

Revisiting Nazrul: An Idiosyncratic and Uncanny Manifestation of Love and Rebellion in Kazi Nazrul's Poetry

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Abstract: *Kazi Nazrul Islam, born in a poor family, led a life of struggle but encountered all challenges through a romantic approach to life and poetic creation. His romantic attitude involves profound insight that can be attained in multifarious ways but can only be understood and made meaningful by expressing and sharing love. The oeuvre of his poetry demonstrates how love is concealed in everything-even in war- implying that even war can bring forth harmony and good in this universe though it sounds paradoxical. However, to Nazrul, it is clear that anything can be considered as love as long as it brings good to humanity as a whole. Thus, Kazi Nazrul, popularly known as a rebel poet, looks for the seed of love in each place where other poets or people dare to venture. This paper, thus, examines how underneath every verse, he manages and approaches concepts of rebellion, war, equality, humanity, tolerance, and even secularism proclaiming the idea of love and its practice among human races covertly and overtly. His rebellion is against all sorts of injustice, inequality, orthodoxy, fascism, and racism which deliberately, and sometimes inadvertently, and nonetheless boldly chants the slogan of greater love for the whole human race. Moreover, the paper contends that though Nazrul dealt with different subject matters, every subject matter, however, falls into the same place, that is, love – love for humanity.*

Keywords: *Rebellion, Fundamental Human Traits, Uncanny*

Introduction

Love, humanity, tolerance, rebellion etc. are some significant and vital forces of life found in every human being in some way or other. These traits or values are almost always celebrated universally. Only a few people can possess or manifest all these romantic aspects of life together. Kazi Nazrul Islam is the one of those poets who possesses all these exquisite qualities as a human being as his heart bleeds for the oppressed and the sufferer; and, more importantly, in his writings, especially in poems, the aspects of these eternal human qualities and romantic ardors are significantly prevalent. Nazrul, though popularly termed as a rebel poet, combines and unifies all the above qualities in his writings in a very bold, and, at the same time, in a very measured way. Current paper is a simple endeavor to investigate few poems of Nazrul to find out the cumulative effects his poems create upon the mind of the audiences as they unequivocally express the idea of love encompassing humanity, tolerance, and rebellion in a very distinct way.

Nazrul shouts out, “I am the rebel eternal” in his poem, *Vidorhi* or *The Rebel*. But, as we go through his poems, we find that he acknowledges a different sort of rebellion which vows to stand against all sorts of oppression and tyranny and invites our soul to love all people on earth. In most of his revolutionary poems, love and rebellion are intermingled and interwoven which create a kind of unified sensibility that give us a profound and complete sense of life. In his

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poetry, love, rebellion and resistance mingle and blend in such a way that it creates a combined positive force to oust the oppressor or to tame the oppressor.

Revolutionary ardor and passionate love are always found in Nazrul's poems. He pointed out the many-sidedness and complexity of love: a universal and eternal crave of every human being on earth. Though, at the very beginning of his poetic vocation he wrote melancholic love poems; however, with the progress of time as he got maturity and started to treat love differently- a rare unification of sweetheart's love, revolution, and humanity- he actually made himself an exclusive but universal voice. To him, humanity and romantic men women relationship are not far apart from revolution; instead, they are complementary and interwoven. Besides, in one way he feels profound love for the timid, young, and for a maiden lady; on the other hand, he demonstrates his utter love for the subjugated people who not only suffer from poverty, but from the oppression of the elite and bourgeoisie.

Methodology

The paper is based on textual study through extensive library works. The primary sources of this paper are some of the Nazrul's poems which are relevant and translated by different famous literary enthusiasts of the country. As secondary sources, necessary information is taken from related internet sites, research journals, online newspapers, periodicals, books and other academic publications on Kazi Nazrul Islam's biography and literary works based on their availability. Moreover, this paper is not expounded and scrutinized through the lens of different literary theories instead, the writing is grounded on the popular interpretations of Nazrul's poems. In this paper we the two researchers have just tried to give a new shape to those popular interpretations.

Literature Review

Much has been revealed till today by many researchers and literary enthusiasts on Nazrul's treatment of humanity derived from love, rebel, tolerance, humanity, freedom etc. in his poems. Through their elaborate discussions and discourses, these human traits have penetrated into the reader's mind sometimes emotionally or aesthetically. We found Nazrul's humanitarian attitude through his representation of the impoverished condition of the subjugated and oppressed people by the elite class oppressor.

“Nazrul's poems bear and convey a rich tone of humanism. Where there are down-trodden people suppressed by the privileged and selfish capitalists, there is Nazrul with the spear of his poems to resist the injustice against the toiling masses.” (Hossain 6)

Some researchers focused on 'Nazrul's humanity' as diverse and multifaceted :

“Nazrul believes that there should be a shift or change in people's and society's attitude to the poor and the destitute. Nazrul carefully noted the importance of such awareness derived from religion and social values of humanity. In many of his poems Nazrul tried to create awareness among the people of his country to see human beings as human beings not as another entity in terms of different caste, creed or profession and ranks.” (Tajuddin 42)

Through the lens of a previous researcher, we further revealed Nazrul's another firm and bold treatment towards humanism manifested in rebellious forms:

“Following the same year (1919) in July, Nazrul accomplished his another poem Mukti (Freedom) published in Mussalman Sahitya Patrika. In 1922, this poem was published with the publication “Bidrohi” (The Rebel) which made him famous and perennial rebel poet. Bidrohi was one of the greatest poems in Bengali literature, where the elements of revolution was the consolidate subject. In the epoch of Nazrul, he was created an irrevocable situation of revolution against all kinds of oppression.” (Haque 55)

However, an in-depth study of the existing documentation (reference materials, literary magazines, printed and online journals, books on Nazrul's poem) of the past researchers suggests us that most of the cases, they tried to show these human traits (love, rebellion, tolerance, freedom etc.) as individual entity from each other. In this perspective, this paper is carried out in order to find out the untrodden areas of research and to avoid duplication of information from past researches. In doing so, this paper unearths the fact that Nazrul's treatment of basic human traits i.e. love in his poems is not separated from each other. Rather, they are interwoven based on the fact that all together they make a harmony derived from both constructive and destructive forces.

Uncompromising and Uncanny Expression/Design of Love

Nazrul's poems display intense sympathy and love for the underdog, and this is where we modern human lacks a lot. In this connection, humanity is one of the most prevailing trends of Nazrul's poem. Nazrul, undoubtedly, is the fervent lover and advocate of humanity. In the poem, “Human Being” (‘Manush’), he justifies the nobility of human being by singing ‘of equality’:

I sing of equality.
There's nothing greater than a human being,
nothing nobler!”
(Kamal, 29)

Further, this humanity not only manifests equality, rather, it has a great concern with inequality of the society where justice is denied. So, his poetry works as a life changing arsenal for the whole humankind, not only as a source of pleasure rather as a weapon for emancipation and against all sorts of tyranny as well as corruption. In his poetry, ‘*Vidrahi or ‘The Rebel’*” he announces a relentless effort to annihilate human torment from this world:

I shall uproot this miserable earth effortlessly and with ease,
And create a new universe of joy and peace.
Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel,
Shall rest in quiet only when I find
The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed.
Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling bloody sabres
Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet, I, the great rebel.
(Kamal, 29-31)

It is also noted that the torment of the creation has made Nazrul rebellious. Here, he is really destructive in a very constructive manner. For that, he even articulates his utmost rages to defy God in ‘*The Rebel’ (Vidrahi)*:

I'm the Rebel Bhrigu
I'll stamp my footprints-
I'll tear apart the chest of whimsical god!
(Kamal, 1997, pp.29-31)

Additionally, Nazrul claims himself as 'disorderly' and 'lawless' in '*The Rebel*' (*Vidrohi*), only to 'trample' all rules and so-called discipline of life. This utter rebellious nature is also manifested in some other poems in a very lyrical way which have made Nazrul quite a distinguished and uncanny one. Unlike other contemporary modernist poets, he always stands beside mass people in their sorrow as well as joy to distinguish himself. The uncanny nature of his poems is prevalent in the sense that they are very lyrical and musical but at the same time, they consist of rebellious subject matter which is designed to construct harmony against all odds and disorder in the society. According to the Nazrul researcher, June McDaniel:

"He shares the pain of humanity, and bemoans the situations that cause it. This is why he is a poet of both love and revolution" (p. 14)

In fact, we find a kind of passionate feeling of love, love for humankind manifested in his rebellious poetic utterance. His rebellious but meek soul vows to fight for the right of the deprived and dominated people but, at the same time, he declares to withstand pain. Thus, it can be avowed that Kazi Nazrul Islam gloriously attains himself as a romantic poet.

Furthermore, we have found a rebellious Nazrul against more specific tribulations i.e. class distinction, social injustice, violation of human rights etc. His voice in "*Kings and Subjects*" (*Raja-Proja*) awakens the oppressed against autocracy of the rulers:

It is a simple question,
We are all children of this earth,
But can you tell me
Why are some kings, rolling in luxury
And some subjects, starving in gutters? (Lines 5-10)

He further probes the oppressor reminding their source of power:

Why a king should not be condemned
As a traitor to the people
For his thousand crimes and follies
It is the people who create kings
And not the kings the people...
(Huda, 2000, p. 551)

Nazrul's life-force always consists of freedom of love, spirit of revolt and the urge for human emancipation simultaneously (Chowdhury 88). He successfully explored himself not only as a poet of love rather a poet of devotion and religious enthusiasm. He composed and rendered many devotional poems for the Muslims and also numerous others for the Hindus along with notable indication of other religions (Chowdhury 136). However, Nazrul's humanity always craved for a communal harmony in distress breaking the entire religious border:

Are they Hindus or Muslims?
Who ask this question, I say.

Tell him, my Captain,
The children of the motherland are drowning today.
(Huda, 2000, p.609)

We also find a ‘rebellious’ Nazrul when he condemns the opportunist Mullahs or Peers who exercise religion as a tool of manipulation against the illiterate people (Huda 50). To Nazrul, we all are more or less sinners but God is the highest merciful. So, he encourages the mankind to be hopeful in receiving mercy from God. He, cynically, criticizes the religious hypocrites for misguiding the people and optimistically makes the sinner comfortable in his poem, “*Sin*” (*Paap*):

I sing of Equality -
Sinners of all grades are all my sisters
and brothers.
In this valley of sin, who is there among
men and women that hath not committed a sin?
(Huda, 2000, pp.271-274)

Again, Nazrul points out the world as “a domain of sin” and censures the religious fanatics who only involve themselves in disparaging people: “Listen, fanatics! Before counting/ another's sins, count thy own!” (Kamal, 1997)

Not only this, Nazrul had a loud voice against religious dogmatism which he thought as deceitful and synonymous to devil’s path. So, he announced combat against all dogmatic faiths beset with diverse manipulation by the religious opportunists and fanatics. He tried to reflect religion as a means of peace, harmony and justice for mankind. To sustain the purity of the religion, he raised his voice against all hooligans and religious opportunists in the poem, “*Dogmatism is not Religion*” (*translated*):

The hooligans and the cheats
Who under the cover of religion
Greedily strive for their own wellness,
Arouse the ignorant public to fury.
They fill your stomach with hatred
Creating a rift religions and castes...
(Custers, 2013, p.117)

In the same poem, he designates the above-mentioned religious counterfeits as “poisonous snakes” and bitterly urges to “smash” them (p. 117). Furthermore, he unmasks the religious camouflage of the fanatics:

Never ever are they really pious.
They are the party of God’s foes,
They are extremely monstrous, they’re asur...
(Custers, 2013, p.117)

Evidently, Nazrul is the spoke person of all religions. For that, firstly he maintained a profound respect for his own religion and that is, obviously a prerequisite to respect other religions too. He acknowledged himself as a Muslim, a warrior of truth, justice and parity but never a disciple of

dogmatic creed. Relevantly, it is a point to be noted that in his childhood, he received religious education in 'Moktab' as well as was involved as a 'Muazzin' and 'Imam' in a local mosque. He even celebrated his Muslimhood and once when he felt that his religion was under the grasp of darkness, he appealed to God to bring back the spirit of Islam in his poem, '*Make Islam strong, O God!*' (Translated):

Make Islam strong, O God,
let the Muslim world again prosper.
Give it back its sultanate of old,
its ancient prowess and generous soul
(Huda, 2000, p. 551)

But as we mentioned earlier, Nazrul's main objective was to bring equality and peace beyond any particular religious belief, race, gender as well as geographical border. In this connection, 'secularism' in his literary works has a great contribution to fulfill his cherished dream especially if we think of in today's world full of religious violence and conflict. Literally, 'Secularism' is a catchphrase which denotes a spirit or tendency, especially a system of political or social philosophy that discards all forms of religious faith and worship. In other word, it also views the public education and other matters of civil policy free from all kinds of religious biasness (Bilgrami, 2-3). Apart from this concept, Nazrul eccentrically, added a new dimension in this term 'secularism' through his literary works and individual life. Nazrul's secularism refers to a concern for long-term human values and decorum that derives from revering all religions placing them side by side with a view to creating a communal harmony (McDaniel 13). In that sense, Nazrul's humanism and secularism are in the same vessel but in different compartments. To him, religion is anticipated for the welfare of humankind.

In view of the fact, Nazrul not only maintained a kind of secularism in his literary works but also as well in his personal life. Probably to justify his secular stance, first he fell in love with a Bramho lady, Asalata Sengupta (he renamed her Pramila) from Comilla and later on, married her dauntlessly (Islam 113). Not only this, in case of naming his children he combined rival myths of Hindu- Muslim such as Krisno Muhammad (b./d 1923), double-barreled name i.e. Arindam Khaled (1926-1930), Kazi Sabyasachi Islam (1929-1979) , and Kazi Aniruddha Islam (1930-1974) (Mcdermott 27). He wanted to live and build in a world free from malicious communal bigotry. So, he dreamt of a multicultural land echoing an enhancement of communal harmony consisting of all religions:

Poem 'Of Equality and That Happy Land' [Translated]

Of equality and that happy land,
Where all artificial differences are resolved,
Where Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians
Are brought together in loving unity,
I sing.

What art thou? A Persian, Jain,
Or Jew? A Santal, Bhil, or Garo?
But whatever thou mayst be, even if thou
Wouldst carry in thy head or in the back

The rich load of all the scriptures of the world,
Or if thou wert versed in all the wisdom
Of the Qur'an, the Vedas, The Bible, The Zend-Avesta
And the Granta-Sahib, I would forewarn thee, friend,
That thy labors would be all in vain.
(Huda, 2000, p. 500)

Again, he did not think twice to be threatened while speaking for other religions. He was imprisoned by the British for nearly a year in 1926 as he used subversive Hindu imageries of the Goddess Durga inviting her to save India in distress. The poem, '*Coming of Anandomoyee (Anandomoyeer Agomone)*' imitates his voice:

How much longer will you
stay hidden behind a clay statue?
Heaven today is subjugated by merciless tyrants.
God's children are getting whipped, heroic youth--hanged.
India today is a butchery--when will you arrive, O Destroyer?
God's soldiers are serving terms of hard labor exiled to desolate islands.
Who will come to the battlefield
unless you come with your sword in your hand?
(Kamal, 1997, p. 31)

This spokesperson of the humanity also tries to create balance between different conflicting forces (i.e. gender disparity, racism, religious conflict etc.) of the society. In that connection, we find an unequivocal voice of Nazrul in maintaining communal harmony and humanity. He sketched an excellent portrait of Hindu-Muslim unity and longing for the emancipation of the distressed humanity. In his poem, *We are two flowers in the same Stem-*

We are two flowers in the same Stem-
Hindu Mussalman
Muslim its pearl of the eye,
Hindus its life!
(Custers, 2013, p.117)

He also frequently expresses his ardent belief in the equality of the sexes and creeds as well as the powers of love and imagination in his poetry. In his famous poem "*Nari*" (Women), Nazrul welcomed women's liberation as he believed humanity is echoed through the equal rights of man and woman curbing the gender disparity in a given society:

There's a bangle round thy wrist,
anklet round thy feet. O woman, tear
off the veil, that has made thee
A coward! Strip off all ornaments
and dresses that stand there as
symbol of slavery!
(Hakim, 1997, pp. 291-292)

Affectionate Nazrul also talked about the destitute classes of the society in a poem entitled '*Prostitute*' showing a profound esteem to the humanity:

Who calls you a prostitute, Mother?
Who spits at you?
Perhaps you were suckled by someone
as chaste as Seeta.
You may not be chaste,
yet you are one of the family
of all our mothers and sisters.
(Kamal, 1997, p. 30)

Probably, based on this humanitarian ground of Nazrul, Poet Mohammad Nurul Huda truly stated:

‘Nazrul's revolt was in favour of liberating mankind in its totality, bringing all the individuals to a uniform forum-a plane where privileges will be shared on the basis of equal distribution of wealth’. (Huda, p. 310)

Tolerance and Equality Led by Love

Poet Nazrul used to support the idea of social and economic justice which is very evident in his belief and writings. He preferred his freedom in religious equality that according to him, should be combined with economic equality. Nazrul was completely different from other thinkers in case of maintaining communal harmony specially as he mentioned two significant class, Hindus and Muslims who were struggling to maintain harmony at the then India. He considered love as a concrete base to sustain the harmony between people from different community.

His writings are simple but full of intense love, and this love is considered for no specific group or community rather for all. Numerous numbers of his writings are amalgamated with symbols and imagery of Islamic thought and history and Hindu philosophy, culture and mythology to express love for all. Probably for this reason Winton E. Langley, A Nazrul researcher applicably considers Nazrul ‘among the first authentic multiculturalists’ who is ‘pertinent’ to emphasize on ‘multiculturalism’. (Langley, p. 33)

Undoubtedly, Nazrul’s sought for personal freedom and liberty in a larger structure i.e. collective liberty by possessing some collective human traits which are precursors to be a ‘total human being’ in the guise of an individual. That is why, Nazrul wanted to gain personal and individual freedom creating a collective and harmonious community. However, the paradox is that Nazrul not only believed that love and humanity is needed to create harmony in a person or in a community but he believed in the necessity of rebellion and to him, rebellion is another way to manifest love. If we read his poems again and again, we will see an extraordinary co-existence of love, humanity, rebellion, and tolerance in his poems. Moreover, he boldly declared that Hindus and Muslims are always alike and echo the same spirit, unfortunately living under the umbrella of different names. Even, in his poem “Kuli-Mozur” (Coolies and Laborers) he portrays intense class struggle and, by showing this gruesome picture, he vows to diminish it to have a life of equality and love. Subsequently, he invites all race and humanity to be together and be ‘One’. This ‘oneness’ claims that we may have different name but to construct anything good both destructive and constructive ideas are necessary. Thus, a destructive force is also constructive when it helps to create harmony and togetherness. And, very aptly, in his poem

“The Rebel”, we not only find a rebel mind of destruction, but the same rebel mind works as a mind of construction too.

At the end of this paper, we can say that Nazrul is not a rebel poet only. He is not simply a love poet either. His poetry is not for the people of one community, country or religion instead for all the people of the world who want to come under the umbrella of love and peace. In his poetry Nazrul not only propels the idea of construction but the idea of destruction also if only that destruction brings new creation and brings harmony and peace in this world. For Nazrul, everything falls into the same place and that is love and only love. Though he covers and deals with many issues in his poetry, at last, it is love which conquers all and love is the ultimate answer and solution for each and every problem. Thus, Kazi Nazrul is a very unique and different poet altogether who always raises his head high and chants the slogans of love in his poems. Love is not the rose; it is a weapon for him too.

Love comes as a creative force in his poetry. Like the poem ‘Ode to the West Wind’ where Shelly calls West Wind ‘art moving everywhere; Destroyer and preserver’, our poet Nazrul in his poetry shows the rebellious force of love which refreshes and rejuvenates everything shunning all the weariness and sorrows of life. In his poem—Anandamyeeer Agamaney, he invites Anandamayee come and save India as she says “God’s children are getting whipped, Heroic youth- hanged. India today is a butchery-when Will you arrive, O Destroyer?” The poet declares that only mighty Anandamayee can create something good out of this oppression by destructing the evil oppressor. In his poetry, he always focuses on the extreme power of love and humanity which can create and recreate like a phoenix bird creates itself from its own ashes.

Love is a creative force; it shows it rebellious face only to create something good for the whole human race. In his poetry, human spirit like humanity, freedom, resistance, rebellion etc. take the shape of love and after reading his poetry it feels like everything is evolving from and dissolving into the same place and that is love. It is love which unifies everyone and everything being irrespective of caste, gender, religion and nationality. Discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, and gender is an unacceptable phenomenon in his poetry and the practice of discrimination can only be rooted out through the practice of love only. At last, we can say that in Nazrul’s poetry it is very difficult to distinguish love and rebellion and he has used these two human attributes almost synonymously. These two interchangeable human traits are used in his poetry to create harmony and peace in the society and to establish greater love to humanity.

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