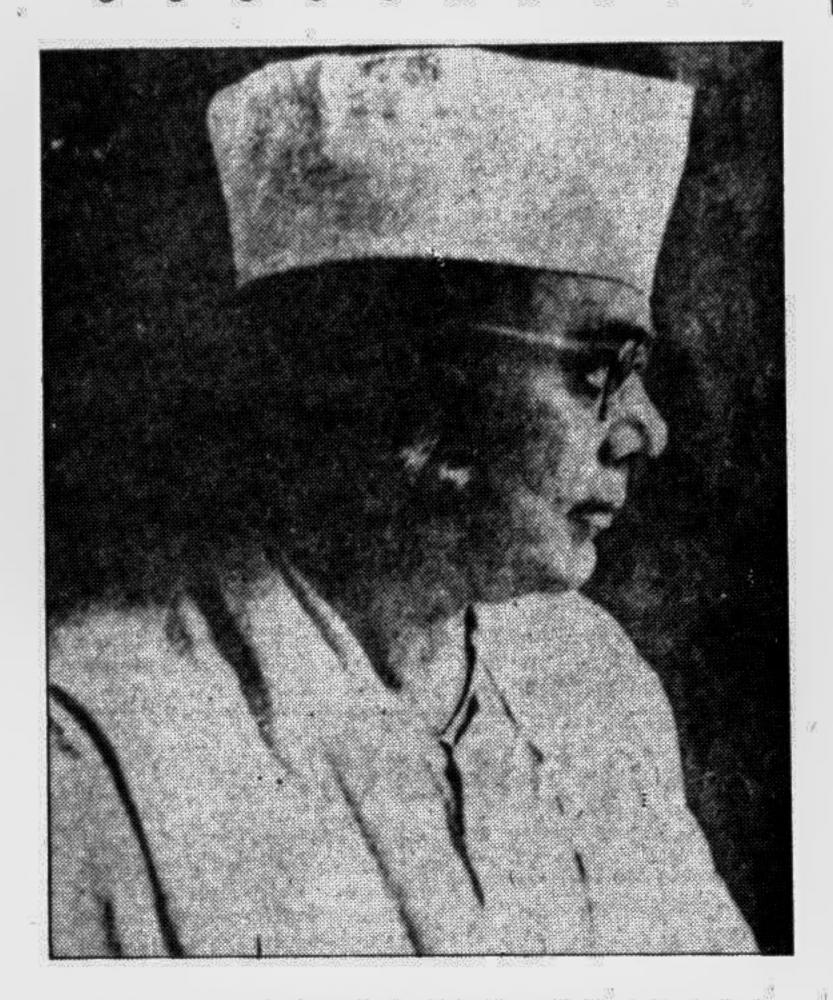
# The Baily Star







\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

N the face of relentless

Tagorization of twentieth

century Bengali poetry,

Kazi Nazrul Islam is certainly

one of those poets constituting

a test-case for a charming

ambivalence. True, the poets of

the thirties - Buddhodeva

Bose, Jibanananda Das,

Sudhindranath Dutta, Amiya

politics of poetic revolution',

as Frederic Jameson aptly

thirties, Nazrul, too, was in-

volved in this Tagore-stimu-

lated anti-Tagorean politics of

poetic revolution which, in

fact, brings out the position

one can attribute to the langue

and parole of Nazrul. But, it

demands observing that

Nazrul's way with the endur-

ing spell of Tagore and its sub-

sequent breakage is not cer-

tainly similar to the ways the.

poets of the thirties took.

Indeed, this difference is im-

portant. While poets like

Buddhodeva Bose, Sudhindra-

nath Dutta and Amiya

Chakrovarty decidedly zeroed

in on the ideology and ethos of

Western modernism, Nazrul

looked intensely towards the

interior, towards the soil

indivisible with the life he led

'here' and 'now', towards a very

familiar zone of experiences

mythicized in such terms and

idioms as he could pick up

only from his own tradition.

And he could bring within his

poetry the world just 'here',

with a force and elan which

can stem only from an awful

sense of simplicity, which

Tagore himself was one of the

first ones to have put his finger

now and then, passed off as

naievete in the conventional

Nazrul criticism which also

tends to underscore signs and

symptoms of immaturity and

lack of so-called aesthetic

fruition in Nazrul's poetry. But,

Tagore took this simplicity

seriously to indicate the

strength and power of Nazrul's

poetry which, according to

him, is "free from diseases"

and is also "violent" and

"primordial", devoid of

bristling artificialities. Thus,

Tagore found in Nazrul that

'health' which was inordinately

romanticized — or rather

idealized - by Goethe and

Nietzsche in their different

terms and tenors. This health,

as Tagore indicated, is not

unambigous, however. For, it

involves simplicity on the one

hand and violence on the

other, while the latter may ap-

pear to be an odd quantity in

the equation. But, what needs

to be noticed is that this

simplicity has its own inter-

te breeding its own form of

e violence which

This simplicity has been,

Alongwith the poets of the

phrases the case.

### Nazrul's Poetry, Nietzscheanism and Man's Centre

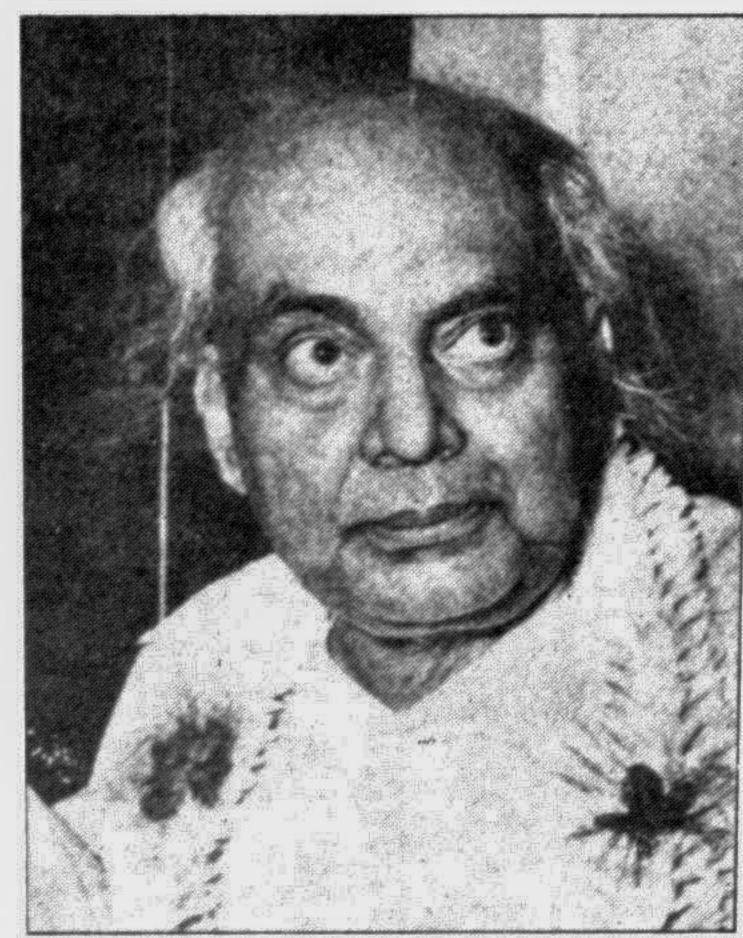
by Azfar Hussain

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-yettaken track of Nazrul criticism may begin with what Tagore had to say on Nazrul's poetry more than fifty years ago.

Chakrovarty and Bishnu Dey were involved, in varying Nietzsche once marked in degrees, in a stylistic struggle terms of the archetypal to 'de-centre' Tagore who Dionysian trend inherent in alone had the potentials of the human psyche, as one can spurring such a movement, see it in his early work called centrifugal in nature. None of them, however, could evade The Birth of Tragedy. In other the influences of Tagore, and words, for Nazrul Islam, that famous epithet (enjoying the so-called 'new poetry' enormous currency in the critanti-Tagorean on the surface, only concealed Tagore's ical marketplace where classicism is glibly merchandized) influences, though not erased of Johann Wincklemann and eliminated them. In fact, noble simplicity and quiet this new poetry only grandeur" - is crossed out, readjusted itself with the for Nazrul's simplicity is not poetry of Tagore, and that was a matter of stylistic ad textual strategy, or of a kind of

great deal of Nazrul's poetry in terms of Nietzsche's pronouncement: "I am no man, I 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 or merely 'centralizes' the 'dynamite': Nietzsche here speaks of man's energy in terms of the metaphor of dynamite. What

Nazrul's unrelenting, unremitting insistence on the re-building of man, charged with the Dionysian elan and eclat, shows that Nazrul can be read, at least to an extent, in the light of one of the predominant aspects of Nietzsche-anism, namely, anthropocentricity, and this reading may be predicated on Tagore's clue that Nazrul's simplicity has its own violence and vehemence hitherto unknown in Bengali poetry.



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 amply taken up for under standing and appreciating Nazrul who has mostly been burdened with stock thematic common places and platitudes.

One can certainly read a

which Nazrul, too, is inter ested, and one can here readfly 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

get here is the essential

dynamitization of man in

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 la 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, cvolves 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 po-

Now, this 'violence' may pose certain problems both at the aesthetical and ethical planes. What kind of violence it is? The Freudian binary split metaphorizing the nature of violence brings to the fore two kinds of wishes - 'deathand 'life-wish', and Nazrul's violence, obviously, excludes the former, and encompasses and enhances 'lifewish' which clearly characterthe Nietzscheanism, rather the spiritual trace of it, in many of Nazrul's poems, particularly in 'The Rebel' Nietzsche once remarked in Beyond Good and Evil "He who does not wish to see what is great in a man, has the sharpest eye for that which is low and superficial in him, and so gives away - himself. And Nazrul does not certainly give away himself; he does not give in to the nihilistic anarchy of self-effacing. His poem The Rebel' is a vivid instance of man-making, of the Dionysian celebration of Nietzschean anthropocentricity or of the violence of creative elevation of man, where the breaking has a great role to play, but not at the expense of the making. In fact, it is this dialectic of breaking and making which strikes the key-note of Nazrul's creative violence characterizing much of his poetry written during a period of twenty five

One should notice that Nazrul, among his many inconsistencies, consistently held onto the image of the reversal as an imperative stylistic signature of his own. One sees it in 'The Rebel'; one also sees it in the 'Dhumketu', and elsewhere. This image of the reversal promotes a creative breakage; Nazrul intends to reverse the scheme of things

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

Ubermensch or Superman is undoubtedly a struggling entity, for he strives to be the great 'One', filling-in and redressing various existential and semantic voids and vacuums that characterize the business of living itself. This Ubermensch has his own aesthetic and metaphysical vision which keeps him going. It would indeed be inappropriate to say that we have the Nietzschean Ubermensch in the Rebel of Nazrul, but the spirit of the Rebel is not devoid of the struggling strength that this Ubermensch, imagistically 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 Ubermensch, but the limits of the Rebel are 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 capital ism 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 Ubermensch, 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, milicu, movement and momentum of the Rebel who unambiguously aspires to be a 'whole' metaphor for a scheme of things re-created in conso-Tagore seems to have poured nance with the dreams and all that was unspeakable in his soul, the libido to be precise, disasters of man whose creativity is the only guiding in a tip-off dump truck style, principle. It is in this sense into his paintings, another that Tagore's clue as to preliterate human manifestation. Sad enough, the Nazrul's health can be Bengalee people have long

rewardingly read, and the Continued on page 9

## Beyond Stereotype

OLLECTIVE 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 indus-trial 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 enviably 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 a 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

ceased to be either a musical

by Waheedul Haque 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 simile, 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-

against what use they were going to him to. Defenders of the Pakistani faith, both of the Bengalee stock and outside, through unrelenting campaign, 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

candidate for the job - Nazrul

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 be-

ing out of his mind since 1942.

The second aspect ensured

that at least Nazrul himself

would not be able to stand

Every inch of his being and

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 writ ers 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 gentus 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

Continued from page 8



tory of literature or of national a glorious civilisation over sevcelebrities has perhaps been eral millennia as mostly prelitmore maligned and distorted erates, they have failed to keep than Kazi Nazrul Islam - literin step with the vanguard socially the gift of the religion of cties in the last three cenpeace and surrender. turies and graduate into a lit-Nazrul Islam, sadly though, erate people. How can a nonwas also an invention of the literate people profit by either Pakistanite cultural politics of a Tagore or a Nazrul? But both the giants have worked their the post-partition subcontinent and Bengal. The ruling geniuses past literate expresmilitary-Punjabi clique needed sions - mainly into music, the some surefire thing to discngreat preliterate medium. And

gage the East Pakistanis from their moorings of Bengalceness 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