



ABOUT KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM (1899-1976)

Kazi Nazrul Islam was a poet of love, humanity and rebellion. The genius Nazrul left the imprints of his talent both on music and literature equally. His versatility was outstanding – he was a poet, short-story writer, novelist, essayist, play writer, dramatist, singer, musician, lyricist, composer, director, actor, activist, journalist, editor, soldier, humanist and a philosopher. He was born on 25th May, 1899 at Churulia of Burdwan in West Bengal, India and dies in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on August 29, 1976, at the age of 77.

THE BOY NAZRUL

Following the unexpected death of his father, the nine years old Nazrul had to shoulder the responsibility of his mother, younger sister and brothers. He was nicknamed “Dhukhu Miah” (The grief-stricken boy) by the village people for his battling poverty in the childhood. At the age of ten Nazrul wrote many lyrics and poems for the plays of a moving theatrical group (Leto) he worked for. He learned a lot of Bengali and Sanskrit literature and Hindu scriptures when he was at that age. During that time he composed a number of folk plays for his theatrical group. In the year 1911 he left the group and took admission in a high school in a town near his village. Being unable to pay school’s tuition fees he frequently quit schools and enrolled again. But he continued his schooling up to class X (the final year of the school) through extreme hardship.

THE SOLDIER NAZRUL

Instead of preparing himself for the Pre-Test to qualify for the final Entrance Examination in the school, he joined the 49th Bengal Regiment under the British Army in India in December, 1917. He

returned to Kolkata in March 1920 after the disbandment of 49th Bengal Regiment. He served there for two years three months. He left the Regiment as a Battalion Quarter Master Havildar.

THE POET NAZRUL

“Baunduler Atmakahini” (Autobiography of a Vagabond), the first prose work of Kazi Nazrul Islam, was published in May, 1919 in an illustrated monthly journal Shaogot. The poem “Mukti” (Freedom) was published in July, 1919 in “Bangio Mussalman Sahitya Patrika” (Bengal Muslim Literary Journal). The poem “Bidrohi” (The Rebel) was published successively in three different magazines – the “Muslem Bharat”, “Bijli” and “Probashi” in the month of December 1921 and January 1922. He reached the peak of fame immediately after the publication of the poem “Bidrohee” (The Rebel). Poet Nazrul was 22 years old when he wrote this poem. The poem is considered as one of the most remarkable masterpieces of literature. The rebelliousness that exists in the theme and language of the poem encouraged both the common people and elites in India to raise their voice against the British colonialism. Nazrul published a collection of short stories entitled “Byather Dan” (The Gift of Pain) on 1st March, 1922 and in the same year on 25th October he published his famous anthology of poems “Agnibina” (The Fiery Lute). A political poem “Anondomoyeer Agomone” (The advent of delightful mother) appeared on 26th September, 1922 in the puja issue of bi-weekly magazine “Dhumketu” (The Comet) edited by the poet himself. In the same year 26th October an essay titled “Joogabani” (The message of the era) was also published in his magazine “Dhumketu” (The Comet). The British colonial government put him in the prison for writing the poem “Anondomoyeer Agomone” (The advent of delightful mother). His pen produced many poems and lyrics that awakened Indian subjugated people to resist the oppression of the British colonial government. He was a poet of extreme courage and spirit. He did not compromise with the narrow minded and religious fanatics of the society.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was a romantic poet by heart and soul and wrote many poems, short stories and lyrics of love, emotion and pain during his active poetic life. He expressed strongly his view on women’s equality in society and their importance along with men. In his poem “Nari” (The Woman), he wrote –

*“The song of equality I sing –
See I not any difference between man and woman !
All deeds great and e’er-beneficial were done
In this world, half of them was accomplish’d by woman,
The rest half by the man” [Woman]*

[Translation by M Munir]

When we read the following verses in his famous poem ‘Poverty’ (Daridro), there we find a courageous Nazrul, who embraced the hardship of life in his life quietly as if he was an ocean that engulfed every stream of water of the earth flowing down into it. He wrote:

*“O poverty, thou hast made me great!
Christ’s honour thou hast bestowed
On me, adorned me with the crown Of thorns!-
O the ascetic, an appalling courage thou hast
Given me to speak out unhesitatingly, endowed
Me with the ability to cast insolent piercing look and
Speak with razor-sharp words,
O poverty, my vain had turned into a sword by thins curse!”*

[Translation: M Munir]

Poet’s all desires in life had suffered much strain and turned pale as he was afflicted with unrelenting poverty. But we see a striking similitude between his poverty-stricken desire and a bloomed white shefali when he expressed:

*“Like a white shefali my painful pallid desire wants
To bloom with fragrance spreadeth around....” [Poverty]*

[Translation: M Munir]

Kazi Nazrul Islam revolutionized the style of Bengali literature and wrote more than four thousand lyrics. He was a patron saint of a new literary movement in Indo-Pak-Bangles sub-continent. His poems validated human values and social justice and demonstrated his feelings for mankind, his rebelliousness against injustice and his emotion of love in concrete and sublime form. As a true romantic poet he merged himself with the beauteous hills, forests, birds, mountains, rivers and seas around him and expressed his feelings of happiness and sorrows through his poems and lyrics.

A GREAT LYRICIST, MUSICIAN & SINGER NAZRUL

Poet Nazrul entered in the realm of theatres and films as a singer, composer, play writer and music director in 1929 and continued his performances till the end of 1940. The talented poet stirred the entire Bengal of British India. He wrote more than four thousand lyrics. He is regarded as the finest lyric poet in Bengali language. He created seventeen new ragas (musical modes) in Indian music while he was composing his own songs known as Nazrul Geeti. He pioneered the raga-based modern Bengali songs known as ‘rag pradhian gan’ (songs composed with melodic modes of Indian classical music) - a genre he created in his experiment. In 1928 he started working as a lyricist, composer and music director for HMV (His Master’s Voice) – a gramophone company in Calcutta, India. His songs, ‘Nazrul Sangeet’, were on the air from radio stations. Indian Broadcasting Company enlisted him as a singer and musician. In early 1930s Nazrul was a link between the period of transition of old and new urban music. In 1939 Nazrul started working and producing music such as ‘Haramoni’ and ‘Navaraga-malika’ for the Calcutta radio. There he sang his songs predominantly with raga ‘Bhairav’. He is the first musician who introduced the melody of Gazal in his Bengali songs. He was recognized and praised highly by the people of India for his

extraordinary talent in music and literature. His fame was spread in every nook and cranny of the society of common people and elite of Bengal and all over India within a short period of time.

DRAMATIST AND ACTOR NAZRUL

In 1931 the lyrical drama 'Aleya', participated by poet Nazrul, was staged in Kolkata. His first film "Bhakta Dhruva" was released in the year 1934. He was also the music composer, director and playback singer of 'Bhakta Dhruva'. His another film 'Vidyapati', based on his story, was released in the year 1938 in Kolkata, India.

THE JOURNALIST NAZRUL

Nazrul worked as a journalist for local newspapers and edited many Bengali newspapers in Calcutta during the years of 1920-1925. His famous newspapers 'Dhumketu' [The Comet] and 'Langol' [The Plough] should be mentioned here for their best edition and wide circulation. In 1940, he was appointed as the Chief Editor of daily newspaper 'Nabayug' (The new Age) by an eminent Bengali politician A. K. Fazlul Huq.

NAZRUL – A BUILDER OF COMMUNAL HARMONY

Nazrul always tried to establish a communal harmony and solidarity between the two faiths – Hindu and Muslim in undivided India. He also urged the religious fanatics to put an end to all differences and hindrances that exist in religion and society.

Nazrul knew that there were a great many narrow-minded and religious fanatic people in this world who failed to produce any good to the society. Nazrul believed that nobility and civility in human soul could repel the communalism for establishing a harmonic society.

The following verses have shown Poet's sincerest intention for bringing a communal harmony among the people of the two faiths (Hindu and Muslim) in India.

(In Bengali)

*"Mora ekj brinte duti kusum Hindu Musholman
Muslim tar noyon-moni, Hindu tahar pran,
Ek she aakash mayer kole jeno robi-soshi dole,
Ek rokto buker tole, ek she narir taan"*

(Translation)

*"In one stalk we are two flowers –
Hindu and Muslim,
Muslim is its glory, Hindu is its life,
In the lap of one sky-mother like*

*The sun and the moon they dangle,
They live with same blood of one heart,
With one umbilical attachment.”*

[Translation: M Munir]

As an honourable citizen and the National Poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam died in Dhaka on August 29, 1976 at the age of 77. He was buried in a garden-lawn and in close proximity of the mosque of Dhaka University, Bangladesh. In a song he expressed his desire to be buried nearby a mosque:

*“Bury me nearby the mosque O brother!
So that I can hear the call of prayer
Of a Muezzin while I’m in the grave there....”*

(Translation: M Munir)