

The Poet of Non-Conformity

A look at Nazrul's literary legacy

ROBINA RASHID BHUIYAN

Kazi Nazrul's legacy as the Rebel Poet was well established during the colonial era. Openly dissenting against the British dominion in India, he was also critical of the Indian Independence Movement, and disagreed with Gandhi's non-violent acts of civil disobedience. His half-weekly publication Dhumkhetu contained impassioned responses that not only addressed the collective rebellions, but also the goals of the nationalist struggle. A man of such intense emotion was also given to romantic ardour, and his poetry reflects the simmering passions trapped beneath his skin, and true to his title, the Rebel writer cared not for form and style, and made way for modern Bengali poetry in a way it had never been attempted before.

Perhaps he was fated to this non-conforming stance; born in steep poverty, he had very little formal education and his familial upbringing reared him on religious doctrines. He worked as a muezzin in his local mosque to help support his family in his early life. While in the British Indian army, he explored literary terrains at home and beyond extensively and was particularly enamoured by the works of Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Hafez, Rumi and Omar Khayyam. His works were infused with Persian and Arabic vocabulary, which compounded his beliefs in a humanitarian philosophy that transcended gender, race, religion and class. Through this interjection, Nazrul expressed a truth both unique and universal, his openness to culture interpreted as non-sectarian and indiscriminate. In this light, the Rebel Poet is also the Poet of Freedom.



However, what makes Nazrul stand out is his remarkable way of stretching language and literary borders. He often experimented with context and form, leading to what Nazrul singer and expert Sumon Chowdhury calls "Content based on asymmetry, not to be confused with surrealism, which gave rise to Bangla Ghazals." Ghazals, which originated in the Middle East, were given a new air of mysticism and ambiguity as Nazrul interspersed the form with Kirtan myths, such as Radha's admonishment to Krishna in "Kaar nikunje raat kataye, ashle praate pushpo chor..."

"Kazi Nazrul Islam's innate restlessness is conducive to the instability of his era; his growing years took place within The First World War and the many anti-British revolutions taking place in his homeland. When he returned from the Indian Army, the Bolshevik Revolution was brimming. At the time India also saw the influx of many foreigners, through trade and otherwise, which gave him the opportunity to meet people from diverse backgrounds, thus probably providing a preliminary influence which was to be later expressed in his works. We know very little about the life he led during his youth up to 1920, but they were crucial in shaping his philosophical and literary focus," added Sumon Chowdhury.

In an era when Imperial dominion imposed Western literary traditions and narratives, Nazrul's fascination towards Oriental languages and texts become a literary, decolonising dissent. His innovative take on such forms makes him impossible to pin down within any literary, cultural movement, embodying emancipation in its truest form.

"Nazrul created not only music, but also artistes"

– Swani Zubayer

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Versatile singer and national film award-winning music director Swani Zubayer has a knack for experimenting with different styles and genres. The artiste grew up in an environment where he learnt to retain and respect our unique cultural identity in all its diversity and richness. In a conversation with The Daily Star, the artiste shared his connection to Kazi Nazrul Islam and his music.

"Kazi Nazrul Islam used to visit our family quite regularly. My maternal grandfather, poet Khan Mohammad Moinuddin was close to Nazrul. Both of them were behind bars in Hoogley jail for six months for their rebellious role in writing editorials against the then British Raj in a Newspaper, edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam," says Swani. "My grandfather wrote a book, 'Jugsroshta Nazrul' that later earned UNESCO award."

"My mother Khurshid Jahan would sing Nazrul Sangeet. My maternal uncles and aunts would also often sing Nazrul Sangeet and Rabindra Sangeet, and our Old Dhaka house had a constant cultural ambience. I remember those memories, and they have an internal impact on my psyche and I always feel that Kazi Nazrul Islam is our family member. I have been learning Nazrul Sangeet since then. I find wonder and joy while I render his songs. It baffles me how the poet composed such vast volumes of music in a career spanning just 22 years. He not only created music, but also artistes at the same time. He would love to give freedom to the artistes, which was his unique quality," said Swani.

Bengal Foundation has produced Swani Zubayer's latest Nazrul Sangeet album "Keno



Megh-er Chhaya", for which Swani himself arranged music and instrumentalists recorded symphony of classical pieces for the album.

The singer-lyricist-composer released his debut album "Saara" in 1998, and has eight solo albums to his credit. Swani Zubayer earned his Master's Degree in Western Classical Composition from the Royal University College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden and also received training in Indian Classical Music from Ustad Mazhar Ali Khan and Ustad Jawad Ali Khan. His vision is to create a symphony orchestra in Bangladesh for which he sacrificed a musical career in Sweden.



A CORRESPONDENT

Television shows during Eid tend to be a star-studded affair, save for a few exceptions. Game shows such as "Krishoker Eid Ananda", conceptualised, directed and hosted by prominent media personality Shykh Seraj, take the Eid festivities to the scenic rural villages where locals join the fun. For Eid ul Azha this year, the game show will be set in Mymensingh's Haluaghat upazila.

"On this side of the Brahmaputra River, farmers subsist by harvesting rice, jute, mustard, and eggplants. Fishing is also an important economic source here," stated Shykh Seraj. "Every year we have a theme for the show, and this year we would like to highlight the strength of women in the locality, and on Khona, the woman whose agricultural wisdom have become proverbs for farmers through the centuries."

The programme will aired on the second day of Eid ul Azha on Channel i at 4:30pm.

Government launches e-Copyright to protect Intellectual Property Rights

A CORRESPONDENT

The Access to Information (a2i) Programme of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Bangladesh Copyright Office under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs jointly launched an 'e-Copyright system' on Wednesday, August 23, to make it easier for anyone to copyright their intellectual property. The programme, held at the PMO had Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor as chief guest.

Traditionally, to apply for copyright of any creative work, one needed to come to the copyright office in Dhaka. There was knowledge gap among the applicants regarding which documents were required to be submitted along with their application. This created possibility for making mistakes in application requiring unnecessary visits to the office, thus adding up to the cost of application. Given the manual application process, the total process took between 30 to 40 days. There was no way to verify application with previously archived items which had already received copyright.

The Bangladesh Copyright Office used a2i's Service Innovation Fund



Ayub Bachchu with Asaduzzaman Noor at the programme.

to develop the 'e-Copyright' system using which any individual or institution from anywhere in Bangladesh can now apply online for copyright of literature, drama, music, records, paintings, movies, radio programmes, television programmes, softwares, etc. They can access the online application form in the website of Bangladesh Copyright Office at copyrightoffice.gov.bd. Once the application is processed, the applicant will receive an SMS mentioning date of delivery. This e-service is expected to encourage more application for copyright, and the creative-minded citizens of

Bangladesh will have a better chance at protecting the intellectual property rights of their creations.

The chief guest in his speech congratulated the a2i Programme and the Bangladesh Copyright Office. He requested the relevant entities to undertake necessary steps for promotion.

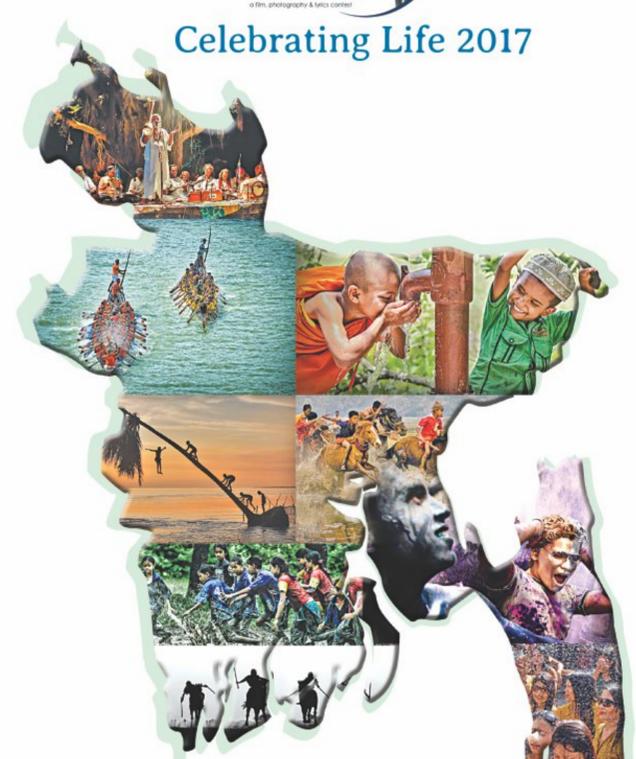
Senior officials from the PMO, Cultural Affairs Ministry, and copyright office were present at the ceremony. As a token of the launch, popular musician Ayub Bachchu and singer Elita Karim received certificates of copyright of their music at the ceremony.

The Daily Star



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