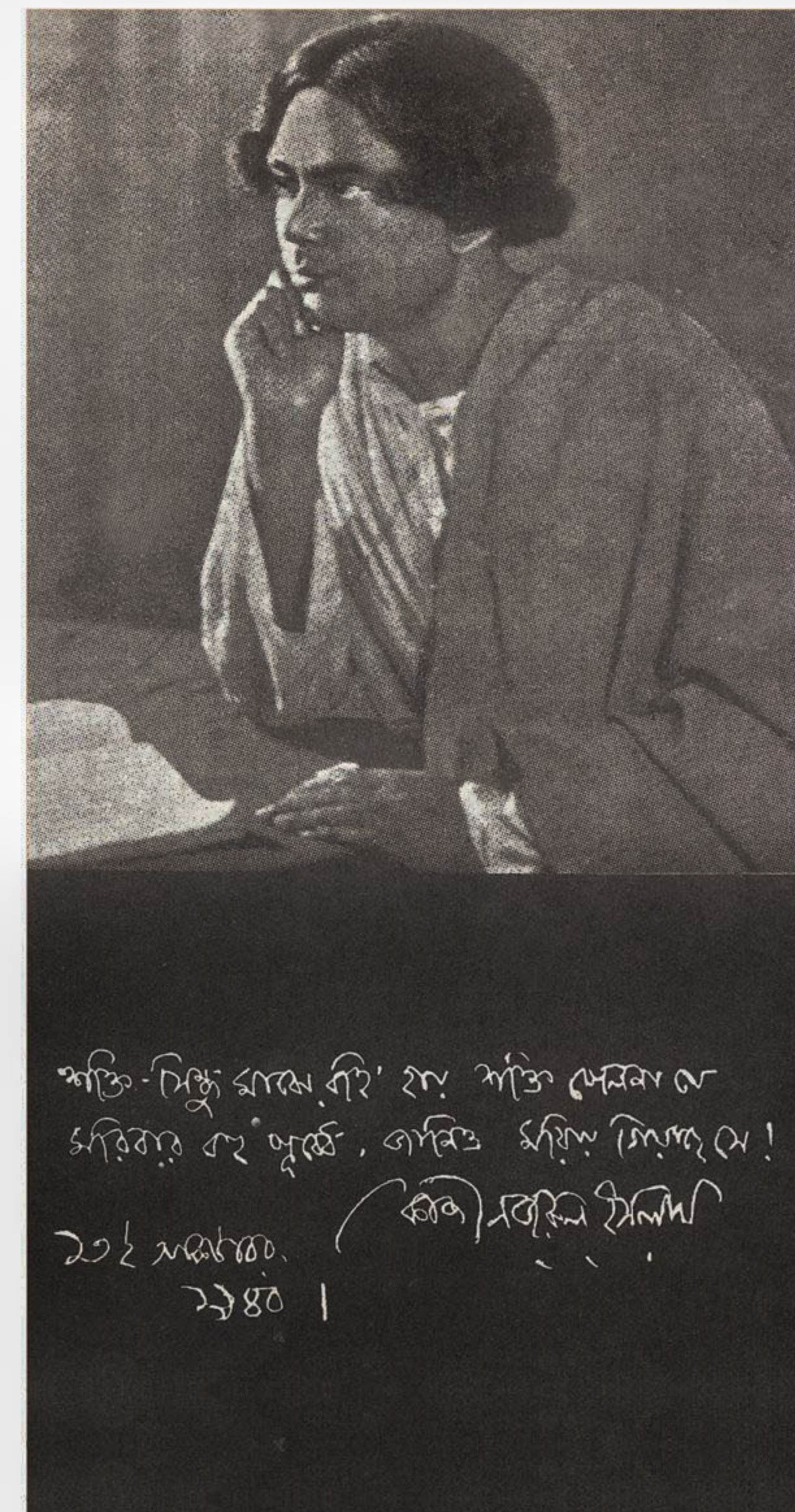


# Celebrating 113th Birth Anniversary of the National Poet Nazrul's tryst with Bengali theatre



**SADYA AFREEN MALLICK**

Draped in his favourite 'gerua' khaddar panjabi, a bright yellow silk turban wrapped around his head and a row of beads around his neck, Nazrul was often seen frequenting the theatre where he was constantly sought-after by the directors. Apart from writing and composing songs for theatre he took deep interest in acting as well. As chief trainer of The Gramophone Company of India, Kazi Nazrul Islam occupied a very important place in the music arena as leading artists trained under him. This was in the year 1932 and he was hardly 33. It was the theatre companies of Bengal that profited most during this time as audience flocked to listen to the newly composed songs by Nazrul.

The songs appealed to the theatre lovers as they were often based on romanticism and human emotions, as opposed to the religious hymns that were composed mostly for a particular niche of the society.

Bengali theatre is indebted to Nazrul for his compositions, which popularised Bengali music amongst a broader audience. His songs inevitably added to the quality of plays that were staged and more often than not, contributed to their success.

Nazrul composed songs for plays including "Jahangir" and "Annyapurna" by Monilal Gangopadhyay; "Siraj-ud-Dowla", "Thoror Porey" and "Jononi" by Shachindranath Sen Gupta; "Mohua", "Karagar" and "Shoti O Shabitra" by Monmoth Roy; "Shymolir Swapna" by Probodh Kumar Sannyal; "Blackout" by Birendra Krishna Bhadra and more.

In her memoirs, legendary singer-actress Indubala recalls the heyday of her career: "Nothing could deviate Kazida (Nazrul) from his world of creativity even if it was in the crowded rehearsal rooms. He would train the artistes one after another, each with different compositions that suited him/her best. We watched in awe at how he could alienate himself from the entire crowd and concentrate in writing or composing songs that ranged from Kirtan to adhunik, light classical, ghazal and more."

Indubala adds that Nazrul was deeply involved with the Monomohon Theatre. The diva herself had joined the Theatre Company, "Kazida composed songs for the play *Jahangir* for which the audience showered me with heartfelt appreciation.

"Sometime later it was decided that Roktokomol by Sachindranath Sengupta would be staged. Kazida wanted me to perform the lead role in the play. Four new songs *Phagun raater phuler nasha*, *Keu bholey na keu bholey*, *Bhanga mon aar jora nahi jaye* and *Ghor timirey* -- were composed by him and I sang them before every act."

"Responding to the ovation I had to repeat each song at least 5 to 6 times, as that was the trend in theatre in those days. There was no way out but to perform with every encore till the audience was totally content," Indubala says.

The minstrel also mentions an anecdote behind the play *Aleya*. The proprietors of Monomohon Theatre had requested Nazrul to work on a new play. A week had passed and

Gramophone Company out of which 50 were written and composed by Nazrul.

Angurbala writes in her memoirs, "I was a regular performer at the company. Sometime around 1928, Nazrul joined the company as an exclusive trainer. We waited impatiently to meet him. We thought that he would be a bearded fellow dressed up in an *alkhella*. We were relieved to see a person who was like a friend to us all and we referred to him as Kazida."

In Sachindranath Sengupta's play, Roktokomol, noted theatre actress Sarju Devi performed in the role of Momota. The actress reminisces, "I had been a great admirer of popular Nazrul songs such as *Rumjhum Jhum Jhum*, *Shukno patar nupur paye* and more. But to perform his compositions in plays were totally an

tre company Natyabharati, unexpectedly a few stars left for Mumbai and we stumbled on difficult times. Although noted actors Johar Ganguli, Santosh Singha and Sabitri Devi were there, the absence of star actor Ahindra Chowdhury put the company in quandary.

"It was then that Nazrul came up with his musical which had little need for stars but demanded two proficient singers. Initially senior actors opposed to the idea but Godadhara Mallik, a successful director and proprietor of the company, wholeheartedly embraced the idea of staging a full-fledged musical. Such productions were long absent in the theatre area of Bengal.

"In the evening, Nazrul was escorted to the new theatre company. The master set designer,



(From left); Sarju Devi, Kanan Devi and Indubala the divas who gave voice to Nazrul's plays.

Nazrul paid little heed to finish the play. The organisers were enraged. "Is he a Kazi or *pajji*? He has already gone through betel leaf and zarda worth Tk 100 (a handsome amount in those days) and there is no sign of a new play yet," they alleged.

They soon worked out a plan and accordingly locked Nazrul in a room. Food, betel leaf and zarda were supplied to the room for the next few days, and miraculously Nazrul had penned an astonishing 22 new songs for the play! *Aleya* saw the light of the day and the songs played a vital role for its success.

Angurbala, another virtuoso singer-actress on stage was attached to the Minerva Studio. She had recorded around 300 songs for the

out of the world experience for me. Donning the lead role was not tough but to sing five different Nazrul compositions was quite a challenge!

"After repeated assurance from Probodh Guha (proprietor), we finally made it to the rehearsal room where Nazrul was seated. Suspecting my nervousness, Nazrul began talking to me on different subjects until my inhibitions died down and I started to hum a few compositions with him. His constant encouragement put me at ease. Within the next couple of hours five new songs were composed and before long I was ready for the stage."

Noted director Birendra Krishna Bhadra in his memoirs writes about staging Nazrul's musical *Modhumala*: "After we initiated a new thea-

Nanu Babu, worked on the set while actors and dancers rehearsed with new determination. Nazrul worked relentlessly for seven days, with little time to spare. A record number of 22 songs were performed in which eminent artistes Radharani and Harimoti did cameos. The musical was a roaring success."

According to Birendra Krishna, in those days Nazrul songs had a tremendous influence in popularising theatre.

Kazi Nazrul Islam had selflessly served the Bengali theatre and took it to great heights, seldom seen since.

SOURCE: NAZRULGEETI PROSHONGO BY KORUNAMAYA GOSWAMI

# Nazrul on the global stage

In conversation with Professor Rafiqul Islam

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry inculcates the triumph of humanity, while his music soothes the senses with its embrace of eternal love. Eminent Nazrul expert, researcher and chairman of the Nazrul Institute Trustee Board, Professor Rafiqul Islam, talks about Nazrul on the international level, and the relevance of his literature in the 21st century.

Nazrul had innate poetic abilities. We would like to convey the message of humanity and dignity that Nazrul reverberated in his poetry to the world. We find the relevance of Nazrul's poetry in the present world brimming with violence, fundamentalism and bigotry.

Today, Bangladesh and India jointly celebrate the 90th anniversary of the publication of Nazrul's "Bidrohi" (The Rebel), the most outstanding of the National Poet's creations. This is a rare event where two countries are celebrating a single poem. We haven't heard of a joint celebration of T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" by USA and UK or Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" by USA and Australia.

To introduce Nazrul's literary works to the world, especially to the English-speaking world, we have much to do in the days ahead. We are short of resource persons, including translators. The language of translations done in the 20th century has become archaic in the 21st century. Again, the translators must be connoisseurs of poetry; otherwise the translation will be below par. We are looking for new translators for our upcoming mission.

The Nazrul Institute, supported by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh, has published several research-based works on Nazrul, marking the 100th birth anniversary of the poet.

Dr. Jahangir Tareque, a well-known linguist, litterateur, translator and a Professor at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, translated Nazrul's works in several languages, including "Kazi Nazrul Islam: Poems Chosits" (French); "Kazi Nazrul Islam: Peomas elegidos" (Spanish); "Kazi Nazrul Islam: Chansons" (French).

Professor Winston E. Langley, Associate Chancellor and Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, has done single-handedly, more than all others put together, to introduce Nazrul to the English speaking world. Langley's book, "Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Voice of Poetry and the Struggle for Human Wholeness", was published by the Nazrul Institute, Dhaka in 2007. A second edition was released in 2009.

In the beginning of the book, Langley placed Nazrul in a historical context and spoke about the significance and characteristics of his poetic voice.

Langley cites English poet Shelley, to whom the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world and are the voices that unite the collective pursuit of moral development. Although in the post-modern era, many may object to this instrumental view of the purpose of poetry, Shelley's view of the poets' role, according to Langley, is personified in Nazrul.

It is simply evident that the work on Nazrul that Langley has embarked on is a true labour of love.

While Winston Langley continues his intellectual and academic endeavour, the couple, Dr. Gulshan Ara Kazi and Kazi M. Belal of (Taranga of California), also remain devoted to the enterprise of introducing Nazrul's genius to the world.

The Kazi couple's determined efforts resulted in the setting up of Nazrul Endowment Funds at the California State University and the University of Connecticut. The couple have also been the driving force behind organising periodic Nazrul conferences and symposia in various North American universities.

The fifth Kazi Nazrul Islam Endowed Lectureship Programme at the California State University, Northridge, California was held on October 1, 2011. The event was jointly organised by USA based organisation Taranga (run by Bangladeshi immigrants) and California State University. A cultural programme featuring Nazrul's songs, music, poetry, dances and drama was also held at the event.

Annual Nazrul Lecture, sponsored by the Nazrul Endowed Program, the Asian American Studies Program and the Asian American Cultural Center of Connecticut State University, Storrs, Connecticut was held on October

5, 2011.

The Nazrul-Burns Centre (The Centre for East-West Arts and Cultural Excellence, Scotland) was established in 2009 at the university of Glasgow in Scotland to promote "multicultural, secular Scottish lifestyle through diverse creative and innovative arts, cultural and leisure activities, including raising the profile of the Bangladeshi National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) and the great Scottish National Poet Robert Burns (1759-1796) towards greater understanding and mutual respect."

Bringing the poet's work to non-Bengali readers through English translation, however, remains a sporadic and private effort.

Dr. Kueker Neua of Japan has also conducted research on Kazi Nazrul Islam. We have already published books containing over 3000 songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam. A CD of 130 songs (in proper notation) recorded by 130 artistes has also been published in June, last year. BTV regularly airs a programme titled "Geeti Shatodal" on Nazrul Sangeet. I host the programme. I observe that other private television channels don't give appropriate emphasis on airing Nazrul Sangeet. This needs to be addressed.

To celebrate the 90th anniversary of the publication of Nazrul's "Bidrohi", Nazrul Institute organised a two-day (June 24-25, 2011) international conference on Nazrul in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The conference, held at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, brought together scholars and delegations from USA, Netherlands, China, India and Bangladesh.

Professor Winston E. Langley, University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA; Professor Rachael S McDermott, Bernard College, Columbia University, New York; Dr. Peter Custers, writer and journalist from the Netherlands; Young Weing Ming, editor and presenter, China Radio International; Professor Pabitra Sarkar, former Vice Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, India; the late National Professor of Bangladesh Kabir Chowdhury; Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Chowdhury; executive director of Nazrul Institute Rashid Haider; poet Mohammad Nurul Huda; Professor Mohit Ul Alam and I gave in-depth presentations on Nazrul at the conference.

Poet Mohammad Nurul Huda presented his keynote paper titled "Universalisation of the Rebel". In his keynote paper, enriched with apt quotations, allusions and references, Huda drew attention to the different layers of meaning in Nazrul's "Bidrohi".

In his brilliant bilingual speech (Bengali and English), Dr. Peter Custers focused on various concepts popularised by Nazrul like "National Awakening", "The Muslim Renaissance", "Firm Opposition to Communalism", "Tolerance and Equality", "Mysticism and Syncretism" and "The legacy of Religious Tolerance". His paper was titled, "Kazi Nazrul Islam: Bengal's Prophet of Tolerance".

Termining Nazrul as "Mohakobi", Custers said, "Nazrul needs to be institutionalised internationally as his poems, songs and love are for the universal humanity. Nazrul focused on religious scriptures like 'Mahabharat' and 'Ramayan' from different perspectives. He termed the exploited and downtrodden people as 'Gods' in his literature."

In her presentation, (in Bangla) titled "Banglar Nazrul: China-r Nazrul", Young Weing Ming said, "My Nazrul studies started with the recitation of 'Bidrohi'. After reading the poem, this certain sensation took over my senses that I can only compare to a volcanic eruption or tsunami."

Meanwhile International Centre for Nazrul (ICNAZRUL) held its soft launch on May 19, 2012 in Dhaka. The soft launch brought together a select group of guests and representatives from USA, Turkey, Japan and the local community, who will forge a collaborative network to formally launch ICNAZRUL and the 1st ICNAZRUL International Symposium in Dhaka in February 2013. Its planned activities are to translate and publish Nazrul's works in English and other languages with leading translators; organise, support and collaborate on cultural programmes highlighting Nazrul's work for the general public and international community; organise International Nazrul conferences and events; support international academic research and publications on Nazrul's life and works; set up a digital archive of Nazrul's literature, translations, music and writings.



Professor Rafiqul Islam

# Vignettes of brilliance Indian High Commission publishes "Nazrul Bichitra"

KARIM WAHEED

Late 1960s. On Kazi Nazrul Islam's birthday, at his Kolkata residence, the poet's family, friends and well-wishers had gathered for an informal celebration. A lei-laden poet is at the centre of the soiree. One after another, artistes are paying homage to the "Rebel Poet" who had by then turned silent. Manabendra Mukhopadhyay started singing "Bagicha-e Bulbuli Tui". A big smile brightened up the visibly excited Nazrul's face. To the surprise of hundreds of artistes and journalists, the poet took off a garland and put it on Manabendra's harmonium. Almost moved to tears by this gesture, the singer said, "I have just received the greatest honour."

Khilkhil Kazi, Nazrul's granddaughter, remembers this vividly. This [first published in *Bharat Bichitra*, May 2009] and many other memorable incidents from Nazrul's life, as well as scholarly evaluations of the poet's literature and songs, are included in *Nazrul Bichitra*. The compilation of write-ups by noted columnists, litterateurs and Nazrul's family members, has been published by the High Commission of India in Bangladesh on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of publication of Nazrul's most famed creation, *Bidrohi*.

About the book, Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka, wrote in the preface, "His [Nazrul's] *Bidrohi*, published in 1922, became a national phenomenon overnight. Governments of Bangladesh and India have decided to



Nazrul, discussing music with Pratibha Basu and Sarjubala Debi.



Kalyani Kazi (right) with the poet.

jointly celebrate the 90th anniversary of the historic event in Dhaka and Delhi. This book is the Indian High Commission's tribute to the poet. Most of the write-ups had appeared in *Bharat Bichitra*, the monthly magazine published by the high

commission. The poet's family and the Nazrul Institute in Dhaka have helped us in bringing out this book."

The book starts off with the full version of *Bidrohi* and segues into Achintyakumar Sengupta's *Jaisithher Jhor*. Sengupta

compares Nazrul to the Bengali month, *Jaisithher*. The second, scorching month of Bengali summer doesn't bring languor inducing comfort, but shakes up the stagnancy. This is also a time when the best of fruits ripen under the unforgiving sun and turn sweet as honey. Nazrul was born in this month and his demeanour, as well as his music and poetry, share these traits.

Amritalal Bala explores the close relationship between Nazrul and his "Gurudeb", Rabindranath Tagore. Diehard

ATN BANGLA	09:45	Poribare Nazrul	
10:30	Unnato Momo Shir	Call-er Gaan	
11:10	Drama: Ognigini	Boishakhi TV	
03:05	Bidrohi Nazrul	Musical Programme	
06:15	Bangladesh O Nazrul	03:00	Kobite Jemon
08:00	Drama: Shilimala		Dekhchhi
09:15	Jodi Er Bashi Na Bajey	05:30	Bajuk Bina Ognibina
11:00	Giti Shudha	06:20	Chalchitre Nazrul-er Gaan
12:30	Lead News		
CHANNEL i	08:00	Priyo Mukh	
09:45	Tritio Matra	08:35	Drama: Shilpi
11:05	Nazrul Mela	11:30	Shomyo Katuk Gaan-e Gaan-e
02:40	Tele-film		
05:00	Janapader Khabor		Diganta TV
06:20	Kobir Priyo Khabar	11:30	Ghum Jagamo Pakhi
07:00	Drama: Pichhu Daak	01:05	Inside Story
09:35	Musical Programme	04:30	Duranto Khabor
11:30	Special Programme	06:00	Alochayor Aina
ntv		08:40	Gaan-er Pahar
10:05	Bangladesh-er Nazrul	11:15	Shorol Pith
12:10	Drama: Kazi		Maasranga Television

RADIO	
abcr radio FM 89.2	12:00
06:00	Bhorer Janjaly
09:00	Mukhoshlo Bhojey
12:00	Duran Dapury
03:00	Duranta Bhojey
05:00	Shoudhata
07:00	Shajer Maya
09:00	Raat-er Akashey
11:00	Gejter Shek Net
08:00	Addabai
02:00	Boier Pola
02:00	Forti Unlimited
06:00	Bumper to Bumper
06:00	Old-Fort
01:00	Back to Back music
06:00	RADIO TODAY FM 89.6
06:00	Green FM
08:00	Good Morning Dhaka
11:00	Flash Back
22:30	News-Program
02:15	Rupali Gaan

**Paribar-er Nazrul On Desh TV at 09:45pm Special Talk Show**  
Guest: Kalyani Kazi

**Pichhu Daak On CHANNEL i at 07:50pm Single Episode TV Play**  
Cast: Anisur Rahman Milon, Keya

**Bangladesh-er Nazrul On ntv at 10:55pm Special Documentary**  
Participants: Selina Hossain, Abul Kalam Azad &

02:34	Drama: Mejobou	11:02	Drama: Shilimala
04:10	Narir Shudhanta O Nazrul	02:30	Ichchhey Gaan-er Dupur
06:45	Roadmadruti	05:02	Doctor's Chamber
08:15	Drama Serial: Roopkatha	06:30	Shanglape Shamabay
09:00	Drama: Ragini	07:35	Art & Craft Programme: Shoil
11:30	Kotha O Gaan-e Kichhukhon	08:00	Drama: Ekti Golper Chitronaty
ETV		11:00	Musical Programme
10:02	Drama: Bongsho	12:02	Drama: Premier Goppo
11:30	Shurer Akashe		CHANNEL 9
01:30	Bangla Feature Film	09:00	Gen X
06:30	Notuner Joygan	10:05	Tahader Kotha
07:50	Bhalobasho Mor Gaan	10:50	Moner Rongor Rangabo
08:20	Bidhronkanto	02:40	Bangla Feature Film
09:30	Tamarey Dibona	05:25	Nazrul-er Aka Shir
10:10	Neelkanthi	07:45	Lokaj Nazrul
		09:00	Drama: Chanbanu
		10:15	Bichitra Toba
			Bishwabani
			FOX MOVIES
		11:05	Black Swan
		02:35	Peter Pan
		04:30	Tangled
		06:15	Once Upon A Time
		07:00	Homeland
		08:00	Urostoppable
		09:40	Date Night
		11:10	Stealth
			Star World
		01:30	Raising Hope
		03:30	Tauch
		05:30	Unforgettable
		07:30	Coffee with Karan
		09:30	The Front Row
		09:30	Jr Master Chef
		10:30	Criminal Minds
			Discovery Channel
		01:30	Gold Rush: Alaska
		03:30	Honey we're Killing the Kids!
		04:30	Man Woman Wild
		06:30	Nature's Deadliest
		07:30	Destroyed in Seconds
		08:00	My Naked Secret
		08:30	Man Vs. Wild
		10:30	Swords
			Cartoon Network

NEWS BULLETIN	
BTV	Boishakhi TV
News (Bangla) at 12pm, 2pm, 5pm, 9pm.	News (Bangla) at 10am, 2pm, 7pm.
News (English) at 10am, 4pm, 10pm.	News (English) at 9am, 6pm.
ATN BANGLA	BANGLAWISION
News (Bangla) at 11am, 12pm, 2pm, 7pm, 10pm.	News (Bangla) at 10am, 2pm, 7:30pm, 10:30pm.
News (English) at 9am, 6pm.	News (English) at 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm.
CHANNEL i	Rtv
News (Bangla) at 2pm, 5pm, 10:30pm.	News (Bangla) at 1:45pm, 6:45pm, 10:45pm.
News (Bangla) at 2pm, 7:30pm, 10:30pm.	Desh TV
ETV	News (Bangla) at 2pm, 7pm, 9pm, 11pm.
News (Bangla) at 1pm, 3pm, 5pm, 7pm, 9pm, 11pm.	Maasranga Television
	News (Bangla) at 7pm, 11pm.