

Nazrul Jayanti Special

# The Great Rebel

by Syed Ashraf Ali

**K**AZI Nazrul Islam was an out and out rebel, a rebel in every sphere of activity and in every domain of thought. But his was a rebellion with a difference, his was a voice that roared in words and soared in songs. Great as a sensational poet, great as a successful social critic, great as an outstanding lyricist, great as a matchless composer, great as a patriot of the first water, great as a bold and upright thinker, Nazrul indeed may safely be marked out from the run of giants in the world of letters as an indomitable champion of truth and justice with a supreme and unshakable courage and conviction. "I am a poet, the instrument through which Truth speaks," declared the great rebel. "Some ruthless power may imprison this flute, destroy it, but who shall imprison him who plays on it?"

The cause of liberation was the first to stir the heart of the young rebel. "What I want," declared Nazrul with a dauntless spirit, "is that not one square inch of Indian territory shall remain in the possession of foreigners." Like a ceaseless and sparkling mountain stream gushed forth article after article, verse after verse, song after song spreading his own

intense fever of nationalism. Whereas in his poems the rhythm heaved and swelled like the demented waves of the sea lashed by wind, the forceful and superb prose of the great rebel reminded one of a waterfall, the accent resounding with the thunder of doom. It is indeed remarkable that the great rebel excelled both in poetry and in prose. Whether in prose or poetry, he could fully well breathe fire like an avenging angel and warble, when the mood seized him, like a refreshing sparkling fountain.

Mallarme once reminded the great painter Degas, "Poetry is not written with ideas, it is written with words". Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote both poetry and prose with words — words palpitating with numerous allusive meanings and shades. His style was not only marvellous but also inimitable. His letters were sometimes like a rain-bow, it was impossible to dissect them. Nevertheless all were entranced by their in-

explicit charm and intangible liveliness.

In the realm of music also Nazrul was a great rebel. Music, like all other arts in the then sub-continent, had become stereotyped, almost fossilized. There was the classical tradition, whether of the north or of the south, which had behind it centuries of discipline and which had, within its limits, attained near perfection. But it was music, pure and abstract, and like all abstract arts its appeal was limited to those who had taken pains to understand what might be called its mathematics. It could be very beautiful, hauntingly so, in the hands of a rare master, but ordinarily and as practised by virtuosoes its appeal was limited. Its counterpart for the popular taste was the traditional religious and folk music. Bengal had its coterie of folk melodies, soft and unique in its blend and vastly enriched by the prodigious outpourings from Tagore. While caring for both the traditions, the rebel respected the inviolable sanc-

tion of neither and freely took from each what suited his purpose. What is more, he added to richness by introducing Ghazals and Thumris into Bengali Music — in exquisite lulling adaptation to the melody of Bengali songs. The magic wand of the great rebel had opened the doors of music for the common masses. Music was no longer confined to a handful of connoisseurs and maestros, nor were his songs confined to fire ad brimstone.

There were hundreds which spoke of tender love, of compassion, of exaltation, of ordinary joy and happiness, sorrows and sufferings. They are sung in religious gatherings no less than in concert halls. While the sophisticated intellectuals delight in his verse and prose and learned scholars write volumes on them, the simple unlettered folk in the congested lanes of cities like Dhaka or Chittagong or in the remote villages from Teknaf to Tetulia sing his songs with rapture. Young

lovers unable to express the depth of their feelings sing his songs and feel the weight of their numbness relieved, and patriots have mounted gallows and freedom fighters braved the bullets with his songs on their lips. Even Subhas Chandra Bose, while organising the INA, gratefully acknowledged, "On our way to the war — we shall sing his (Nazrul's) songs and proceed." Last but not the least, it was his clarion call which inspired the then 75 million Bangladeshis, prepared their imagination for the glorious vision of a sovereign state of their own, and the valiant freedom fighters marched triumphantly to victory and emancipation with the songs of the great rebel on their lips.

Nazrul fought not only the political tyranny, the fiery flute also found and fought tyranny and oppression, subjugation and injustice, vice and corruption in every sphere of activity — in social customs, in caste and creed, in orthodox ideas and practices and distorted preachings in religion.

In a series of poems called "Samyabad" (egalitarianism), he rose against every form of distinction and disparity. Batch of the poems started with "Gahi Samyag Gaan" (I sing the song of equality) and those were devoted to god, to men, to women, to workers, to the youth, to mankind, to sin and even to prostitutes. To the prostitutes he wrote, "Some call you beautiful, yet spit on you. Perhaps some women as pure as Sita gave birth to you and your progeny shall perhaps be nobler than ours." The rebel went a step further and asked: "Are we not all products of lust and desire — yet what vanity and pride we display!" What is more, with the indefatigable spirit and the indomitable courage and conviction, he had the guts to challenge the age-old conception and declare: "If an 'unholy' (characterless) mother's child is called a bastard, so should be the son of a characterless father!"

Former student of Dhaka Residential Model High School and a Master's degree examinee in Political Science, Bapi has been working in the Arab Bangladesh Bank for the last one year.

He seemed very busy in his work at the bank which is actually not an expected profession for a descendant of a great poet. And specially for the family that traces back to the Mughal period.

The rebel indeed was a poet of the down-trodden millions, a champion of truth and justice, a lover of his people, a lover whose loyalty was pledged to all mankind. All through his life, even during the "silent eloquence" in the twilight of senescence, did he plead and strive for social justice, for the right of the lowly to dignity, of the poor to material well-being, of the ignorant to knowledge, of the child to unfettered development, of the women to equal status with men. And all these were done through works which have no parallel in the world of letters, works which remind one of a fiery waterfall, the accent resounding with the thunder of doom. His style indeed was unusual, inimitable with sounding cadences, indomitable spirit, splendid figures, elegant classicism, majestic constructions and wonderful poetic illusion — all contributing to an over-all vigour eminently suited to the time and to his purpose. His was a struggle aimed at eliminating oppression in every shape and form, in every sphere of activity and in every domain of thought, a ceaseless endeavour which ensures that not a single soul on this clay of a cold star remains unwept, unhonoured and un-sung.

The writer is Director, Radio Bangladesh, Dhaka.

# They Look Back to Dadu ... His Conscience Guides Them

by Shamsad Mortuza

**T**HE youngest of the Kazi family is yet to be named — she is just three months old.

"We are trying to seek out a suitable name for her from the writings of dadu" said Khilkhil Kazi, the grand daughter of our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and the elder daughter of Shabyashachi Kazi adding "like that of 'Durjoy' ... his name is picked from 'Bidroh'."

Both Durjoy, the six-year old child, sitting by her aunty and the unnamed youngster (well, at home they call her Saana) are the successors of Mishti Kazi, Khilkhil's sibling.

Married to an Indian businessman — Arun Agarwal — Mishti frequently visits her mother in Dhaka.

forefathers was reportedly a Kazi or judge in a Mughal court in India.

When Nazrul was born, the Kazis of Churulia lost their glories. After four early-dead children, Kazi Fakir Ahmed and Zaheda Khatun were blessed with a son Kazi Nazrul Islam, alias Dukhu Mia. Nazrul, the grandson of Kazi Aminullah, a Maktab teacher, had two brothers and one sister: Kazi Shahebzhan, Kazi Ali Hossain and Umme Kulsum.

Umme Kulsum died very young and the descendants of Kazi Shahebzhan and Kazi Ali Hossain now live in India. "Informed Khilkhil, who is also a contributor to the local papers and magazines.

dadu was invalid at that time." The city mayor used to come with the honorary key of the city and certificate and there was a throng in our house and not to mention the flowers, recalled Khilkhil. "And our duty was to remove the garlands from the neck of Dadu," she added.

"Still, the Nazrul Academy at Churulia organises a week-long festival to commemorate the birth anniversary of the poet," from 70's Khilkhil jumps back to the present. "Uncle Abdus Salam Kazi (Hadu), cousin Mazhar Hossain, Kazi Rezaul Karim take care of the Nazrul Academy over there."

"I felt the same essence, as that of Churulia, in this year's Shilpa Kala Academy's programme," conceded Khilkhil. "But I was very surprised at the absence of some leading Nazrul-sangeet singers at the poet's mazar on May 24," said Khilkhil. "Well, they should be more respectful to the poet."

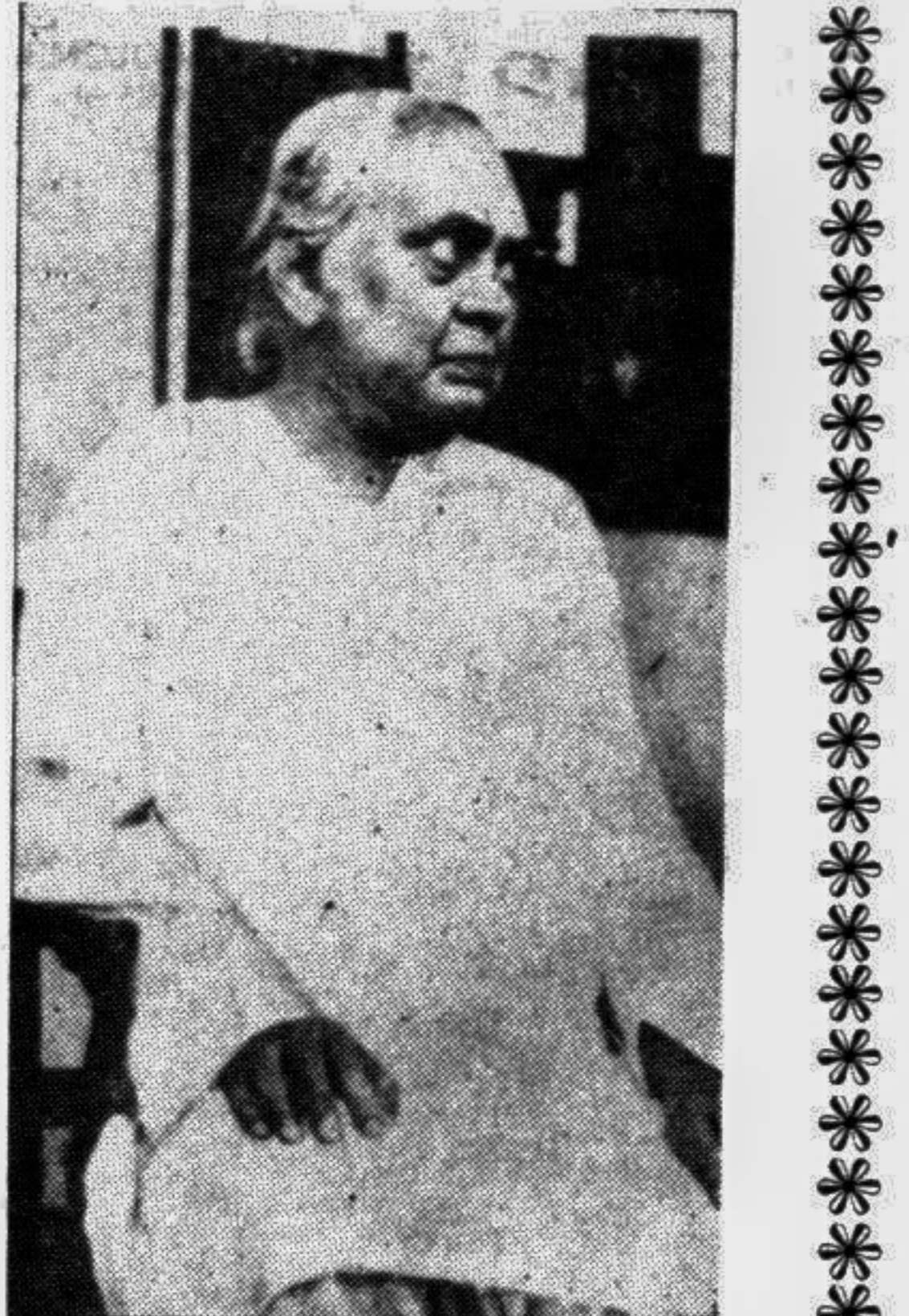
"Besides, Dhaka University authorities should be more responsible to secure the mazar of the poet."

"It's alright that the lovers go there and gossip ... after all my dadu was also a great lover. But in no way anything obscene should be at the resting place of the poet."

Uma Kazi, who nursed the poet in his ailing period had the same opinion of the mazar. "People go there with shoes on," said she in a hurt voice.

Khilkhil longs to write on her dadu for common people, in a plain and easy language. "There are many confusions about the life of Nazrul ... and my effort will be to defuse them."

Nazrul, the poet is not just a grandfather or a father-in-law for this family. Nazrul is the impetus for the family. In every step of life, they are guided by the conscience of this mammoth figure in Bengali literature, which sings out for humanity.



NAZRUL

The Poet in Pictures

CLOCKWISE

In his teens

As Habildar

In youth

In old age

Poet of 'Bulbul'



## Ramblings on Nazrul's Anniversary of Birth

by G. A. Momin

I broke my journey half way bleeding all over  
Yes, my journey came to a sudden and crushing halt.  
Probably a few could sense that beneath  
all my clamorous singing, laughing and musings,  
There coursed a secret streamlet of blood  
gushing out of my soul.  
And why so? What was my fault?  
My fault was: I fell deeply in love with love,  
all embracing, all enveloping love.  
Love for everything around me and  
a profound hatred nay a war against  
those who were against love and life.  
When I was alive some paved the way for me,  
While some other's made it thorny.  
Whatever I found in my life,  
Now from across the worldly bounds  
I see things no better.  
My poems are read,  
My songs are sung  
Pedagogues discourse my philosophy.  
But my spirit, my message  
nay whatever I stood for  
Are all buried under the brusque pronouncements  
and fanciful chantings.  
With shocking dismay I find my imaginary soul  
cut into pieces and  
distributed between different camps.  
Even the communalists, the tyrants  
the oppressors and the usurpers  
All who were my enemies throughout my life  
Have their share, too.

So, for God's sake, no more affront to my soul,  
No more flowers and singing and chanting for me  
Please leave me alone and allow me  
to listen to the Aazan of the Muazzin  
from the minaret perched high above the defiled soil.  
For God's sake, for God's sake.

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31-9-41.  
A Romantic young man!  
He roams in the sky.  
Smiles with the moon.  
Hums with the bees,  
He buds with the flowers.  
A Romantic young man.  
He twinkles with the evening star.  
He blushes with his morning dew.  
He weeps with the weeping willow.  
He sighs with cuckoo's nightingale.  
He laughs with jolly jangle.  
He fades out with the setting sun.  
A Romantic young man!  
His mission is the Sun.  
He shines with his own light.  
His "Beauty" is his sweet heart.  
His duty is plenary  
"majesty" has died.  
He flies with butterfly.

One of Nazrul's Poems  
Written in English  
A facsimile of the  
Poet's handwriting

## Beyond Stereotype

Continued from page 7  
Nazrul, lived a life of intensity and art, burning his candle from both ends and burning it down quick! We do not have a good answer because we have been too complacently satisfied with our stereotype to look for one.

So many questions about the real one in Nazrul remains unasked and unanswered that what we think we know about him is all but fabrications of the same stereotype representing a study in prodigality.

Let us first ask very simple and primary questions. Where and how did he pick up his facility with the languages — Bengali, Urdu, Persian and Arabic and a smattering of Sanskrit too? Ordinarily language problems cannot be healed even after sixteen years of schooling. For a deserter from home life at eight, Nazrul's language skills should set us rethinking about his wayward ways. How did he come to know his primary sargam and when was he initiated into the mysteries of ragas? Both music and languages call for intense application that doesn't at all fit with the stereotype of a brimming jolly-good-fellow. Was he well read? No, the stereotype would say. Yet, those who have studied him even cursorily would want to say yes, he ventured into varied tracts of literature —

even in English — and showed a keenness and power of assimilation not to be matched easily. Even Rabindranath himself could envy him his grasp of Indian mythology. Nazrul used the great subcontinental mythology with more facility and adroitness than any other writer of the modern times.

How and when did he soak into his system this endless thing? This wouldn't have been possible for the unremitting guzzler of betel leaves and the carousing type he represents in his stereotype.

He is veritably Ameer Khusrow born again — this time as a native of Bengal and not a far-travelling Turk. It is the misfortune of the mean Bengali society knowing little beyond Hindu-Muslim intolerance that Nazrul's synthesis of the Indic and the Persian-Sarashenic strains of culture was let to go by default unlike in the case of Khusrow whose efforts blossomed into the rich modern Indian culture.

On the occasion of every returning Nazrul Jayanti we reverse so many travesties of Nazrul. We never want to know this seeker on an eternal quest and go along with him — beyond law and government, mores and religion and into life and humanity. Down with these travesties of our ideal of eternal youth that was Nazrul.

Facsimile of Poet's letter written to his son.