



# CONCERTO

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CRITICAL EXPLORATIONS

Edited by  
Dr Dhruvajyoti Banerjee  
Dr Somdatta Banerjee



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**An Anthology of**  
**Critical Explorations**

1

2

5

19

36

45

53

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63

78

88

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## C O N T E N T S

- Acknowledgements 1
- Editorial 2
- Death in VārāGasī: Through the Lens of PurāGas 5  
– Aniruddha Kar
- Endorsing Democracy: Paradigm Shift in India's Foreign Policy Mechanism. 19  
– Devarati Mandal.
- The Travails of the Traveller, The Exilic Life at Home : Jorge Luis Borges' 'The Ethnographer' 36  
– Dhrubajyoti Banerjee
- Education and the Menace of Dowry: Case Study 45  
– Guddu Singh
- India Bangladesh Land Swap Deal 53  
– Madhuparna Dutta
- Morbidity SES and Household Financial Contribution in India : Evidence from NSS 63  
– Mauli Sanyal
- Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Rebel against British Imperialism 78  
– Mithun Banerjee
- A Tale of Two Queer Men: A Reading of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* 88  
– Neela Sarkar
- Effectiveness of Communicating Health Messages through Mass Media : An Analysis 96  
– Payal Sen Chowdhury

## KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM: THE REBEL AGAINST BRITISH IMPERIALISM

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Rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's sudden emergence in the Bengali literary world, is often compared with the appearance of 'Comets' in the dark night sky. Comets are generally associated with unexpected changes and uncalled-for upheavals in the world. Likewise, Kazi Nazrul Islam's literary experiments with language, vocabulary of Bengali and other foreign languages, mode of expression, and the selection of unprecedented subject matters for his literatures were quite unusual in the then literary sphere of colonial Bengal. Nazrul Islam wrote most of his literary masterpieces during the most turbulent period of the Indian history. During this early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Nazrul wrote his poetries and essays on the most controversial topics of the period like, exploitation of the Indian subjects by the colonial British rulers, economic inequality, social discrimination, communal politics by the religious fundamentalists of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Kazi Nazrul Islam's literary creations reflected the contemporary political situations with near perfections. In reality, the objective Nazrul aimed to achieve, through his writings, was indeed a political objective and that is the reason behind the choice of such subject matters for his literary pieces. Exactly for this reason, his writings would reflect the demands of the masses, urges of the common people in the colonial society, dissents and resistance by the subjugated common people of colonial India. All of these subject matters clearly states that the main driving force that pushed Nazrul in creating literary masterpieces was

Politics. However, it has always been a matter of debate, whether Nazrul was a Communist or a Congressman. In reality, he was a '4 anna member' of the Congress party like Muzaffar Ahmad, but at the same time he was communist by heart. Nevertheless, his affiliation to either of these parties was not of much importance as, his primary objective was to free his motherland from the colonial rule of the British Empire. He also believed that mere political independence would not be enough to achieve real freedom of the common people who had to face similarly exploitation from the indigenous exploiters like moneylenders, Zamindars and large landholders.

Nazrul was born in colonial India on 24 May 1899 at Churulia, a village in Burdwan district. His family had migrated from Bihar during the reign of Mughal emperor Shah Alam II. Nazrul was the sixth son of Kaji Fakir Ahmed and his mother was Zaheda Khatun, the second wife of Fakir Ahmed. Nazrul's father died when he was only 10 years old and was just a pass out of local Maktab. Consequently, Nazrul had to look for jobs at that tender age to sustain his large family. He started the job of Imamat in the local mosque and also started teaching in the Maktab. However, this religious education even the orthodox Muslim education did not produce a religious fundamentalist out of Nazrul. He learnt lessons on Urdu and Persian language from his uncle Bujle Karim, used these languages and Islamic symbols in his literary pieces and thereby revolutionized the Bengali literary world. Nazrul did not continue with the job of priest for long. He received completely different kind of experience when he joined Leto musical parties for better earning. These Leto musical parties were actually drama groups or band of performers who use to present an assortment of songs, dances, music and acting among the village folks. Nazrul's association with these Leto groups ignited his creative instincts as a composer. This not only helped him to

sharpen his literary skills, these creative activities liberalized his views regarding different religious faiths. He learnt about the mythologies associated with both Hindu and Muslim religious faith. He used these mythologies in his Leto plays. He also worked as composer in different 'Kobi' groups, another form of musical party. All of these exposures had widened his views on religion and made him an open-minded tin-ager when he joined Shiarsol Raj High School at Raniganj. He attended this school for three years. During this phase of his life, Nazrul came close to Nibaran Chandra Ghatak, who was a teacher at that school as well as a member of the revolutionary Jugantar group. Nibaran Chandra Ghatak attracted Nazrul toward the ideology of Jugantar group. He actually influenced Nazrul immensely in writing patriotic literary pieces. Under this profound influence of Ghatak, Nazrul Islam determined his future planes for the emancipation of his motherland, and accordingly left his school at the age of 17 only to join the British Army. He was recruited in the Bengali Double Company, which was organized by the British Army to meet the increasing demand for troops during the First World War. Nazrul sacrificed his bright academic career for the sake of his motherland and left with the troop for Naoshera, a province near border of Afganistan, just before his final examination of class X.

After completion of training in Naoshera, Nazrul Islam got posting at the Karachi army headquarters. Subsequently, he was promoted to the post of warranted officer in the Bengali regiment. However, he never went to the battlefield. He had to enjoy his army life in his own way. He started writing poems and short stories based on his own experience in the army barrack. He also started leaning towards Bolshevik revolution and developed admiration for the Red Army of Russia, which fought bravely against the Tsar monarchy in Russia and finally overthrew the dictatorial rule through the revolution of

1917. Nazrul used to discuss about these activities of the Russian revolutionaries with his close associates in the British army posted in Karachi headquarter. On one such occasion, he invited his close friends in the army to his own cabin and celebrated the success of the Red Army in the November revolution with patriotic songs, played different musical instruments to mark the occasion. He even showed to his associates the newspapers giving detailed account of the success of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Apart from this inclination towards the left politics, Nazrul also developed a deep attraction towards Bengali literary journals and started to subscribe many of them during his army life. He also started creative writings to compensate for his frustration as a soldier as he could not fulfill his dream of overthrowing the British rule in India through violent armed revolution, which was the sole objective behind his enrolment in the British army. Then he realized that his pen could be mightier than his bayonet in his fight against the colonial rule. Therefore, he started writing literary pieces with the objective of creating awareness among the Indians about their duty towards their motherland. Nazrul wrote many literary pieces during his stay in the army barrack until March 1920. Among these literatures, two short stories clearly conveyed his anti-imperialist message. These two stories were 'Hena' and 'Byathar Dan', published in Bongiyō Musalman Sahityo Patrika. Both these short stories reflected Nazrul's ideas regarding anti-imperialist movements and his plans for the freedom of India from British rule through violent revolution. Two main characters of the story 'Byathar Dan', Dara, the hero and Sayful Mulk, the villain joined the Red army with the objective of the freedom from exploitation. Nazrul used the character of Dara to exemplify the selflessness that, in his opinion was the most important requirement for the people of India in their fight against the British



colonial rule. Similarly, in 'Hena' also Nazrul reflected his deep urge for anti-imperialist struggle. He wrote both these short stories to inculcate anti-imperialist consciousness in the hearts of the exploited Indians.

The British government, in March 1920, disbanded the Bengali Regiment and Nazrul came back to Kolkata. In search of an accommodation, he went to the office of Bongiyō Musalman Sahityo Samiti and there he met Muzaffar Ahmad. He had established correspondence with Muzaffar Ahmad during his army life for the purpose of publication of his literary pieces in Bongiyō Musalman Sahityo Patrika. Thereafter, they became close associates as Nazrul started sharing rooms with him. They lived together in different addresses for two years. During these two years, they worked together as journalist and started a bengali daily news paper called 'Nabojug'. Abdul Kashem Fazlul Haq was the editor of this newspaper. Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmad worked as joint editors. This was Nazrul Islam's first step towards a political career. He started writing articles on contemporary topics. The people, as well as officers of the British government quickly recognized these articles for their unusual spirit. Most of the Nazrul's articles published in 'Nabojug' were anti-imperialist in nature. His strong anti-imperialist attitudes were reflected in articles like 'Muhajirin Hotyar Jonyo Dayi ke', and 'Dayarer Smritistambho'. In the first issue of the 'Nabojug' he published 'Muhajirin Hotyar Jonyo Dayi ke', and thereby directly criticized the colonial British government for its exploitative policies and predicted the end of the British rule without concealing his intentions. Nazrul vehemently criticized his fellow citizens' subservient mentality towards the colonial rule. He wanted to awaken a nation, which in his opinion were ignorant of the exploitations they were going through under British rule. This feeling inspired

Nazrul to write an article after the Jalianwala bagh Massacre by General Reginald Dyer. He penned a brilliant self-criticizing article with the sarcastic heading – 'Dayarer Smritistambho', to arouse the ignorant Indians. In this article, Nazrul suggested his fellow citizens to erect a monument in memory of Reginald Dyer who had imparted unprecedented violence and exploitations to their countrymen, so that it could remind them the sorrow they had undergone on the day of Jalianwala bagh massacre and that they could remain conscious of their duties towards their motherland. Thus, Nazrul started to use his mighty pen to spread the message of awakening among his fellow citizens who had lost their self-confidence and were absolutely subjugated by the British rulers. Nazrul repeatedly disclosed the exploitative nature of the British rule to his readers and advised them to buildup resistance against it. In the article 'Desh Gache Dukkho Nai Abar Tora Manus Ha', he urged his fellow citizens to end their slave-master relation with the British rulers. Nazrul knew that some sections of the Indians had deep rooted faith in the British rule and this inspired him to write 'Kala Admi Ko Goli Maro', an article where he analyzed the attitude of the British officers toward a common Indian labour and thereby showed that they treat Indians as inferior, even to the animals.

Apart from this newspaper articles, Nazrul Islams also used his anti-imperialist literatures for spreading nationalist messages to his fellow citizens. He wrote a song on Mahatma Gandhi describing him as a 'Pagal Pathik', and there by expressed his heartiest respect to the national leader for his contribution in mobilizing the masses of India for the freedom struggle. He expressed his clear views on the concept of 'Swaraj' and warned against begging for 'Swaraj', because he firmly believed that real Swaraj could be achieved only when every Indians could feel it in their heart. In this respect, Nazrul was deeply



influenced by Deshabandu Chittaranjan Das. He wrote another song named 'Maran Baran', to inspire the Indian youths to forget fears for their death, because this fear, he thought, makes people less wise. So he invited death to come and to take away the fear for death from the Indian masses, whom Nazrul described as a herd of sheep that used to follow instructions from the British rulers without any question. He also wrote 'Bandana Gan' and 'Jagoroni', patriotic songs for inspiring Indians to sever all kinds of allegiance they had towards the British Empire.

The anti-imperialist literary creations of Kazi Nazrul Islam reached a distinct high point with the poem 'Bidrohi', the Rebel, the most popular poem written by the rebel poet. In this poem, he inspired the people of India to ignite the indomitable ego within them and declare revolt against all kinds of authority. He motivated them to challenge the supremacy of the colonial British rule in this country. Nazrul made this statement aptly clear when he gave reference to 'Bhrigu's revolt against Lord Narayana'. According to Hindu mythology, rishi Bhrigu challenged the supremacy of Lord Narayana by placing his foot on chest of Lord Narayana. Apart from this motivations, for revolt against the sovereign authority of the British government, Nazrul also made his intentions clear that the rebel within him would not stop until the freedom of his motherland was obtained from the exploitative colonial rule of the British Empire. Similarly, in 'Bhangar Gan', published in 'Banglar katha', a periodical edited by Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das, Nazrul boldly asked his fellow citizens to revolt against the British Empire. He also asked them to attack symbols of British Authority and advised them to break open and set the Jails on fire, as these jails were the main symbol of British authority as well as the machinery, which the British Government used to exploit the Indians.

Although Nazrul was tirelessly expressing his messages and political thoughts against the exploitative British rule through his literatures and became an inspiration for the youths of the country, yet he was in constant search for a free medium through which he could directly oppose the British colonial rule. In Dhumketu, a biweekly paper, he found that instrument. It became an organ of Nazrul's revolt against British colonial rule. 'All forces of violent rebellion against British imperialism-Bolshevism, militant Turkish nationalism, Islamic spirit of crusade against untruth and Bengali revolution- would find appreciation and utility in the periodical in a unique attempt to derive inspiration for a revolutionary struggle for freedom of India'. However, 'Dhumketu' not only advocated destructive political activity, Nazrul used it also to spread his constructive political ideas. In the article 'Mora Sabai Swadhin Mora Sabai Raja' he expressed his views on 'Swaraj' in detail. For him 'Swaraj' meant freedom from all kind of servitude, it was a domain where no one subjugated others. Nazrul prescribed methods also for achieving this real form of 'Swaraj' and that was arousal of 'Atmashakti', the unshakable faith in one's own self. He believed that Indians could be able to achieve this pure form of Swaraj only when they could develop this unshakable faith in themselves.

In this way, Nazrul made some serious efforts to fill up the political vacuum, created in the national struggle with the end of the Khilafat and Non Cooperation Movement. He tried to fill it up with the revival of heroic spirit of the revolutionaries. He wrote 'Anandomoyir Agomone' to spread this spirit among the masses, and published it in the twelfth issue of Dhumketu. It instantly became very popular among the masses. The British authority, without wasting any time, proscribed the issue of Dhumketu immediately and arrested Nazrul Islam on 23 December 1922. The poet was awarded rigorous

punishment for one year. However, the British authority could not tame the indomitable rebel in Nazrul Islam even after his imprisonment. He went on hunger strike for 39 days in protest against the jail authority for their mistreatment with the political prisoners. Nazrul got release from Behrampur jail on 15 December 1923. However, the British authority was very much concerned about the anti-imperialist activities of Nazrul. Therefore, they always kept a vigilant eye on him and whenever they found any opportunity they used their state power to impose ban on Nazrul's newly published books. They proscribed as many as five poetry books under the charge of sedition. These books were 'Jugobani', 'Bisher Vansi' 'Bhangar gan', 'Proloy Shikha'. 'Chandrabindu',.

Nazrul was the only Bengali poet who raised his voice against the colonial rule in such a manner that the British authority could not ignore him and put him behind the bars. These qualities of Kazi Nazrul, makes him separate from the stalwarts of bengali literature. He used his mighty pen as well as participated in actual political activities for his true love towards his motherland. Inspired many others to be brave and fight for their motherland. He will always be remembered, as a poet who revolted against the mighty British Empire to set his motherland free from colonial rule.

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