which is mostly a consumptive way by which a society's mind wastes itself towards mindlessness. For the Bengalee people, the two big all-shrouding stereotypes are of Tagore and Nazrul. In reducing them into such the Bengalees are making of those two, who, born in earlier epochs would no doubt be enviously placed on the pantheon of gods, mere spectres having haloed appearances — all too commonplace — and little substance. The society or societies of the Bengalees are, every moment of their existence, sending the two back as apparitions without responding to their constant knock at the door. For letting them come in and join the none-too-convivial party we are at, the 200 million Bengalee speaking people of the world must go beyond stereotypes and look for the real men in them and their still more real works and aspirations.

Bengalees as a people are now non-literate. After carving

or a visually responsive society. At the present juncture of their social decline, the Bengalees can do mighty little to grasp even the agreedly more mundane Nazrul, not to speak of the high-soaring skylark. And this is more than a smile, a very typical stereotype of Tagore.

Paradoxically, we cannot hope to transcend our literacy and art barriers to reach up to Tagore and Nazrul without a serious and all-in-recourse to the two much-too-misunderstood men. It is an odious practice to hyphenate the two persons who couldn't be more different in all respects, in a manner post-Einsteinian physics speaks of space-time. In fact, anyone of taste and discrimination should draw back in horror from this abomination of an offspring of communalism eating up culture. But for a discussion of stereotypes, Nazrul's far surpasses the Gurudev's in being false and direly dangerous to individual and societal being. And these become ideal cases of a nation being robbed of its greatest redeeming treasures by sustained and deliberate campaigns of lie supported by an endless sea of prejudiced ignorance. No one in the his-

candidate for the job — Nazrul.

Every inch of his being and his life's work was against what he was now picked up to serve. Barring two aspects of the unmanageable character — which came handy. His name in Arabic and the fact of his being out of his mind since 1942. The second aspect ensured that at least Nazrul himself would not be able to stand against what use they were going to him to. Defenders of the Pakistani faith, both of the Bengalee stock and outside, through unrelenting campaigns, made of him what he was not or rather what he had fought all his life against. He was used as a thorn to pluck out another — as the saying goes in Bengali — and this another was his ideal and inspiration in everything, Rabindranath.

The Pakistani communalists couldn't quite succeed in their ploy as long as Pakistan was there. But after liberation, instead of removing the veneer of lie that encrusted his personality, the false image was allowed to gain a universal circulation and awesome influence in independent Bangladesh.

It would take a polemicist of Lenin's order or the inexorable force of history to set right the image of Nazrul and salvage him from the image he has been made into by men with motives other than literary or artistic. The stereotype by which Nazrul is being touted about by the carriers of those Pakistani attitudes to society in Bangladesh is a gross insult to the poet's life and strivings and achievements. This would be a past thing when society would be able to pick itself up and march forward. For the moment it is the duty of all writers and artists, intellectuals and cultural activists to save Nazrul from such mauling and endeavour to establish the truth about all aspects of his life and creation.

Nazrul has suffered more on another account too from our predilection for stereotypes. One very widely subscribed image of the poet has been built up not from prejudice and political motivation but out of ignorance and our love of filling holes of information and understanding by idealisation. The stereotype of a fire-eating everything-can-go-to-hell rebel has spawned numerous other supplementary images of a kind of a heavy-drinking and licentious kind of libertine living in civil society but wholly against its mores and temper — one going very very wastefully with both his genius and his youth — he never grew out of this spring of life — fits in so very snugly to complete a very satisfying no-questions stereotype. Nazrul, wittingly or otherwise, bore himself in a way that would give that image a whole world of credence. This is a stereotype that would stay glued to that supremely untypical character. Was his untypicality, we avoid speaking about his uniqueness for fear that this attribute helps create a type of its own — something very akin to that of Vincent Van Gogh's who also, like

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a glorious civilisation over several millennia as mostly preliterate, they have failed to keep in step with the vanguard societies in the last three centuries and graduate into a literate people. How can a non-literate people profit by either a Tagore or a Nazrul? But both the giants have worked their geniuses past literate expressions — mainly into music, the great preliterate medium. And Tagore seems to have poured all that was unspeakable in his soul, the libido to be precise, in a tip-off dump truck style, into his paintings, another preliterate human manifestation. Sad enough, the Bengalee people have long ceased to be either a musical

tory of literature or of national celebrities has perhaps been more malignant and distorted than Kazi Nazrul Islam — literally the gift of the religion of peace and surrender. Nazrul Islam, sadly though, was also an invention of the Pakistani cultural politics of the post-partition subcontinent and Bengal. The ruling military-Punjabi clique needed some surefire thing to disengage the East Pakistanis from their moorings of Bengaleeness epitomised in their loving debts to Rabindranath. The Bengalees dreaming of an Islamic resurgence for very transparently communal and sectarian reasons, supplied them with a most unlikely