

110th Birth Anniversary of Kazi Nazrul Islam Saga of the Relentless Rebel

The Dawn of New Creation
(Aaj Srishti Shukher Ullashey)

Today at the Nativity of New Creation,
A thrill of joy runs riot in me,
My face is aglow, my eyes are radiant,
My blood boils and bubbles and
dances in ecstasy
Today at the Baptism of New Life!

Today in the imprisoned well of my
heart --
A deluge arises and the flood-tide
violently
breaks through the barriers.
There comes smile, there are tears,
Liberty appears, fetters follow.
I learn to speak, today, my bosom is
split up, there comes the joy of
my bitter sorrow,
Lo! There comes the sorrow of
a forlorn heart --
Today at the Baptism of a New world!

There appear the deserted, there wait
the dejected,
And heart-rending lamentations
beggar description,
The ocean is swelling, the sky trem-
bling,
the wind blowing,
Vishnu's discus piercing the firma-
ment,
the trident of Shiva being hurled.
Behold! The comet and the meteor
Out to subvert the Creation:
At this, in my breast are blossoming
now the flowers of million gardens,
Ay, at the prospect of a Millennium!

Translated by Abdul Hakim



COURTESY: POETRY OF KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION, EDITED BY NURUL HUDA

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

It was one particular day of Ashwin. Preparation for Durga Puja was well underway and there was excitement in the air. The black clouds looked to break into a heavy shower any moment. Late at night, while everyone lay in a deep sleep, poet Kazi Nazrul tossed in his bed.

As soon as the first drops of rain splashed on to the roof, Nazrul could contain himself no longer. The poet took a piece of paper and began to write "Bolo Bir Chiro Unnoto Momo Shir", the first few lines of the poem "Bidrohi" (The Rebel), the masterpiece that inspired millions.

Such was the temperament of Nazrul that earned him the title "firebrand" poet impulsive, inspirational and tireless in creativity.

Early in the morning he called his friend and comrade Muzaffar Ahmed and set out for Jorashako, to meet Tagore. Upon reaching, Nazrul called out aloud, "Guruji, Guruji, come and look what I have for you." Tagore hurriedly came out of his room and sat with rapt attention as Nazrul read out his work from the night before. This was in 1922 and Nazrul was only 23.

In the same year, with hardly Rs.250, Nazrul started a bi-weekly publication. Not surprisingly, he named it "Dhumketu" (The Comet). When it was launched, Tagore sent a message of blessings:

"Come, ye comet
Come to build a bridge of fire
Across the dark
Hoist up your flag of victory"

From the very first issue *Dhumketu* became extremely popular, particularly amongst the youth. Like its name, it sparked the deep rooted patriotic sentiments through stirring writings against colonialism. National revolutionaries hailed it and it became a common voice of protest. On 26 September that year Nazrul's poem,

"Anondomoyee Agamoney" was penned for the first time in Dhumketu demanding India's complete freedom from colonial rule. Then came "Agni Bina" (*The Fiery Bina*) a collection of poems and the rebellious "Juga Bani" (*The Message of the Age*) a collection of essays. Both were quickly banned by the British government.

Two months later, on November 23, Nazrul was arrested in Comilla and sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment for spreading anti-British feelings through his writings. He was sent to Presidency Jail, as an under-trial prisoner but was kept there for two months before being produced in court. Later on he was shifted to Hoogly Jail from Alipur central jail.

The imprisonment stoked national outrage even more. To the masses, Nazrul came to be seen as a symbol of the resistance, a propagator of freedom. Tagore, who did not fail to recognize the personal sacrifices of Nazrul, said "Nazrul has brought spring in the life of the nation. So I have dedicated my newly published play "Boshonto", (Spring) to him."

In April, Nazrul went on a hunger strike for 40 days to protest the ill-treatment of political prisoners. Novelist Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya and political leader Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das requested him to give up the hunger strike. Sharat wrote, "I am taking the 1 o'clock train to Hoogly, to try to convince Kazi to quit hunger strike. Otherwise I see no other alternative. Kazi is a great poet after Tagore and I see no other as great as he in the horizon".

The jail authorities tried in vain to forcibly feed him, give him medication as he had lost 25 pounds during the hunger strike. Tagore sent a telegram from Shilong urging Nazrul to give up the hunger strike, but the message was never delivered to the poet. Nazrul was released from jail in December.

After a year, in 1923, Nazrul married Pramila (Duli) and moved off to Hoogly. His first collection

of songs and poems "Bisher Bashi" (*The Poison Flute*) and "Bhangar Gaan" (*The Song Of Destruction*) were published, but as before, were soon banned.

Nazrul faced hardship in his personal life also. His publishers failed to pay him his dues, and he found it difficult to make ends meet. But he wrote on at a prolific rate, penning some 3500 songs, 25 books of poetry, 3 novels, 29 plays, 3 books of translation and much more.

In fact, it was at the end of 1926 that Nazrul gradually stepped into the exclusive realm of music. Nazrul's association with the Gramophone companies began in 1928. He was also involved with Senola, Megaphone, His Masters Voice (HMV) and Twin.

On December 15, 1929 a grand civic reception for Nazrul was held at the Albert Hall in Kolkata. Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, an eminent Bengali scientist presided, while Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the celebrated leader was the chief guest. Sir Prafulla said that the poets are normally timid and soft spoken whereas Nazrul's writings were fiery. Prison walls or chains did not stop Nazrul from writing for the Bengalee masses and imbuing in them a sense of patriotism and unity.

In a way, this was the personality that our marked Nazrul as incomparable. In all his work, the one common thread was its diversity. His writings spread from the patriotic to ghazals, from Hamd Nath to Bhajans, Kiritaans and love songs. Though a poet at heart, Nazrul was also a dramatist, novelist, lyricist, composer, film director, actor, bard, brilliant public speaker and a maestro in different forms of music.

Nazrul wrote like he lived his life, full of vigour and optimism against all odds. And just like he sparked life into words, his work remain as the *dhumketu* on our horizon, in our minds and in our hearts.

Bringing Nazrul to the dance stage

KARIM WAHEED

With a cast of over 56 male, female and child dancers, Nriyanchal staged a spectacular production, "Badol-o Barishaney" -- based on a short story by Kazi Nazrul Islam -- on March 30, 2007 and left the audience at the packed auditorium craving for more. A question cropped up: why do we not see more such dance productions based on the National Poet's works?

Shibli Muhammad and Shamim Ara Nipa, two of the most accomplished dancers in the country, who staged "Badol-o Barishaney" at the dance festival by Shadhona and UNESCO (in 2007), reflected on the reasons, limitations and possibilities.

Shibli: "The tradition of modern Bengali dance drama is predominantly the contribution of Tagore, who was an avid dance enthusiast. His dance dramas, such as 'Chandalika', 'Shyama' and 'Chitrangada' were staged in Tagore's lifetime, often by him or overseen by him. Tagore had even specified which dance form should be used in which dance drama. To put it in a nutshell, Tagore was meticulous and very disciplined when it came to his creations. He had financial freedom to do so.

"Nazrul wasn't blessed with family fortune. He was a rebel. Discipline and consistency were not his virtues. Exponents are still unsure about the exact number of songs composed by Nazrul. He didn't write dance dramas or indicate his wish to adapt particular works in his lifetime."

Nipa: "I consider the lack of dance productions based on Nazrul's works our failure as well. I don't want to compare but I feel that Tagore exponents and artistes are more active when it comes to experimental productions based on the Nobel laureate's compositions. Some of his long poems have been beautifully adapted as dance dramas, 'Shesh-er Kabita' and 'Abedan' for example. Unfortunately, adaptations (of similar standards) of Nazrul's works are few and far between. I think that certain drive is missing among Nazrul exponents, researchers and enthusiasts.

"We have to thank artistes Khairul Anam Shakil and Ferdaus Ara for their support to 'Badol-o Barishaney'



(originally adapted by Nazrul exponent Dr. Rafiqul Islam)."

There is also the issue of patronage, say the duo. It takes around Tk 5,00,000 for a standard dance production to go on stage. A dance drama requires songs to be re-recorded (use of instruments differ from regular renditions and 'bol' have to be included), elaborate costumes are involved; set and light designs should be innovative and so on.

"Frankly, if Shadhona hadn't financed it, 'Badol-o Barishaney' wouldn't have gone on stage," says Nipa.

"Another important factor is Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy's willingness (or lack of it) to encourage creativity. Over the last 7/8 years, it has become a 'tradition' to hold nationwide programmes on Nazrul Jayanti with some very uninviting arrangements," complains Shibli.

"There was a time when renowned cultural personalities were put in charge of this institution. When planning a major programme, artistes were consulted and shows were usually of a certain standard. Shilpakala Academy used to produce dance dramas as well. Now, Shilpakala programmes can't come out of the 'chorus and group dance' format," he adds.

Noteworthy adaptations of Nazrul's works: "Jodi Ba(n)shi Aar Na Bajey," adapted by Shahidul Islam and staged by Nriyanchal 12/13 years ago. The dance drama imagines Nazrul in diverse roles, featuring classics like "Amar nayan-e," "Parodeshi megh" and "Phool-er jalsha-e."

"Shunyo E Buk-e," a Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy production, scripted by Manzur-E-Maula (when he was the DG of Shilpakala). The dance drama was directed by Deepa Khandokar.

"Navras," featuring Nazrul songs on nine basic human emotions, by Dr. Mahua Mukherjee (renowned Indian danseuse). The production highlights the 'Gaudiya' dance form ('Gaudiya' means old Bengal and the dance form vanished from the scene because of lack of patronage and political instability. Dr. Mukherjee has been working tirelessly to bring this dance form back to its old glory).

Dr. Mukherjee has also choreographed "Chal Chal Chal" -- an adaptation of a Nazrul poem with the same title. The composition features 'Bratachari bol' and 'Raibeshey' (another dance form indigenous to Bengal).

Shibli and Nipa are hopeful that Nazrul can be effectively incorporated into the contemporary dance scene. "There is a sizeable audience, keen on dance, in our country. We've rarely performed at shows that were not houseful. And Nazrul's compositions, highlighting intricate use of classical music, are particularly suitable for dance. If competently adapted, they should draw an eager audience," Shibli says.

The many facets of Nazrul Shimul Mustafa talks about the National Poet

JAMIL MAHMUD

His poetry and nationalist activism earned him the title, 'Rebel Poet.' Accomplishing a large number of much-admired works throughout his life, Kazi Nazrul Islam is more than a rebel. He was an ardent admirer of love and harbinger of patriotism, as well as a versatile lyricist-composer. His poetry added new dimensions in the field of recitation in Bengal. On the eve of the National Poet's 110th birth anniversary, renowned recitor Shimul Mustafa talked about Nazrul's versatility and genius that continues to encourage recitors.

"Nazrul was a turning point in the field of recitation in our country. Before Nazrul, it was predominantly writings and poems of Tagore that our recitors chose to work with to satisfying their inner feelings. Through Nazrul's poetry recitors started to highlight different political and socio-cultural aspects. Nazrul's son Kazi Sabyasachi was the pioneer in this regard, who came to fame in the 1960s and '70s," said Mustafa, who has been a widely known recitor in our country for nearly three-decades.

"This continuation and revolution in the field of recitation carried out a significant role in our Liberation War," he added.

To signify the essence of Nazrul's poetry and writings that drives the recitors to perform fervently, Mustafa finds the inner tempo and emotion beneath his highly composed words that are magical to recite.

"Though it is difficult to find out the proper meaning of some of his words, the tempo, emotion and inner strength of them are powerful enough for the recitors to want to read out Nazrul's writings," said Mustafa.

"Nazrul was a versatile genius. He deconstructed himself whenever he wished. He is known as the 'Rebel Poet,' but this title alone does not denote Nazrul on the whole. He was rebellious, yet romantic. I think, he worked on the spur of the moment. Whatever was on his mind, he penned that instantly," Mustafa said of Nazrul's versatility.

Mustafa feels that the lack of interest among the youngsters to learn about Nazrul and other maestros is the cause that's driving us in a culturally vulnerable position. "It is our incapability that we have not completely understood or evaluated Nazrul. I fear we may not be able to bring the message of Nazrul to the youth of our country," said Mustafa. "It is our (Nazrul enthusiasts') duty to introduce his treasure-trove to the nation," he added.

Mustafa suggests the younger generation of recitors as well as artistes from others fields who are working on Nazrul to come forward and highlight more works of the National Poet. According to Mustafa, "The lack of preservation of Nazrul's works is one of the main causes behind the prevalent disinterest. We need more audio-visual works featuring his songs, poems and writings."

Mustafa has had the great privilege to work on Nazrul's works. So far he has released 30 albums featuring 70 poems, letters and essays by Nazrul. He said, "Usually I select poems by different poets in my albums or solo performances, which is a kind of homage to them." One of Mustafa's albums, "Jugalbandi," along with Indian artiste Saumitra Chattopadhyay features poems of Nazrul and Rabindranath, in which Mustafa recited Nazrul and Saumitra performed Rabindranath.

"Chithi," a duet album with Sharmin Mustafa (1995), features letters of legends, including a couple of Nazrul's works.



"Badol-o Barishaney," staged by Nriyanchal, is an adaptation of a short story by Nazrul.

PHOTO: STAR