

Received: December 2023 Accepted: January 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i2.374>

Nazrul's Quintessential Islamic Spirit in His Islamic Songs

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Abstract

When the Islamic dimension in the literature by Kazi Nazrul Islam of Bangla literature is considered, there have been concentrations on his Sufi and mystic self, and his propagation of economic system and removal of social injustice, remaining fixed in his Islamic standpoint. There has also been attempt to depict Nazrul as a poet of humanity, putting aside his Muslim identity. But the poet's solid faith in and deep knowledge of Islam as expressed in his Islamic songs is also a conspicuous dimension of his literature. Besides writing Islamic songs, Nazrul also writes songs on Hindu religious tradition and does anti-colonial struggle. As a result, it becomes an imperative to examine the nature of Nazrul's Islamic spirit. So, this research mainly sheds light on the Islamic songs by Kazi Nazrul Islam and studies them from the perspectives of The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah in order to understand the nature of his Islamic spirit. The research also gives effort to explore whether the poet's Islamic spirit has prompted him to be all-inclusive by writing songs on Hindu religious tradition, and to do anti-colonial struggle. This is how the research finds that the spirit expressed in Nazrul's Islamic songs is quintessentially Islamic. Here library research with analytic methodology was adopted.

Keywords: anti-colonial struggle; Hindu religious tradition; Islamic songs; Kazi Nazrul Islam; Quintessential Islamic spirit

Introduction

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) of Bangla literature is widely discussed for his literary pieces of various genres on the subject matters of love, patriotism and humanity. He is also note-worthy for his standpoint in his religion Islam, especially in his Islamic songs. Being a Muslim poet, he firmly expresses his belief in Islam, and allows the belief to be flourished in those songs. The poet declares his profound attachment with and deeper understanding of the foundational components of Islam. With this identity, he is all-inclusive by writing songs on Hindu religious tradition. Remaining fixed in his Islamic self, he opposes all types of injustice including colonial occupation, and serves humanity. He is Islamic even when he writes love songs. This clarifies his spirit found in his Islamic songs as quintessentially Islamic because the quintessential Islamic spirit of a Muslim, as it is commonly known to the Muslims, fulfills both Hakkullah (duties to Allah) and Hakkul Ibad (duties to men). Allah Himself emphasizes Hakkullah and Hakkul Ibad by declaring rewards for those who will perform the two duties. In Surah Al-Ankabut, verse 7 of The Holy Qur'an, the supreme words of Allah states,

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And those who believe and do pious deeds, We shall remove all their misdeeds from their (record), and We shall certainly give them a reward better than the deeds which they will have (actually) accomplished. (Irfan-ul-Quran)

Here Allah declares that men will have firm faith in Him and His Messenger, and according to that faith, they will do duties to Him by offering Salat (Muslim devotional activities and prayer), go through Roja (fasting during the month of the Ramadan of Arabic calendar), give Jakat (doing charity to the poor if one is rich or affluent) and do Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca (if financial ability enables). These are the duties to Allah which are called Hakkullah. Thus, Allah says that a man, while doing Hakkulla, will also do Hakkul Ibad or duties to fellow human beings by doing good deeds. This is how, as Allah mentions, if a man performs both Hakkullah and Hakkul Ibad, he will be rewarded. Nazrul seems to perform both Hakkullah and Hakkul Ibad. So, Nazrul's spirit may be called quintessentially Islamic. With this spirit, Nazrul has written thousands of songs where hundreds are directly Islamic. Notably, in Nazrul-Shangeet Shanggraho (a collection of songs by Nazrul), there are available "3174 songs" though the actual number is far more than that (Nabi, 2018, p.14).

In a world of spiritual bareness, falsehood, injustice and bloodshed, the present study on Nazrul is very much relevant because the poet's quintessential Islamic spirit, as expressed explicitly in his Islamic songs, can culturally provide soothing and beautiful sense of spirituality, humanity and justice to all men irrespective of cultural, national and religious identities.

Literature Review

However, there has been research endeavors to explore Nazrul's Sufism (an avenue emanating from Islam with emphasis on men's profound love for Allah). Such a research tries to do an overall study of Nazrul's literature, and attempts to focus how Nazrul relies on The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, and expresses Sufism (Sattar 1999). Another research, almost in the same vein, explores the poet's mystic self in his rebellious one, doing an overall study of his literature (Huda, 2021). Again there is a research on Nazrul's literature in general that attempts to find out how humanitarian Nazrul, in social and political issues, depends on Islam for solutions. Such a research states, "[Nazrul] deals the issues of the poor and the poverty not only in a socio-economic and political context but also in the context of people's moral and religious faiths" (Tajuddin, 2015, p. 36). Another research on Nazrul's literature as a whole gives effort to understand how the poet, in solving abject poverty like begging, depends on Islamic economic system. Thus the research visualizes "a noteworthy similarity between the tenets of Islam and the philosophy of Nazrul" (Hoque & Uddin, 2016, p. 42). Yet another research ponders over Nazrul's write ups on Islam and Hinduism, and, with less emphasis on the poet's Islamic self, tends to say that humanity is his religion for which "[i]n his writings Hindu and Muslim rituals have been so completely accorded that it is difficult to disentangle one from the other (Nitu & Khan, 2017, p. 22).

But the nature of Nazrul's Islamic spirit itself is also an area that deserves critical attention because we find myriads of Islamic songs in the literary oeuvre by Nazrul. Then worth-noticing, in their relation to the Islamic spirit the poet propounds in his Islamic songs, are his songs of Hinduism and anti-colonial struggle that pertain even his life itself. Thus, this research gap our present research concentrates on.

Methods

For analyzing a literary piece, choosing a methodology by applying a theory is always difficult because theorists who are mainly from Europe have left a very little space for the readers' autonomous thoughts and ideas. When readers' of literature have viewpoints that claim "moral import" and their roles pertain to "the categories of ethical discourse", "[the] ontological status" theorists ascribe on literary pieces may be questioned (Ward, 1990, p.2).

In this scenario, a theory was to be applied to analyze the Islamic dimension of Nazrul in his Islamic songs. In doing it, Nazrul's religious, social, colonial and cultural contexts came to the forefront. Taking those contexts and limitation of theories into concern, we opted for a mixed application of two theories: Reader Response Theory and the theory of New Historicism.

The proponents of Reader Response Theory are Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Louise Rosenblatt, David Bleich and Stanley E. Fish. To define Reader Response theory, Browne et al. (2021) writes,

The theory maintains that textual meaning occurs within the reader in response to text and recognizes that each reader is situated in a particular manner that includes factors such as ability, culture, gender, and overall experiences. ("General Overview", para. 1)

This is how the theory, though one of the extremely few of the kind, does give due evaluation to readers' response to a particular text, obliterating Euro- and theorist-centricity to a great extent. In his edited volume *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (1980), Tomkin, on Reader Response Theory, writes, "[R]eader response is not a representation of a uniform position, but is rather a term associated with theorists whose work addresses the reader, the reading process, and textual response" (Browne et al., 2021, "General Overview", para. 1). Thus, the theory facilitated to analyze Nazrul's Islamic songs by accommodating "[the] overall experiences" of researchers as readers, which concerns with Islam as their religion, British colonialism as their history and Bangla literature as a part of their culture.

Then, we adhered with the theory of New Historicism which has Stephen Greeblatt as its theorist. The definition of New Historicism states,

[It] is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. (New World Encyclopedia, n.d. para. 1)

In this manner, with the help of this theory, the researchers analyzed the intellectual history of Nazrul's time through his Islamic songs and the Islamic songs through Nazrul's cultural, social, religious and colonial contexts.

Applying the two theories, researchers gave effort to analyze the nature of Nazrul's Islamic spirit as expressed explicitly in his Islamic songs and implicitly in his songs on Hindu religious tradition and his anti-colonial struggle. His Islamic songs were analyzed in their association with The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, the teaching of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). In Islamic epistemological framework, whether something is truly Islamic or not is always authenticated by its central paradigms - The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah. Thus, in this research, The Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah as well as books and articles in print version and from different online sources, related to the focus of the research, were analyzed. Thus, we carried out the research.

Results and Discussion

Nazrul's Islamic Spirit in His Islamic Songs

Firm Standpoint in His Muslim Identity

In his Islamic songs Nazrul robustly and confidently declares his strong belief in and attachment with Islam. Nazrul says he is not afraid of anything as Allah is his Master, Muhammad (Pbuh) is his Prophet, The Holy Qur'an is his religious text, and this is how Islam is his religion. Thus, he strongly declares his identity as a Muslim. Such an Islamic song is "Allah amar pravu amar nahi nahi voi" or "Allah is my Master, I never have any fear". Here Nazrul (2018) writes,

Allah amar pravu amar nahi nahi voi Amar nabi Muhammad, jahar tariff jagatmoi. Amar kisher shongka, Qur'an amar donka, Islam amar dharma, Muslim amar parichai. Kalema amar tabij, towhid amar murshid Eeman amar barma, helal amar khurshid. "Allahu akbar" Dhvani Amar Jihad bani Akher mokam ferdous jethai khudar arosh roi. (pp. 340-341)

Translation

Allah is my Master, I never have any fear My Prophet is Muhammad praised everywhere Why weariness will be set, The Qur'an is my trumpet, Islam is my religion, Muslim is my identity.

Kalema is my talisman, tawhid is my rudder Eeman is my shield, Helal is the light my luster "Allahu Akbar" the sound vibrant Is my Jihad's spirited chant Akher Mokam Ferdous is where Allah's throne remains.

Thus, Nazrul furthermore says that his talisman to accompany, protect, and bring him blessings from Allah is his Kalema or central principle of Islam stating that there is no Creator but Allah and Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is His messenger. To be a Muslim, one has to believe in Kalema first and foremost. Muslim poet Nazrul does make inner and literary proclamation that Kalema is not only his central domain of belief but it is also the source of energy and courage for him. Also, tawhid or belief in one Allah is his guide. Eeman or belief in Allah and His Prophet is his protector in dangers. Helal or Crescent meaning the glorious past of Islam provides him light in darkness. The chant "Allahu Akbar" or "Allah is Great" remains active and forceful within him. The chant has him strive or do Jihad against evil. It confirms that Nazrul, far from deviating away from his religion, is of course a solid Muslim with firm belief in every component of Islam.

In verse 257 of Surah Al-Baqara of The Holy Qur'an, Allah's declaration for mankind states,

Allah is the Wali (Protector or Guardian) of those who believe. He brings them out from darkness into light. But as for those who disbelieve, their Aulia (supporters and helpers) are Taghut (false deities and false leaders, etc.), they bring them out from light into darkness. Those are the dwellers of the Fire, and they will abide therein forever. (Al-Hilali & Khan)

Allah Himself expresses the essential need of Eeman or belief in Him and His Prophet. It helps a man to be enlightened being away from the world of darkness or evil. Nazrul expresses his firm adherence with that Eeman. Here Nazrul seems to materialize in him the declaration of Allah for mankind.

In Surah Al- Asr of The Holy Qur'an, from verse 1 o 3, there is the divine utterance by Allah:

1. By Al-'Asr (the time).
2. Verily! Man is in loss,
3. Except those who believe (in Islâmic Monotheism) and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth (i.e. order one another to perform all kinds of good deeds (Al-Ma'rûf) which Allâh has ordained, and abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds (Al-Munkar) which Allâh has forbidden), and recommend one another to patience (for the sufferings, harms, and injuries which one may encounter in Allâh's Cause during preaching His religion of Islâmic Monotheism or Jihâd, etc.). (Al-Hilali & Khan)

Here Allah refers to time at the beginning to indicate the importance of what He says to mankind. He says if a man has Eeman or faith in Him, offers Salat, does good deeds, advises others to remain attached with truth, and points out to others to have patience, he is never lost. In the song above, Nazrul seems to imbibe Allah's saying available in the first three verses of Surah Al-'Asr.

His Wish to go to Mecca for Pilgrimage

As a true Muslim, Nazrul does have the soul-felt thirst of going to Mecca (where Kaaba or Allah's symbolic home is located) for Hajj or pilgrimage and Medina (where Prophet Muhammad saw is buried), for offering his Salat. But Nazrul's poverty seems not to allow this long-cherished yearning. He sees the distance of Bangladesh from Arab where Mecca and Medina are located, and feels sad thinking how he will cover the distance. This feeling the poet (2018) expresses in the following song:

Dur Araber shopen dekhi Bangladesher kuthir hote. Behush hoye colechi jeno kede kede kabar pothe. Iya Ilahi ! Bol she kobe Amar shopen shofol hobe, Gorib bole hobo ki nirash, Madina dekhar niyamote. (pp. 167-168)

Translation

I see the dream of far Arab from the hut of Bangladesh. As if fainted I move crying along the path of Kaaba. O Allah! Tell me the time when My dream will come true, For being poor will I be deprived of the gift of seeing Medina.

Going to Mecca and Medina is of supreme value to a Muslim. Likewise, to Nazrul, it is priceless. But he laments the fact that he is poor and may not be able to go to those sacred places of Islam.

Here one Hadith by Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is worth-mentioning. In Volume 1, Book 2, Hadith no. 7 mentions:

Narrated Ibn 'Umar:

Allah's Apostle said: Islam is based on (the following) five (principles)

1. To testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Apostle. 2. To offer the (compulsory congregational) prayers dutifully and perfectly. 3. To pay Zakat (i.e. obligatory charity). 4. To perform Hajj. (i.e. Pilgrimage to Mecca). 5. To observe fast during the month of Ramadan. (Translation of Sahih Bukhari)

If the teaching of the Hadith is summarized, what we understand is the emphasis of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) on Eeman, Salat, Saom or roja, Hajj and Jakat as the five pillars of Islam.

Nazrul is inseparably connected with these five pillars but feels agonized because he cannot perform Hajj due to his poverty. For the same reason, he feels he cannot offer Salat beside the Rawza Sharif (grave and tomb) of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) in Medina. The poet's intimate feeling for Islam is obvious here.

His Repentance for His Lack of Sincerity About Salat

Once prominent poet and singer of Bangla literature Abbas Uddin (1901-1959) came to Nazrul's home and offered his Salat when it was Salat time. The offering of Salat appeared to Nazrul with unparallel beauty and holiness. He instantly went through a self-criticism as he found he was not serious about offering Salat. His burning heart imagined that his heart could be a prayer-mat for Abbas Uddin, so that the latter's touch of feet on his heart could bring him blessings from Allah. This earnest feeling Nazrul (2018) expresses through a song that states,

He namaji amar ghore namaj podo aaj. Dilam tomar choron-tole hridoy jainamaj. Ami gunahgar bekhobar, Namaj podar nai abashar [Tobo] Choron-chuwai ei papire koro sarfaraz. He namaji amar ghore namaj podo aaj. (p. 93)

Translation

O Namaji ! Offer your namaj at my home today. My heart like mat have spread under you feet to pray. I am a sinner unconscious Have no time to offer salat Let [your] feet-touch turn this sinner blessed.

Here Namaji means devotee in Salat. However, Allah prefers when men repent for their misdeeds or negligence toward religious activities addressing Him. Allah welcomes and accepts the repentance and pardons men. In The Holy Qur'an, in Surah Al-Araf, verse 153, Allah declares, "But those who committed evil deeds and then repented afterwards and believed, verily, your Lord after (all) that is indeed Oft-Forgiving even after that your Lord is indeed Ever-Forgiving. Most-Merciful"(Al-Hilali & Khan). So, from this perspective, Nazrul's repentance as expressed in the song is rather encouraged by Allah, the most Merciful. So, Nazrul's feeling revealed in the song is undoubtedly praiseworthy.

Besides, all the words - namaj, jainamaj, gunahgar, bekhobar – are Persian meaning Islamic devotional activities and prayer, prayer mat, sinner and unconscious respectively. If history is concerned, Persian language, together with Arabic, had been the heritage of Bengal and Bangla literature for more than a millennium. But British colonizers in 1800 AD tried to remove Persian words from Bangla with the help of Fort William College Pundits. Then in 1835, colonizers made English the state language of India replacing Persian. These two steps were taken to remove altogether Persian language and words from all walks of life. As Persian Sufis were spreading Islam in ancient period in Bengal and India and that was how Persian started to flourish in the region, Muslims always felt an unbreakable tie with the language. So, British attempts against Persian were to remove Muslims from linguistic, cultural and intellectual spheres of Bengal. So, it was a colonial attempt against which Nazrul's use of Persian words were counter attempts of decolonization to re-enact Muslim presence in all the vital fields of the society including literature.

The rhyme scheme of the song is aa, bb, aa, cc, dd, aa. Interestingly, words used for rhyming are quite innovatively mellifluous and soothingly sonorous. We find "aaj" is a Bangla word rhymed with the Persian word "jainamaj". Then Persian word "bekhobar" rhymes with Bangla word "abashar". Then Arabic word "sarfaraz" rhymes with Bangla word "aaj". This is Nazrul's power of innovation. For Hussain (2019, May 25), Nazrul's creative talent in writing songs is

“an excitingly experimental chapter in the global history of music itself” (para. 4). Again, to another scholarly observation, Nazrul’s creative power is unparalleled in “1000-year history of Bangla music” (Islam, R., 2021, para. 10). Thus, Nazrul’s Islamic songs have been an exclusively innovative addition to Bangla literature creating a significant place for the Muslims in the literary domain, which perfectly existed before British colonialism in the region.

His Celebration of Eid-Ul-Fitr and Eid-Ul-Adha, and Realization of their Significance

Nazrul believes that Muslims have their culture like Eid-ul-Fitr (the day which is endorsed by Islam as a day of happiness for the Muslims, which comes after fasting for one whole month during Ramadan) and Eid-ul-Adha (an important event of Islam, while animals are sacrificed to please Allah and to sanctify soul). With regard to Eid-ul-Fitr, the poet (2018) writes,

O mon Ramjaner oi rojar sheshe elo khushir Eid Tui apnake aj biliye de shon asmani taghid Tor sona-dana balakhana shob rahelillah De jakat murda Muslimer aj vangahte nid Aj podbi re mon Eider namaj shei she Eidghahe Je moydane shob ghazi Muslim hoyeche shahid ... (p. 179)

Translation

O my mind, happy Eid has arrived after the Roja of Ramadan Listen, you will open up being generous which Allah instructs Of all your gold-jewel and the Bangle Allah is the owner Give Jakat to wake up the dead Muslims from their slumber O my mind, in that very Eidgah you will offer your namaj today The plane where all the heroic Muslims got martyred straightway

Here Roja means month-long fasting of the Muslims, Eidgah means the open plane where Salat of Eid-ul-Fitr is offered and namaj means Salat. However, Nazrul does recognize the day of Eid-ul-Fitr as an occasion of happiness for the Muslims when the rich and the affluent will simultaneously be dutifully generous, and give Jakat to the poor from their wealth which Allah is the actual owner of. Men are simply given the right to utilize the wealth. So, the Jakat or charity is the right of the poor over the rich and the well-off. So, according to the instruction of Allah, the affluent will give Jakat from their wealth, and thus, there must be awareness among unconscious Muslims to perform their duties. This viewpoint Nazrul expresses in the song. Here Nazrul would not be able to do the constructive criticism if he did not feel a sense of belonging to Islam and the Muslims. Then, the poet cheerfully says that Salat of Eid-ul-Fitr will be offered to Allah in the open plane together while the open plane should remind the Muslims of all the martyrs who, in that plain, laid down their life to establish Islam and justice in the world. Thus, Nazrul urges the Muslims to be historically conscious about when they observe Eid-ul-Fitr. The poet furthermore says that by standing in rows for their Salat of Eid-ul-Fitr in the open plane, the Muslims will be friends forgetting their mutual enmity or bitterness if there is any. Thus, Nazrul, through the song mentioned above, provides insight into the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Regarding Eid-ul-Adha as well, Nazrul has his insight. Still today, among many Muslims, Eid-ul-Adha means buying a cow and taking beef. So, Nazrul, being a reformer of Muslim society, propagates the inner significance of the occasion which is a part of Islamic culture as well. Thus, Nazrul tries to remove the wrong notion held by the greater section of the Muslims with regard to Eid-ul-Adha. This is what the poet (2018) writes in the song Notun chader tokbir shuno or “Hear the call of new moon” (p. 175). In the song Nazrul writes that the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha means the teaching of sacrificing dearest things for Allah. In the same song the poet also writes,

Ki hobe oi poshu khudare diye, Tora kam-krodadhi moner poshu jobeh kor niye.

Translation

What use is there as for Allah sacrificed is the animal wild
You better go and slaughter your lust-wrath, the animal of mind.

Nazrul wants to say that on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha, only slaughtering an animal in the name of Allah with superfluous or self-pleasing understanding of the instruction will not be sufficient or acceptable. Reformation of an individual must take place by being free from lust, wrath and hypocrisy while sacrifice of the animal is done. In verse 37 of Surah Al-Hajj of The Holy Qur'an, Allah's ultimate words state,

It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allâh, but it is piety from you that reaches Him. Thus have We made them subject to you that you may magnify Allâh for His Guidance to you. And give glad tidings (O Muhammad SAW) to the Muhsinûn (doers of good). (Al-Hilali & Khan)

So, through the sacrifice of the animal, sinful qualities have to be sacrificed as well. This can be done if piety is achieved. Sacrificing animals on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha is a great opportunity to convey the feeling of piety to Allah SWT. Nazrul seems to realize this inner message of Eid-ul-Adha.

This is how some of Nazrul's Islamic songs even simplify Surahs from The Holy Qur'an for those who face difficulty in finding out the proper meaning of them. To Kamal (2015, July 11), this is "[poet's] indepth knowledge of Arabic in reference to the events mentioned in the Holy Quran ...to form simple messages" (para. 3).

His Feeling for Muslim Unity for World Peace

While the Divinity of Allah is absolute and flawless, on religion Islam Nazrul wants all the Muslims of the world to unite. There is no alternative for the Muslims other than achieving excellence in respective field by being united forgetting all self-interests. Thus, the glorious days of Islam can be brought back. To uphold this truth, Nazrul (2018) writes a song where he sings,

Tawfik dao khuda Islame Muslim Jaha puno hok abad. Dao shei haranu Saltanat dao shei bahu shei dil azad. Dao she Hamza shei beer Olid Dao she Umar Harul al Rashid, Dao shei Salahuddin abar pap duniyate choluk Jihad. Dao shei Rumi Sadi Hafiz Shei Jami Khoiyam shei Tabriz Dao she Akbar shei Shahzahan dao Tajmoholer shopnoshadh. Dao vaye vaye shei milon Shei shwarthyagh shei dripto mon Hok bishwo Muslim ek jamat uduk nishan fer jukto chad. (p. 178)

Translation

Give ability, O Allah, to till the Muslim world again with Islam
Give again that Sultanate, that muscle, that free heart awesome.
Let Muslim world unite in one assembly flying the crescent flag of triumph.

In this song the poet, in order to fight against evil, eagerly waits for heroes like Hamza, Walid, Umar, Harun-or-Rashid and Salahuddin who are the heroes of Islamic history. Also, the poet, to have a resourceful literary world for the Muslims, waits for great poets like Rumi, Sadi, Hafiz, Jami, Khayyam and Tabriz of Persia. The poet then expresses the need of monarchs like Akbar or Shahzahan of Mughal Empire, who will have riches and love in abundance. Towards the end of the song, the poet earnestly wants that Muslims will be united by embracing each other

leaving their self-interests. Thus, they will achieve victory in the world with a view to establishing peace. What is important here is Nazrul's concentration on Islam in global context.

In verse 103 of Surah Al-Imran of The Holy Qur'an, Almighty Allah's utterance states,

And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allāh (i.e. this Qur'ân), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allāh's Favour on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islāmic Faith), and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allāh makes His Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) clear to you, that you may be guided. (Al-Hilali & Khan)

Allah orders the Muslims to remain united based on belief in Him and The Holy Qur'an. In human history there had been incessant conflicts among mankind. They were to be on the verge of Fire (Allah's punishment). But Islam, the religion chosen by Allah, united them and gave them peace.

Thus, for world peace, Muslims have to remain united relying on Islam consisting of tawhid (belief in the Oneness of the Creator Allah), The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah. Nazrul realizes the truth and accordingly gives expression to his realization in the above song. Nazrul, in this manner, tries to guide his fellow Muslims. In accordance with it, an event can be remembered here. Once the reputed poet of Bagdad Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati was full of emotion, and cordially embraced with Abdus Sattar just after knowing that the latter was from the country of Nazrul. Al-Bayati told Sattar, "Ahlan wasahlan wa anta minal mamlukatil Nazarul Islam shayerul mashhurun; shukran, khayrun khayran." meaning "I am warmly welcoming you as you are a man from the country of the torch-bearer of Islam or Vision of Islam" (Sattar, 1999, p. 1). Thus, Al-Bayati gave the title "Nazarul Islam" or "the torch-bearer of Islam" or "the vision of Islam" to Nazrul Islam.

For unity of the Muslim world, Nazrul does want successful heroes and rulers like those in Islamic history. The poet also wants successful literary figures like Rumi, Sadi, Hafiz, Jami, Khayyam and Tabriz of Persia for the cultural unity of the Muslims. Interestingly, Nazrul does not consider himself as a great poet or as one of them though his superlative talent has already been recognized by renowned scholars like Hussain and Islam R. But Nazrul does not consider himself great. He (2014) writes in his poem "Amar Koifiyot" ("My Answer"), "Omor kabbo tomra likhio, bondhu, jahara aso sukhe!" (p. 222) or "So, it's up to you, my friends – who are happy - / to write the immortal poems" (1997, trans, by Sajed Kamal, p. 380). This is the modesty of Nazrul. He does not nurture any pride which one must get rid of according to Islam.

In Surah Luqman, verse 18, of The Holy Qur'an, Allah (the most glorified, the most high) states, "And turn not your face away from men with pride, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allāh likes not each arrogant boaster" ((Al-Hilali & Khan). Here Allah expresses His dislike for those who, with pride, nurture hate for others and move on land with audacity. Again in Hadith collection Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 2, Hadith no. 8 mentions:

Narrated Abu Huraira:

The Prophet said, "Faith (Belief) consists of more than sixty branches (i.e. parts). And Haya (This term "Haya" covers a large number of concepts which are to be taken together; amongst them are self respect, modesty, bashfulness, and scruple, etc.) is a part of faith." (Translation of Sahih Bukhari.)

Prophet says that modesty is a part of Haya which is again a part of Faith in Allah SWT. So, Nazrul, with his modesty, humility and pride-less heart, seems to internalize the instructions of Allah and His Prophet. This is how we find him in the above song.

His Attachment with Sufism

Nazrul, in his expression of and concentration on Islam, turns sufistic too. In the section “Sufism” of Banglapedia (2015), Sufism is defined, which says that “Sufism (Arabic tasawwuf) deals mainly with mental, spiritual and philosophical aspects of Islam, the essence of which is to establish a direct relationship with Allah by purifying the soul” (para. 1). Notably, when Islam states that Allah remains in his Arsh (Dominion) being completely apart from His creation, Pantheism contrarily views that God remains inherent in His creation. The Islamic viewpoint that Allah remains apart from His creation is advocated by Hoque when he (2014) argues that “...if God does not have separate entity, we need not turn our faces to Him. According to Islam, Allah is upheld as One, Unbegotten, Eternal, and Unequalled and beyond partnership of any kind” (p. 52). Some Sufis merge Islam and Pantheism and consider it as Sufism. Hoque (2014) views, “...some sufis and Muslim mystics have merged the concept of oneness/monotheism (tawhid) with the concept of pantheism. According to them, the existence of all created things is God’s existence” (p. 50). So, there are some deviated forms of Sufism.

But Nazrul’s Sufism is based on The Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah which are the very foundations of Islam. Then Nazrul understands that the core issue of Islam is humanity, and to serve humanity he opposes injustice done by men. With this understanding, the poet earnestly wants that there will be awakening among Muslims. Sattar (1999) views, “Nazrul Islam understood too the real meaning of Islam for which in his entire life he fought against falsehood and injustice, and continued to sing the song of Muslim renaissance” (p. 10).

With foundation on The Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah, Nazrul feels his love for Allah deepens. This is how Nazrul undergoes right kind of Sufism. Thus, he (2018) writes the song,

Khodar premer sharab piye behush hoye roi pode. Chede mosjid amar Murshid elo je ei poth dhore. Duniyadarir sheshe amar namaj rojar bodlate Chai na behesht khodar kache nityo monajat kore. Kayes jemon Laili laghi lovilo Majnu khetab Jemon Farhad Shirir preme holo diwana betab. Bekhudite mashgul ami temni mor Khodar tore. (p. 20)

Translation

Drinking the sharab of love for the God faint I remain Coming out of masjid this path my guide would gain. In exchange of my namaj and roja after each day’s worldly affairs I don’t want heaven from the God raising hand in my daily prayer. The manner in which the title Majnu Qays earned for Layli The manner in which for the love of Shirin Farhad was crazy In the same manner engrossed am I in the drunkenness for Khoda’s sake.

Here Nazrul says that he is profoundly in love with Allah. Having the profoundness, he feels he has drunk the nectar (or sharab) of love which he feels for Allah. The nectar being drunk, he cannot hold on to his sense. In this manner, for Allah, his love is very intimate. When his relationship with Allah is based on love, he says for his namaj and roja, he does not want heaven from Allah, that is, where tie is that of love, no exchange of object should take place there. Then, to indicate the depth of his love for Allah, Nazrul deems himself similar to Qays who achieved the name Majnu or mad (or paghol in Bangla) for the love of his beloved Layli. To show his unfathomable love for Allah, Nazrul also compares himself with Farhad who went

crazy for the love of his beloved Shirin. The two love stories – that of Qays-Laili and that of Farhad-Shirin- were literary creations of the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141 – 1209 AD). In the first love story, as shown by Ganjavi, Qays is the 7th century Najdi Bedouin poet Qays ibn al-Mulawwah who would love a girl named Layla bint Mahdi. The second story is a famous tragic romance based on the love affair between the Sasanian king Khosro II and the Armenian princess Shirin. So, with love for Allah, Nazrul is behush (faint), Majnu (mad), betaab (restless), and is in bekhudi (drunkenness). This is Nazrul's Sufism because, as Sattar (1999) point out, the poet is seen '... reaching the stage of selfhood-abolition or fanafillah, [and has] realized that he was "paghol" (hysteric) or "behush" (faint) being in love with Allah (p. 12)'. Sattar (1999) clarifies fanafillah by writing,

... It is to be mentioned that there are the four stages of Sufism- Shariot, Haquiqot, Tariqat and Marefot – and when one reaches the stage of Marefot crossing the three stages prior to it then the real spirit of Sufism can be felt-which is called fanafillah or the stage of the abolition of selfhood. (pp. 12-13)

Thus, this is Nazrul's Sufism and it is clearly Islamic.

Another feature of the song is Nazrul's interest in Persian literature. The word sharab meaning wine or nectar of poetry was common in all Persian literary pieces. Nazrul (2016) himself says that "Iranian poets cannot think of writing poems without sharab, Saki, golap and Bulbul" (p. ii). Thus, Nazrul uses the word sharab in the song. Then Nazrul includes the tragic romances written by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi, where we see the love stories of Qays-Layli and Farhad-Shirin. When Persian heritage consisting of its language and literature has been an integral part of Bangla literature, British colonizers try to obliterate Persian from the region. But Nazrul, besides including Persian words, brings the similitude of Persian literature for decolonization and for ensuring Muslim presence in Bangla literature. And Nazrul has been successful in this regard. Sofa (2011), in his acknowledgment to Nazrul's contribution, states "Through his effort, Muslims of Bengal have achieved a new horizon in socio-cultural practice" (p. 135). This cultural resistance to British colonial hegemony and service to the fellow Muslims were of course the duty of Nazrul as a Muslim poet.

Nazrul (2018) has written many more songs on Sufism where "E kon modhur sharab dile al Arabi Saki" or "What a sweet sharab you have offered, the Arabian Saki" (p. 183), and "Bokkhe amar Qabar chabi or "The image of Qaba on my bosom" (pp. 179-180) are two examples.

His Songs on Hindu Religious Tradition: A Reflection of All-Inclusive Islam

Nazrul wrote many songs on Hindu religious tradition prompted by wisdom and love, not by belief. It was his wisdom because he, by writing both Islamic and Hindu songs indicating unity, had to resist colonial policy of "divide and rule". Nazrul encountered a global context where "the colonial rule was devastating the colonised world's trust in its own vitality" while simultaneously an aggressive nationalism was gaining momentum beneath anti-colonial resistance" (Rahaman, p.121). Here Nazrul's use of wisdom may be called hikmah from Islamic perspective. Hikmah is "famously translated as wisdom" (bin Lokman & bin Ibrahim, 2017, p. 745). In verse no. 125 of Surah Nahl, Allah's supreme words state

Invite (all) to the way of Thy Lord with wisdom and good instructions. (Irfan-ul-Quran)

In Islam, wisdom or hikmah is placed in topmost position in term of importance (Shahran, 2016). Songs on Hindu worships, gods and goddesses by Nazrul was not his belief, but love because he nurtured fellow feeling for Hindus and all other communities. It was not belief because never did Nazrul utter that he believed in Hinduism except in Islam. Similarly, when he fought for country's independence, it was meant for all the Indians irrespective of religious identities. Here quite relevantly we can look at 20th century American religious leader and social activist Martin Luther King, Jr. who is considered a great leader not only in America but also in the whole world. He was a Baptist minister but with his all-embracing heart, he became the leader of all. Similarly, Nazrul was, and still is the poet of all. This is why Nazrul scholar Winston E. Langley, in a program of Boston University Medical Campus, finds likeness between the two great human beings: Nazrul and Martin Luther King, Jr. Langley's view is retold in the following manner:

In an impassioned voice, Langley compared the two men, who despite their obvious differences (race, religion, etc.) shared similarities as moral leaders and activists of their generation. Both understood that belonging to or identifying with one particular group invariably meant the exclusion of others and was the basis for among other things intolerance, injustice, bigotry, humiliation and could possibly lead to torture and murder. (Boston University Medical Campus)

But arguing with the later part of Langley's view, we would say that one's sense of belonging to a race or a religion cannot be an obstacle in one's all-inclusive approach in the field of culture and humanity. This truth was materialized by the Muslim poet Nazrul, as it was done by Baptist Martin Luther King, Jr. Here Nazrul performs Haqqul Ibad or duties to mankind with his solid Muslim identity.

His Uncompromising Anti-Colonial Struggle

Though Nazrul is widely known as the Rebel Poet of Bangla literature, his recognition may be best identified as the great Muslim poet of universal humanity. The word "rebel" gives a sense that someone is protesting against authority at one corner of a vast country. So, the term "the Rebel Poet" gives a parochial idea about the colossal humanitarian activities of Nazrul. So, Nazrul may be called "the great Muslim poet of Humanity". This poet, in the extremity of his humanitarian activities in the form of anti-colonial activities, was even ready to lay down his life inside jail for the independence of his country. Rahaman (2022) compares Palestinian poet Darwish with Nazrul and shows that they fought against occupations and "their poems and individual battles against coloniality forge a locatedness of their identity" (p. 133).

On September 26, 1922, in the 12th issue of Dhoomketu, Nazrul's political poem "Anondomoyeer Agomone" (The Arrival of the Goddess of Delight) was published. British colonial ruler could not tolerate Nazrul's spirit of freedom from colonial subjugation expressed in the poem, and arrested him on the charge of sedition. On November 29, 1922, there was the hearing and Nazrul gave his famous statement "Rajbondir Jobanbondi" (Confession of a Political Prisoner). On January 16, 1923, Nazrul was sentenced to one-year rigorous imprisonment. When in jail, Nazrul wrote "Ei Shikol pora chol" ("Having these shackles is a pretension") opposing colonial torture and occupation. Protesting the cruel treatment of jail authority upon the prisoners, Nazrul started a hunger strike on April 24, 1923. Nazrul went through the fast for forty days. His life was at danger at one stage (Islam R, 2010).

So, Nazrul, with his literature as well as his life, fought in order to emancipate people of his country from colonial occupation, which is incomparable in the whole world. Hussain (2019, May 25) views, "I think Nazrul appears to be a matchless figure in the history of world poetry—a figure that remains relevant to the question of resistance anywhere in the world" (para. 3). Actually, a Muslim's good deeds have their true origin in Islam. In this regard, based on The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, a view states, "Islam provides guidance for all aspects of life - individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, and national and international." (Ahmad, "Some Basic Characteristics of Islam", para. 10). Nazrul seems to reflect this Muslim virtue. More importantly, in Surah Al-Imran, verse 104, of The Holy Qur'an, Allah's supreme words instruct mankind by stating,

Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good (Islâm), enjoining Al-Ma'rûf (i.e. Islâmîc Monotheism and all that Islâm orders one to do) and forbidding Al-Munkar (polytheism and disbelief and all that Islâm has forbidden). And it is they who are the successful. ((Al-Hilali & Khan)

Here Allah SWT orders mankind, for their own wellbeing, to be that chosen group (good Muslims) to have faith in Him, do good deeds and forbid whatever is evil. Nazrul seems to try to reflect Allah's order which we understand by going through his Islamic songs, fight against social evil and all-out struggle against colonialism. For wealth, position and British-patronized fame, Nazrul could be an associate with the colonizers. But far from doing it or nurturing the desire of it, he was rather ready to sacrifice his life to remove colonial subjugation. On the basis of The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, Nursi (1995), regarding the desire of corrupt way of life, views, "However, this desire perilous for the people of the afterlife, is also destructive for the worldly-minded; it is the origin of many bad morals, and the weakest point in human character" (p. 228). So, Nazrul, with his morality and humanity that have their origin in Islam, seems to be careful about life here after and worldly life according to Allah's words and Prophet's guidance.

Islamic Dimension Even in his Pure Love Song

In Nazrul's pure love song, when the happy or sad feeling is expressed from the perspective of the beloved, the beloved is almost all the time characterized as a wife while "varying his mood from the euphoric to the melancholic" (Hussain, 2019, para. 6). Such a song is "Piya piya piya papiya pukare / E jeno birohini bodhuro moner kotha" or ("O dear, o dear, o dear, sings Papiya / It is as if the heart's language of the lamenting wife"). Here Papiya is a kind of cuckoo. However, there are many more songs by Nazrul, where the beloved is the wife or the wife is the beloved. But a criticism states,

Nazrul has been criticized in modern times for not exploring the possibility that a woman's life may reach beyond wifely duties. Nazrul elucidates the feelings of an "ideal woman," devoted to her husband and explores the imagination of men in their idealization of woman. (New World Encyclopedia, "Mass Music", para. 5)

Here "modern times" refers to modernity or modernization that materialistically reconstructs men, women, family and society, and destroys their traditional roles. So, in this modern world humans are most unhappy in their entire history. For this reason, "ideal" or "idealization" which can be enacted by tradition where Islam, as the complete code of life chosen by Allah, is the thing humans can depend upon. So, imagining beloved as wife, Nazrul is not only traditional but also scientific, logical and above all Islamic.

Conclusion

In fine, in his Islamic songs, we find Kazi Nazrul Islam as a poet with solid Muslim identity and faith, and careful about *Salat*, *Roja*, *Hajj* and *Jakat*. The poet's care about *Jakat* is rather his emphasis on Islamic economic system with a view to removing poverty from the society. This is how Nazrul adheres to and stresses the foundational components of Islam. The poet at the same time confirms a strong position for the Muslims of Bengal in the domains of society and culture with the power of his creativity exhibited in his Islamic songs. He contributes to universal humanity and resistance to colonial "divide and rule" policy with his all-inclusive literature like songs on Hindu religious tradition. With no attraction for materialistic temptation of the world, he opposes social injustice from micro to macro level. He opposes colonial occupation through his actions and even risking his life which is the effort to materialize Allah's command. Thus his anti-colonial struggle is Islamic too. Even his pure love songs have an important Islamic dimension. Thus, Nazrul tries to fulfill both *Hakkeullah* (duties to Allah) and *Hakkeul Ibad* (duties to men) which is the core issue for anybody in becoming a good Muslim. This is how in Nazrul's Islamic songs, the spirit which is found proves to be quintessentially Islamic. This finding may be helpful for the Muslims to strengthen their Muslim identity in a world of Islamophobia which actually should be called anti-Islam. The research findings may also help people of all religions in having inspiration for morality, spirituality, humanity and inter-religious tie in the face of all-pervasive materialism and chaos.

Note: Songs by and quotations from Kazi Nazrul Islam, except "Islam, K. N. (1997)", are mentioned in our translation from Bangla to English. Quotations from Abdus Sattar and Ahmed Sofa are also mentioned in our translation from Bangla to English.

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