



Treatment of religiousness in Kazi Nazrul Islam

¹ Nafisa Ahsan Nitu, ² Mohammad Ehsanul Islam Khan

¹ Lecturer, Department of English, Fareast International University, Banani, Dhaka, Bangladesh

² Lecturer, Department of English, Manikarchar Bangabandhu (Degree) College, Meghna, Comilla, Bangladesh

Abstract

The current paper aims at finding out the attitude of Kazi Nazrul Islam and his treatment of religious elements in his poetic works in a vivid manner. Nazrul is the most famous writers of modern period in the Indian sub-continent. He is also the major Bengali poet of the first half of the twentieth Century Bengali literature. Religious themes are abundant in his poetic works. They had great contribution of literature in his time. He came from an ordinary family but there are lots of loftiness and grandeur in his writings full of religious and spiritual themes. His religious poems have still that universal appeal from their time to till now. Kazi Nazrul Islam was known as Rebel poet. He wrote many religious poems of his own culture that contain religious and spiritual contents and thoughts. Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote about Islam and its relevance along with other religions.

Keywords: Islamic practice, assault on extremism, humanism, mysticism, love for rasul (sm), parallelism, spirituality, introspection, love of god

1. Introduction

Kazi Nazrul Islam was one of the most notable and influential poets of twentieth Century Bengali literature. His poems have widely great religious appeal. That time he was influenced by religion, and completely devoted to spirituality. That's why he wrote many poems where main theme is religion or self-finding. Kazi Nazrul Islam, for the first time introduced Islam in Bengali music and poems (Wikipedia). He wrote many religious poems where main theme is humanism and spiritual aspects. He composed songs and poems dealing with various aspects of Islam such as *namaz*, *roza*, *hazz*, *zakat*, *Rasul (sm)* etc. Nazruls's religiousness in Bengali literature had great impact in the Indian Sub-Continent when British rule was running. Nazrul highlighted the true spirit of Islam, its values and tradition and its humanist aspects through his writings, and thus made significant contribution to Bengali language and literature. Nazrul Islamized of Bengali literature by composing various Islamic songs and poems, but he also introduced secularism and Hinduism. Nazrul also composed a number of notable *Shyama Sangeet*, *Bhaian* and *Kirtan*, combining Hindu Devotional music. Still now the artists of Bangladesh and India sing— 'Rabindranath is in everyone's heart, and in consciousness there is Nazrul'. Nazrul never repented for writing seditious poems and essays, Nazrul always presented himself as the representative of 'Truth', holding the 'scepter of humanity'.

2. Literature Review

Based on the comparative study in handling of religious theme by Kazi Nazrul Islam, enough critical books and many literary journals already published which are very useful as the supporting materials for further study of the current paper. Different Books published by Nazrul Institute at Dhaka in Bangladesh about Kazi Nazrul Islam's poems is also helpful

for the study of Nazrul's poems. Such as- Selected *Naat* (A Bilingual Edition) by Labiba Hassan, Selected Islamic writings of Kazi Nazrul Islam Edited by Rashid Haider, Sanchita a book of Nazrul's poems collection published by Nazrul Institute, *Nazruler Kabita Shamoggro* edited by Mohammad Nurul Huda etc. On the other hand different literary web sites of internet are also helpful in this thesis.

3. Objective

20th Century Bengali poet Kazi Nazrul Islam has extraordinary poetic demand to the people from their time to present world. His writing's has poetic demand not only of their age but also of all ages. This work deals with the treatment of religious themes in Kazi Nazrul Islam in a brief and credible way.

4. Methodology

To develop this hypothesis, the primary idea is found from the study of many poems by Kazi Nazrul Islam published in the shape of different books and literary journals. For development of the hypothesis the study is prepared in a planned way. The method was 'Observation Method' with conceptual analysis for this gestalt study. By using this method the researchers go through different critical books, and literary web sites to find out related study materials. The researchers also go to different libraries to collect different information from different journals and critical analyses of Kazi Nazrul Islam for preparing this article in a more acceptable way. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

5. Discussion: Prevailing themes of Nazrul

Exploring the life and conditions of the downtrodden masses of India, Nazrul worked for their emancipation. Nazrul's writings explore themes such as love, freedom, and

revolution; he opposed all bigotry, including religious and gender. Throughout his career, Nazrul wrote short stories, novels, and essays but is best known for his poems, in which he pioneered new forms such as Bengali *ghazals*. Nazrul wrote and composed music for his nearly 4,000 songs (including gramophone records), collectively known as Nazrul *geeti* (Nazrul songs), which are widely popular today.

6. Findings: Kazi Nazrul Islam's Works

i) Religious Uniformity

Religious issue was one of the prominent issues in Nazrul's writings. This issue became prevail over other issues in his later part of life. Kazi Nazrul Islam appeared as another writer in order to express his parity in every religion. He made a mixture of Islamic devotional songs with the Bengali folk music. This was the outstanding creation of Nazrul which was helpful to take him towards more achievements. Besides the Islamic devotional songs with Bengali folk music, Nazrul looked for Hindu devotional music such as *Shama Sanget, Bhajan and Kirtans*. He has synthesized Islamic and Hindu values. This fusion was the ideologies of Nazrul, which he has made with both the Islam and Hinduism. He did not like fanaticism and always fought for Hindu –Muslim unity.

Kabi Nazrul expressed his devotional writings so detail, therefore he exhibited his perspectives of religious harmony in an editorial *Joog Bani*,

"Come brother Hindu! Come Musalman! Come Buddhist! Come Christian! Let us transcend all barriers, let us forsake Forever all smallness, all lies, all selfishness and let us fall Brothers as brothers. We shall quarrel no more."

By these very crystalline words, it is to be noted that, Nazrul is not only a poet but also a true humanist. He proved his religious equality by choosing his four sons names with both Hindu and Muslim names. His first son was named by Krishna Muhammad, then Arindam Khaled (Bulbul), after that *Sabyasachi* and at last his fourth son named by Kazi Aniruddha. Nazrul was deeply plunged in a tradition of Hinduism, Sufism, folk tradition to make his doctrine in a uprising way. (Haque, 2016) Nazrul emphasized in his celebrated *Ognivina* (Fire and Lute) that he was not a Hindu or a Muslim, he was for all men, all religions. In his writings Hindu and Muslim rituals have been so completely accorded that it is difficult to disentangle one from the other. Nazrul's intention was to remove the religious separatism and gaping between man and man and sustain the greatness of human. According to him religion is created for man and is destined to advance the well being of man. Man should embrace this religion of humanism and love of man should be held absolute – this was Nazrul's utmost aspiration. That is why he sang passionately – "I sing of equality".

Above the caste, doctrine, religion– a human being is supreme and nobler! There is no dissimilarity. We're all the expression of common humanity all through ages and places.

ii) Famous Islamic Lyrics

Kazi Nazrul Islam has written many Islamic poems and songs in his life time. According to the information and history there were fourteen Islamic songs published by Twin (F.T.) and H.M.V. Record Company. These were written and tuned by

Kazi Nazrul Islam. The most famous of these songs are:

*Islamer oi souda loye,
O mon Ramjaner oi rojar sheshe
Ahmader oi Mimer porda
Bokkhe amar qabar chobi
Torun premik pronoy bedon
Doriai ghor toofan
Ay moru parer hawa*

The famous singers of that time such as Abbas Uddin Ahmad, Faqre Alam, Mohammad Kasem, Taokrim Uddin Ahmad sang those songs. (Haque, 2000).

iii) Man and Woman

His poetry retains long-standing notions of men and women in binary opposition to one another and does not affirm gender similarities and flexibility in the social structure:

"Man has brought the burning,
scorching heat of the sunny day;
Woman has brought peaceful night,
soothing breeze and cloud.
Man comes with desert-thirst,
woman provides the drink of honey.
Man ploughs the fertile land,
woman sows crops in it turning it green.
Man ploughs, woman waters,
that earth and water mixed together,
brings about a harvest of golden paddy."

However, Nazrul's poems strongly emphasize the confluence of the roles of both sexes and their equal importance to life. He stunned society with his poem *Barangana* (Prostitute), in which he addresses a prostitute as 'mother'. Nazrul accepts the prostitute as a human being, reasoning that this person was breast-fed by a noble woman and belonging to the race of "mothers and sisters"; he assails society's negative notions of prostitutes.

Who calls you a prostitute, mother?
Who spits at you?
Perhaps you were suckled by someone
as chaste as Seeta...
And if the son of an unchaste mother is 'illegitimate', so is
the son of an unchaste father.
-"Barangana" ("Prostitute") *Translated by Sajed Kamal*

Nazrul was an advocate of the emancipation of women; both traditional and non-traditional women were portrayed by him with utmost sincerity. Nazrul's songs are collectively called as Nazrul Sangeet Nazrul geeti.

Nazrul professed faith in the belief in the equality of women as we know Islam has also put emphasis on women's rights—a view his contemporaries considered revolutionary. From his poet *Nari* (Woman):

"I don't see any difference
Between a man and woman
Whatever great or benevolent achievements

That are in this world
Half of that was by woman, The other half by man."
(Translated by Sajed Kamal)

iv) Religious Elements: Islamic Practice and Hindu Culture

His works changed significantly from rebellious expositions of society to deeper examination of religious themes. His works in these years led Islamic devotional songs into the mainstream of Bengali folk music, exploring the Islamic practices of *namaz* (prayer), *roza* (fasting), *hajj* (pilgrimage) and *zakat* (charity). This was regarded by his contemporaries as a significant achievement as Bengali Muslims had been strongly averse to devotional music. (Haque, 2000)

Nazrul's creativity diversified as he explored Hindu devotional music by composing Shyama Sangeet, bhajans and kirtans, often merging Islamic and Hindu values. Nazrul's poetry and songs explored the philosophy of Islam and Hinduism. His famous *Shyama sangeets* are:

1. *Amar hate kali mukhe kali*
2. *Shyama namer laglo agun*
3. *Ogo Antorjami*
4. *Amar kalo meyer*
5. *Thir hoye tui bosh*

Nazrul's poetry imbibed the passion and creativity of Shakti, which is identified as the Brahman, the personification of primordial energy. He wrote and composed many *bhajans*, *shyama sangeet*, *agamanis* and *kirtans*. He also composed large number of songs on invocation to Lord Shiva, Goddesses *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati* and on the theme of love of *Radha* and *Krishna*.

v) Love for Rasul (sm)

Naat means the lyrics which expresses the love of Rasul (sm). Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote in his *Naat* "*Ahmad Chan Jodi Heshe*",

*"Allah ke je paaite chaay, Hazrat ke valobeshe-
Arash Kursi low he salam na chaitei peyech she."*

Translation: Those who want to reach Allah by loving Hazrat will get the throne of hundreds of kalam without even asking for it. (Hassan, 2007)

In "*Islamer oi Bagichate*", Nazrul exposes his joy for Allah and his Rasul (sm).

*"Islamer oi bagichate futlo duti ful,
Shovay otul shei ful amar Allah O Rasul."*

Translation: Two flowers have bloomed in Islam's garden's pool. These two pristine beauty are my Allah and Rasul. (Hassan, 2007)

Again in the lyrics of "*Mohammad Mustofa Salleala*" Nazrul praises the supreme human being Hazrat Muhammad (sm) in this way,

*"Mohammad Mustofa Salleala,
Tumi baadshar o baadhsah kamliwala"*

Translation: "Muhammad Mustafa Salleala, you are the humble king of kings. The whole world which was darkened by sins". (Hassan, 2007)

vi) Symbolism

Nazrul has been compared to William Butler Yeats for being the first Muslim poet to create imagery and symbolism of Muslim historical figures such as Qasim, Ali, Umar, Kamal Pasha, Anwar Pasha and Muhammad. He devoted many works to expound upon the principle of human equality, exploring the Qur'an and the life of Islam's prophet Muhammad.

vii) Assault on Extremism

Nazrul overwhelmed extremism in religion, denouncing it as evil and intrinsically irreligious. His vigorous assault on extremism and mistreatment of women provoked condemnation from Muslim and Hindu fundamentalists.

Again in the poem *Issor*, Nazrul has expressed his disgust on the extremists who do not know much about the spirituality and Islam but advise the common people in a wrong way. In his language,

*"Shihori uthona, Sasthro bidere koro nako bir voy,
Tahara Khodar khod private secretary to noy"*

Translation: Don't Fear the bookish religious persons. They are not the private secretary of God!

viii) No debate between Islam and Hinduism

In an article entitled '*Hindu Musalman*' published in *Ganabani* on September 2, 1922 he wrote-'I can tolerate Hinduism and Muslims but I cannot tolerate the *Tikism* (Tiki is a tuft of never cut hair kept on the head by certain Hindus to maintain personal Holiness) and Beardism. Tiki is not Hinduism. It may be the sign of the pundit. Similarly beard is not Islam, it may be the sign of the mollah. All the hair-pulling have originated from those two tufts of hair. Today's fighting is also between the Pundit and the Mollah: It is not between the Hindus and the Muslims. No prophet has said, 'I have come for Hindus I have come for Muslims I have come for Christians.' They have said, "I have come for the humanity for everyone, like light". But the devotees of Krishna say, "Krishna is for Hindus". The followers of Muhammad (Sm) says, "Muhammad (Sm) is for the Muslims". The disciples of Christ say that the Christ is for Christian". Muhammad, Krishna and Christ have become national property. This property is the root of all trouble. Men do not quarrel for light but they quarrel over cattle."

7. Humanism

Nazrul had innate poetic abilities. We would like to convey the message of humanity and dignity that Nazrul reverberated in his poetry to the world. We find the relevance of Nazrul's poetry in the present world brimming with violence, fundamentalism and bigotry.

The poets are the unsung legislators of the world and are the voices that unite the collective pursuit of moral development. Although in the post-modern era, many objects to this instrumental view of the purpose of poetry are personified in

Nazrul.

Nazrul was an exponent of humanism. Although a Muslim, he named his sons with both Hindu and Muslim names. Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry inculcates the triumph of humanity, while his music soothes the senses with its embrace of eternal love. Eminent Nazrul exponent, researcher and chairman of the Nazrul Institute Trustee Board, Professor Rafiqul Islam, talks about Nazrul on the international level, and the relevance of his literature in the 21st century.

Nazrul had innate poetic abilities. We would like to convey the message of humanity and dignity that Nazrul reverberated in his poetry to the world. We find the relevance of Nazrul's poetry in the present world brimming with violence, fundamentalism and bigotry.

Today, Bangladesh and India jointly celebrate the 90th anniversary of the publication of Nazrul's *Bidrohi* (The Rebel), the most outstanding of the National Poet's creations. This is a rare event where two countries are celebrating a single poem.

Nazrul can be addressed as a true humanist. Being a Muslim and living in an age of extreme conservatism, he followed his own sets of rule regarding religion. He was very much from Bengal; he was sodden in a rich belief of Islam, Hinduism, Sufism and folk tradition. Nazrul has explored many themes such as love, freedom and revolution in his various writings. He was brave enough to oppose all kinds of bigotries based on gender, class, social order and religious conviction in that conservative Muslim society. Being a moderate man he opposed all racism. Though he tried his best in all kinds of structures of writings such as short stories, novel, essays but he is mostly famous for his poems. He was a trendsetter in the literary field and established new forms of literary cults such as Bengali *ghazals*. He composed nearly 4,000 songs. The compilations of his composed songs are known as Nazrul *geeti* and are still admired in India and Bangladesh. Kazi Nazrul Islam is considered as embodiment of Bangla poetry. He is still alive in the form of his poetry and other literary works and he will continue to encourage the world in the future with his enriched works. He is a versatile writer with different literary forms to enrich the Bangla Literature as well as the World Literature. Kazi Nazrul Islam expresses his stronger feelings in humanism as a true humanist which also reflects the view of the medieval poet Chandidas who says 'Man is above everything, nothing is above man'- the true universal humanism, which should be the main belief of every persons of the world. In every writings of Nazrul this universal humanism is reflected vividly.

Mysticism

Huda (2013) ^[1] investigates into the *sufi* and mystic side of Nazrul, his spiritualism, and writes in *The Mystic in the Rebel*: "And though Nazrul was not a practicing *sufi* so to say, he is undeniably a mystic diver searching out the fathomless bottom of the ocean of truth pervading human consciousness since prehistoric antiquity. This is how the rebel lives in a harmonious interaction with the mystic in the esoteric and aesthetic self of Nazrul." How concisely put Kazi Nazrul Islam was a great mystic poet. Sometimes his verses are very absurd to understand or realize. Some of his writings carry the

essence of mysticism and this gives his poems more profoundness.

8. Conclusion

Nazrul captures the peculiar charm of his early love verse their best, the unique blend of passionate feelings and rapid subtle thinking, the strange sense that his verse gives of a certain conflict between the passionate thought and the varied. He often elaborates pattern into which he moulds its expression, resulting in a strange blend of harshness and constraint with reverberating and penetrating harmony. No poems give more the sense of conflict of soul, of faith and hope snatched and held desperately. Nazrul is always conscious of his environment, of the world in which he lives and of his passionate friendships. As such his religious poetry lacks the transparent ecstasy found in great religious poetry. Nazrul's holy sonnets are deservedly famous and are remarkable. They embody his deeply felt emotions in a language reflecting sensible craftsmanship.

9. Reference

1. Huda, Mohammad Nurul. Online Article: *The Mystic in the Rebel*. Retrieved from, 2013. <http://opinion.bdnews24.com>
2. Hassan, Labiba. *Selected Naat 'Kazi Nazrul Islam'* (A Bilingual Edition). Nazrul Institute: Dhaka, 2007.
3. Haque, Asadul. *Islami Oitijjyo Nazrul Sangeet*. Nazrul Institute: Dhaka, 2000.
4. Haque, Farhana. Fierce Literary Works of Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Rebellious Identity in the Domain of Bangla Literature, *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*. 2016; 4(8):53-58.
5. Shekhar, Soumitrya. *Nazrul: Anto Dhormiyo Sompriti abong Shilpir Bodh*. Nazrul Institute: Dhaka, 2013.
6. Goswami K. *Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Biography*. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1996, 37-51.
7. Huda, M. N. (Ed.) (2000). *Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English Translation*. Volume 1. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 13-14-16-233-252-395.
8. Quick dissolving tablet. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazi_Nazrul_Islam, 2016.