

The Rebel

by Kazi Nazrul Islam

Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: I raise my head high!
Before me bows down the Himalayan peaks!

Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: Tearing through the sky,
surpassing the moon, the sun,
the planets, the stars,
piercing through the earth,
the heavens, the cosmos
and the Almighty's throne,
have I risen — I, the eternal wonder
of the Creator of the universe.
The furious Shiva shines on my forehead
like a royal medallion of victory!
Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: My head is ever held high!
I'm ever indomitable, arrogant and cruel.
I'm the Dance-king of the Day of the Doom.
I'm the cyclone, the destruction!
I'm the great terror, I'm the curse of the world.
I'm unstoppable.

I'm smash everything into pieces!
I'm unruly and lawless.
I crush under my feet
all the bonds, rules and disciplines!
I don't obey any laws.
I sink cargo-laden boats — I'm the torpedo,
I'm the dreadful floating mine.
I'm the destructive Dhurjati,
the sudden tempest of the summer.
I'm the Rebel, the rebel son
of the Creator of the universe!
Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: My head is ever held high!
I'm the tempest, I'm the cyclone.
I destroy everything I find in my path.
I'm the dance-loving rhythm,
I dance to my own beats.
I'm the delight of a life of freedom.
I'm Hambeer, Chhayanan, Hindol.
I move like a flash of lightning
with turns and twists.

I swing, I leap and frolic!
I do whatever my heart desires.
I embrace my enemy and wrestle with death.
I'm untamed, I'm the tempest!
I'm pestilence, dread to the earth.
I'm the terminator of all reigns of terror,
I'm ever full of burning restlessness.
Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: My head is ever held high!
I'm ever uncontrollable, irrepressible.
My cup of elixir, is always full.
I'm the sacrificial fire,
I'm Yamadagni, the keeper
of the sacrificial fire.

I'm the sacrifice, I'm the priest,
I'm the fire itself.
I'm creation, I'm destruction,
I'm habitation, I'm the cremation ground.
I'm the end, the end of night.
I'm the son of Indrani,
with the moon in my hand and the sun on my forehead.
In one hand I hold the bamboo flute,
in the other, a trumpet of war.
I'm Shiva's blue-hued throat
from drinking poison from the ocean of pain.
I'm Bomkesh, the Ganges flows freely through my locks.
Proclaim, Hero,
proclaim: My head is ever held high!
I'm the ascetic, the minstrel,
I'm the prince, my royal garb embarrasses
even the most ostentatious.
I'm Bedouin, I'm Chenghis,
I salute none but myself!
I'm thunder.

I'm the OM sound of Ishan's horn.
I'm the mighty call of Israel's trumpet.
I'm Pinakapani's hourglass drum, trident,
the sceptre of the Lord of Justice.
I'm the Chakra and the Great Conch,
I'm the primordial sound of the Gong!
I'm the furious-Durbasha, the disciple of Viswamitra.
I'm the fury of fire, to burn this earth to ashes.
I'm the ecstatic laughter, terrifying the creation.
I'm the eclipse of the twelve suns
on the Day of the Doom.
Sometimes calm, sometimes wild,
I'm the youth of new blood —
I humble even the fate's pride!
I'm the violent gust of a wind storm,
the roar of the ocean.
I'm bright, effulgent.

I'm the murmur of over-flowing water,
Hindol dance of rolling waves!
I'm the unbridled hair of a maiden,
the fire in her eyes.
I'm the budding romance of a girl of sixteen —
I'm the state of bliss!
I'm the madness of the recluse,
I'm the sigh of grief of a widow,
I'm the anguish of the dejected,
I'm the suffering of the homeless,
I'm the pain of the humiliated,
I'm the afflicted heart of the lovesick.
I'm the trembling passion of the first kiss,
the fleeting glance of the secret lover.
I'm the love of a restless girl,
the jingling music of her bangles!
I'm the eternal child, the eternal adolescent.
I'm the bashfulness of a village girl's budding youth.
I'm the northern breeze, the southern breeze,
the callous eastwind.
I'm the minstrel's song,
the music of his flute and lyre.
I'm the unquenched summer thirst,
the scorching rays of the sun.
I'm the softly flowing desert spring
and the green oasis!

In ecstatic joy, in madness,
I've suddenly realized myself —
all the barriers have crumbled away!

I'm the rise, I'm the fall,
I'm the consciousness in the unconscious mind.
I'm the flag of triumph at the gate of the universe —
the triumph of humanity!
Like a tempest
I traverse the heaven and earth
riding Uchchaisraba and the mighty Borrak.
I'm the burning volcano in the bosom of the earth,
the wildest commotion of the subterranean ocean of fire.
I ride on lightning
and panic the world with earthquakes!
I clasp the hood of the Snake-king
and the fiery wing of the angel Gabriel.
I'm the child-divine — restless and defiant.
With my teeth I tear apart
the skirt of Mother Earth!

I'm Orpheus' flute.
I calm the restless ocean
and bring sleep to the fevered world
with a kiss of my melody.
I'm the flute in the hands of Shyam.
When I fly into a rage and traverse the vast sky,
the fires of Seven Hells tremble in fear and die.
I'm the messenger of revolt
across the earth and the sky
I'm the mighty flood.
Sometimes I bring blessings to the earth,
at other times, cause colossal damage.
I wrestle away the twin daughters
from Vishnu's bosom!

(incomplete)
Excerpts from Sayed Kamal's translation.



THE centenarian editor of the Shaoghat, Mohammad Nasiruddin who died last week, on one occasion related that the first of Kazi Nazrul Islam's writings was published in the Calcutta-based Shaoghat in 1920.

Just after six months of its publication, Shaoghat carried a story 'Memoir of a Vagabond' and a poem 'Samadhi' (graveyard) which Havildar Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote from Bangal Paltan, Karachi.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, who travelled from one place to another like a nomad joined the 49th Bengal regiment in 1917 when he was a student of class ten. Mohammad Nasiruddin also had recalled with sadness the end of the poet's literary life and said his last writing 'Kabir Mukti' (salvation of the poet) also appeared in the Shaoghat, incidentally. After one month of the publication of this writing poet Nazrul Islam lost his voice and became paralysed.

Another leading litterateur, octogenarian poet Sufia Kamal also recalls the fond memory of the poet with whom she had correspondences as an admirer at her tender age.

Nazrul was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Rather, he came of a poor family. He was the sixth issue of his parents and lost his father in 1908 at the age of eight. At that age Nazrul started earning his livelihood as a Khadim of a local mosque at Churulia village of Asansol in Burdwan district. He was also associated with the local opera party as a singer, dancer, composer and director of ballads. At eleven, he ran away from his village home and was employed at a



If Only We Loved Him

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Look at him drawing as if a draught beast the chariot ridden by unlawfully established immoral governments assiduously cutting at the very roots of a people's being. This he was doing in effect without physically doing it for almost all of the half-century that he lived and yet lived not, after the partition of the subcontinent.

How about his songs? Rabindranath has a celebrated quote to the effect that the Bengali people will of necessity keep singing his songs and that of all his creations only songs would perhaps endure. Nazrul is not on record as expressing similar sentiments about music — after all there was nobody around him who would take down whatever issued from his mouth. But one can very confidently say, without any fear of being controverted, that Nazrul felt the same way about his songs, if not more strongly. And if Rabindranath's claim to musical glory lay also in his being the father of modern subcontinental music, Nazrul has an equally strong claim as the progenitor of what has for the last half a century been called the Bengali *Adhunik Gaan*. And Nazrul composed at least 3000 songs within a span of just 16 years. That could be some welcome information for the Guinness people. But these are the least important aspects of his songs. His songs are a treasury of all immortal north Indian melodies that were still extant at the *ustad khandan* level and now are nowhere to be found anymore — for which we of the immediate posterity — or those of the long removed

Nazrul and Nasiruddin

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

bakery shop at Asansol to earn his livelihood when most of the young boys of his age went to school. On being moved by his talent he was sent, by a police officer, from Asansol to Mymensingh's Darirampur High School for prosecution of studies. He did not stay there for more than a year and again came back to Asansol, where he was admitted in the local school by its headmaster when a poem composed by Nazrul was shown to him.

While studying in class ten he surreptitiously went to Calcutta to join 49th Bengal regiment in 1917. Here again he refused to fight against his Turkish brethren and was not called out of Karachi for active service. From here he began his writings after amassing a store of experience through many years of travel and adventure. His poems and songs reveal a mind trained and tried in hardship and suffering, and enriched and deepened by a wide knowledge of life. Nazrul practically lived with pangs of poverty. Poverty was his pride. This has amply been reflected in the poem 'Poverty', where he says, "O poverty thou hast made me great, thou hast made me honoured like Christ with crown of thorns. Thou hast given me courage to reveal all."

Born in an impoverished family and having experienced all the adversities of poverty Nazrul Islam distinguished himself from other contemporary writers in thought and style. In his writings the problems of the poor were truly reflected as he felt deeply for the poor which others hardly demonstrated. From his biography it is known that Nazrul Islam did not subscribe to the ideology of partisan politics but most of his poems channelled the sentiment of his own class — the have-nots. The songs of the peasant, colliers and labourers and a new world represent their sentiment.

Poet's overwhelming love for the downtrodden and the exploitation of his people by the British Raj evoked reaction in him and he voiced his anger against the oppression which is found in his famous poem 'Vidroh' (the rebel). For this very poem which was widely

acclaimed on the one hand but resented by a small section of non-liberal Muslims, he came to be known as the rebel poet. This was followed by poems, one after another, which had majesty of dynamism and were boisterous in rhythm. In fact, he raised his voice against all kinds of exploitation and oppression — political, social and religious.

In 1922 Nazrul brought out a bi-weekly journal with the title 'Dhumketu' (the comet) to launch a campaign for the independence movement for which he was sentenced to imprisonment for one year on a charge of 'sedition'. This had, in fact, offered him immense opportunity to write more powerful poems and patriotic songs. His celebrated 'Shikalpar Gaan' (verses of enchantment) is one such example. Apart from these, he was possibly the lone vocal secularist poet of his time whose writings reflect life and culture of various religious communities of the British India advocating communal harmony. By suitable and appropriate use of Arabic, Persian and Urdu words in his writings Nazrul Islam enriched the Bengali literature itself.

Kazi Nazrul Islam is perhaps the only Bengali poet who has written a large number of devotional songs for both the Muslim and Hindu communities. It is on record that Nazrul is still at top in respect of recorded songs. Their number runs into thousands. As a young man his songs were full of the spirit of revolt and his composition at a later stage tended more towards romanticism and soon he came to be acclaimed as one of the greatest poets of the time. He is not only held in high esteem as a famous poet and lyricist but also as a great musician in his own right. If not anything else but for songs Kazi Nazrul Islam will remain immortal as a great composer.

While he was full bloom in writing poems, novels and songs, he lost his beloved son Bulbul in 1930 and his wife Prameela also became paralysed in 1940. All these worries coupled with economic hardship gave a fatal blow to his



health and brought an untimely end to his career in 1942.

Nazrul Islam was brought to Dhaka from Calcutta with fanfare immediately after the emergence of independent Bangladesh and was decorated with the title of the National Poet. Despite requests by litterateurs and intellectuals not much attention was paid to build a house in the name of Poet Nazrul Islam where his works would be preserved and research carried out on his works. However, Nazrul Institute was established at Dhanmondi in 1985 after eight years of his death and that too under pressure from literary-minded people spearheaded by no less a person than Mohammad Nasiruddin. It was again Mohammad Nasiruddin who was instrumental for establishment of Nazrul Institute. It is perhaps a positive sign to note that Nazrul Institute succeeded in bringing out as many as 48 publications on Nazrul which of course include speeches, records and notations of Nazrul songs and the Institute's journal. This list was released by the Institute on the occasion of the 106th anniversary of birth of Mohammad Nasiruddin.

Nazrul breathed his last in Dhaka in 1976 and was buried on Dhaka University campus. On the occasion of Nazrul Zayanti (Nazrul's anniversary of birth) we pay glowing tribute to the poet but I feel his soul may really rest in peace if more research is conducted on his works for appreciation and understanding the greatness of Kazi Nazrul Islam.

You and a Fiery Element

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

In their eyes, you were a mere fireball;
With the passage of time, they prophesied, you would diminish.

Your angst, your anger, your anguish
Would not arouse anybody anymore.
No memorabilia would be there,
your verses no longer cherished.
Yet, betraying all those extra-sensory knowledge,
my dear poet,
Your verses create splashes after splashes in the heart of this humble fellow.

Their supposed profundity now seems so shallow.
Your poems, once proscribed,
give me vigour to take up the challenge of the inevitable clashes
With the gendarmes of the flint-hearted Pharaohs.
Yes, my dear poet, you inspire me to become a bit rash.

When they enslave my brothers and sisters,
When they conjure up the spirits of long-dead monsters,
I find in your verses, vibrantly resonating, my deepest disapprobations.
Then a vow is made to confront the tormentors.

When a martyr's mother stands out
For the justice denied,
When a sea of people shout out
In a genuine rage, then your verses become their slogans.
Yes, my dear poet, like you they then overcome
the fears of guns and goons.
A fiery element then surpasses time' and space's span.



The Poetics and Politics

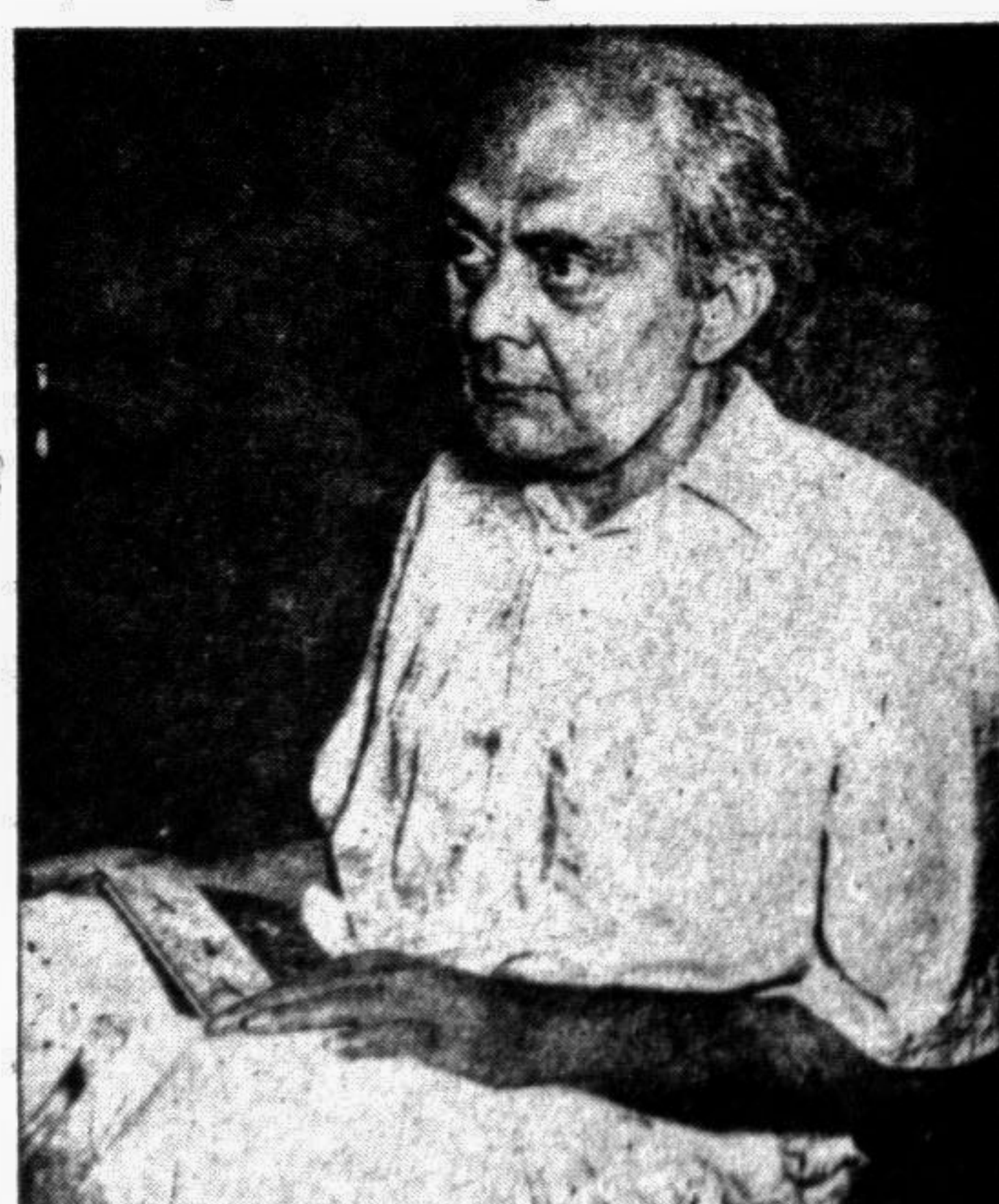
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and the poor all over the world.

Nazrul's internationalism and humanism made him stand against yet another evil of colonialism and

imperialism, namely communalism and fundamentalism. He could say strongly: "You are not a Brahmin, not a Sudra, nor a Hindu, nor a Muslim; you are a human being, that is the truth". This typical Lalonesque response of Nazrul to man naturally brought him into sharp conflicts with the culture of *fatwas*, drawing its energy and inspiration from *shastras*, from religious texts which were then used to undermine men and women quite conveniently in a society that was feudal and colonial. For Nazrul, as he himself mentioned, *shastras* are not prior to man, but man brings *shastras* themselves. It was Nazrul who, perhaps most strongly, unearthed the dirt and design of *shastravallahs* who were called by Nazrul 'shastralcoholics'. In fact, according to Nazrul, the *sheshastravallahs* made wine out of the *Quran*, the *Vedas*, the *Bible*, also turning these texts into a form of trade-capital. And Nazrul stood against this feudal-colonial culture of fundamentalism and *fatwabaji* which is always inimical to the freedom and growth of man.

Nazrul consistently made the point clear in a number of his works that God and religion do not reside in mosques or in temples, but in man himself — in his heart, in his work, in his love, in his songs, in his struggle for unity.

Colonialism in the physical-geographical sense came to an end earlier, but it has redrawn its map, extending itself more subtly and effectively into this part of the world. The feudal relations of production had already been dissolved no doubt; but the accompanying super-structural changes have not yet taken any final shape in that the remnants of feudalism still persist with their force and fury. Capital, which comes "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt", is increasingly replacing man by profit. On the other hand, fundamentalism is posing deadliest threats to man's freedom and creativity. Against such a scenario where the oppressed sigh and cry and die, the Rebel in Nazrul with his poetics and politics of opposition and resistance increasingly assumes his significance, his contemporaneity, and a humanistic appeal. Indeed, to pay tribute to Nazrul Islam is to remain uncompromisingly involved in the struggle for man's freedom.



Trishal's Nazrul

by Nirmolendu Gun

The unaging image of juvenescence
Frozen at fifteen in eternity's frame,
Still haunts Trishal's Kazirsima
Reliving the magic of the thaiden meeting;
The treasured reminiscences of an epiphany.
It all happened due to one Kazi Rafizullah,
An insignificant OC of the British Raj
A uniformed defender of imperialist interests
Whom we can't but thank and acquit from
Charges of onanism of loyalty to looters.
Like most homecomers but unlike all whose
Feral relish is confined to lamifews
He brought to Trishal a living curio
Languishing at an Asansol bakery
A fifteen year old dilute; a gazelle-eyed boy
Of kinky flowing locks — Dukhu Miah!
What a name! A kind of sad-sack it means
What a fate! Lotted to be hand-cuffed
In 1922, Comilla, Nazrul's first confinement
Began here with an affectionate arrest.
Policemen need not be gemmologists for
Their trade is mostly to listen and not to see but
Rafizullah was, in picking an uncut diamond from mire.
For once in this vermiculous zone
Decent could not turn a discovery into disillusion.
Darirampur School had room for this lad
Winning in turn a place in history unwittingly.
But the inchoate chapter of love and security closed
For a man fatally enamoured of love and freedom
Of higher intensity, of tenuous tensor and the truant
Was out of Mymensingh, furtively back to Burdwan.
Were the morsels at the Presidency jail:
The carping clerics in Calcutta; the spleen-synging brew
So overwhelmingly fascinating? Certainly, All the better.
The concoction of suffering gave us an egalitarian poet
Wide, embracing and stretched across the horizon
Like the flaming, rubefaction summer sky.
But you, poet, lost in the tranquil Trishal
A loving canopy of wide welkin.
Memory's melody held you in a muted trance
As I entered the P G Hospital sixty one years later
In the old capital of new-fangled Bangladesh in 1975
Resigned to a rueful regression
by the throny rivage on a summer noon
He was tuning unheard melodies for the 33rd year
Under the dual reign of amnesia and alalia
Armed guards kept vigil to the solitary servitude
To me it seemed the last imprisonment of the rebel.
Nazrul Islam in this cell?
Limp limbs were emboldened by a sudden rush of blood
Sentry refused entry; Not now.
Reesty rebel inside surprised me: Yes right now!
Only to see a masque of many moods on a white bed.
A sudden turn of a pair of eyes baptised in innocence;
What cruelty Oh Lord!
Ah what a plight in sight!

Translated by Chandrashekhar Das