

## 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, Zaheda 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 Shaheban and Kazi Ali Husain, and sister, Ummu Kulsam (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 a 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 Badh* (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 Rafiqullah, a police sub-inspector, who arranges for Nazrul to study free of charge at Daritrampur 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.

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

Also meets Nibaranchandra 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 Shailajanananda Mukhopadhyaya (the latter-day renowned litterateur) decide to join the army. They travel to Calcutta. Nazrul passes the recruitment examination. Shailajanananda doesn't. Nazrul joins the army in the 49th Bangali Paltan. Trained in Nawshera, stationed in Karachi.

1919 First publication, *Bounduler 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 Mahalar Ghomita Khola* (The Unveiled Face of a Turkish Woman), in *Saogat*, 1st year, 12th issue.

First poem published, *Mukti* (freedom), in the *Bangio* Muslim Sahitya Patrika (Bengal Muslim Literary Magazine).

1920 Returns to Calcutta, first staying in the same hostel with Shailajanananda Mukhopadhyaya, then in a rented apartment with Comrade Muzaffar 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. *Langal*'s name is changed to *Gono-Bani* (Voice of the People). May, writes and sings *Kandari Hushiar* (Helmsman Be Aware) for the inaugural song of the Krishnanagar Congress.

Their second son, Arindam Khalid (Bulbul), born. Composes his first ghazal, "Bulbuli tui phul shakhate dis ne aji dol."

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 health 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 sing the inaugural song at the meeting of the All India Socialist Youth Congress at Calcutta, presided by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

1929 Son, Kazi Sabyasachi, born.

January, Nazrul attends the inaugural ceremony of the Muslim Shiksha Samity (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.

*Pralayshikha* (The Doodsey 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 Megaphone, Hindustan, Senola and His Master's Voice (HMV).

The chief trainer of HMV was Ustad Jamiruddin Khan, a reputed master of Hindustani classical and semi-classical music. Nazrul trained under him, and upon Ustad Jamiruddin 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 June, travels to Darjeeling, accompanied by Barsha-bani editor, Jahanara Chowdhury; meets with Tagore.

1932 Presides over the *Sirajganj Bangio Muslim Tarun Sammelan* (Sirajganj Bengali Muslim Youth Conference).

1936 Presides over the Faridpur Muslim Students Conference.

1938 Presides over the Bangio Mussalman 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 *Nava-joog*.

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 Bangio Mussalman 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 Jatindra Mohan Bagchi, presiding.

August 7, Tagore dies in Calcutta. Nazrul reads his poem, "Rabihara" (Loss of Rabi) 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 Mukhopadhyaya, 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 Bangladesh 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 Sabyasachi.

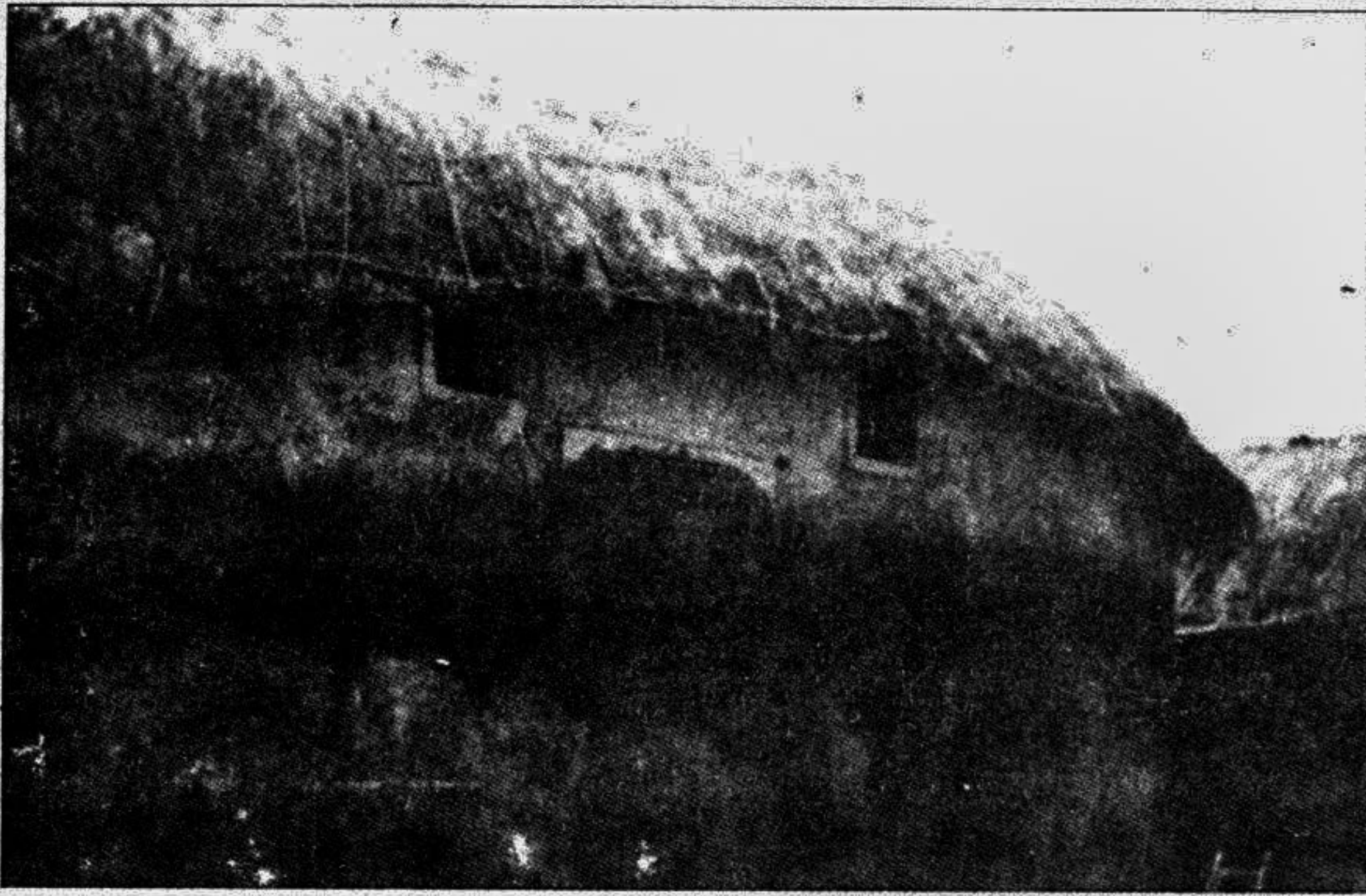
1974 Son Kazi Aniruddha dies.

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

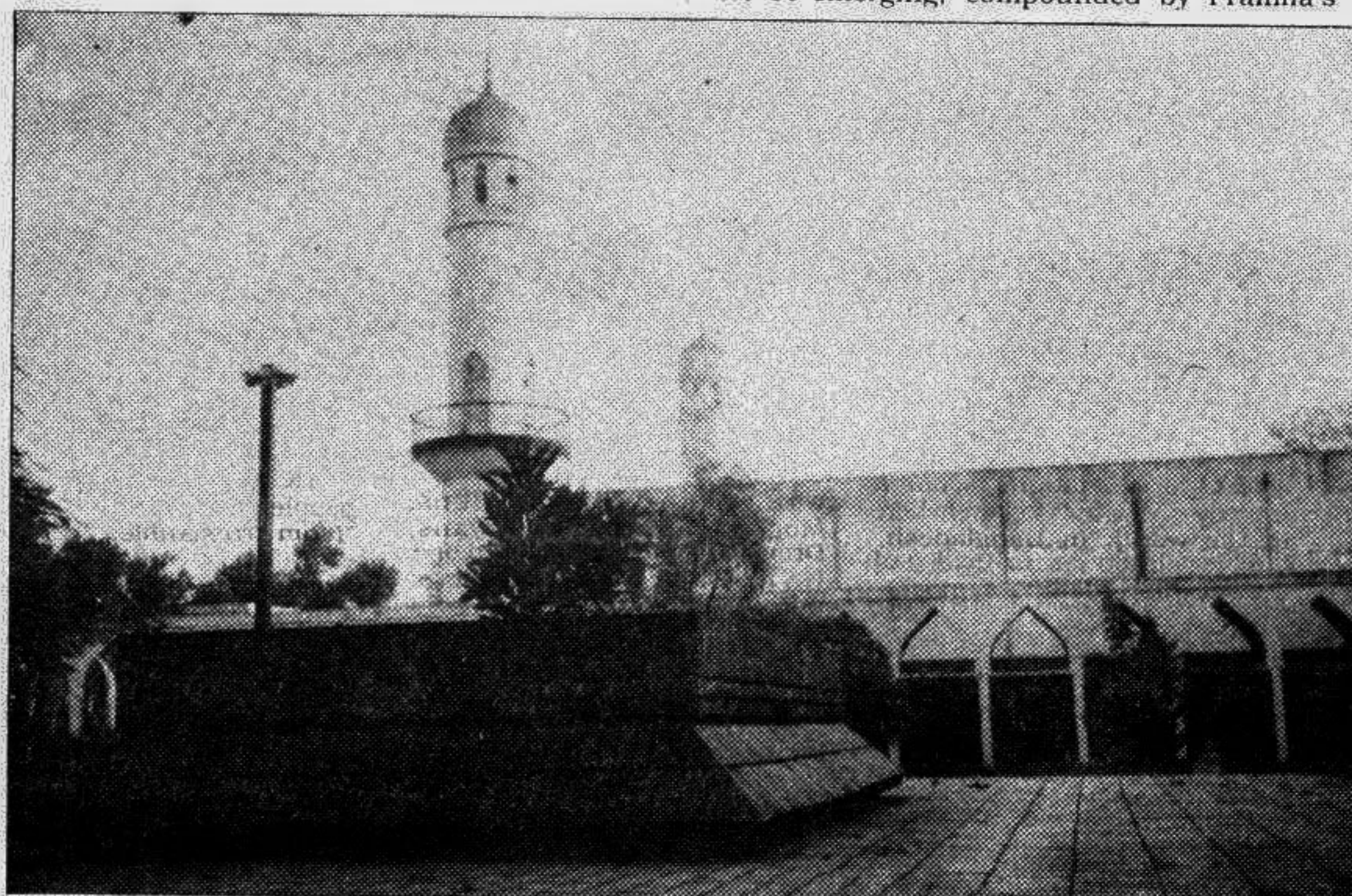
1976 Bangladesh citizenship conferred on Nazrul.

Awarded the "Ekushe 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, Khilafat 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 of an indigent lowly educated family gained permanent recognition in the realm of literature and music. They say every man is self-taught. Nazrul also was 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-

ance". 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 towards 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 Rafiqullah who was Police Inspector of Asansol. He took Nazrul to his native village Daritrampur 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 Shailajanananda, his class fellow, who later turned out to be an eminent novelist and film-maker.

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

While at Searsol Raj School, Nazrul came into close contact with his teacher Nibaran Ghatak who was member of an underground revolutionary organisation committed to go as far as armed struggle against the British colonial government. It was he who ignited love for freedom and inspiration to fight for motherland's independence in Nazrul's mind and made him conscious of the need of armed struggle against the British.

All these persons and events, experiences and ideologies, mythologies and poetry that he came in contact within his youth, left an indelible impression on the making of the poet in Nazrul.

He sat for the Pre-test examination for his Entrance Exam-

ination, but responded to the call of romance without completing his school career. At the age of eighteen (1917) Nazrul joined the 49th Bengal Regiment which was formed in the midst of the First World War.

Nazrul's army life lasted for three years (1917-20). The major part of his army life was spent in Karachi. After the war had ended, the Bengal Regiment was disbanded (March 1920) and Nazrul came back to Calcutta from Karachi.

While at Karachi, Nazrul started also his literary career. He used to send from Karachi his writings to Calcutta's literary journals like *Saogat*, *Bangio Mussalman Sahitya Patrika*, *Nur* and *Probast*. In his childhood, Nazrul developed the practice of composing and singing songs in company with other children. Later on he cultivated poetry and music. While at Karachi, from maulanas Nazrul learnt Persian, took lessons in Hafez and training of Ghazal. This was the background of the making of a poet in Nazrul starting from Churulia and maturing at Karachi.

It is found that this young writer acquired within a short time (1920-22) a high proficiency in writing ballads, poetry, songs, letter-novels, novels and short stories after quickly assimilating and absorbing so many materials and elements from multifarious sources.

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was impossible for the extrovert Nazrul.

According to Kabir Chowdhury, a famous critic, Kazi Nazrul Islam is universally known as the Rebel Poet *par excellence*. Indeed the spirit of revolt against every kind of tyranny, injustice, hypocrisy, bondage and falsehood lies at the core of his poetry. He is the arch-rebel of literature championing in his trumpet-voice the cause of the downtrodden, the exploited and the have-nots. In his most widely known poem, *The Rebel* we hear him declaring unequivocally:

I, the great rebel, shall rest in quiet  
Only when I find the sky and the  
Free of the piteous groans of the oppressed  
Only when the battlefields are cleared  
Of jingling blood sabres,  
Shall I, weary of struggle, rest in quiet  
I, the great rebel...

William Radice in his 'Sampling the Poetry of Nazrul Islam' writes:

"Nazrul's social message is found at its most cogent in 'Samyabadi' (1925). In this section, Nazrul gives his humanistic view of the Divine:  
Who are you, my friend, looking for God in the thin sky,  
Who are you wandering through forests, climbing mountain-peak?  
There is a jewel in your heart that you look for in distant lands  
You search for a creator, but it is your own self that you seek.  
Blind longing, open your eyes, look at your body in the mirror.  
You will see His shadow falling over all your limbs."

Nazrul Islam was a committed writer. What he said in deposition before the British magistrate who was trying him on charge of sedition, has no parallel in the history of Bengali literature. A part of the statement reads as follows: "I am a poet. I have been sent by God to express the unexpressed, to portray the unportrayed. It is God who is heard through the voice of the poet. My voice is but a medium for Truth, the message of God".

Nazrul received fame, honour, recognition, appreciation

and applause till he became mentally imbalanced and lost his power of speech in 1942. He never recovered from this mysterious disease and finally died at the P G Hospital, Dhaka on 29 August 1976.

Nazrul wanted his countrymen to be free in mind and thinking. Nazrul Islam's message to young readers and budding generation was characteristic.

"Do consider the honour of martyrdom more glorious than slavery"

Do not pray to God for anything petty,  
Bow not your head to any one except God."

Nazrul was among the first protagonists of the working class movement in the country. In an article he says, "My brave men, raise your heads and declare we are all free, we are all kings." In his poem *Samya* (Equality) he describes thus his ideal society:

"There's no king or subject here,  
None there is poor or rich,  
None can here enjoy milk or butter  
While others do not get even broken rice."  
In the poem *Farid* (Complaint) he tells God:  
The world You created  
Belongs to all."

In the poem *Raja Praja* he says:  
"I have a single question,  
We are all children of this earth."  
Then why is one king and another his subject?  
His *Shramick Majur* (Labourer) is a manifesto of the oppressed classes:  
"We were ignorant  
And the learned ones cheated us,  
But now we know our power,  
And will suffer oppression no longer  
These our hands constructed the palaces  
The same hands can bring them down."

Nazrul wrote songs in praise of the labourer, the peasant and the fishermen and exhorted them to demand their just rights from society. Nazrul's songs of renaissance and new ideas through films, radio, records and other mass-media caused quite a stir in every nook and corner of Bengal.

Today we are celebrating the Nazrul birth centenary at a time when our country is crawling with momentous problems. We are suffering from identity and leadership crisis. Many black money holders and so-called leaders, godfather of the terrorists and offenders have flourished at the expense of the have-nots. Corruption of every kind is reigning supreme in the society. Dangers loom large on the horizon and stares the whole nation in the face. There is no rule of law and sense of security in the society. At this

hour of trials and tribulations, let us invoke the blessing of the almighty to draw inspiration from the writings and statements of Nazrul in his poem *Bidrohri Bani* where he describes the false patriots thus:

"They mouth the slogan of Liberty  
But their thoughts are always of mercenary and money alone.  
To become a leader is all they want  
Liberty is just an idle talk (lip-service).  
Finally we remember the

optimist poet's hope and warning:  
"Good days are coming,  
But those who have been overtaken by intellectual and moral bankruptcy  
have to pay a heavy price in the long run."

We have every hope that posterity will remember Nazrul for many years to come for the garland of songs. The garland is large and strong enough to withstand the wear and tear of time.

The writer is Principal, South Sandwip College.

**Nazrul and Kamal Pasha**

Continued from page 6  
Kamal Pasha and his progressive outlook, but also influenced with the spirit of the progressive social pattern of Islam and imbued with the spirit and philosophy of love expounded by Rumi, Hafiz, Omar Khayam and other Persian poets, and the spirit of humanism of Shelley, Whitman and Rabindranath.

Keeping in view the above historical background and facts it needs to be admitted that poet Kazi Nazrul Islam was greatly inspired by Mustafa Kamal Pasha owing to the affinity they had in their minds. Love for freedom and Muslim brotherhood and the spirit of Pan-Islamism inspired Nazrul to compose many songs and poems for the rejuvenation of the world Muslims. It is a historical fact that the Muslims of the world used to regard the caliphate of Baghdad and later on the caliph of Turkey as their own caliph. During the First World War the ruling British power had given the Indian Muslims the word that they would not attack Turkey. But after the end of the First World War British imperialist power swallowed their promises. They helped the allied powers and forces in attacking Turkey. At this the Indian Muslims realised that the British could not and should not be trusted. Against this backdrop the Indian Muslims joined the Khilafat Movement with the sole aim to give support to the struggle of the Turkish people against the alien aggressors and allied powers. The Khilafat Movement and the Non-cooperation Movement in India were launched against

the British imperialism and

Kamal Pasha, raised confidence in the mind of the oppressed people of the world at large. They thought that even the British could be defeated by united efforts and fierce-fighting.

In the earlier phase, poet Nazrul keenly observed the historic event of the defeat and fall of the Tsars of Russia as a result of the Bolshevik revolution. In the victory of the Turkish people under the guidance of the valiant fighter Kamal Pasha, Nazrul observed the defeat of the big powers in the hands of the united people of a small country. It was possible largely for the unique leadership of Mustafa Kamal Pasha. Hence, in his famous poem *Kamal Pasha* poet Nazrul not only saluted Mustafa Kamal Ataturk but also the freedom-loving and heroic people of the world in general. He knew that in his fitting tribute lied the seeds of the destruction of colonialism. Thus, the poem *Kamal Pasha* attained a great significance and a symbolic meaning.

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