

# The fiery flute

It was not only the political tyranny which agitated the young rebel, the fiery flute also saw and fought tyranny in every sphere of activity -- in social customs, in caste and creed, in orthodox ideas and practices in religion. In a series of poems entitled *Shamyabad* (egalitarianism), he rose against every form of distinction and division.

SYED ASHRAF ALI

**K**AZI Nazrul Islam was one of the fortunate few to whom Benign Providence, in his infinite Mercy, gave in full measure almost all the things (except affluence) which human beings desire, and combined them with a sensitiveness and sympathy for human sufferings which sometimes turned his personal achievements into agony at the sight of so much folly, so much futility, so much hatred and so much cruelty and injustice all around.

Known as the "Rebel Poet," Nazrul was indeed a versatile genius. Rebels sometimes create great literature, but seldom contribute to the other aesthetic needs of man. Nazrul was a notable exception. Besides being a poet, he was a successful social critic, an outstanding lyricist, a superb composer, a bold and upright thinker, a fearless patriot, and an indomitable champion of truth and justice. But in every sphere of activity and in every domain of thought he was out and out a rebel. No wonder Tagore called him "the mutinous child of the Goddess of the Universe."

His formal education never transcended the boundaries of a school, but his thirst for knowledge far outstripped the bounds of the classroom. Like a wild horse he would not be yoked, he must graze at will in what pasture he liked. He taught himself Persian and Arabic and Sanskrit and acquired a deep knowledge of the lore and philosophy expressed through these rich languages.

As a result, his mind absorbed from the culture of his environment, from his wide readings in classical and vernacular literature, from his remarkable proficiency in Arabic and Persian and Sanskrit, thoughts and ideals that embodied the finest elements of the national genius. Out of them his mind created literature, the worth of which undoubtedly deserves universal acknowledgement.

The cause of liberation was the first to stir the heart of the young rebel. "What I want," declared he with a dauntless spirit, "is that not one square inch of Indian territory shall remain in the possession of the foreigners." Like a torrent came forth verse after verse,

song after song, spreading his own intense fever of nationalism.

Vibrant words set to exhilarating music, his marching songs spread far and wide and inspired youths not only in Bengal but in every nook and corner of the subcontinent, urging them to rise from their slumber, to unite and to overthrow the imperial yoke by "tearing apart, piercing, smashing," if necessary, "even the sun, the moon and the planets."

His was the clarion call to the youth -- "*Balo bir, balo unnata mama shir*" (cry out aloud, brave one -- my head is held high.), "I am the power, I am the storm, I am the creation, I am its death -- I am the volcano in the bosom of mother Earth, I am the fire, the God of fire, and I growl and rumble in the ocean of entrapped inferno."

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the legendary hero of the INA, responded to this clarion call and gratefully acknowledged: "On our way to war we shall sing his songs and proceed." No wonder the poet's call also inspired the 75 million "East Pakistanis" and prepared their imagination for the glorious vision of a sovereign Bangladesh, the valiant freedom fighters marching triumphantly to victory with the songs of the great rebel on their lips.

But it was not only the political tyranny which agitated the young rebel, the fiery flute also saw and fought tyranny in every sphere of activity -- in social customs, in caste and creed, in orthodox ideas and practices in religion. In a series of poems entitled *Shamyabad* (egalitarianism), he rose against every form of distinction and division. Each of the poems started with *gahi shamyar gaan* (I sing the song of equality), and were devoted to God, to men, to women, to sin, to workers, to mankind, and even to the prostitutes. To the prostitutes, he wrote: "Some call you beautiful, yet spit on you. Perhaps some sati as pure as Sita gave birth to you and your progeny shall perhaps be no less than ours."

The Rebel went a step further and asked: "Are we not all the products of lust and desire? Yet what vanity and pride we display!" And with the indefatigable spirit and the indomitable courage of conviction, he declared: "If an unchaste mother's child is called a bastard, so should be the son of an

unchaste father."

The Rebel had no illusion about what is today glibly called progress and has come to be synonymous with multiplication of luxuries and worship of the mechanised living. By progress he meant the increased provision of facilities, material and moral, for the all-round development and free expression of the human personality. He believed in life only when it was progressive, and in progress only when it was in harmony with life. He preached the freedom of man from the servitude to the non-human.

Nazrul was a rebel also in his ability to set his songs to music. Music, like all other arts in the then subcontinent, had become almost fossilised. There was the classical tradition, which had behind it centuries of discipline and which had attained near perfection. But it was music, pure and abstract, and like all abstract art its appeal was limited to those who had taken pains to understand what might be called its mathematics.

Its counterpart for the popular taste was the traditional religious and folk music. Bengal had its own folk melodies, soft and unique and vastly enriched by the prodigious pourings from the great Tagore. While caring for both the traditions, the Rebel respected the sanctity of neither, and freely took from each what suited his purpose.

He added to the richness by introducing ghazal and thumri into Bengali music -- in exquisite lilting adaptation to the melody of Bangla songs. Music was no longer confined to a handful of connoisseurs and maestros. Nor were his songs confined to fire and brimstone. There were hundreds that spoke of tender love, of compassion, of exaltation, of ordinary joys and happiness, sorrows and sufferings.

Among the modern writers in the subcontinent he is almost unique (barring the towering personality of Tagore) in that while the sophisticated intellectuals deluged in his verse and prose and learned professors and scholars write volumes on them, the simple unlettered folks in the congested lanes of cities or in the remote villages of Bangladesh sing his songs with rapture. They are sung in religious gatherings no less than in concert halls.

Patriots have mounted gallows and freedom fighters have braved bullets and mortar with his songs on their lips; and young lovers unable to express the depth of their feelings sing his songs and feel the weight of their numbness relieved. It is really remarkable that each change of the season, each aspect of the country's rich landscape, every modulation of the human heart, in sorrow or in joy, has found its voice in his songs.

It is all the more remarkable that though



The Rebel.

the voice of the Rebel, which roared in words and soared in songs, was muted in life for more than three decades, the songs which emerged from the fiery flute exceed in number even that of the great Tagore, who was fortunate enough to be able to pour out songs and poems till the last week of his life.

As we celebrate his birthday, let us once again remember that although Nazrul adorned a splendid period of Bengali literature, he neither left any literary descendant nor did he mark a stage in the development of Bangla literature -- the Rebel, like the loftiest peak in the mountain, stood all alone. In religion, in literature, in politics, in the high-ways of thought, in whichever direction the Rebel went, he went alone, and on no road did he travel with the caravans of the age.

Not that he forsook his fellow-men, but his carotid moved fast and could not afford to wait for those whose feet were blistered. His rapid advance raised blisters on his own feet as well, but they cleared the road of many an encumbrance which littered it. It is a cruel irony of fate that in the daring march forward the thunderous voice was suddenly muted in eloquent silence.

Now, that the eloquent silence is no more, let us try to fulfill the work of our beloved national poet. What was done by him may perhaps be accomplished by a million jointly. But let us always strive to look in the direction shown by the Great Rebel -- towards untarnished truth, towards selfless action, towards objective learning, towards mutual understanding, and towards love and respect of real human values.

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# An easy conversion



CAC is a floating exchange rate allowing anyone to freely move from local currency into foreign currency and back without needing prior government permission.

ANITA GHAZI RAHMAN

**T**HE Daily Star, on May 10, reported a statement made by Dr. Atiur Rahman, Governor, Bangladesh Bank, in which he stated that the Bangladesh Bank planned to approve Capital Account Convertibility as a test case, which would allow Bangladeshis to invest in foreign countries subject to certain restrictions.

In Bangladesh, taka became convertible for current account transactions in March 1994, but this is our central bank's first attempt to achieve capital convertibility.

In view of the global perspective, Article VIII of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) prohibits its members from imposing restrictions on the making of payments and transfers for current international transactions. Article VI (3), however, allows members to exercise such controls as are necessary to regulate international capital movements, but not so as to restrict payments for current transactions or which would unduly delay transfers of funds in settlement of commitments.

of Article VIII, Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the Agreement of the International Monetary Fund in 1994 and maintains an exchange rate system that is free from restrictions on current payments and transfers, except for a restriction on the convertibility and transferability of funds from nonresident taka accounts.

Articles VI and VIII give the IMF only limited jurisdiction over capital account transactions. Thus, there is no official binding over any member state to opt for full capital account convertibility, but it has been a constant component of the IMF's advisory reports on member countries.

The concept behind capital account convertibility (CAC) in most traditional theories of international trade was to allow foreign investors to invest without barriers. It is, therefore, a floating exchange rate allowing anyone to freely move from local currency into foreign currency and back without needing prior government permission. CAC has been argued by some to be inevitable, as it is part of the inexorable process of globalisation.

There are both economic and legal perspectives to the pros and cons of the case for and against CAC (may be more so economic than legal), however, I, being a lawyer by profession, shall limit the scope of this article only to suggesting legal safeguards in drafting the guidelines for CAC.

CAC allows the freedom to make investments in foreign equity, extend loans to foreigners, buy real estate in foreign lands and vice-versa. Broadly speaking, CAC allows anyone to move freely from local currency to foreign currency and back. The risks to an unrestricted CAC include capital flight

On the other hand, CAC helps attract foreign investment and offers foreign investors significant comfort as they can reconvert local currency into foreign currency and take their money away. At the same time, CAC makes it easier for domestic companies to tap foreign markets.

It may be noted from the governor's statement that he is not contemplating an unrestricted CAC; he has stated that there must be a ceiling for capital to be sent to foreign countries for investment and that "the amount will be given from an exporter's retention quota with Bangladesh Bank." It appears that the Bangladesh approach to CAC will not be for complete CAC, and, in the author's view, rightly so.

While many developing countries concentrated on liberalising inflows/outflows irrespective of resident or non-resident transactions, we note that India liberalised the capital account for non-residents and maintained stringent controls on capital account transactions by residents. India set out some basic requirements in implementing CAC, amongst which those relating to capital outflows in the beginning required that:

- All types of liquid assets must be able to be exchanged freely, between any two nations, with standardised exchange rates.
- The amounts must be a significant amount, i.e. in excess of \$500,000.
- Excessive outflows should be buffered by national banks to provide collateral.

India has moved towards CAC liberalisation on a phase-by-phase basis, and is now implementing the third phase of the Tarapore Committee recommendations. A

similar approach is also recommended for Bangladesh.

Taking examples from the Indian experience, the opening up of the capital account in Bangladesh can, to start with, also be based on distinctions between residents and non-residents.

Bangladesh Bank may also set guidelines/slabs on the minimum and maximum amount of foreign investment allowed by Bangladeshi persons and the types of companies, listed shares and debt securities in which the capital may be invested. The Bank may review other restrictions keeping in mind our foreign exchange reserves and other macro-economic factors.

It is the author's opinion that opening up of CAC outflow would encourage FDI as investors would have the security of entry as well as exit of funds. This would also open up the possibility of developing Bangladeshi MNCs abroad, thereby allowing Bangladeshi residents to have a globally diversified equity portfolio. Moreover, reducing delays in foreign exchange trading would reduce transaction costs and increase the efficiency of businesses in our country.

Controls on the capital account are rather easy to evade through unscrupulous means. Huge amounts of capital are moving across the border notwithstanding the restrictions and, as such, it is better for Bangladesh if these transactions happen in white money. Implementation of CAC would reduce the size of the black economy, and improve law and order, tax compliance and corporate governance.

In conclusion, we note that CAC is not a matter of all or nothing. Some types of transactions may be free while others are not; and the tightness of restrictions may vary in the same country over time.

The two limitations as set out by the governor are apt and reflect the prudent nature of the government's approach to CAC. The Bangladesh Bank can also consider implementing a roadmap to achieve CAC in a phase-by-phase manner, as has been done in India.

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# Web stalkers!

Perhaps the saddest thing about us is that most of us don't always know the law. Many people think that there is nothing that they can do to stop a stalker. Even more people think that people on the internet can do/say whatever they want to.

SHAMRIN AFIA ADIBA

**W**E really don't want to hear any more about suicides. Instead of lurking in bushes or hiding in the shadows outside homes, stalkers have gone high-tech, using cell phones, computers and the internet to hunt and track their victims. The stalkers of earlier times have now been replaced by the tech knowledge "web stalkers," who keep constant watch on people's whereabouts and their every move online.

Internet has made it possible to share everything via messaging tools such as Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, Facebook, Google Talk, and SKYPE to name a popular few.

People put out information about where they're traveling, where they work, pictures of their car, their friends, or themselves. They put out all the information someone stalking another person would need to know. They think "it's not going to happen to me." It does! It happened to me... I am a victim of web stalkers!

The internet can be a great place to meet new and interesting people, voice your opinions, do research for work or school and even to make money.

The bottom line is that we need to keep ourselves safe and understand our rights as internet users. No one has the right to stalk or threaten us. Our legal system will continue to support this point.

Perhaps the saddest thing about us is that most of us don't always know the law. Many people think that there is nothing that they can do to stop a stalker. Even more people think that people on the internet can do/say whatever they want to.

Stalking is a form of harassment and is against the law. So, it is important to know that the law is available to protect us from any stalker or someone hounding us and our "virtual" identity. If you even suspect that someone is stalking you, don't wait until it escalates. Contact the authorities immediately. The information is out there, so get educated quickly.

Remember, you have the right to surf the internet free from stalkers. So stay informed, get educated and start learning what you can do and what you should not do. Safe surfing!

- Do not share personal information online.
- Do not use your real name or nickname as your screen name or user ID. Pick a name that is gender- and age-neutral.
- Do not post personal information as part of any user profiles such as those in Face book, MySpace, Twitter, etc.
- Use a "nonsense" password that has no relation to you as a person; use a combination of numbers, symbols, and letters, and make sure it is at least six characters long. Try to change your password frequently and avoid using the same password for multiple accounts.
- Be cautious about meeting online acquaintances in person. If you choose to meet, do so in a public place and take a friend.
- Make sure your Internet Service Provider (ISP) and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) network have an acceptable user policy that prohibits cyber stalking. If a situation online becomes hostile, you should log-off or surf elsewhere.
- Do not share passwords to e-mail or social networking sites with friends or acquaintances.
- Activate password protection on cell phones.
- If a situation makes you afraid, contact a local law enforcement agency.

This abuse of technology and gross misuse of information has to be tackled and severed at its roots before it spreads out of control. Parents should educate their children on the kind of harm that could come from the internet and try to restrict their online activities only to fun and educational websites.

Software giants such as Yahoo, Microsoft and Google should make special efforts and pioneer activities in the area of internet security and come up with applications that make technology fun and safe. Cell phone companies should also strive harder at protecting their customers' identity. With a little education and awareness, technology can indeed be made fun, secure and useful.

Lastly, I would like to request our government and the law enforcement agencies to help general people regarding this issue.

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