



Research Paper

## Humanism and Egalitarianism in Nazrul's Poetry

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper basically deals with humanism and egalitarianism manifest in the poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh. He is quintessentially a rebel poet who voiced against the discrimination and disparity between human beings and at the same time upheld humanism and egalitarianism in his major poems. His widely acclaimed poem 'The Rebel', which brought him the fame as the rebel poet and some other significant poems are chosen to analyze the nature of his humanism and equality in this article.

**KEY WORDS:** Humanism, Egalitarianism, the Rebel

Well accredited as the national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam was the versatile genius. He was a poet, a novelist, an essayist, a philosopher, a soldier and what not. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury (1994, 13) aptly remarks;

*"It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, either to account for his extraordinary popularity, or, which is more important, to understand the making of his genius, mysterious though all geniuses are, without placing him in the context of the social and cultural situation to which he belonged."*

Nazrul contributed a lot to the various literary genres. He also emerged as one of the most leading musical pioneers in the classical Bengali music. His personal life was the symbol of religious unity and the communal concordance. To the backbone, he was humanist. He was also a harbinger of modernity of his kind in post-Tagorean literature. (Huda, 1997, pp 05)

American Humanist Association defines that "Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity."

On the other hand, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines that "Egalitarianism is a trend of thought in political philosophy. An egalitarian favors equality of some sort: People should get the same, or be treated the same, or be treated as equals, in some respect."

In accordance with humanistic view all humans are born equal and so it is the birth right of all human beings of the world to enjoy equality of the socio-political right, equity and justice without any discrimination and disparity. But de facto we see human kinds in the society are entangled in the maze of despotic discrimination. Being trapped in the hands of unjust rulers, humanity cries in silence. This painful situation moved Nazrul to come up with his poetic voice of denunciation against the inhuman act of the crooked rulers. His rebellion is contrary to the evils of class exploitation. He is the champion of proletariat, farmers, fishermen, mason and coolie. His voice, we see, is very direct in his 'The Song of Labourer';

"In the lap of luxury lie kings and ministers  
Drinking in the life blood of the peasant and the worker,  
While we work ourselves to death to support those tyrants  
Come, O workers of the world,  
Let us trample these useless lords.  
Hold fast your hammer; pick up your shovel,  
Sing in unison and advance." (Chowdhury, 1997, pp90)

Nazrul is widely known as the rebel poet especially for his Rhapsodic piece *Vidrohi(The Rebel)*. But his rebellion is not aimless rather it targets the evils of the society. He has painfully eyed the discrimination and disparity between the people of the society. He believes in liberty, fraternity and equity, all of which are missing from the society he lives in. The deep rooted inequality and the corruption of the society mesmerized his heart. And so he, with an object of reformation, tries to attack the society by the weapon of his poetry. His poetry is mightier than the sword of a soldier. That is why he has chosen poetry rather than the shield and spear. His

Viidrohi is the thunder bolt upon the despotic ruler of the world and it is relevant till today. He cries and denounces the suppression of a ruler in this great poem;

"I'm the Rebel Bhrigu  
I'll stamp my footprint on the chest of god  
Sleeping away indifferently, whimsically, while the creation is suffering."

(Kamal, 2000, pp111)

He sympathizes all who are deprived and destitute, and sings hymn for people of every clime. He never knows the distinction between men, irrespective of caste and religion. In another celebrated poem 'Boatman, Beware', he says;

"A hapless nation is being drowned  
It knoweth not how to swim,  
Boatman! Today is put to test  
Thy vow for the liberation of thy Mother  
"Hindus or Muslims; who are they?  
Well, who doth make the query?  
Boatman! Tell him that there's being drowned  
Man, son of my mother!"

(Hakim 2000, pp353)

Nazrul's poems deal with a rich tone of humanism. Where there are down-trodden people suppressed by the privileged and selfish capitalists, there is Nazrul with the spear of his poems to resist the injustice against the toiling masses. Sayed Ali Ahsan(1997,pp202), a great Bengali poet and critic, rightly says;

*"Nazrul Islam's life is an impressive record of a ceaseless struggle against the oppression and cruelty, the cowardice, meanness, and selfishness he had seen and encountered. His was the voice of a protagonist raised in revolt all that was evil. The resentment he felt went right into the making of his poetic self."*

His poem 'Coolie-Mazdoor' is a corrosive attack on the capitalists who never admit the contribution of the labourers and working class. In this poem, a Baboo Shahib is seen to push down a coolie in the railway station. This inhuman barbaric behavior shakes the heart of Nazrul;

"The other day I saw in the railway train,  
A Baboo pushed down a coolie—  
Tears welled out of my eyes,  
Should the weak be thus mal-treated all over the world?"

.....  
How few pies you have given to  
the coolies for multi-millions you have got.  
On the public road run your motor-cars  
On the bosom of ocean float your ships

.....  
Whose gifts are they?  
Whose blood makes your palace blood-red?  
Remove the cover and see it inscribed in each brick.  
You pretend not to know, but every particle of dust  
Of the road knoweth the meaning of those paths, ships engines and palaces!"

(Hakim, 2000, pp 312)

Man is the prime concern of Nazrul's poetry. In myriad of his poems, Nazrul Islam sings the victory of human being. Man is the apex of everything. To ignore human beings means to ignore God. Because, he believes that Creator and the creation are tied in a bond. Creator can never tolerate the torture of his creation. So he craves for equality and human liberty in his poem 'Human Being';

"I sing of equality  
There is nothing greater than a human being,  
Nothing nobler!

Caste, creed, religion—there's no difference.

Throughout all ages, all places

We're all manifestation of our common human humanity."(Kamal , 2000 pp 43)

Nazrul started writing while India was under the British colonial rule and an anti-colonial movement was getting orchestrated against the oppression of the colonizers. To inspire the suppressed colonized, he started framing the fire-like rhythmic verses against the colonizers. Finally, the colonizers were bound to quit the subcontinent

leaving the rein of sovereignty to the natives. In this way humanity then rejoiced at the triumph over the defeat of British colonizers. In this regard a big credit goes to the mighty pen of Nazrul;

*"His steady pen reflected the eloquence and force of protest against the suppression on one hand and a triumph of humanity and morality on the other hand."*(Hemal 2015)

The setting in which Nazrul was born was poverty-stricken. It did not have any big industry. The whole of the country was based on agriculture. The colonizers desired to squeeze as much revenue as the people could pay. (Chowdhury 1994, pp13) These very deplorable circumstances stirred up the mind of Nazrul. Critic and scholar, Azfar Hussain(1997, pp 290) says;

" Nazrul comes from the class of the rural proletariat and that he believes in the politics of the proletariat". It is evident from the verses of Vidrohi;

"I am the pain and sorrow of all homeless sufferers.

I am the anguish of the insulted heart."

Finally, we can say that Nazrul's cognitive observation of down-trodden humanity found in his poems is unparalleled. No other poet of the world could ever sing the victory of egalitarianism in verses as Nazrul did in his poetry. Time has already said that Nazrul will exist so long as man can breathe or heart can beat. Hundred years over, still Nazrul is relevant.

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