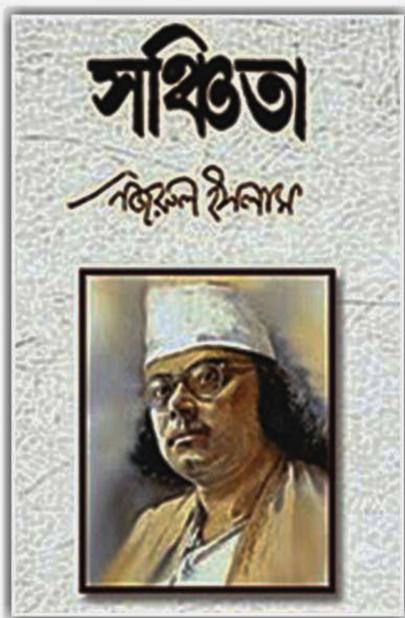


MUSINGS

REMINISCING Shanchita

T S MARIN



As a child, I was not an ardent fan of the "Rebel Poet". I was made to memorise "Bidrohi" before I started going to school; and, I can vouch that Nazrul and I began on a very wrong foot. I distinctly remember my Mamma reciting to me many of his serious, and of course, more distinguished poems e.g. "Shamyobaadi", "Kandari Hunshiyar", "Chol Chol Chol" to me when I was merely 6 or 7 years old from a fancy, dark chocolate-coloured book with gold letters on the cover. At that age, I was not mature enough for poems so intense and passionate as the ones in *Shanchita*, and thus, I dubbed Kazi Nazrul Islam as the "Angry Poet" instead of the Rebel Poet!

My next encounter with *Shanchita* occurred when I was in Grade 4. My parents decided to give me lessons in arts and recitation. The first poem we were taught to recite in the arts school was "Lichu-Chor". Back in 1999, photocopy shops were not to be found in every road and alley; therefore, copying the poem in our notebooks was the easy way out. I remember my shock when I realised that my "Angry Poet" had written something as adorable as "Lichu-Chor"! I vividly remember returning home overly excited that evening, and narrating this feeling to my Mamma. Her major was in Bengali Literature, and looking back, I cannot even begin to fathom how hilarious my gushing over this "great revelation" must have been to her.

The next poem I was taught to recite was "Khuki o Kathberali"; and it remains the most special poem in our mother-daughter dynamics till date since Mamma's nickname is Khuku, and to her - I am quite like the mischievous, incorrigible *Kathberali*! After a gap of several years, *Shanchita* resurfaced from a dusty corner of our library because of my recitation lessons; and for the first time, I was awestruck seeing the universality and versatility of Nazrul.

I learnt reading by the time I was five years old, and

reading anything and everything (from newspapers to complete Shakespeare to instructions found in packets of medicine) within my reach was a precocious habit of mine. Having something so stimulating as *Shanchita* was a dream come true, and it initiated my love-hate relationship with the "Angry Poet". I remember going back to the cover of this magical book over and over

only to check whether all these very different poems had been written by the same person or not!

In my school days, at least one Tagore and one Nazrul poem were essential part of all Bengali text books. While poems by Tagore seemed to be mostly descriptive, Nazrul's creations struck me as more thought-provoking, dynamic, and, on more than one occasion, quite heart-breaking. As a reader, I have always been on the softer and sensitive side, and "Manush" makes me dewy-eyed every time I read it. Years passed, and my fondness for the "Angry Poet" grew. In all honesty, I will admit that he has not been my top favourite, but he certainly has been special. In our undergrad level, I had one course titled "Introduction to Bengali Literature". Naturally, Nazrul was a very big part of the syllabus; and under the tutelage of a good teacher, and reading from a more matured reader's perspective, I started seeing Nazrul in a whole new light. *Shanchita* has always been a great treasure box for me, and this time I started to find not only invaluable life lessons, but also multi-facets of Nazrul - his passions, free-spirit, and almost naively idealistic beliefs.

To sum up, *Shanchita* to me is nothing short of a box of assorted candies - you never know what is going to be the next one! Of all his creations, this book probably captures Nazrul's fanciful, whimsical, flighty persona most, changing and swinging moods and tones drastically with every poem. While "Aaj Srishty-shukher Ullashe" gives me goose bumps, and "Kuli-mojur" makes me sit down and contemplate, nothing has surpassed the joy and wonder of the nine years old bookworm that her "Angry Poet" wrote delightful things such as "Jhinge Phool" and "Khadu Dadu".

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"Padmar Dheu Re..."

A Bhatiyali/bichched song

KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM
1899-1976



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

Kazi Nazrul Islam was enticed by the challenge of writing a *বিচ্ছেদের গান* (Song of Separation) in a Bhatiyali tune. River Padma is, of course, the mighty river inextricably associated with East Bengal through which it flows. Nazrul, a native of West Bengal, was visiting East Bengal and Bhatiyali is the genre of traditional songs of boatmen plying the waterways of eastern Bengal. The Bhatiyali mode must have seemed the most appropriate one for any song Nazrul composed as a paean to the mighty River Padma. Themes of Bhatiyali songs usually deal with nostalgia and homesickness of a young married woman sitting by the riverside, beckoning the passing boatman to go and tell her brother to come and escort her for a visit to her parental home. But Nazrul broke this convention in his Bhatiyali by adapting a *bichched* theme, which is that of Radha's lament for separation from Krishna. He did this because, in my opinion, he could not resist the punning of Padma (পদ্মা), the river, and padmo (পদ্ম), the lotus blossom!

The punning, however, gives rise to a problem. The two words may be similar sounding, but in nature they do not cohabit the same world. Lotus is a still water plant, quietly growing in a pond or by a lakeshore, not to be swept up by the swift moving waves of a noisy river by any chance. Nazrul tackles the problem by coining a metaphor, his favorite image of 'hridoy-podmo' the heart-lotus, the pedestal upon which the flute-playing, cross-ankled Krishna stands in popular iconography. The absent Krishna has left the pedestal vacant, and adrift in the waves of the River Padma. The song's text negotiates between the image of a lotus blossom, a desirous heart, and a barren heart-lotus on the look-out for God Krishna wondering alongside the river of Love.

Nazrul is almost playful in the way he throws himself such artistic challenges. How brilliantly he has met all of those challenges in creating one of the most beloved songs in the bangla language! The text of the bangla song is deceptively simple. Yet, when I made an informal survey, I discovered that most people do not fully grasp the meaning of the song. Despite Nazrul's mastery in reconciling 'Padma,' the river, and 'padmo,' the lotus blossom, people are puzzled by the different elements of the text, and the kind of sense they make as a whole. And yet they've heard, or even sung the beautiful song, all their lives! I hope my English translation will deepen their appreciation and love of the song.

O the waves of river Padma!

Take away my emptied out heart-lotus, take it away ...
The one whose glorious feet had rested upon this lotus is gone
-- I've lost him!

My dear-heart, my friend, is not here,
No honey is therefore in the lotus, no, none...

The wind wails around, that sweet scent cannot be found.
In my beautiful fount
there's no more the noise of buzzing bees of joy.

O river Padma, the way your waves roll upon waves
and sparkle in the moonlight,
my dear-heart's beauty shimmers the same way
in Krishna-black darkness.

He is out there somewhere
roaming from one river port to another
on the river of Love, playing his flute.

If you catch his sight, perchance, please
place my heart-lotus at his feet
and tell him: - why did he ignite the diwali lamps of hope
in my bosom and then leave me forlorn in eternal abyss?

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The One Who Shows THE WAY

TRANSLATED FROM KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

TRANSLATED BY SOHANA MANZOOR

[A] An unknown Darvish arrived in town that dawn. People rose euphoric, as if rising from the churning of the sea; they were everywhere-- in streets, fields and river banks. The harem, the world of zenanas, was of course, as quiet as ever. Outside there was chaos--inside only pulsation.

Everybody asked, "Who is he? Who is this man whose unexpected appearance has caused such cacophony alongside birdsong at dawn?"

Everybody rushed to see the man: men, women, elderly persons, all went the same way to take a look at the Darvish. Still, there was no end to their seeing. It was as if Duhshashan went on dragging Draupadi's saree, and before pairs of amazed eyes it kept on growing. People kept on viewing the Darvish in the same manner. But there is a God beyond everything who never reveals the secret of the hidden.

The Darvish did not utter one word--he was absolutely silent.

Many asked to become his disciple. But he remained unmoved. There were a few that would not leave him alone. To one he said, "Leave your garments behind." The man threw away his soiled clothes and took up kingly robes. The Darvish only smiled, but did not say anything more.

The Qazi of the town heard everything. He too started to visit the Darvish. However much the Darvish declined to speak to him, the Qazi kept on nagging. At one point the Darvish realized that he won't let go. A faint smile lit up his face.

you stand ready for prayers, you will drop the bottles on the prayer rug and break them."

The Qazi's face turned blue. He trembled and said, "My Lord, you will be free of me, that's true. My head will surely be off my body afterward. But will I be free?"

The hermit replied, "You've set so many people free. Now it's time that you see to your own freedom." The Qazi left the place. He thought, "I'll take two bottles to the mosque tomorrow. The Darvish must know more than I do."



They held a meeting to decide on the punishment of such a brazen debauchee. Everyone except the minister said, "Punishment for such a sinner needs no deliberation. He should be impaled." The minister then stood up and said, "This insignificant slave begs forgiveness, Your Majesty, but I believe that the death penalty is not enough of a punishment for such a criminal. The exact punishment for such a man would be to strip him of his titles, dignity and assets. If he is merely killed, that's the end of everything. But if he continues to live, he will suffer throughout his life."

people for wrong-doing. Now they came forward and gave him a sound beating, letting him know that time was changing for everybody. Then came those whom who had convicted and the way they punished him was worse than being impaled.

And yet, even after all these insults and humiliation there was consolation as well, like the touch of the beloved. The Qazi clutched his bony chest and cried, "O Lord, is this how you drowned all my pride in tears! Oh Darvish, where are you? In what faraway land?"

That evening, when the Qazi finally reached the den of the Darvish like a reptile on his breast, the poor sufferer's eyes were droopy. Nevertheless, he had the strength to cry, "Darvish, teach me!--I have come, and there is so little time!"

In the melody of the Puravi music, in the mingling of evening and dusk, there was such pain, but no one noticed.

It was as if someone had said, "Come, son. Come. All your soiled clothes and tattered pride have been cleansed by your tears."

The Darvish struck his xylophone and sang:

"Bomay sajjada rongeen kun gorot peere hanga goyed.
Ke salek bekhobor na bud jerahosome manzel ha."

"Drown your prayer-rug in liquor, if the teacher says.

The one who shows the way, knows where the road ends and begins."

A shadowy darkness with the melancholy charm of the tear-stained face of a motherless daughter chased by her step-mother slowly descended everywhere.

The Qazi gathered all his strength to cry out one last time, "Who is there? O my friend on this journey, who are you?"

Nothing could be heard for a while. A deep sound echoed around the silent banks of the river, "Who--are--you?"

A barely audible responderose from the boat, trembling as it said, "Drunken Hafiz."

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[C] The Badshah came. Along with him came all the officers, ministers, soldiers and God knows who else! Friday prayers began. The Qazi was the Imam. A little later two bottles of rice wine fell from the Qazi's robes. It is only natural that the pungent smell that rose from the broken liquor bottles made all the faithful at the mosque agree unanimously that there was no worse drunkard than the Qazi in the entire universe. The one who got drunk could be forgiven, but the one who was consumed by drunkenness could not be forgiven, nor spared.

The insult and humiliation of his position will consume him eventually." Everyone including the Badshah howled, "Thus it shall be."

A mad man passing them by like a popcorn the wind laughed, "Those insults and humiliation are the prizes of life. You don't get burned by those; they relieve you from life's burden."

[D] After being so utterly humiliated at the court of the Badshah, when the Qazi stood at the bend of a dark alley, even the street dogs felt sorry for him. When he was the Qazi, he had punished

[B] At last the Darvish spoke. "Listen, Qazi sahib, will you agree to what I have to say?"

The Qazi sprang up, "Of course, my master."

And so the Darvish laughed and said, "Very well then. Tomorrow is Friday; the Badshah of the land will be here. He will ask you to lead the prayers. Can you do something there?"

The Qazi agreed without thinking. "Of course. What shall I do?"

The Darvish said, "You will take two liquor bottles under your arms. When