

37th death anniversary of our National Poet

A LOST SOUL...

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

Nazrul was restless -- a defining trait in his character. He had been granted permission to come down from heaven to his beloved country to see for himself how his devotees were observing his death anniversary. While the angels draped him in his favourite 'gerua khadder panjabi', he put on his black military boots that he always wore. His trademark -- untamed long curls falling loosely from underneath the bright yellow silk turban, he hummed a favourite tune "Sheye choley gechheye boley..." The twinkle in his eye said it all -- he would hardly wait.

Nazrul had a plan chalked out. He would spend the day visiting all the organisations that work to cherish and honour him, in particular the Nazrul Institute. He would also make time to visit the Bangla Academy, the Shilpakala Academy, radio and the TV channels. The institutions had to be the focus, where he could see for himself the people teeming in, the music in the air and reminisce on the days of yore.

Weaving his way to the Nazrul Institute through a crammed Dhanmondi road 28, he became increasingly confused. He figured that once in the vicinity, he would simply follow the crowd. But where was the crowd? Where was his house? It took him some time to finally spot the decrepit building and what he saw shocked him to his core.

Nearly 37 years ago, this used to be his home. He had slowly slipped into a terminal illness and watched in silence as hundreds of people thronged day in and day out to get a glimpse of him and to express their adulation anyway they could. It was here where he bade farewell to the world, leaving behind his admirers in a sea of grief. He had hoped the house would remain as a link to him and his memories. Now it seems, along with him, the house had died a premature death; the worn out structure looking helpless in the midst of a concrete wilderness.

As he walked in with dreaded steps, he saw a droopy receptionist at the entrance, responding half-heartedly to a few visitors. The auditorium itself looked like a post war scene. It seemed a heavy shower or mild tremor would bring the ceiling crashing down. The musty smell was nauseating. Termites had taken full control of the auditorium. A chill ran down his spine, "It's only a matter of time before my lifetime's work is ruined because of sheer negligence and apathy," he thought.

"Special" classes were held, two days a week, he heard some people discussing nearby. With hope, he made his way to the classrooms. But as the soft melody gradually became louder, Nazrul stopped dead in his tracks. These are not the tunes he had lovingly composed! In his prime, legendary singers had followed Nazrul's compositions with a rigid discipline, maintaining that certain magical appeal that defined his music. Now it seemed the students were fusing his style with their own. And where were the reputed artistes who could guide the students? Who was in charge of preserving his notations? As he looked



around desperately, the rooms seemed eerily empty.

At the Gramophone Company when Nazrul was signed as an exclusive trainer, eminent artistes such as Dilip Kumar Rai, Sachin Dev Burman, KL Saigal, Tulsi Lahiri, Pronob Rai, Abbassuddin Ahmed, Kamol Das Gupta, Juthika Rai, Angur Bala, Indu Bala, Kamala Jharia and many others recorded songs under his guidance and gained immense popularity, turned into legends.

At the library, Nazrul noted with horror, the CDs featuring songs from original records, and 35 volumes of notations containing a thousand songs, a picture album lying under a layer of dust. Most artistes unfamiliar with the technique of following swaralipi, have probably bailed out and shifted to other genres.

The situation perplexed Nazrul. It wasn't as if there were no funds allocated by the government. But most of it seemed to go to printing books, pamphlets, reprints -- anything -- but original articles. The songs that were so close to his heart were clearly not given the priority they deserved.

Nazrul remembered that he had composed 3500 songs -- on patriotism, ghazals, devotional, for theatre and cinema, and based on Turkish, Arabic and Cuban tunes all within a span of just 22 years. "Was that all in vain?" -- he thought to himself.

Agitated, he left the venue and decided to go to Bangla Academy, which was a hub of scholars and cultural activities. The dimmed lights, however, were a clear indication that the programme had either been cancelled or not promoted properly. There were several other venues in the country where celebrations were on, but the mediocrity was too painful for the poet to bear any longer. Uncontrolled tears welled up, as it became apparent that his desire to listen to his creations would remain unfulfilled.

As the moon emerged in the sky, Nazrul sat on the lawn and reminisced on his days in the Alipore Jail. Tagore had dedicated his play "Basanta" to Nazrul. He remembered his emergence on the literary scene of

Kolkata, as a soldier poet -- a time when Rabindranath Tagore's influence was dominant. This was the golden age of Tagore's literature and it was difficult for any poet not to be swept up by his presence. Nazrul himself was influenced by Tagore. But very soon Nazrul started to break away from that trend, composing songs with fiery spirit, heroic sentiment and ignited a newfound passion among readers and music enthusiasts. It seemed that the fire was now being put out through sheer apathy -- had his work inherited his terminal illness?

Subhas Chandra Bose had once said that he had travelled to many war fronts of India, but never had he been so moved by a song as spirited as Nazrul's "Durgomo Giri". Bose said, "Whenever we will be at the war fronts or in jail, Nazrul's songs would always be our true inspiration." Nazrul took a deep breath -- were the songs taught at educational institutions to familiarise the young ones with the National Poet's works? Perhaps not, he thought.

What about the media, he thought? Surely with all the new technological developments he had observed from above, something could be done? And what about this "globalisation" he had heard about? Didn't that imply promoting one's ideas to the world? Re-recording of the original songs by talented singers, attractive visual presentations of the songs could also draw the audience, couldn't they? What also concerned Nazrul was a dearth of skilled teachers across the country. He was also surprised that the government institutions, as well as sponsors or private institutions, seemed oblivious to the gradual decline that had set in.

But, there was no one to share his grief and it was time to return. Hurt and desolate, he made his way back to his abode in the heavens. The twinkling lights of stars greeted him. From a distance he could see a grand stage bedecked with flowers. Legendary artistes of yesteryears were waiting to greet him with his classics.

Perhaps his wish was to be fulfilled after all. But not in the earthly world!

"Nazrul's impact on Bangla literature is colossal"

... Poet Mohammad Nurul Huda

FAHMIM FERDOUS

Mohammad Nurul Huda, a versatile writer, essayist, literary critic, translator and folklorist who is best known as a prominent poet of the late 1960s, with over fifty poetry books to his credit. A former director of the Bangla Academy and Executive Director of Nazrul Academy, he is a prolific Nazrul researcher, who has translated a number of the Rebel Poet's works. On Nazrul's 37th death anniversary, the scholar spoke on various aspects of Nazrul's works with The Daily Star. Excerpts:

The impact of Nazrul's poetry:

"Very soon after Nazrul began writing, he influenced readers and writers alike. When he wrote "Bidrohi" at the age of 22, he jolted poets and litterateurs of the Bangla language, including Rabindranath Tagore. It was not only because of the content; of course no one had spoken about liberation in that tone before, but his construction, his use of oxymoron and juxtaposition of opposites, his knowledge and use of mythology -- not just Indian but of the West too, and to combine them and conflict them to compile a 'text' in a single night, remains a glaring instance in world literature. The publication where "Bidrohi" appeared went into a few reprints; it's said 29,000 of that particular issue were sold -- as it appealed not just to readers, but to poets, and revolutionaries. A number of poets parodied the poem very soon after it was published; many intellectuals also opposed the theme of the poem initially. To my knowledge, no other piece of work in Bangla literature created repercussions at this level. And it was not just because of the subject matter; it was because of his self-developed 'aesthetic report'.

"Many people had said Nazrul's works would die out in the course of time, but we see in the past 100 years or so, he is one of the two most celebrated poets of our language. "Having said that about Nazrul's impact on readers, his works have also influenced a number of poets. His resonating style of rhyming have been followed by many poets of his time and after. Nazrul was a symbolic poet, and this form of writing influenced poets like Jibananda Das; all poems of his book "Jhora Palok" were influenced by Nazrul. However, his imageries were more abstract, while Nazrul

dealt with more 'concrete' imagery.

"What we call post-modernism today, is a restless, open-ended text. Nazrul's works from 1922-23 have all the characteristics of post-modernistic literature; if we go back to the "Bidrohi" example, the 139-verse poem 'stops' at 11 places, creating an open-endedness and giving a polyphonic voice to it. I believe Nazrul has influenced and inspired a lot of post-modern poetry as well. Also, Nazrul never wrote poetry in prose-form (godyo), but when people read texts like "Rajbondi'r Jobanbondi", they can pick out 'found poetry in them'. Nazrul's impact on Bangla literature, both to readers and writers alike, is colossal."

The practice of the various forms of Nazrul's literature:

"Any literature is readable. But poetry is also 'recitable'. Songs and plays also have their greater values lying in the performing arts. In today's 'digital' culture, the forms that are performable are perceived more; that is one reason I think his novels and stories are not as popular as they could be. However, those forms can also be transformed into performing arts, and I hope more work is done on that front so that Nazrul is reached to people in greater depths. "One other thing I would love to see is an initiative to translate the entire volume of Nazrul's works in English, so that it is open to the world, and readers of other languages can relish it too."

The relevance of Nazrul's works and philosophy in today's context:

"I think more than any other time, his thoughts and philosophies are applicable in our current social-political scenario. In his last address, given at the 'Bongio Musolman Sahitya Samitee' his thoughts can be applied directly, where he said he had come to alleviate the differences and conflicts of religion, and the stark contrast of wealth and poverty that is around. He also spoke of an 'Obhed Sundor' or 'beauty identical with everybody'; something that is equally beautiful to everyone's eyes. To emerge from our political crisis, we can go back to Nazrul. While on the one hand he spoke of rebellion, on the other hand he spoke of equality, harmony and positive relations between people -- as individuals and as collectives. Our leaders, both individually and collectively, must assert themselves and accept the assertion of another, individually and from collective idealistic viewpoints."

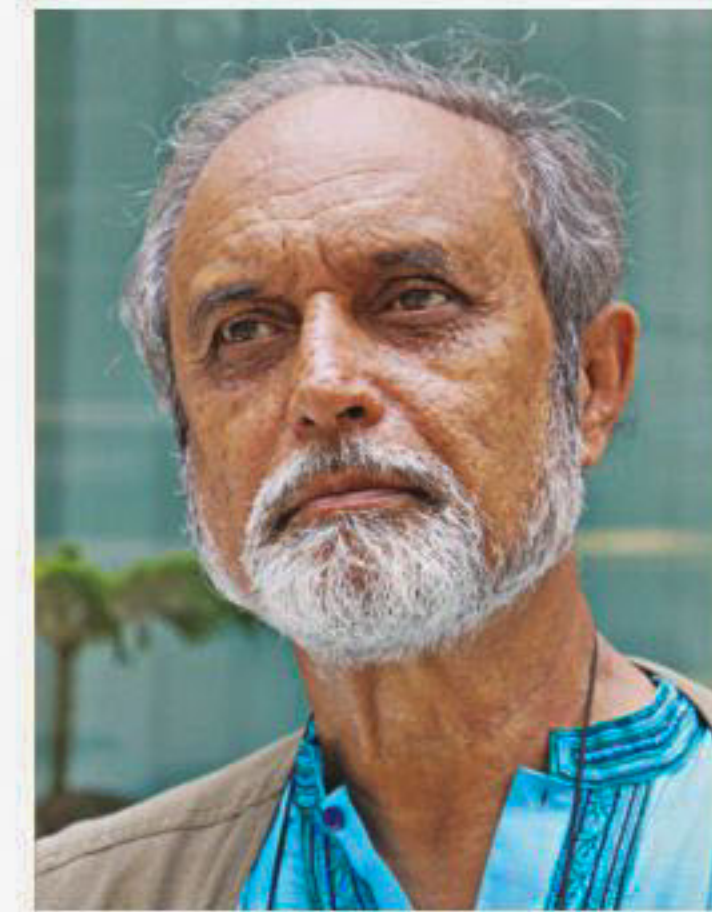


PHOTO: ATL AAKASH

TV WATCH



A solo musical performance of eminent Nazrul exponent Feroza Begum will be telecast on Boishakhi TV tonight at 8:35pm.



Based on Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Badhon-hara", Nahid Ahmed Pial's tele-film "Kuhu" will be aired at 3pm today on Maasranga TV. The cast of the tele-film includes Sadia Islam Mou, Shams Sumon, Deepa Khondokar and Maznun Mizan.

DS CAFE

Actress Nipun is our guest at this month's edition of DS Cafe. She will take on your questions at The Daily Star Centre between 4-5 pm Today. To interact on telephone with Nipun, just dial in at 01711623915 and 01711623917. The lucky reader who poses the best question will get pride




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