

The bard of Bengal: Nazrul

If there were to be a name synonymous to fearless righteous rebellion and prolific emotional connections, that is Nazrul's, Bengal's romantic *bidrohi*.

But to me, at least through his writings, he is a complete man. Be it his naughty child thief—self seeping through the rhymes of *Lichu-chor*, or the voice of a gentle soul disturbed by the daily troubles of a society's disenfranchised in *Kuli-mojur*, who then roars into rebellion to declare— *Ami shei din hobo shanto, jobey utpeeriter krondon-rol akash e batash e dhonibey na* (I will rest when the screams of the suppressed no longer resonate in the air). He is also the romantic who binds the love of nature, and the adoration for his lady love in *Mor priya hobe esho rani, debo khopa'y tarar phool* (Let me make you a queen my dearest, with stars in your hair.) Or the aggrieved father, *Shunno e-bukey pakhi mor aye firey aye, torey na heriya shokaler phool okaley jhoriya jae* (Come back to my bereft heart, my little bird, the morning bloom withers too quickly for not seeing you), or *Ghumiye geche shanto hoey more gaan-er bulbuli* (My song-bird is sleeping quietly) ...

The rebel's call

The most often and easily recognisable aspect of Nazrul, especially for the psyche of the Bengali nation, has been

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Once back from service, in 1920, he became a journalist, his foray into literature truly began, in Kolkata. Even in that he was a trailblazer, introducing *ghazals* to

Bangla, and adding words from other languages like Persian, which hitherto had not been done intentionally.

But experiences or exposure alone could not make him the literary behemoth that he is today, or the inspiration that he was, throughout the fight, against the British, as well as the Liberation War. He personifies the common man, in our passions, in our tribulations, but grants our emotions the lucid expressions with eloquence we would be hard pressed to find otherwise.

Especially when these emotions pertain to freedom from oppression and dignity of life. Forever in dissent, and clear in his position against the oppressive state in collusion with the often spineless native elite, he wrote while free, and while incarcerated, always the revolutionary. His spirit, and the depth of his emotions in these poems are universal in nature, just as oppression and human dignity are. And so, his poems consisting of a critique of the tyrannical social order, its categorical rejection, and then a call to arms, or protest, is a siren's song for all of lesser privilege, all around the world.



He speaks for all those who work for and hope for a better world order, but even more vehemently, with a spirit that is not scared of sacrifice:

*Have no fear!
The flood deluge will soon overtake the universe.
The final hour is fast drawing near.
The rotting old and the dying decrepit will now be wiped out for good.*

(Translation collected)

Sublime romance

With over 4,000 songs, and works in all sorts of mediums like short stories, novels, poems and plays, there is no lack of variety in the subjects that Nazrul has written on. Romance, in all its shades, has a muse in his works. In *Tumi shundor tai cheye thaki, e ki mor oporadh--* he speaks unabashedly of the beauty of his beloved that holds his gaze transfixed.

In my limited study of the vastness of his words, I have found all the shades of emotions that lovers may go through over the course of a lifetime—young romance, desire, despondency, misery, agony and reminiscence of love and youth lost, and finally hope for the souls to unite or reunite as fate allows.

Love in its first stages often has the feeling of inadequacy, from sheer wonder, and many lovers have lamented the limits of a human heart.

*"Ami eto j tomae bhalobeshechi
Tobu mone hoy, e jeno kichui noy,
Keno aro bhalobeshe jete parey na ridoy
Ami eto j tomae bhalobeshechi"*

Or the feeling of having known someone from some other time, like the connection of soulmates:

*"Mora aar jonomey hongsho-mithun
chilam
Chilam Nodir chor-e
Jugol-rup e eshechi go abar matir ghor-e"*
(We were a pair of mated swans in another lifetime
On a river island
And have only returned as a couple to this mud-house.)

Or the gentle letting go of the lover, perhaps lost to situations unknown, with a hope of meeting again someday, somewhere:

*"Porojonomey dekha hobe priyo,
Bhulio morey hetha bhulio,
E jonom-e jaha bola holo na,
Ami bolibo na, tumio bolio na"*
(Let us meet again, reborn
Forget me here, now
What is unsaid this time, let it remain,
Let us not speak, neither you nor I.)

Or of broken hearts and dreams, and dejected agony;

*"Hethay din er shopon raat e furay,
Raat er kushun praat-e jhorey jae."*
(Dreams spun in the day die at night here,

The blooms of the night wither at dawn.)

For each shade or nuanced emotion that love can evoke in a human being, Nazrul has felt it, and bestowed words on them for us to borrow when our own fall short.

Nazrul and the word 'freedom'

Always guided by his tempestuous emotions, all his works have the quality to evoke emotions and egg us to make them unrestrained, unbound, to let the spirits be free, unbowed. This is true for his freedom exercised in the use of words, in the range of emotions given legitimacy and recognition to, and the way he picked and celebrated parts of all religions that he took a fancy to or was impressed by:

*"Mora jhonjhar moto uddam
Mora jhonar moto chonchol
Mora bidhatar moto nirbhoy
Mora prokritir moto shocchol."*

In other works, he calls farmers to break free of the shackles that keep them oppressed, or for people to shed the burdens of old age, which he describes as not the years a person has lived, but rather, the readiness or reluctance to bring and accept change, specifically saying that he sees many ostensibly young people who are actually just worn out skeletons inside a farcically youthful skin.

Perhaps it is time again that we read his poems for inspiration and strength alike, like we did during all our national crises—be it liberation from the British, or the Liberation War, let us be young again, let us live the Nazrul way, unbowed.

By Sania Aiman
Photo: Collected

the unapologetic and unwavering rebel in him. Having lived through the waning sun of the British colonial rule in India, and after serving in the British troops in World War I, the poet emerged, rich in his experiences and learnings of languages, literature and music from his diverse battalion mates.