

Nazrul Centenary

Kazi Nazrul Islam

A CHRONOLOGY OF LIFE

by Sajed Kamal

1899 May 24. Kazi Nazrul Islam born at the village of Churulia in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal, India. Mother, Zadeha Khatun; father, Kazi Fakir Ahmad, the Imam (the head of a mosque) and the custodian of the Haji Pahlwan's mazar (a Muslim shrine) in his village; brothers, Kazi Shahabjan and Kazi Ali Husain, and sister, Umme Kulsum (three surviving out of the total of seven sons and two daughters of Fakir Ahmad).

1908 March 20. Nazrul's father dies at the age of 60.

1909 Passes the Muslim lower primary education examination in maktab (a Muslim primary school).

1910 Discontinues formal schooling due to financial hardship. Earns his livelihood as a teacher at a maktab, muazzin (a caller for prayer at a mosque), and a custodian of the village shrine, etc.

1911 Joins a *leto* group (folk musical troupe) with the encouragement and help from his uncle, Kazi Bazle Karim, a singer-song-writer-composer, himself a *Goda Kobi* (the leading poet) of his troupe. Bazle Karim wrote songs in Bengali as well as Urdu and Farsi. Nazrul succeeded him as the *Goda*. Nazrul's talent impressed many others, including the reputed, Sheikh Chokor Ali *Goda Kobi*, who also encouraged him to develop his *leto* career. During his four years or so with *leto* troupes, along with songs, Nazrul also wrote scripts for *leto* dramas, one of his scripts was based on the Bengali epic poem, *Meghnad Bodh* (The Slaughter of Meghnad) by Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873).

Most of Nazrul's writings for *leto* have been lost.

1911 Studies at Mathrun Nabinchandra Institution (Class VII).

1912 Works in the household of a railway guard, in a bakery shop, etc.

1913-14 Meets Kazi Rafizullah, a police sub-inspector, who arranges for Nazrul to study free of charge at Darirampur High School in Mymensingh. Completes Class VII, then returns to Churulia.

1915-17 Admitted to Searsol Raj High School in Raniganj, Burdwan, in Class VIII. Kazi Manzoor Hussain, a distant relative, helped making the arrangements for free schooling and accommodation. Studies through Class X, until the pre-test examination required prior to the matriculation examination.

As Searsol Raj prior to Satish Kanjilal, a teacher with some mastery in classical music, who actively encouraged Nazrul to continue to develop his musical talent.

Also meets Nibaran Chandra Ghatak, a teacher and member of an underground revolutionary organization committed to go as far as armed struggle against the British colonial government. Attracted by the thought of utilizing the training later for the freedom movement, Nazrul and his schoolmate Shalajananda Mukhopadhyaya (the latter-day renowned litterateur) decide to join the army. They travel to Calcutta. Nazrul passes the recruitment examination. Shalajananda doesn't. Nazrul joins the army in the 49th Bengali Paltan. Trained in Nawabshah, stationed in Karachi.

1919 First publication, *Boudhuler Atma-kahini* (Life Story of a Vagabond), a short story in *Saogat* magazine, 1st year, 7th issue, in Calcutta. Mohammad Nasiruddin, editor. The first article published, *Turki Mahilar Ghonto Khola* (The Unveiled Face of a Turkish Woman), in *Saogat*, 1st year, 12th issue.

First poem published, *Mukti* (Freedom), in the *Bangyo Muslim Sahitya Patrika* (Bengali Muslim Literary Magazine).

Nazrul Havildar (sergeant) in the army in Karachi.

1920 Returns to Calcutta, first staying in the same hostel with Shalajananda Mukhopadhyaya, then in a rented apartment with Comrade Muzaaffar Ahmad.

November 10. The Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress formed. Nazrul announces and publishes the party pamphlet.

December 16, the premiere issue of *Langal* (The Plough), the Party magazine, contains Nazrul's set of poems on equality.

1926 The family moves to Krishnanagar.

May, writes and sings *Kandari Hushiar* (Helmshelm Be Award for the inaugural song of the Krishnanagar Congress.

Their second son, Arindam Khalid (Bulbul), born.

Composes his first ghazal, "Bulbul tu phul shakhati dis ne aji dot."

1927 February, comes to Dhaka to attend and speak at the annual conference of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj (Muslim Literary Society).

Nazrul faces tremendous financial hardship, especially due to non-payment for his writings by several publishers; faces a crisis as well as growing threats and harassment by both the British government and the Hindu and Muslim conservative members of the society; even subjected to physical attacks.

March, *Saogat* sponsors a "variety performance" to benefit Nazrul and his family. Held at Albert Hall in Calcutta, attended by Nazrul.

July, Sufia N. Hossain (later Sufia Kamal), a young poet of 16, moved by the news of Nazrul's continual, even worsening, hardship and harassment, appeals as "his [Nazrul's] mother, his sister" in a letter to *Saogat* editor Mohammad Nasiruddin to come to his rescue, to "tie him with affection."

Nazrul accepts Nasiruddin's offer to join the salaried staff of *Saogat*, commuting from Krishnanagar.

1928 Mother dies.

Two separate editions of *Sanchita* published.

November, Nazrul honoured by the Haragachha Tarun Sangha (Haragachha Youth Organization) in Rangpur.

For both financial and health considerations, Nazrul's friends and well-wishers associated with *Saogat* help the family to move to Calcutta. On behalf of the family, *Saogat* rents an apartment in the same building until the family moves to Pan Bagan a few months later.

December, Nazrul honoured by the Rajshahi Muslim Club in Rajshahi.

December, Nazrul attends the conference of the Nikhil Bharat Krishak O Sramik Dal (All India Farmers and Workers

Party); sings the inaugural song.

December, Nazrul sings the inaugural song at the meeting of the All India Socialist Youth Congress at Calcutta, presided by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

1929 Son, Kazi Sabysachi, born.

January, Nazrul attends the inaugural ceremony of the Muslim Shiksha Samiti (Muslim Education Association) in Chittagong; honoured by several organizations in Chittagong the same year, including the Bulbul Society.

Honoured at the annual conference of the Bogra Akkelpur Youngmen's Muslim Association.

December 15, a grand National Civic Reception for Nazrul held at Albert Hall, Calcutta, organized by the *Saogat Sahitya Majlis* (*Saogat* Literary Society). Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, an eminent Bengali scientist, presiding; and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the celebrated political leader and freedom fighter, the chief guest.

1930 Son, Kazi Aniruddha, born.

Pralayashikha (The Doomsday Flame) a collection of poems and songs, and *Chandrabindu* (The Nasal Mark), a collection of songs, published in Calcutta; both are proscribed.

May 7, Bulbul dies of smallpox. Even by this early age of three and a half, Bulbul had shown signs of astounding musical talent.

For a period lasting several years in the 30s, Nazrul's career flourishes with a variety of roles, including as a recording artist with gramophone companies, a composer, music director, singer, song and story writer, actor, etc. in films, plays, and radio programmes. Nazrul's association with gramophone companies brought him a few years of financial success. It was difficult for Nazrul to get a recording contract because of the British authority who would not allow the recording of his songs on political grounds. Even the admirers of Nazrul were subject to scrutiny. Harendra Dutta sang and recorded a song of Nazrul but kept Nazrul's name out of the label fearing that the British authority of the recording company (His Master's Voice) would not permit the recording. But the recording companies finally gave in to the immense popularity of Nazrul and, sensing profit in it, started offering him contracts.

Nazrul's association with recording companies possibly began during 1928, flourishing during the 30s. Over the years, the recording companies which Nazrul associated with included Mahapone, Hindustan, Senola and His Master's Voice (HMV).

The chief trainer of HMV was Ustad Zamiruddin Khan, a reputed master of Hindustani classical and semi-classical music. Nazrul trained under him, and upon Ustad Zamiruddin Khan's death in 1932, succeeded him as the chief trainer. In addition to his current position as the chief composer, Nazrul also associated himself closely with many other eminent musicians, including Ustads Kader Bux, Manju Saheb, Dabir Khan, Mastan Gama, Pandits Jnanendraprasad Goswami and Suresh Chakravarty.

1931 Julie, travels to Darjeeling, accompanied by *Barshabani* editor, Jahanara Chowdhury; meets with Tagore.

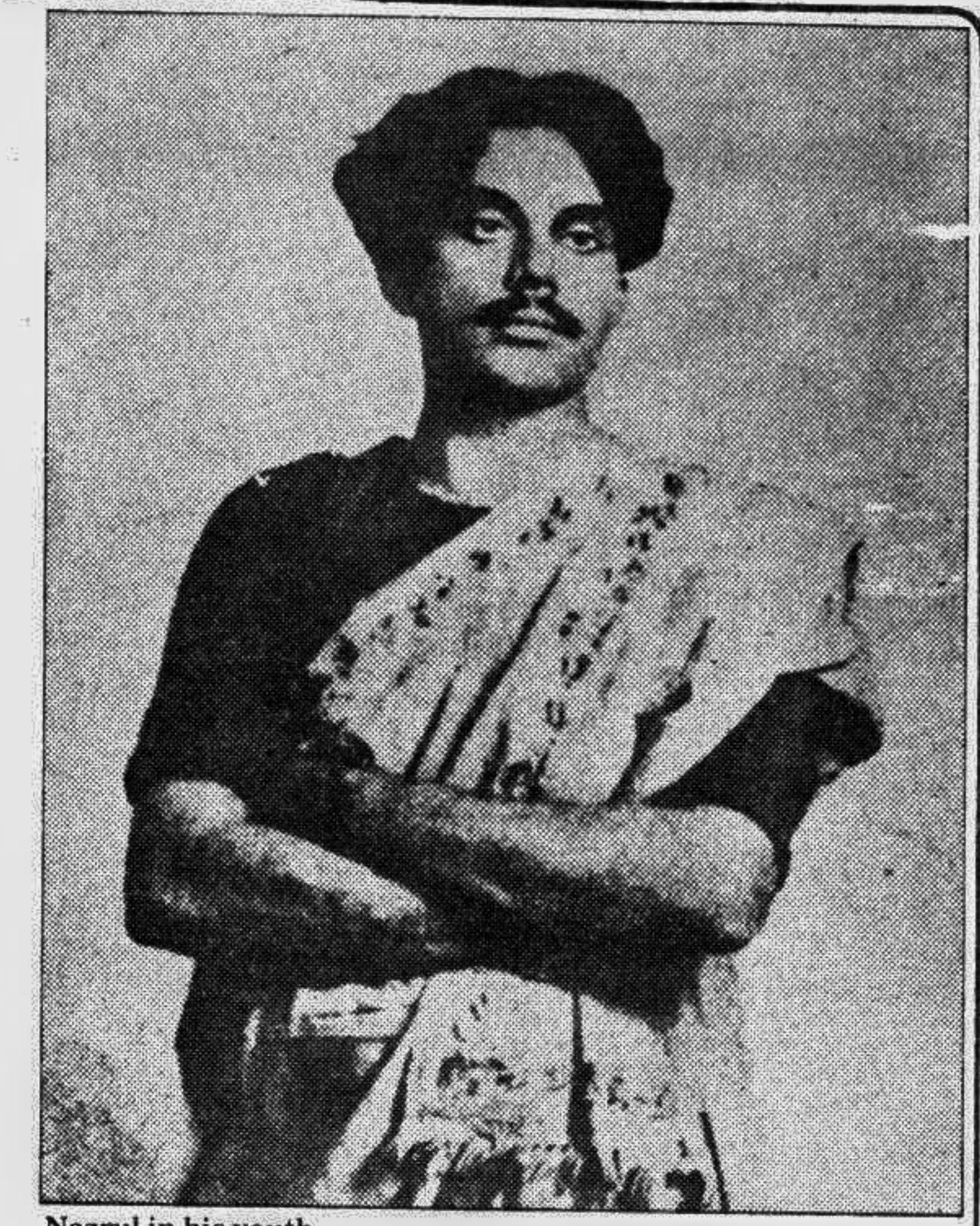
1932 Presides over the *Sirajganj Bangyo Muslim Tarun Samanmel* (Sirajganj Bengali Muslim Youth Conference).

1936 Presides over the Faridpur Muslim Students Conference.

1938 Presides over the Bangyo Musselman Sahitya Sammelan (Bengali Muslim Literary Conference) in Calcutta.

Pramila Nazrul afflicted with paralysis of the lower half of her body.

Financial crisis re-emerging, compounded by Pramila's



Nazrul in his youth.

medical expenses. Nazrul resorts to mortgaging the royalties of his gramophone records and literary works for a mere sum of 4000 rupees.

1940 Assumes the chief editorship of the republished *Naujoog*.

Attends the year-end celebration programme of Dhaka Radio.

1941 March, presides over the annual conference of Bangaon Sahitya Sabha (Bangaon Literary Society).

April 5 & 6, presides over the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Bangla Musselman Sahitya Samiti; delivers his final address, "Jodi ar banshi na baje" (If the flute doesn't play any more).

May 25, Nazrul's 43rd birthday celebrated in Calcutta; Poet Jatin Mohan Bagchi, presiding.

August 7, Tagore dies in Calcutta. Nazrul reads his poem, "Rabhabara" (Loss of Rab) on All India Radio, Calcutta, soon afterwards.

1942 July 10, while participating in a children's programme on All India Radio, Calcutta, Nazrul is struck by the loss of his power of speech. His mental capacities affected. July 19, taken to health retreat Madhupur for a change.

October 7, admitted to Lumbini Park Mental Hospital Calcutta, for three months. No improvements.

1943 Nazrul Niramoy Samiti, a committee to care for Nazrul formed; Shyamaprasad Mukhopadhyay, president.

1945 Calcutta University awards Nazrul the "Jagattarini Gold Medal".

1947 August, the end of British rule in India. India divided into India and Pakistan.

1952 July, the Nazrul Niramoy Samiti sends Nazrul and Pramila to an asylum in Ranchi for treatment for four months. No improvements.

1953 May, the Samiti sends them to London, then to Vienna for treatment. No improvements. Return to Calcutta on December 15.

1960 Awarded the "Padmabhushan" title by the Government of India.

1962 June 30, Pramila dies. Buried in Churulia.

1971 March 25, Bangladesh's liberation war against Pakistan's colonial rule begins in the face of planned genocide of the Bengalis.

December 16, the Pakistani military forces surrender to the joint command of the Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini — the freedom fighters — and the Indian army. Bangladesh assumes its sovereignty.

1972 May 24, Nazrul brought to Bangladesh under a state arrangement, accompanied by Uma Kazi, the wife of his son Kazi Sabysachi.

1974 Son Kazi Aniruddha dies.

1975 Dhaka University confers an honorary D. Lit. on Nazrul.

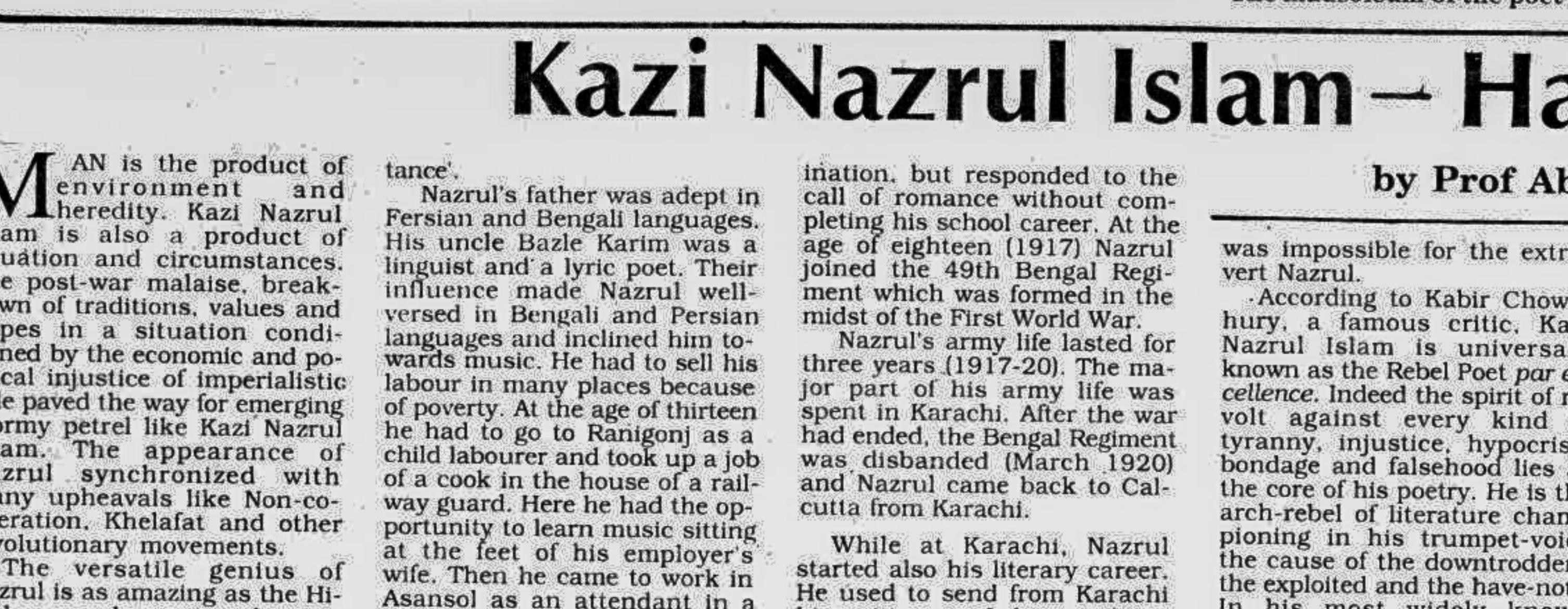
1976 Bangladesh citizenship conferred on Nazrul.

Awarded the "Ekushey Padak" by Bangladesh Government.

August 29, Sunday, 10 am Nazrul dies in P G Hospital in Dhaka. Buried in Dhaka.



The house at Churulia where Nazrul was born.



The mausoleum of the poet beside the Dhaka University mosque.

Kazi Nazrul Islam – Harbinger of Renaissance

by Prof Abul Kalam Elias

MAN is the product of environment and heredity. Kazi Nazrul Islam is also a product of situation and circumstances. The post-war malaise, breakdown of traditions, values and hopes in a situation conditioned by the economic and political injustice of imperialistic rule paved the way for emerging stormy petrel like Kazi Nazrul Islam. The appearance of Nazrul synchronized with many upheavals like Non-cooperation, Khelafat and other revolutionary movements.

The versatile genius of Nazrul is as amazing as the Himalayas and as astonishing as the boundless ocean. It is difficult to explain how a boy coming from an indigent, lowly educated family gained permanent recognition in the realms of literature and music. They say every man is self-taught. Nazrul was not the maker of his own destiny.

Nazrul was born in a stormy night of 25 May 1899 in a village called Churulia in Burdwan district of West Bengal. Churulia was a very old village with hundreds of temples, some mosques and mazars. In his childhood, Nazrul used to be called by such names as Dukhu Miya (darling of sorrow). He suffered all through his life and his behaviour resembled that of an abnormal saint or problem child.

The Kazi family had migrated from Patna in Bihar to Churulia in Bengal towards the end of Mughal rule and received the title of Kazi (Judge) from Mughal Emperor Shah Alam.

Nazrul's father died when he was nine years old (1908). And from that day he started his life of struggle. It was to keep the wolf from the door that he had to take up at the age of ten such odd jobs as teaching at a maktab, muazzin (a caller for prayer at a mosque) and a caretaker of the village shrine.

The weapons of a writer and poet are experience, observation and imagination. Nazrul gathered much experience about Islamic rituals, Muslim social practices and Hindu mythology. Quite naturally the receptive and sensitive mind of young Nazrul was influenced by the message of saint poets of Bengal, popular and folk traditions, customs and ways of life of the people around him.

As Francis Bacon wrote — 'An educated man is not necessarily a cultured man, culture is in the background and inheri-

tance'. Nazrul's father was adept in Persian and Bengali languages. His uncle, Bazle Karim, was a linguist and a lyric poet. Their influence made Nazrul well-versed in Bengali and Persian languages and inclined him to music. He had to sell his labour in many places because of poverty. At the age of thirteen he had to go to Raniganj as a child labourer and took up a job of a cook in the house of a railway guard. Here he had the opportunity to learn music sitting at the feet of his employer's wife. Then he came to work in Asansol as an attendant in a bread shop at a monthly wage of rupee eight only. By sheer luck young Nazrul was rescued from his wretched condition by Kazi Rafiullah who was Police Inspector of Asansol. He took Nazrul to his native village Darirampur in Mymensingh district (1914) and got him admitted to a high school. Nazrul played truant from many schools. His life is full of vicissitudes. He got admitted in Searsol Raj School at Raniganj in 1915. Here he came in contact with Sajaljananda, his class fellow, who later turned out to be an eminent novelist and film-maker.

Before going over to Darirampur, Nazrul studied for some time at Mathrun High School in Burdwan district, where poet Kumudranjan Mukherjee was the headmaster. Young Nazrul was influenced by his poet headmaster. Both at Mathrun and Searsol schools, Nazrul read Joydev, Chandrashekhar, the Vaisnava poets, the Hindu Puran and poetry of Rabindranath. All these influences proved active in his later life.

While at Searsol Raj School, Nazrul met Satish Kanjilal, a teacher with some mastery in classical music, who actively encouraged Nazrul to continue to develop his musical talent. For a period lasting several years in the 30s, Nazrul's career flourished with a variety of roles including as a recording artist with gramophone company, a composer, music director, singer, song and story writer, actor in films, plays and radio programmes.

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