

Voicing the Subaltern: An Analysis of Nazrul's Egalitarian Protest Poetry

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Abstract

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1898-1976) is widely and popularly known as the 'Rebel Poet' of Bengal for composing a number of revolutionary poems which have challenged the conventional religio-political and socioeconomic structures of the British colonial India. He writes poems in favor of the rights of proletariat people. His approach to equate men and women has been humanistic. His polemic position against multiple orthodoxies labels him as a noncommunist poet. Many of his poems were banned in British colonial Bengal, because they mark the voicing of the unvoiced oppressed people. In his poems, he combats to establish equality and egalitarianism targeting every possible area of exploitation and discrimination. This paper aims to show how Nazrul gives voice to the subalterns through his egalitarian protest poems.

Keywords: Subaltern, Rebel poet, Egalitarian, Protest, Colonial, Equality

Introduction

In the 1920s, the land of Bengal was going through a tough phase when the sociopolitical as well as literary fields of the British colonial India were largely influenced by the indomitable and unwanted effects of the First World War and Bolshevik revolution. Even in the literary world, there was a conflict between two groups of writers—one group wrote in the monthly literary magazine Kallol and the other one wrote in the weekly Shanibarer Chithi. The later was heavily influenced by the literary works and style of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). In contrast, the writers of Kallol group proactively read The Communist Manifesto since it was translated in Bangla for the first time in Indian subcontinent by Tagore's grandson Soumyendranath Tagore. So, they were significantly and noticeably influenced by Marxist ideas. They resisted against all the powerful hegemonies of Tagore and Tagore-influenced poets. The Trinity of Revolution—the Irish revolution, the Turkish revolution and the Russian revolution—created an impact on the literary ideologies of these revolutionary writers. Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), known as the 'rebel poet' and the national poet of Bangladesh, belonged to this group of iconoclasts. The socialist movements tremendously touched his mind and added new dimensions to his poetic sensibilities. He writes political prose, poems and songs for the powerless subaltern and proletariat people and their long unheard and unspoken sufferings. He takes "poetry as a charged site of actions and interventions against different forms and forces of oppression and exploitation" (Hussain, "Kazi Nazrul Islam:

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More Than a Rebel Poet", Dhaka Tribune, 2017). He raises his voice against the patriarchal oppression on women. His clear-cut and bold stance against plural orthodoxies brought him hazards, but his pen did not stop preaching the songs of equality. Nazrul, as Azfar Hussain mentions in his article, "continues to confront, challenge and combat: capitalism, colonialism, communism, racism and patriarchy" ("Kazi Nazrul Islam: More Than a Rebel Poet", Dhaka Tribune, 2017). Biswajit Ghosh writes, "Nazrul proclaimed victory for humanity, called for the marginal downtrodden masses to rise up. Along with the great rebellion in his poems, he wrote about coolies, workers, peasants, labourers and fishermen, about the Santal and the Garo communities" ("The Relevance of Kazi Nazrul Islam", 2019, 2). He is the poet of the proletariat and also from the proletariat class. His egalitarian protest poems give the subaltern their long desired and unheard voice. Subalterns, as Gyanendra Pandey writes in his article "The Subaltern as Subaltern Citizen", are people who live "in a relational position in a conceptualization of power, a space without identity" (Pandey, 2006, 4735). In a patriarchal society, a woman is a subaltern. In a white supremacist racial society, a colored person is a subaltern. Similarly, in a capitalistic society, a proletariat or working-class labor is a subaltern. Subalternity is a state of being which is inevitable in a society based on class division. Since the fundamental and archival documents are usually produced by the elite, the subaltern speaks by imitating the elite version of discourse. In Nazrul's poems, the subalterns and the downtrodden people, regardless of their class, race, religion and gender, get their voice back through Nazrul's poems. Nazrul, through his poetry, gives answers to Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak's vital question – "can the subaltern speak?" – long before she hypothesized it. In his poems, the subalterns speak.

Poet Nazrul was born on 24 May 1899 at Churulia, a village on the bank of Ajay River in the Bardhaman district of West Bengal. He was born to Kazi Fakir Ahmed and Zaheda Khatun in a "poverty-stricken, death-locked family" where he was appropriately nicknamed 'DukhuMian' (Mister Miserable) (Mitra, 2007, 21). Critic and writer Niaz Zaman, in the preface of KaziNazrul Islam: Poetry, Politics, Passion (2019), writes that Nazrul's parents named him DukhuMian for "casting off the evil eye" (Preface vii) for which their family lost its normalcy after going through the unimaginable pain of having four still-births. However, the misery never ended for Nazrul too as he lost his father at a very tender age and, therefore, had to go through diverse odd-jobs from an early age in order to support his family. Consequently, Nazrul had chances to witness the sufferings of the proletariat people. Although he was reared up in a subaltern society of British colonial India, he had his own voice which helped to set him and many downtrodden subalterns free from the oppression of the British rulers. Azfar Hussain says, "Nazrul comes from the class of the rural proletariat and that he believes in the politics of the prole

tariat" (as cited in Hossain, 2018, PDF). His rebellious voice was raised against all sorts of confrontational orthodoxies of British Raj. His was the rebel as Camus depicted in his Rebel. For Camus, "rebellion of the representative individual is a necessary condition of mankind's existence as a whole: 'I rebel—therefore we exist' (Mitra, 2007, 8). Nazrul's rebellious dissent ultimately led him to write for equality and egalitarianism. Azfar Hussain comments that "Nazrul is the first and foremost poet of his own people—peasants and workers" (Kazi Nazrul Islam: More Than a Rebel Poet, Dhaka Tribune, 2017). Bipasha Raha, in her article titled "Imaging the Peasant: Muslim Literature in Bengal in the 1920s", confidently claims that "Only Nazrul, among his contemporaries, dwelt at length on the theme of protest. His political beliefs surfaced again and again in his literary works. For him literature was a mode of protest" (Raha, 2005, 647). Nazrul fights against all sorts of weapon knowing that his pen would be mightier than a sword.

Nazrul grew up in a society where poets from different classes and levels used to write various poems. For example, Tagore is often labeled as a non-Marxist poet. However, Tagore too wrote a few revolutionary essays in the late 19th century. His essays "Americaner Roktopipasha" and "Socialism" showcase his anti-imperialistic position. He read The Communist Manifesto, because his grandson Soumyendranath Tagore translated it in Bengali and gave Tagore a copy to read. His reading and understanding of the Manifesto influenced his writings to a great extent. He also has written novels like Ghore-Baire and plays Like Roktokorobi in which he seeks freedom of Bengali ordinary Hindus from the dominance of Bengali Zamindaars and British colonialists. Like Tagore, Nazrul too looked for "liberation from not only the external structures of political colonization but also from the internal structure of colonization which reside within the mind" (Chaudhuri, 2019, 196). Ratna Roy Sanyal, in her article "Impact of Gandhian Movement on the Subaltern People of North Bengal—A Study" comments that "the reverberation of Gandhism movement had reached to the far-flung areas of Northernmost part of Bengal. This area, mainly populated by the subaltern people, came under the influence of Gandhian movement, which had a great impact on the nationalist movement of the region" (Sanyal, 2006, 522). Nazrul's way was anti-Gandhian. The clustered effect of the influences he had gathered "from Bengali revolutionism, Soviet Bolshevism and the Turkish militant nationalism was just the perfect antithesis of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence" (Mitra, 2010, 65). He called for "an end to inequality and exploitation, even exhorting the oppressed to rise up in arms against the mighty oppressors" (Islam, S. M., "Nazrul's Protest Poetry", The Daily Star, 2010). So, he wrote a number of poems and songs to help his subaltern, devoiced and outlawed readers break the brutal and oppressive shackles of colonization. The communist revolutions impacted other parts of the world as well. So, Nazrul's position of protest can be made clear by connecting him with other revolutionary poets of the third-world. Azfar Hussain writes, "If one has

to make connections between Nazrul and other poets, one might begin by placing Nazrul in the company of his own predecessors on one hand, and, on the other, in the company of such “third-world” revolutionary poets as Nazim Hikmet from Turkey, Pablo Neruda from Chile, Aime Cesaire from Martinique” (“Kazi Nazrul Islam: More Than a Rebel Poet”, Dhaka Tribune, 2017). Edward Said made a list of revolutionary poets in which Nazrul is absent. It is because his works have not been translated as much as Tagore’s. However, all his life, Nazrul writes to disseminate the emancipatory spirits and ideas that can establish a society free from all sorts of discrimination and empower the subalterns.

A Subaltern, as written in the dictionary, is a person “holding a subordinate position”. The Anglo-Indian writer Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) views “imperialism from the ambivalent position of the subaltern functionary in the complex colonial hierarchy caught between detested superiors and feared natives”. Antonio Gramsci sees the subaltern as the “unorganized masses that must be politicized for the workers’ revolution to succeed” (The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, 2001, 2194). Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, in one of the widely read and applauded critical pieces, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” views the subaltern as the “general nonspecialist, nonacademic population across the class spectrum” (The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, 2001, 2199). Being subaltern is not an identity, rather a state of servitude in relation to a lordship in which the lord speaks and the subaltern cannot express his/her thoughts or raise his/her voice. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel asserts in his “Master-Slave Dialectics”, “We have seen what servitude is only in relation to lordship. But it’s a self-consciousness” (“Phenomenology of Spirits”, The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, 2001, 634). In a capitalist society, the laborers are subalterns. In a patriarchal society, women are subalterns. The ‘other’ is usually made subalterns. However, when the subalterns start becoming aware of their rights and duties, they start raising their voice in a laudable way so that the lords and bondsmen hear them resist. For example, Magna Carta Libertatum or The Great Charter was formed in 1215 under the reign of the oppressive king John, because the discontented and subaltern barons realized their power to resist against the exploitative royal authority. The uncomfortable feelings and experiences led them to the way of resistance. It marked a significant dynamic in history. The history is full of struggle—struggle for power and position. Nazrul read The Communist Manifesto in which Marx states, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, 2001, 769). For this reason, Nazrul, similarly, writes, “Comrade, nobody is king in this land and none a subject” (“Shammyo” translated as “Equality”, 305). All he wants is to set the country free from all sorts of oppression and exploitation. The best way he finds is providing the subalterns with their dignity and egalitarian voice.

Nazrul's idea of human dignity is clearly stated in his poem "Manus", translated as "Man". Winston E. Langley mentions 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and its article as follows, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should not act toward one another in the spirit of brotherhood" (Nazrul in 21st Century, 2012 93). Nazrul, more than two decades ago, conveys similar statement to establish equality in society. In "Manus", he writes,

Nothing is higher than man, nothing nobbler!
There is no distinction of clime, age and person;
There is one individualistic brotherhood.
("Manus", translated as "Man" by Abdul Hakim, 262)

Nazrul writes protest poetry because he has an egalitarian eye to look at the unequal world. He wants to establish what Thomas More hypothesized in his book Utopia (1516). Like More, Nazrul too writes for "Liberty, fraternity and equality" (History of English Literature, 2018, 63). Nazrul gives titles to his poems which, as Syed Manzoorul Islam opines, give out his commitments to the marginalized and the oppressed". He also mentions that Nazrul's poems "articulated what the subalterns had always spoken out in their supposedly inarticulate and inaudible voice" ("Nazrul's Protest Poetry", The Daily Star, 2010). Bidrohi or rebel is a person who rebels against the conventional notions of an oppressive system. A rebel is usually marginalized by the mainstream bondsmen. Chor, Dakat or thieves and Barangona or Prostitute possess "social taboo and a permanent seal of disapproval" (Islam, S. M. "Nazrul's Protest Poetry", The Daily Star, 2010). They are in a way outlawed and outcast from the conventional social structure. Nari or woman, Kishan or peasant, Shromik or laborers are subjugated and devoiced. Syed Manzoorul Islam further comments that "Protest in the poems implies first a rejection of the condition of poverty, neglect and servitude, and secondly, a call to arms" ("Nazrul's Protest Poetry", The Daily Star, 2010). Nazrul raises his voice on behalf of the entire subaltern group.

Nazrul's signature poem "Bidrohi", translated as "The Rebel", first appeared in 1921. This poem brought him the title "Rebel Poet". It has been translated into many languages. The poem has established its own individual voice against all forms of oppression. Azfar Hussain comments that poem itself is a "dialectical dance of the insurrectionary imagination in the high noon of British colonialism in India" ("Kazi Nazrul Islam: More Than a Rebel Poet", Dhaka Tribune, 2017). Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), in his The Wretched of the Earth (1961), writes, "Religion splits up the people into different spiritual communities" (The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, 2001, 1584). At that time, in the name of religions, there were many riots and massacres, because Bengal was governed by the British who had

already implemented their “divide and rule” policy to subjugate the ordinary natives. He was also tremendously moved by the ongoing political tensions inside and beyond the border lines. The world war along with the colonial subjugation influenced Nazrul’s ideology. Nazrul then writes “Bidrohi” (translated as “The Rebel”) which appeared in “Bijli and Moslem Bharat almost simultaneously” in 1921 when “Gandhi’s non-violence movement had already started and the spirit of defiance against the colonial rule was all pervasive” (Alam. M, 2012, 81). Nazrul deliberately and intentionally writes “I” and establishes his rebellious voice against all sorts of oppressors. He develops a new sense of self as Haider A. Khan comments in his article, “It was the birth of a new I/eye” (“Nazrul’s Poetics: a polyphonic discourse of the multitude”, 6). In his other poems, Nazrul critically ridicules inequality and injustice. However, “Bidrohi” implies his intensified disgust against British Raj in order to free the devoiced voices of the subaltern. Even the title itself represents the group of the subaltern as rebels do not belong to the mainstream power politics; rather they write new political discourse with their rebellious voice.

Poet Nazrul asked a vital question regarding being called a rebel in his poem “Raja-Proja” (translated as “Kings and Subjects”). He rationally points out the simple straight-forward question that if “we are all children of the same Earth, why is it that some of us are kings while some others, subjects?” (“Kings and Subjects”, 302). He also speaks the truth that subjects “can be considered as rebels against the state”. He ridicules the class system of the society which has privileged the kings and demeaned the subjects. The truth is,

It's the subjects who institute the kings—
Not the kings the subject;
Is that why—out of gratitude—the kings castrate the subjects?
 (“Raja-Proja”, translated as “Kings and Subjects” by Sajed Kamal, 302)

Nazrul echoes what Marx also writes that the laborers or the slaves are sustained in order to sustain the mode of production so that the masters remain the kings and the slaves remain the subjects. Nazrul writes, “In our own land, we've become slaves, servants and coolies”. This is ironical that the subjects are always taken inside the bars of justice. There are courts to judge the slaves, but “none to judge the kings”. For this very reason, Magna Carta or the Great Charter was provisioned in 1215 in England. The exploited and oppressed barons raised their voice and revolted against their exploitative king John and forced him to sign 63 clauses of Magna Carta which projected and ensured the rights of the subaltern barons and ordinary people of England. Nazrul, in the early 20th century, envisions protecting and safeguarding the rights of the subjects and subalterns. He realistically hopes to see the sunrise of such day when the world will witness the subjects’ victory and the kings will cherish the day and sing their victorious song. He writes,

It isn't an unrealistic hope, nor the day far away,
When all the kings of the world will sing in chorus
To their subjects' victory.

("Raja-Proja", translated as "Kings and Subjects" by Sajed Kamal, 303)

Nazrul writes for the coolies and laborers after noticing the inhumane treatment of the "so-called gentry" towards these subaltern beings. He is saddened to see them get beaten up by the capitalists. He calls the heartless people to open the "closed and rusty door of" their heart. He writes to them,

Cast off the coloured glasses
From your selfish eyes
Like a discarded cloak,
Let it make you feel pure and clean,
And stand before death fearless and serene.

("Kuli-Mojur", translated as "Coolies and Laborers" by Kabir Chowdhury, 311)

The egalitarian bard wholeheartedly and practically wants to establish equality in the society he lives in by voicing the subalterns and less privileged people like coolies, laborers and even peasants. He writes to make the peasants awaken with full spirit. In his poem "Kishaner Gaan" (translated as "The Song of the Peasant") he writes,

Arise, O tiller of the soil
Hold the plough in your iron grip
Since we are all going to die
Let us die a glorious death.

("Kishaner Gaan", translated as "The Song of the Peasant" by Kabir Chowdhury, 334)

Nazrul acknowledges the contributions of the agrarian people in his poems. In this way, he pays them tribute and appreciates their hard work. These peasants are the hard-working agrarian people who sacrifice their well-being and comfort just to grow crops in the soil. They sweat and bleed to make the world beautiful. At the end of the day, all they have is their hunger. Nazrul calls the peasants to make their hunger their source of joy which is enough for them to conquer the world. He writes,

When we have lost all, what else is there to fear?
By the strength of hunger
We shall conquer the world of joy

.....
Let the civilized world watch in wonder
The power of us, the tiller of the soil.

("Kishaner Gaan", translated as "The Song of the Peasant", 335)

Nazrul believes that the strength of the working-class people can even melt the rock. Since they are as strong as the rock itself, their voice is feared by the oppressive bourgeois. The poor, black workers are mere subjects to disgrace and humiliation. In "Shromiker Gaan" (translated as "The Song of the Worker") Nazrul writes,

Today we are only black coolies,
Mere scum, who blacken ourselves with the disgrace
Of the whole mankind.

("Shromiker Gaan", translated as "The Song of the Worker" by Kabir Chowdhury, 339)

Nazrul claims that the disgrace of the working class brings disgrace to the entire human race. He wants these subalterns manifest their voice and power. He wants them to fight back against the exploitation. He has been an anti-Gandhian since his childhood. He has witnessed physical subjugation of the British. Therefore, he wants the workers to take their weapons in their hands. He writes,

Come along, O Comrade, and keep your weapons high,
The light of anarchy is in front
Come along, O you who want to bathe in the sea of light,
We shall board the ship of darkness tonight,
Comrade.

("Shromiker Gaan", translated as "The Song of the Worker" by Kabir Chowdhury, 341)

Nazrul not only just writes against capitalism, he is vocal against patriarchy too. In a patriarchal society, women are considered as the subalterns. They are not supposed to speak for their own choice and voice. They cannot exercise their power. They are considered as the 'second sex'. Nazrul wants to empower women by acknowledging their equal and remarkably mentionable contributions to human society. With a sharp and bold intension, poet Nazrul declares his belief in the equality of men and women. He is progressive and sensible enough to admit that women are the equal half of man. In "Nari" (Woman), he writes,

I sing of equality
I don't see any difference
Between a man and a woman.
Whatever great of benevolent achievements
There are in this world,
Half of that was done by woman,
The other half by man.
Whatever sin, grief, pains, tears –
Half of that was brought by man,
The other half by woman.

("Nari", translated as "Woman" by Sajed Kamal, 293)

In the aforementioned verse, the poet claims that every fine work is a production of equal contribution of both men and women. All the deeds and misdeeds are brought to the world jointly by men and women. He sings for equality in both sexes. Nazrul writes this poem while living in an extremely patriarchal society. Since the society he lives in is male-dominated, the women are considered as inferior creatures. Even while interpreting the religious scriptures, people blame Eve for committing the dreadful sin of disobeying God's command. Nazrul clarifies that the "original sin" was not done by a woman, but by a "neuter satan". He further establishes gender equality by neutralizing the gender of Satan. He writes,

The sin or Satan
Is neither a man nor a woman
But neuter, equally
Mixed with man and woman.

("Nari", translated as "Woman" by Sajed Kamal, 2018, p. 293)

The sin is equally committed and the consequence is equally faced by both Adam and Eve. In popular cultural studies, even now many critics blame Eve while critically reading Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*. Eve still has to take the blame on his shoulder for getting tempted by Satan's conspiracy. A few feminist critics even like to burden God and Satan for being responsible for Eve's fall. Nazrul, back in 1925, sets the equation clear in his poem. He does not take any side. He blames satan by calling it "neuter" that is a combination of both sexes. He portrays man and woman as binary oppositions and two indispensable interdependent living beings. He writes,

Man has brought the burning, scorching
Heat of the sunny day,
Woman has brought the peaceful night,
Soothing breeze and cloud,
She has given strength and courage
During the day, as a bride at night.

("Nari", translated as "Woman" by Sajed Kamal, 293)

The interdependency between man and woman is equal and vice versa. One completes and complements each other. Without woman, man is incomplete and vice versa. Woman's participation should, as Nazrul claims, equally be appreciated. The patriarchy is heartless as it degrades the honor and contribution of women. Nazrul derogates such patriarchal men with his unconvincingly bold words. He writes,

Man is heartless—
Woman humanizes him
By lending him a half of her heart.
Those immortal, great human beings
We celebrate every year
Might have been born out of whims
Of pleasure-driven fathers.
(“Nari”, translated as “Woman” by Sajed Kamal, 294)

Nazrul boldly calls man heartless. It is woman who shares her heart with a man to make him more humane. His polemic approach towards egalitarianism is remarkable and admirable. He encourages woman in the period when women's issue is no-man's issue. He gives courage to the hapless women and writes,

Tear open your veil, woman,
Break your chains into pieces!
Cast away the veil that turned you into a coward!
Get rid of all your marks of slavery,
All your ornaments!
(“Nari”, translated as “Woman” by Sajed Kamal, 295)

Nazrul criticizes woman's conventional ornaments by calling them “marks of slavery”. In the early 20th century patriarchal Indian society, women were psychologically and even physically tortured if they did not conform to conventional notions. The history has marked a few revolutionary women who cannot be taken as examples. They were exceptional women who could break the shackle of patriarchal society and pledged for equality. The current Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, in her speech in a conference organized by Nazrul Institute on 24 June in 2011, mentioned one of Nazrul's letters to Begum Shamsunnahar in which he wrote, “The women of our country are poor fellows. I saw a lot of girls with great talents, but all of their prospects withered to meet the needs of the society. So, I urge the women to be rebellious” (Nazrul in 21st Century, 19). So, he writes,

Tear open your veil, woman,
Break your chain into pieces!
Cast away the veil that turned you into a coward!
Get rid of all your marks of slavery,
All your ornaments.
(“Nari”, translated as “Woman” by Sajed Kamal, 296)

Nazrul, being very optimistic, calls the hapless women to be more concerned about their rights and opportunities. He wants them to speak and get rid of their subaltern beings. He believes that one day the world must recognize woman

as equally compatible to man. He concludes "Nari" with this hope and writes in the last stanza,

The day is not far off
 When the world shall sing the glory of woman
 Along with that of man!
 ("Nari", translated as "Woman" by Sajed Kamal, 296)

Nazrul pledges for the equality of all women. He dreams of a world where equality is a practical thing to cherish. He raises his voice even in favor of the fallen women who are not respected by anyone in a society. He gives humanistic respect to prostitutes and their profession which is considered taboo and forbidden. As a result, prostitutes are dehumanized and considered as untouchable. Nazrul equates them with other ordinary women. In his poem "Barangona" (Prostitute), he writes,

Who calls you a prostitute, mother?
 Who spits at you?
 Perhaps you were suckled by someone
 As chaste as Sita
 You may not be chaste,
 Yet you are one of the family'
 Of all our mothers and sisters.
 Your sons are like any of us sons,
 As capable of achieving fame and honor
 As any of us,
 As capable of entering heaven.

("Barangona", translated as "Prostitute" by Sajed Kamal, 284)

Prostitutes are considered as sinners and fallen creatures. Their children are humiliated for being "illegitimate". It is the woman who is usually blamed for bearing children without the identity of a father. Without a father's recognition, a child's identity is questioned and resentfully marked. No one would blame the man who was responsible for such consequences. Nazrul criticized the biasness of patriarchy towards men and against women. The society judges a woman on the basis of her chastity and virginity. When a woman is marked as a sinner, she is prevented from having a normal humane treatment. She would not get any chance to undo her misdeeds. Nazrul asks a simple question by referring to the supreme Beings. He writes,

Because I have once committed a sin,
 Have I no right to return to virtue?
 Hundreds of sinful acts
 Did not take away the divineness of the gods.
 ("Barangona", translated as "Prostitute" by Sajed Kamal, 284)

Nazrul refers to gods and goddesses and states that they remain supreme beings despite committing “hundreds of sinful acts”. He asserts to get a normal life for the prostitutes by advocating that their virtues too should be restored. Nazrul boisterously divides the sin between man and woman. A woman cannot beget a child without a physical contribution of a man. The process of begetting children is, according to Nazrul, nothing but the result of carnal desire. Yet the legal couples feel proud to beget legitimate children. Nazrul courageously writes,

Purely from carnal urge
Do men and women unite,
We are children born of that lust.
Yet how proud we are!

(“Barangona”, translated as “Prostitute” by Sajed Kamal, 285)

Nazrul’s argument here is that prostitution has always been a gendered profession. However, it takes two people of opposite sex to proceed towards the mechanics of prostitution. On the other hand, a child is born out of the physical unity of both sexes. So, if a child is called illegitimate for being born to an “unchaste mother”, Nazrul imparts that the son of “an unchaste father” should also be treated the same way. Nazrul sings the song of equality even on the matter of chastity. He finally writes,

If the son of an unchaste mother is “illegitimate”,
So is the son of an unchaste father.

(“Barangona”, translated as “Prostitute” by Sajed Kamal, 285)

Nazrul’s egalitarian poems are exceedingly political. He sets himself against religious orthodoxies and fanaticism. His poems are religio-political in this way. He wants to end the sufferings of women, workers and subaltern beings—everyone who is a mere victim of men-directed religion. He imparts his “radical liberal views about moral discrimination” (Chaudhuri, 2019, 209).

Kazi Nazrul Islam was being called the ‘Rebel Poet’ of Bengal as soon as he composed and published his signature poem “Bidrohi”. However, he was politically a conscious and vocal poet all his life. He only had 24 years of literary life when he composed his poems, essays, novels and songs and won the heart of the whole nation. Nazrul, through his poems, aims to abolish class struggle and establish equality in society by voicing the subalterns. His poems, which were once banned in the early 20th century, are still relevant in today’s world. As long as there is oppression, struggle and inequality in the world, Nazrul will be read, analyzed and embraced in all possible way. His egalitarian spirit will remain alive in his readers.

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