



Mechanism of Resistance to British Imperialism in the Literature of Kazi Nazrul Islam

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Abstract: Literature has always been an effective medium of presentation. Whenever the groaning sound of people with the increasing tyranny of colonial rule raised high, literature played a pivotal role to draw it in a pragmatically artistic touch. The Bidrohi Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam, National Poet of Bangladesh, made a unique place in the journey of Bengali literature resistance of the early twentieth century. He inextricably applied diverse literary genres and thematic mechanisms of resistance in his literature which undoubtedly bore the motive-inciting words of love and fire against any form of injustice whether of British Empire or societal customs and continued the thread of awakening in the Bengal Renaissance. The Rebel Poet was the figurehead of the allied Hindu-Muslim struggle of undivided India against the imperialistic British rule. However, miserably the discourse on Nazrul Resistance Literature is limited only in Bengali corridors with mere poetic contributions. With this viewpoint, the research delves into exploring the dimensional works of the poet and tries to establish him as a versatile writer of prose and poetry. In addition, the work makes a sincere effort to elucidate various thematic decorations of his literary outcomes and their universal acceptability. Ultimately, Nazrul Studies are yet to be expounded further ahead to bring out more research works on this Bengali poet of love and resistance overlooking the cross-country borders.

Keywords: Kazi Nazrul Islam, Literature, Resistance, Love, Imperialism, Bangla.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has been a dynamic framework of art that actively influences all aspects of life and society in collective. This creative stream of art encompasses imagination, expression, information, emotions, actions, movements, argumentation and all other mobility earlier to its academic establishment till this day. It's to flourish for further wings in future courses too. Resistance Literature or Literature of Resistance, whether differentiated in definition, has



been an ‘impressive’ subfield of the literature itself. Rebel Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is one the most prominent figures in the chronicle lineage of this category of writers. As generally concerned, resistance literature is an art within the vast definition of literature which coercively opposes contemporary situations of oppression or any other individual erosion or social corruption and actively supports contrary views of solutions. It’s not confined in a single aspect of literature but, ambiguously found in all other art forms. The Rebel Poet of Bengal, including the Indian state of West Bengal and the national state of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, has contributed a lion share in this form of literature. However, unfortunately his touches are restricted only to poetry with less mention of some of his prose. Apart from this, the flame of resistance in the literature of Kazi Nazrul Islam, later revered as the national poet of Bangladesh, can be found in all forms of literature that he entered. This is because of not only his resisting emotions but also his rebellious intellect. Therefore, the methods and mechanism adopted by the poet accepted his readership in locals and particulars equally. Influenced by his poetic spirit, oppressed Indians woke with awareness against the oppression of the foreign power British. Scholars of Nazrul Studies have enormously attributed his writings as resistance to British colonialism hammering on weak citizens of India and the nation itself. However, when his writings are closely analyzed, it becomes clear that they bore a big message against all tactics of British imperialist mentality not only in India but the whole of humanity. That’s why it’s more enriching Nazrul Literature to attribute it against the general conceptualization of British Colonialism with Neo-Imperialism. Thus, the resistance voice of Nazrul becomes relevant beyond the geo-political boundary of India and its historical line of past. Another breach in the universal generalization of Nazrul’s Resistance Literature is the difference of two nationalistic and ideological roots - West Bengal and Bangladesh.

This paper explores some hidden aspects of Nazrul Literature that makes it more universal in the essence of its resistance force as it attacks British Imperialism. Similarly, the process applied by Kazi Nazrul differed from others as it logically attracted or attacked all respective readers is also an important finding of this study. This research includes different forms of arts in his resistance literature, breaking the traditional concept of previous researchers about the sense of rebellion only in the poet’s poetry. However, the research will not leave the poetic lines aside. It will provide a more generalized and comprehensive concept of Nazrul’s writings, opening a new door for future studies on his resisting literature against every specific illness of a society. Thus, this paper will be a unique contribution in the expansion of Nazrul Studies focusing on his rebellious characteristic in his art of literature.

Nazrul's Dynamic Mechanism in Literature of Resistance

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), popularly known as the rebel poet, was an undisputed warrior of early 19th century freedom struggles against the Britishers though the weapon was his pen. Simultaneously, he was one those who led the awakening for the emancipation of contemporary countrymen. He led struggles for peace, justice, freedom, rights and reformation with dynamic utilities of art and literature that can be summed up as Nazrul Resistance. However, it has been a long trend to project the epoch-turning figurehead of Bengali resistance literature only through the lens of his poetry.



Different Nazrul Studies have made bold works nullifying the stereotype and establishing Nazrul as a writer of revolution with poems as well as prose including plays, news, songs, novels, short stories, etc. He set up a mechanism of resistance in almost all literature genres that he touched and freed a 'stream of fierce literary' influence. Furthermore, as the Nazrul researcher Farhana Haque stated in her work that the poet instilled his revolutionary spill "through literature, journalism and political activism, Nazrul fought against British colonialism, fundamentalism, communalism, society's prejudice and injustice towards poor people, women and the outlawed people." The voice of 'decolonization' that the poet raised apparently disturbed the imperial administration and conservative community persons. (footnote) That's why they made a set of hurdles on his way but, "the rebel didn't stop his revolutionary activities." At same time, as literary scholars have stated, he was "Bengal's prophet of tolerance" by focusing on the dynamic versatility of the poet. The flute Kazi Nazrul Islam sang which brought 'sleep to the fevered world,' made 'the heaving hells temple in fear' and carried 'the message of revolt to the earth and the sky' because he was the Rebel!

Beyond Poetic Lines: Signature of Nazrul's Resistance in Different Genres of Literature

Unquestionably, Kazi Nazrul Islam left an undeniable imprint of resistance in the one-stream flowing of Bengali Literature. That's why, the undivided India called him the Rebel Poet as well as the newly-born country of Bangladesh earnestly greeted him even in his illness period and conferred him with the honorary title of National Poet. In addition, with poetry, the Bidrohi Kabi inextricably wielded the weaponry aspects of prose and stabbed the foundation of the British authoritarian government. Not to mention his gallantry works fueling the awakening of the renaissance using the poetry spills. Even with a cursory glance, one can find a number of thought-provoking substances in all literary genres that the poet has touched which simultaneously worked for societal reformation and anti-colonial propagation.

Resistance in Poetry

The prima facie characteristics of Nazrul's Poetry are his rebellious resistance to submit before prevailing social stagnation and bow down under the yolk of colonial cruelty. That's why Nazrul is remembered as the Rebel Poet. To take pragmatic instances, his charming attraction of poetry and resistance can be assessed in the lines *Banduler Atmakahini* (1919, *Life of Vagabond*) *Mukti* (Freedom), *Bidrohi* (1921, *The Rebel*), *Bhangar Gaan* (1924, *The Song of Destruction*), *Rajbandandir Jibanbandi* (1923, *Deposition of a Political Prisoner*), *Coolie-Mujur* (Coolie and Labourers), *Samyabadi/Manus* (1926, *The Proclaimer of Equality/Man*), *Praloy Sikha* (1930, *Doomsday Flame*), etc.

Published in December 1922 and later collected in his collection of fierce poetry *Agnibeena* (*The Flute of Fire*), the poem *Bidrohi* (*The Rebel*) brought him the all laurels and established him as a new figure of fire in Bengali literature overnight. This revolutionary poem with 'heroic sentiments' and imaginative portrayal of the Rebel called upon the weaker section of society as well as all Indians to confront the mighty British tyrannical power.

Say, Valiant,

Ever high is my head!

I am creation, I am destruction,

I am habitation; I am the grave-yard,



I am the end, the end of night!

(Translation: Kabir Chowdhury, 2011)

With these lines of proliferated self-assertion, the poem starts as optimistic brevity is the most eminent factor to face an opposition. The poet brings down all poetic tools to hurl the poem an eternal life and arouse other lives. Some other lines hued with blood of resistance against oppression are as in the Coolie-Mujur. The poem inextricably tries to lay a foundation of egalitarianism and equality.

On the rail-way once I saw

A lord pushed down a man for being a coolie.

My eyes got burst with tears;

Will the weak be beaten this way

Throughout the world?

The steam-vehicle was made of Dadhichi's bones;

The lord got on it;

The coolies had fallen underneath.

Do you say that you have paid wages?

Shut up, great liars!

(Translation: Sayeed Abubakar, 2017)

Every stanza of Nazrul poetry instills such an inciting courage to defend the self, the society and nation against injustice, oppression and exploitation. Furthermore, the poet was himself a warrior of this struggle. He was arrested in 1922 by British authority in a sedition case from Comilla for writing the poem Anandamoyeer Agamon (The Coming of Anandamoyee). Some collections of rebellious poetry are Agnibeena (The Flute of Fire) , Bisher Banshi (The Flute of Poison), etc. His other poetry like Bhangar and Pralay Shikah were also prescribed by the British government in 1924 and 1930 respectively.

Song

Songs are a benevolent sound of love. Love teaches lessons of humanity, spirituality, romance, unity and/or justice, patriotism, heroism, etc. Kazi Nazrul Islam deftly composed his songs encompassing all these catchy aspects. He had a natural or habitual proximity with songs and music from early childhood as he called for prayers and joined singing groups of Leto. He had a wonderful caliber too which earned him laurels from his Leto masters and colleagues. Religious influence is also a big hallmark of Nazrul Songs, as his songs are marked as Nazrul Geeti, which can be identified in his Gazal and Shyama Songs. Spirituality was the chord of his musical flute which binds human to human, spreads love and frightens oppression. More than three thousand songs are accredited to Nazrul Islam. His versatility was that as well as composition, he would also sing them directly calling people for mutual assistance against British cruelty. When he was arrested in 1922 and imprisoned in Hooghly Jail, he composed songs extensively criticizing the cruel conducts of jailers and inciting other convicts. Some of these songs are Ei Shikal Pora Chhol (The Song of Fetter), Notuner Gaan or Chol Chol Chol (The Song of Youth or March March March), etc. His famous collections of songs are Bulbul (1928), Ganermala (1934), Zulfikar (1932), etc.

His songs largely consolidated the Hindu-Muslim unity against the Divide and Rule policy of British bigotry and took ahead the freedom struggle. At a prospect to spread the songs of



egalitarianism, the poet availed of all possible means like gramophone, radio and political ceremonies. He always sang: Gahi Sammer Gaan (Of equality I sing).

Prose: Novels, Plays and Shorts Stories

Bandhan Hara, with the same title translated into English by Reading Circle Group of Bangladesh, is the first novel of Kazi Nazrul Islam serially published in Moslem Bharat from 1921. Later, all series were combined into a single book. It is the first serial novel in Bengali literature. Fakrul Alam, a scholar of literature in Dhaka University, stated in an essay published in The Daily Star referring the Nazrul Scholar Professor Rafikul Islam, “It reflects Nazrul's perpetual penchant for rebellion and tendency to break free of chains...” In novels too, the poet didn't lose his voice for resistance. His other novels are Mritukhuda (1930), Kuhelika (1931). Likewise, he has left an igniting spirit in other genres of prose literature like story and play. His stories include Bathar Dan (1922, The Gift of Pain), Rikter Bedon (1925, The Pain of Solitude), Shiulimala (1931, Garland of Shiuli), etc. Some of his stunning plays are Jhilimili (1930), Aliya (1931), Madhumala (1960), Jhor (1960, Storm), etc. Nazrul Islam has a set of revolutionary essays too which were periodically published by the poet himself in different newspapers like Jugbani (1922, Message of the Age), Dhumketu (1961, The Comet), Rajbondir Jobanbondi (1923), etc. He also has some great translations like Ruabiyya-e-Umar Khayyam (1958), Dewan-e-Hafiz, Kabbe Ammapara, etc. He mashed up colours of humour, reality, spirituality, love and sentiments with the current of individual and political independence.

Journalism: News and Publications

What's intriguing is that most of the poet's writings at first were published in newspapers and then brought into books in later times. In fact, newspapers were a fore-runner factors behind the Bengal Renaissance. Some of these have been aforementioned. Likewise, the poet's contributions in Bengali newspapers added a new maneuver of resistance in Bengali language. A major part of his literary career can be attached with newspapers and various news agencies. Its inception was when he returned from military service and settled in Kolkata. The company with Muzaffar Ahmed in the office of Bangiyo Muslim Sahitya Samiti helped him to join different literary associations. There, he contributed for Moslem Bharat, Bangiyo Muslim Sahitya Patrika, Upasona, etc. Through these newspapers he reached the literary intellectuals and revolutionaries of Bengal. He also joined and greatly contributed for the newspaper Naboyog (the New Age) which was published in 1920 to disseminate the gravity of Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movements under the supervision of Tiger of Bengal Prime Minister Fazlul Haque. The Daily Bangladesh reported that the newspaper grew immensely popular due to the attractive literary contribution of Kazi Nazrul Islam. In 1922, the famous newspaper of Bengali struggles Dhumketu was published under the editorial guardianship Nazrul Islam. In the first edition, Nazrul wrote electrifying words addressing the paper:

“Those who are enemies of the country. Dhumketu (the Comet) will be a fire extinguisher to remove all the lies, hypocrisy and machinations of the country. Dhumketu' is not a communal paper. Humanism is the greatest religion. One of its purposes is to wipe out the hindrances or loopholes of Hindu-Muslim union.”

Personalities like Rabindranath Tagore were highly impressed with the content of Dhumketu. Tagore even wrote a complimentary poem for this newspaper.



How critical to the government, the sound of Dhumketu was that the British authority confiscated it. Nazrul preached the message of love and resistance through this newspaper. This is how Kazi Nazrul Islam became a symbol of resistance against British imperialism through his literary activities.

Varying Thematic Decorations of Nazrul's Resistance Literature

The literary excellence of Kazi Nazrul attracted all healthy hearts. Holding a Muslim identity, he was equally popular to Hindus too. He brought natural themes in his writings which helped him cross any religious, cultural or ideological barrier. The elements which the poet picked up to decorate his arts were all crafted with humanistic comprehension. He grabbed the living picture of religion, society and politics with a secular and prejudice-free lens.

His motives were supportive of a syncretic India where Hindu and Muslims are two buds of the same stalk. Similarly, the aesthetic presentation of religious symbols captivated all hearts and pushed them for a universal unity for a universal purpose. The poet's contribution of new vocabulary addition from Indo-Persian languages in the Bengali literature created an impressive affection among readers. Gender equality, in addition, was also a big content of Nazrul's writings which also reflected a necessary unity for a fight. All these themes curved with artistic representation created a current of unity and consciousness among Bengalis and raised them for resistance against the despotism of British imperialism.

Patriotism: Love and Fire

One of the central components of Nazrul literature was his extensive gut of patriotic feelings which enlivened his works with resistance against any damage to the national interest whether of external or internal. The poet incited all citizens to participate in the national anti-British movements with their patriotic zealot and uproot the foreign rule in writings like Praloy Shikha, Bisher Bansi, Bhangar Gaan, Chandra Bindu, etc.

Initially, Nazrul was so fond of Mahatma Gandhi, a strong supporter of his non-cooperation movements. Even he wrote praise songs for him when he visited Bengal like Pagol Pothik (1921, Crazy Wayfarer). However, later Nazrul didn't agree with the narrow interpretation of Swaraj (self-rule) that the Father of Nation Gandhiji preached. Instead, Nazrul expounded it and demanded Purna Swaraj (complete independence). That's what he demanded in an editorial of Dhumketu: We are all free; we are all kings. Both Gandhiji and Nazrul Islam were aspirants of free India, but with a mix of "some admiration and some criticism" the later excelled in amalgamating love and fire. He never kept silent against injustice, oppression and inequality but raised voice for rights and prestige. As well as a poet of love, Nazrul was unwaveringly resistant against the greedy exploitation of the British government. One of his lines go like this:

Whether you leave the country
Or I would beat with fist
And break the bone into water.

Equality: Man or Women; Age or Space

The poet of love and resistance Kazi Nazrul Islam was an ardent spokesperson for equality. When the arbitrary power of the British Empire discriminated in treating Indian nationals. At the same time, the prevailing societal customs undermined women's capabilities and left them



under the grip of injustice and superstitions. In contrast, Kazi Nazrul Islam raised his resisting voice. He wrote for equality that can't be measured by gender whether man or woman, time and space. His palpable motives can be sensed in the poem said before Coolie and Labourers where he highlighted the hierarchical mistake which made fractions between labourers and owners, poor and rich and weak and strong. In another poem justifiably titled as Nari (Woman), the poet expresses:

Everything that is great in the world,
All the works, beneficial or good.
Half must be credited to women.
A same tune makes sound:
None is greater than (hu)man, nor more glorious
Separation by nation, faith, time and place is spurious
In every place, time, in every home, He dwells as man's kin.

Unique Language Vocabulary

Another amazing aspect of Nazrul's Resistance Literature is that he opted for the most fitting words for his literary presentation. He is considered as the first Bengali poet who made the language more inclusive and secular by enriching it with enormous Arab-Persian words. His selection was highly striking that mindfully aroused the emotions of common people to step ahead and get rid of colonial shackles. With this process, he imposed a mixture of spirituality, legacy and resistance. Dr. Ishpita Chanda, scholar of Comparative Literature at EFLU, Hyderabad, has detailed a debate on his usage of 'foreign' languages breaking the hegemony of Sanskrit influence. She has pointed out that 'khoon' in the poem Helmsman Alert is redder than the Sanskrit word 'rakta'. The poet directly calls for war against the British government in his poem Kandhari Hushiyar (Helmsman Alert):

Helmsman before you lies the Palashi Battlefield
Bengali's khoon smeared upon Clive's naked sword and shield
In Ganges water, alas, has drowned India's sun
it will rise once more reddened with our sacrificial khoon.

Self-Assertion

It is another important inciting element of the poet's creativity. Nazrul repeatedly urged for nationalistic unity as well; he stressed self-assertion as an immortal strength. In all setbacks, this inner motive pushes forward to move ahead. Although the Englishmen were advanced in military preparedness, the poet incited the national interest of common people and confronted them with songs of optimism. Nazrul asserted that Ami or self of mine is the most powerful element and most beautiful creation in the cosmos; it's unputdownable.

Speak, O brave and bold.

Say always, my head high I hold.

Likewise, it can be attested with some other lines of his revolutionary poem Bidrohi (the Rebel):

I'm made of clay, I'm embodiment of soul

I'm imperishable, inexhaustible, immortal

I intimidate the humans, demons, god, the supreme humanity,



Traversing heaven and the earth.

Humanistic Unity: Religious and Cultural Plurality

In a diverse country like India, it's primarily indispensable to keep the rope of unity to resist an opposing force. Being a small number of traders, the British could make a strong grip in India because of their unified strategies vis-a-versa to Indians when they were divided in politics, culture, mutual existence under ignorance and enmity. The British widened this existential fracture with their spoiling policies of divide and rule.

Here, Kazi Nazrul Islam had got this. He extensively advocated for Hindu-Muslim harmony and led a joint coalition against the British Empire. He stood as a limestone proponent of religious and cultural plurality in Bengali society which once had it. His all writings whether of poetry or prose explicitly provide a clear message of humanistic syncretism and communal cohesion. Furthermore, the poet himself was a pragmatic example of this societal reformation. As a consequence, several criticisms of irreligious acts were spelled against him. Researcher M.D Saiful Islam points out in his doctoral work that Nazrul had realized the ultimate truth observing the whole universe and came to perceive that dwells in heart, neither mosque nor temple. As the poet says in famous poem Manush (Human):

Of equality I sing.

Nothing is greater than human kind

There is nothing nobler than humanity.

Then the poet adds:

There is no bigger than this heart

Neither mosque nor temple.

After all his all-person-heard poem of Hindu-Musalman metaphorically says: We are two buds in a flower

Anti-Communism

At the same time as making a nationalistic and humanistic bond between all religious communities, Nazrul Islam tried to eradicate all elements that can fire communal disturbances in a society. As aforesaid, he has elucidated this in the first editorial of Dhumketu. This tendency of the poet's secular personality easily helped to create a more reliable and safe relationship between all communities of Bengal and stand joint handedly against the authoritarians.

The poet participated in secular political associations and contributed his very share. He wrote his revolutionary poem Kandhari Hushiyar (Helmsman Alert) for Bengal Provincial Congress in 1926 where he outburst:

Are they Hindu or Muslim? Who is it that asks?

Helmsman, say humans are drowning, all my mother's sons.

Religious Symbolisms

Religious teachings create uncompromising zeals to act something or restrain from it. As a Bengali Muslim Kazi Nazrul Islam, being aware of it, successfully brought fearsome pictures from religious beliefs and deftly presented them in an artistic form to respective readers.

He used many times in his poems the names spritual bodies like Israfil that represents the Muslim belief about the angel who blows a trumpet to signal the fearsome Domsday or Qayamah in Islam. Likewise, he has extensively sketched the symbols of Hindu faith like



Chakra, Shanka etc. which made a vibrate overflow of emotions. These religious pictures obviously instill a spirit for struggle till the result is gained. At the same time, Nazrul Islam objected the religiosity of a man who confess before other repressing elements rather than the Ultimate Truth.

I will throw off the burden of custom and destroy society... He who was enslaved by men, has he religion? Does he have the right to speak of religion?

Universality

The humanistic values that Nazrul put forth attracted all people of its universal acceptability which made his writings practical apparatus for resistance activities. Globally acclaimed Nazrul Scholar Winston E. Langley asserted that the humanistic dignity and values that the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) agreed upon Nazrul had called for the same earlier two decades in his poem of equality Manus (Man). He proclaimed:

Nothing is higher than man, nothing nobbler!

There is nothing distinction, clime age and person;

There is one individualistic brotherhood.

(Translation: Abdul Hakim)

2. CONCLUSION

The revered poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is an immortal spirit of Bengali Literature Resistance. Known as Bidrohi Kabi or the Rebel Poet assiduously crafted various mechanisms of resistance with cord of his creative literature against British imperialism. However, it's not only his poetic contributions that earned him this reverence of rebellion as the mainstream researches found, rather he left somehow the same share in other literary works including prose of stories, plays, novels and journalism. Thus, this work in a concise mode of pragmatic concept has brought forth a different dimension of Nazrul Studies highlighting his rebellious and revolutionary hues in various genres of literature which undoubtedly stirred the direction of resistance in Bengali Literature.

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