

Nazrul Centenary

The Fiery Brilliance of Poet Nazrul Islam

by Shamsul Huda Chowdhury



THE fiery brilliance of our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam has been portrayed by Nripendra Krishna Bhattacharya, a contemporary Bengali litterateur in a way that deserves more mentioning. He compared the talents of the poet with the speed and flow of the Niagara, the most forceful waterfall of the world. He remarked: If out the whims of the nature, the flows of the Niagara suddenly dries up, no photograph of a cameraman will be able to testify to its how forceful it had been. Similarly, today, whom we identify as a poet, a lyricist, it will not be possible to make others understand through them, what Nazrul had been to us. Compared to the upsurge of the tide of a sea, the flame of a wildfire, God Almighty has sent Nazrul in the thick darkness of the nation with a different frame. This in nutshell is a testimony to the talents of our loving poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, whose Centenary of birth the Nation is celebrating today.

The year 1921 all on a sudden marked a turning point to the poetic genius of Kazi Nazrul Islam. Surprisingly enough, with the publication of his long poem, 'Bidrohi' the Bengali literature instantly entered into a new chapter of vigor and energy. Kazi Nazrul Islam was soon brought into prominence through this poem. It was first published in 1921 correspond-

ing to the Bengali calendar year 1328, in the Kartik issue of 'Muslim Bharat', a monthly Bengali journal published from Calcutta. Within a span of two months, the poem was reprinted in Bijli a Bengali weekly, also published from Calcutta on 22nd Poush, the same year. Within the next six months it was reprinted in Prabhati, another Bengali monthly of Calcutta in its Jaistha issue of 1329. As a matter of fact, the literary circle of Calcutta was started on going through this fiery poem. The Bidrohi instantaneously opened up a new vista, a new life, a new dimension hitherto unknown to the horizon of Bengali literature.

Obviously, it was in the year 1921 that the Bengali literature discovered the uncompromising and youthful rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. The revolt of Nazrul was against the injustices that prevailed in the then society. His was a total revolution against all odds. In the same breath he attacked the British colonial regime of India as well as social inequalities, superstitions, religious dogmas, suppressions and oppressions. The mighty pen of the rebel poet penetrated into the very base of the British colonial administration in India. Through his pen Kazi Nazrul Islam gave expression to his thoughts equally as a poet, a lyricist, a litterateur, a novelist, a play-

wright and sometimes also as a journalist.

The unique character of Nazrul Islam was that under no circumstances he bent his head to anybody. He wrote and sang for the truth without fear of victimization. While he revolted against tyranny and oppression, he vowed that he would take rest only when the cries of the oppressed were heard no more. The rebel poet declared:

*The great embattled revolutionary that I am
I shall repose then and only then
When the cries of the oppressed
Will no longer rent the sky
Under the tyrant's bloody sword*

(English rendering by Professor Kabir Chowdhury)

The colonial administration of the British Regime was soon alerted at the uncompromising writings and compositions of poet Nazrul Islam. Charge of sedition was brought against him. He was first sent to jail in September 1920 for his poem 'Anondomoyee Agomoney'. The poem was sent to jail for the second time in January 1923. But all the repressive action of the colonial master failed to subdue the rebel poet. The poet even created panic in jail through his compositions like 'Shikal Para Chhal' and 'Kakar

Oi Louho Kapai' etc.

No other poet of the subcontinent could project the sufferings of the toiling masses as Nazrul did. His ideas for their emancipation were first published in 'Gonobani', a Bengali weekly of Calcutta and jointly edited by the poet himself and Muzaffar Ahmad. His political views first found expression in 'Fani Monasha' and 'Sarbahara'. The poet did not care if he would survive the period of turmoil that preceded the independence of the subcontinent. His only wish was to herald the ruin of those who robbed away the food of the millions and drove them to death. The poet composed in his poem 'Sarbahara':

*I don't care if I live or don't
When the turmoil of the age is past
I wish you only to pray for me
That through my writings
I can herald
The ruin of those who rob
Over three hundred millions of men*

*Of their food
And drive them to their death*

(English rendering by Professor Kabir Chowdhury)

Kazi Nazrul Islam excelled equally as a poet and a lyricist. He composed songs which outnumbered even Tagore's. His

compositions of patriotic songs have a magic power to rouse even a sleeping man. His Islamic songs, Ghazals, love songs, comic songs, heavy sombre songs etc are also equally unparalleled in rhyme, theme and language. Significantly enough Kazi Nazrul Islam's songs and poems equally inspired us during the nine-month long bloody War of Independence in 1971. Our war against the occupation force was streamlined and the morale of our liberation army as well as the seven and a half crore Bengalees were rejuvenated by his fiery songs.

Shortly after Independence, the poet was brought to Dhaka from Calcutta by the Government of Bangladesh at the initiative of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He was extended all facilities of treatment and living including a spacious house at Dhanmondi. The poet was conferred the citizenship of Bangladesh in 1976. The same year of February 21, he was presented the 'Eklusher Padak', the highest national award of Bangladesh.

The brightest star of Bengali literature was lost forever on August 29, 1976. The rebel poet breathed his last on this date at 10-10 AM in a cabin of Dhaka

Post Graduate Medical Hospital, now Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical University.

The poet lived for seventy-seven years. But in practice he lived for forty-three years only. The rest thirty-four years of his life were spent in an absolute insanity. The literary talents of the poet thus came to a halt prematurely. Obviously, Nazrul Islam did not get a long time to record his literary contributions as other literary geniuses of the world.

The nation will remain ever grateful to this pride poet of Bengali literature. The poet laurel passed away from us twenty-three years back and is lying in an eternal sleep by the side of the Dhaka University Mosque. But his writings and compositions are with us that will give us a constant courage to keep our heads high above misfortunes and evils that may stand in our way to progress or threaten us to succumb to temptations and greed, superstitions, suppressions, oppressions and all the vices. His mighty compositions will ever ring in our ears and will reverberate with echoes that would give us courage for generations to come



Havildar Nazrul, at the age of 21.

Kazi Nazrul Islam : Century's Greatest Gain

by Areful Huq

IF by freak of nature it so happens that the Niagara Falls dries up, it will be impossible to realise the tremendous speed of its stream from a photograph. Similarly we would not understand what poet Nazrul Islam was looking at the trend and lifestyle of those in Bangladesh whom we as poets, singers or musicians. The Creator had created Nazrul in unique mould like the overwhelming floods, sweeping flames, in pitched darkness of slavery. These are words of Nripendra Krishna Bhattacharya, an Indian writer. Another writer wrote: "I remember Nazrul when I see a mountain. I feel Nazrul used to move on the mountains. Why I think so, I don't know." Nazrul is really like the peak of a mountain, where the storm hits and clouds cover up. But it is where one, if one can climb up, can take breath which is not possible anywhere else. That is why Nazrul is our greatest gain in a hundred years. Nazrul combined in him the mind and body of crores of people through the century. So Nazrul is a great existence to us.

The century of birth of this great man falls on 11 Jaistha 1406 i.e. 25 May 1999. How will we observe it? We saw such a day for another great poet Rabindranath Tagore celebrated in West Bengal in 1961.

The planning and preparation for that celebration sprawled over ten years. Low priced anthology of Tagore writers were published and Rabindra centres sprang up even at subdivisional level. The centenary was celebrated at schools, colleges, universities, cultural centres. The day was declared a public holiday. Many other programmes were organised for their na-

tional poet.

How will we celebrate the centenary birthday of our national poet? Will Nazrul centres be set up at districts? Will we realise that Nazrul is not read in the universities? Probhat Mukherjee wrote 'Rabindra Jiboni'. Besides, Maitreyee Devi and other researchers published books on the occasion. Will there be such efforts in Bangladesh for Nazrul?

So far no complete book has been written on the life of Nazrul. We are still ignorant of the part of life of Nazrul spent with the village bards (falo) and in Karachi. Has there been real research on Nazrul as journalist, film maker, singer, philosopher? Is there real work of depth on his literature, poems, songs? Has there been any work on the politics of Nazrul? How shall we know a complete Nazrul? How can we touch Nazrul towering like the Himalayas if we cannot reach him? May be the Bengali Muslims do not have that broadness of mind to adorn the personality of Nazrul.

The other day one foreigner said that he wanted to take some works of our national poet back home. "Sorry," I said. Because there has not been any translation of any work of Nazrul in this country. The foreigner was surprised. It was not unusual. There has not been any translation of any work of Nazrul in hundred years. How miserably we failed to evaluate him who held high the light for the Muslims in an age of darkness, wielded unsheathed sword on behalf of half-dead Bengali Muslims to inspire them and played the role of a bugler to raise new consciousness for them? Don't we have anything to do for this great man?

We heard that the government would begin celebration of Nazrul centenary. We heard some one hundred boys and girls would sing recite and other programmes would be organised. The Prime Minister would perhaps release some balloons amid claps to inaugurate such function. And there would be claims that such functions were not held earlier. But the grave will remain neglected. The Nazrul fans longed for a memorial is built at the site of the mar of the poet and Nazrul centres spring up at every district headquarters. They feel a Nazrul museum will also be set up. Probably that will not happen. Strangely enough there are Nazrul Chair and Nazrul Professorship, but Nazrul is not taught. What a tragedy not witnessed anywhere in the world. In Bangladesh, one is elated or critical of Nazrul just reading a poem. There is no effort to go for studying Nazrul really.

The other day a professor said we could not approve of Nazrul's 'Kirtan' and 'Shyama Sangeet' (Hindu religious songs) or his capacity to pierce the throne of Allah. Yet another professor said the reason he became insane was that he wrote Islamic songs. This is the picture of how Nazrul is studied. We are far behind the objective of what real Nazrul study should be. Nobody is trying to know what Nazrul was really was.

Nazrul was an epic poet without writing one. Because he did exactly what an epic poet does in highlighting the life-unravelling truth about life in his poems and long poems.

Nazrul was a rebel, a lover, a humanist, a fighter in class struggle, a spiritualist, a devotee and above all a Muslim. That he focused on all questions that arise in every heart, so he is an epic poet like Hafiz and Iqbal. To understand Nazrul in his entirety, all these aspects must be taken into consideration together. Only those who want to see Nazrul partly or perfunctorily, try to do it. Otherwise as described, in the preceding paragraph.

There is no doubt that Nazrul is the poet of Muslim nationalism. This will be clearly perceptible when one truly dives deep into Nazrul's poems. But, like Islam, he had the great broadness to exist with other faiths. He did not want all Showk, Huns, Moghuls, Pathans, Aryans, Dravidians — to merge into one. He never hated a non-believer nor did he shut his eyes from them.

Nazrul appeared at the critical juncture of the Muslims. With the support of the ruling British colonialists, the Hindus had progressed in all spheres of life and the Muslims were lagging behind. Hindus were ahead in education, socio-economic and cultural field. The Muslims of Bengal were then overtaken by hopelessness, frustration, inaction and were bewildered. They were almost dead. They saw darkness on all fronts. Nazrul realised that the nation must be imbued with the spirit of youth. Their pride as human beings has to be roused. He assumed the role of the Rebel. He declared, "Say Hero, say my head is ever high"

If the nation is to be roused, it needs a teacher. Who is that spell-binder? Who would give the call for supreme sacrifice? There was none around Nazrul to give him the heroic mantra. Even Rabindranath's talent was never used to break the shackles of colonial rule. So Nazrul lamented:

*The light of Rabi
(Rabindranath) spread to every
nook and corner,
But, mother, that ray could not
enter the
dark prison.
Rabi's chariot flies through the
sky.
When the monster on the
ground rides on man.*

Nazrul himself assumed the role of teacher to rouse the nation with its inherent strength to throw away the monster from motherland. He wore the pale yellow cloth and inspired the nation to fight.

He gave the mantra to the people:
*"I am irresistible, I break everything.
I am against all rules, lawless:
trample
all binding,
all laws, shackles."*

He told those who wanted to use force to subdue all to establish themselves in the glory of gods: "I will tear the hearts of the capricious god". He told those same exploiters who called themselves the gods: "Tearing apart the sky, flying far above sun, moon, planets, through the void, the seat of god, I rise as the wonder of the god."

It will be wrong to equate this pride of Nazrul with that spiritual philosophy. It reflected the consciousness of the period, and tallied well with the politics and society of the time. He used the words as capricious



Nazrul in his teens.

god as a symbol for the British King and 'god's' spat for the throne. He rebelled against the rule and the King. He used the traditions of both the Muslims and Hindus in the cleverest way and the credit goes to Nazrul alone.

He composed some 300 Islamic songs because he was inspired by Islamic ideal.

We must strive to present to the generation of next millennium a true picture Nazrul. All will profit by that.

Insan-e-Kamil of Iqbal and Purushottom of Nazrul

by Shahed Ali

BOTH Iqbal and Nazrul are rebels who wanted to build new society breaking the existing one. In case of Nazrul, it was not a pious wish. He jumped into action to break up the exploitative society and joined in the reconstruction of a creative society. He gave a clarion call to all to join his efforts. Both the poets were born to Muslim families with Islamic tradition. Islam has fought injustice, falsehood and exploitation. It never compromises with slavery which it considers anti-human.

Man is a regent of the world where Iqbal and Nazrul were born. And the entire creation is placed at the disposal of man, who was given authority over everything in nature including time. But with ignorance, influence of society, politics, economics, and mental slavery, man is blinded. He fails to recognize himself and starts behaving like an animal which considers life and death as its fate. When he comes to know about the Creator, he realizes that there is nothing between him and his Creator before whom he has, to prostrate. He bows only before his Creator to whom every creation falls in to prostration.

Man is released from his shackles at this point. He comes out in the open wide world "kicking away the closed door of the prison" and proclaims "I have discovered myself, suddenly all barriers have collapsed." Such an unbounded person can be true to his own self and can be elated in his own creation. "My eyes, face or even my blood is happy with the happiness for creation." Suddenly we comprehend how genuine is poet's pain of creation. How truly it was reflected in his poetry.

It was this acceptance which was at the root of the world where Nazrul and Iqbal grew up. Man has come to the world as its emperor to rule over it and not to be ruled by anyone else. Nazrul's 'Bidrohi' is a testa-

ment to this realization of the self and is a clear proclamation. This 'freeman' is Nazrul's 'Purushottom' and Iqbal's 'Insan-e-Kamil'.

Man-made rules, politico-economic slavery, society and customs all overshadow the supremacy of man and forbids him from knowing himself. But man is at the root of all creations. Only Iqbal and Nazrul made this bold declaration. The poet wanted to free man from all these restrictions — restrictions imposed by the colonial rule, customs and traditions. Iqbal declared that "the sky had turned old and dilapidated. He wanted a new one. Nazrul's rebellion will not end till all kinds of oppression and the oppressors were eliminated. That is till the world is turned into one free from exploitation and habitable for free man. The struggle of the poet will continue as he is an eternal fighter. Nazrul does want to evoke piety by saying that "the hands of king steal the wealth of the poor." Nazrul wants to save the poor and the exploited by breaking the hands of the tyrannical king and the exploiter.

Man-made law is designed to ensure division, exploitation and oppression so that man can be held in prison for eternity. But when man faces his own self by earning the ultimate knowledge, his hands go up in prayer to his Creator who then asks His creation about things that makes him happy. This self realization then makes man a co-worker of his Creator.

He is freed from all customs and bindings — temporal and spiritual. In happiness he cries out, "I am the truth, the godhead." Here the godhead means the ruler of the world. Nazrul's godhead represented the same thing. He is not under control of anyone. So the poet declares: "Say, hero, my head is high." Both Nazrul and Iqbal sang for free man and this man is eternally engaged in the struggle to free all from every kind of slavery.

Nazrul: In Search of a Lost Pearl

by Commodore (Rtd) MA Rahman

I feel overwhelmed with the collective effort of the nation to search for the lost pearl. May be we shall be able to gain his rightful place in the world as the great poet. We looked at him in the way our intellectuals and ruling clique presented him to us. We have known him as a great poet and critics have now evaluated him in greater depth to make our understanding clearer. They have been looking for the lost laurels and stumbled on the truth. Now they join their tune with the great poet:

*Unscalable mountain, difficult
deserts, we have to traverse
them but the night is dark.
We feel the people are again
reawakening with courage.
With Nazrul, they are singing:
Barriers, prohibitions they
didn't agree, for they were men,
not cattle in the enclosure.*

The poet is tough on one aspect where he fights injustice. He signs the song of equality. He traverses the universe in one moment, he returns to earth the other moment:

*Frustration, defeats, pains,
Can't I hide in this night,
Secretly and alone,
The tears well up in the eyes.*

The poet was a loner from

his childhood and was known as 'Dukhu Mian.' Nothing could desist him from rising against injustice. While he burns himself in the Fire of the Rebel, he complains to the Creator why the people should be barred from their rights. Why must they always keep their heads bowing?

*Now the prisoners realise
where's freedom,
So are they roaring across free
world.
Victory for the oppressed,
Victory for new campaign,
Victory for new rising.*

What we heard about him from our intellectuals, or read about him as a poet of the people and unity, we describe him as such. But few wrote that he was also the champion of the Bengali Muslims and reflected in his writings their hopes, aspirations, life and literature.

In a way, the poet remained undiscovered to us. But there must be efforts to discover the many splendoured undiscovered aspects of the poet's life. It must be revealed that the poet talked of pangs and sufferings of the humanity. He symbolized freedom. He was the emblem of people's cherished desire for beauty, good life.

Nazrul suffered imprisonment, the wrath of British oppression. He had to live a life of a fugitive to avoid the harassment of the imperial power. He suffered the pangs of poverty. Even he suffered the criticism of Mullahs and Pandits. In a word he was kept on the tenterhook all the time and his family could not have peace. In real terms, he was a sad person.

Probably he had this prognosis. Before bidding adieu to this mortal world he wrote: "Probably there will be big meetings after my demise. Many will praise me for my patriotic sacrifice, being a rebel. There will be poems on me. So many adjectives will be used for me. Maybe someone

will break the table being inspired and agitated over me. But please don't go to such meeting if you can. On the other hand please remember something which has not been written about my life."

The poet himself indicated that he had other side of his life which is more interesting and worth attention, but which has never been written and discussed.

How shall we remember our dear great poet? No word is good enough to describe our deep regret over the fact that Nazrul is not amply studied in our colleges and universities.

We must make our efforts to establish a Nazrul University.

The official efforts are unnecessary. If the people love Nazrul and are inspired by his poetry, funds can be collected to set up such a University.

Who will give leadership, who has the courage? Come forward, Oh youngman, beckons the future. Struggle ahead is intense, but we must overcome."

We do not want to involve Nazrul in any controversy. Nazrul belongs to all Bengali speaking people across the world. He is a poet of the world in terms of his dynamic message for the human race, his philosophy, his love for youth.

His philosophy about which we are ignorant is beautifully encapsulated in one of his poems.

*"My Lord is Allah, whom do I fear?
I follow Quran, Islam is my*

religion and I am a Muslim."

He was an eternal revolutionary. But for whom was the revolution?

*"I am soldier of Allah, I fear none,
I cut loose all binding with His sword,
Storm is my life-companion, I am rebel wind,
I sing for revolution, I sing for jihad"*

Truly Nazrul is a wonder. He trod all branches of literature during his short literary life and he left his mark everywhere.

Let us promise to make united efforts to establish a Nazrul University to keep up the memory of this great poet. Let Allah give us strength and capability to fulfil our desire.

Nazrul and Kamal Pasha

by Shahabuddin Ahmad



1972: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then Prime Minister, with the poet at Kabibhaban, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Among others were Anwar Pasha of Turkey, Jagul Pasha of Egypt, Amanullah and leader Abdul Karim of Afghanistan. Nazrul Islam composed poems based on the life and heroism of these world famous personalities. But in his youth, Nazrul was greatly influenced and pulsated by the heroic role played by Kamal Ataturk in the Liberation War of Turkey and for his modern outlook, spirit of nationalism, social and state policy and endeavours for the emancipation of the intellect. It may be mentioned here that like Mustafa Kamal Pasha, poet Kazi Nazrul Islam himself was a soldier who had joined the First World War as a soldier of the 49 Bengalee Regiment and he found close affinity with the spirit and characteristics of Kamal Pasha who had fought against the foreign power, exploitation, oppression and superstition of various kinds

being imbued with the spirit of nationalism, humanism and patriotism.

In joining the army there was a sharp and basic difference between Mustafa Kamal Pasha and Kazi Nazrul Islam and that was in the perspective of their respective countries. Nazrul joined the British Army for his livelihood and Mustafa Kamal joined the National Army for the liberation of his country. Though Nazrul took his profession in the British Army he did not have to take part in the actual warfare, rather he had been posted in Karachi far away from the war-field. Though Nazrul was in the foreign colonial army, he kept in his mind the freedom-loving spirit and love for the independence of his motherland. He was undivided Indian sub-continent. Poet Kazi Nazrul, an ex-Havildar of the Bengalee Regiment formed during the First World War, struggled against the British colonialism and

foreign domination and for the independence of his motherland. As a poet and personality, Nazrul fought throughout his active life against oppression, injustice, social inequality, superstitions and other vices.

As regards the background, where and in which level poet Kazi Nazrul Islam was influenced by the characteristics and heroic deeds of Kamal Pasha, it needs to be mentioned here that, in 1914 Nazrul joined the Bengalee Regiment created during the First World War and at that time Mustafa Kamal Pasha was the Commander of the Ottoman 7th Regiment and had been fighting for Turkey's independence, against the allied power.

In 1920 the 49th Bengalee Regiment had been disbanded and the ex-Havildar Kazi Nazrul Islam returned to Calcutta from Karachi. By then Mustafa Kamal Pasha, a great soldier of Turkey, had organised the liberation forces, imbued the Turkish people with the spirit of nationalism and

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