

# MIRRORING UNIVERSALISM IN KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM: A HUMANITERIAN POET WITH DISTINCTIVE STYLE

By

Nawshin Sharmily  
14103024

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in English

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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**Nawshin Sharmily**  
14103024

## Approval

The thesis/project titled “[Thesis/Project Title]” submitted by

Nawshin Sharmily (14103024)

Of Fall, 2019 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and Humanities.

### Examining Committee:

Supervisor:

(Member)

---

Dr. Abu Sayeed Mohammad Noman  
Assistant Professor, Department of English and Humanities  
BRAC UNIVERSITY

Departmental Head:

(Chair)

---

Professor Firdous Azim  
Chairperson, Department of English and Humanities  
BRAC UNIVERSITY

## Abstract

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the National Poet of our country is one of the most versatile genius who worked in multiple literary genres. Although known as a Rebel, the various aspects of his creativity proves that he is more than that- an aesthetician, a freedom fighter, a secular icon and above all a humanitarian poet of all time. In the Post Tagorean Bengali literature, he came up with his own writing style going beyond the conventional phenomenon unlike many of his accomplished contemporary writers. It makes him one of the architects of modernity as well. A large portion of his writings bear the testimony of his creative soul including *Sufism* and *Mysticism*<sup>1</sup> followed by Persian literature. Equally, he mastered Hindu *Puranas*<sup>2</sup> and many of his works carry the essence of Hinduism as well. The purposeful unification of different religions in his works spread the message of Interreligious Harmony which mirrors his universalistic notion. He also wrote against almost every system of oppressions and continued to confront, challenge and combat: capitalism, racism and patriarchy. Many of his comparable contemporaries lack of such spirit which is why my claim in this thesis is that Nazrul had a distinctive style to rebel. Also, the truest humanist essence which remains at his core helps to juxtapose him along with the other writers across the world who share the same spirit. Based on such shared platform in literary works, this thesis further claims that Nazrul is a humanitarian poet who deserve to be recognized universally.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sufism* variously defined as “Islamic mysticism” or the phenomenon of mysticism within Islam.

<sup>2</sup> *Puranas* literally means “ancient, old” and it is a vast genre of Indian literature about a wide range of topics, particularly myths, legends and other traditional lore.

## **Dedication**

To my late grandpas (Dada and Nana) who would be cherishing my success the most.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would never be brave enough to do my thesis on Kazi Nazrul Islam unless my supervisor Abu Sayeed Noman would inspire my idea on the very first day of my thesis proposal. He always inspired us to do something different which has not been done yet. For such inspiration, I am truly grateful to him.

Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate of Indian subcontinent is a well-known figure across the world. His works are appreciated and read in the contemporary world literature. On the other hand, another contemporary writer Kazi Nazrul Islam who also deserves to be recognized universally is often brushed aside by the scholars. From this dissatisfaction, I had a feelings to write about him. Although this is a very little attempt, I have a desire to carry this work on in future too.

Having come so far, I am grateful to everyone since the journey seemed very difficult at the beginning. Firstly, I am thankful to the Almighty for giving me health and patience while doing my research. I cordially would like to thank my parents and beloved husband for their constant support. My friends, classmates including juniors and seniors also deserve my gratitude because they were always there to pull me up whenever I lagged behind.

At this moment, I cannot but recall my other faculties who educated me throughout this entire academic life. My heartfelt gratitude and devotion goes to one by one- Chairperson Professor Firdous Azim, Nawshaba Ahmed, Anika Saba, Rifat Mahbub, Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury, Afsan Chowdhury, Mohammad Mahmudul Haque, Sabreena Ahmed, Seema Amin and all other faculties who wonderfully performed their duty as a teacher, I bow to them for being such great inspirations in my life. Lastly, yet importantly, many thanks goes to Nazrul Institute for providing me all the available research materials. I wish I could utilize them all.

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## Epigraph

*"I come in every age,*

*I come again and again.*

*Now I have come for the great revolution."*

--- Kazi Nazrul Islam, *The Comet*. (Translated by Kabir Chowdhury)

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The emergence of Kazi Nazrul Islam from the post war truculence in the regime of British colonialism reminds us that he is a product of the situation and one of the most original talent. His metamorphosis from a folk-based *leto*<sup>3</sup> poet to an ever non-conformist presents his dual renditions a writer and a fighter who was eventually worn the crown of National Poet of a newly liberalized country after a sanguinary war in 1971 named Bangladesh. He was born in Burdwan District but his association with East Bengal was undisputed. The identification both as a rural poor and a Muslim poet brought him out of the Calcutta *bhadralok*<sup>4</sup> society. With his versatile contribution to Bengali literature including prose, poetry and music, he is often considered as a pioneer of modernity in Post Tagorean Bengali literature. Going beyond the conventional *Rabindrik*<sup>5</sup> phenomenon of literary world, he established his individuality with his works without even proclaiming himself like many of his academically accomplished contemporaries. An aura of Sufism and mysticism is also found in his works with the usage of multiple languages followed by Persian literature and philosophy. In his writings, religious hypocrisy is directly indicated which in a way leads him to conduct secularism. In this thesis, I propose to mirror Nazrul's universalism in order to present him a humanitarian poet of all time who is also distinctive in style.

While doing my research, it leaves an underlying question on his trackless existence in world literature. What are the distinctive styles of Nazrul? What qualities presents his universalism and do they really make him a humanitarian poet? Even if his universalism is mirrored and if he is considered a humanitarian poet of all time, why do the scholars in the contemporary world

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<sup>3</sup> *Leto* is one kind of folk song mostly common in West Bengals.

<sup>4</sup> *Bhadrolok* literary means gentle people. Here it refers to elite class.

<sup>5</sup> *Rabindrik* refers to the style of Rabindranth Tagore

literature of post colonialism brush him aside? – These are also my research questions that will be answered in this thesis through the explanations of some of Nazrul's literary works mainly by poetry. The purpose of this thesis is to provide some significant perspective on perennial themes of the contemporary literary world found in his works too such as revolution, inter-religious harmony and feminism, which will work as the supporting details in my thesis. In doing so, I will correlate with the theories of Post Colonialism, Marxism and Marxist Feminism.

## Chapter 2

### Research Methodology

In order to conduct my thesis I will use mainly two theories Marxism and Post Colonialism along with their few branches. For the primary and secondary resources, I will be taking help from different books, journals, articles and literary criticisms that will provide strong evidence in favor of my thesis statement. Furthermore, I will not try to establish Nazrul within these theories; I would rather demonstrate those of his works, which are supported by these theories.

#### 2.1 Marxist Criticism

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were the joint founders of this school of thought. According to Marxism, there are two main classes of people; bourgeoisie and proletarians. The bourgeoisie controls the capital and means of production and the proletariats provide labor. Almost in every history there has been a struggle between these two classes, widely known as class struggle for which Karl Marx suggests a conflict theory, another branch of Marxism claims that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources.

Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory, an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* provides different definitions of Marxist Criticism. He says Marxism is a *materialist* philosophy which is opposite to *idealist* philosophy. “Based on a common ownership it aims to bring about a classless society. Whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it. Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. The exploitation of one social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism particularly, in nineteenth century

form. The result of this exploitation is *alienation* among the workers. The simplest Marxist model of society sees it as constituted by a *base* which is the material means of production, distribution and exchange and a *superstructure* (which is the ‘cultural’ world of ideas, art, religion, law and so on.” (Barry).

Professor Bertell Ollman in his article “What is Marxism? A Bird’s- Eye View” talks about the origin and various aspects of Marxism. “Concentrating on the social and economic relations in which people earn their livings, Marx saw behind capitalist’s law and order appearance a struggle of two main classes: the capitalists, who own the productive resources, and the workers or proletariat, who must work in order to survive”(Ollman).

Moreover, Marxism provides a notion of class distinction that goes through different layers of hegemony which ultimately leads to struggle between the classes. In the world of capitalism where individual progress is everything, there Marxism calls for equality neck and crop.

### **2.1.1 Class Consciousness and False Consciousness**

Class-consciousness refers to the self-understanding of members of a social class born out of collective struggles. Although this theory is directly not articulated by Karl Marx himself, nevertheless it is closely associated with Marxism. He apprized the concept in his characterization of the working class. According to Marx, the working class first becomes conscious of sharing some common grievances against bourgeoisies hence it becomes a class for itself. However, Marx did not support the idea of class-consciousness as a pure ideality. In order link between subjectivity and objectivity, he used the term “Conscious Human Practices”. Andre Munro in his article “Class Consciousness” talks about Hungarian Marxist philosopher Gyorgy Luckas who stressed the need to distinguish between class-consciousness and the ideas

or feelings actually held by the members of a social class. “An objective analysis of class consciousness, according to Lukacs, must take into account those thoughts and feelings but also those that the members would have held were they able to acquire a true picture of their situation and a society as a whole. Because Marxism considers social classes to have objective identities and interests, its conception of class-consciousness includes the possibility of its antithesis: ‘False Consciousness’.”(Munro).

False Consciousness refers to distorted understanding of one’s class and interest. It concerns the existing tension between historical mission of working class and understanding thereof. The historical mission was to destroy capitalism and realize the socialist revolution. Although an err, False Consciousness is historically determined and not entirely fictitious or baseless. “The problem of false consciousness has encouraged an elitist streak in Marxism” (Munro2). Furthermore, Munro brings forth Lukacs’s suggestion on False Consciousness which is “the bourgeoisie cannot face that crisis, because to do so would require accepting the end of the class structure and relinquishing their class privileges. In that sense, the economic and political ideology of the bourgeoisie is a form of False Consciousness, but it is nonetheless objectively determined by the historical position of that class” (Munro 3). Munro also asserts Lenin’s and other socialist thinkers’ contradictory opinions regarding class-consciousness. “Lenin argued that the working class did not possess instinctual socialist tendencies and therefore needed to be enlightened by a revolutionary vanguard” (Munro 4).

However, with the fall of communist regime, the idea of Class Consciousness countermarched during 20th century but it left few underlying questions regarding the relationship between economic condition and subjectivity, the role of the intelligentsia in bringing about political change and whether there is any collective forms of consciousness and if there is any, what is the political efficacy.

## 2.1.2 Lenin and Literature

Terry Eagleton in his book *Marxism and Literary Criticism* writes that “Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and, meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history” (Eagleton). The book was published in 1976 but many years ago when the book was not even written, Vladimir Lenin the Russian revolutionary, politician and political theorist asserts his concern about literature. He views literary works as a reflection of the social institutions from which they originate. In this regard Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory* says- “Lenin had argued in 1905 that literature must become an instrument of the party. ‘Literature’ he said, ‘must become Party literature... Literature must become part of the organized, methodical, and unified labors of the social-democratic party’” (Barry). R. K. Dasgupta in his article “Literature on Lenin” describes Lenin’s response to different literary works of his time. He describes that while watching *The Cricket on the Heath* at the Moscow Art Theatre he walked out in the middle of the first act because Dickens’ middle class sentiment was getting into his nerves. Similarly, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* are disliked by Lenin because of the fact of bourgeoisie’s matter. On the other hand, he enjoyed the play *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky. According to Dasgupta, “Actually Lenin was too much engrossed in revolutionary activity to develop that sophisticated taste for literature and art which is essential for building up a theory of aesthetics and for producing criticism of lasting importance. There is no evidence of his visit to the National Art Gallery when he was in England or of a visit to the Louvre when he was in France. He rejected modern poetry as decadent writing which had 'some sound all right, but there is very little sense in it’ (Dasgupta).

Many contemporary authors of Lenin's time played vital roles in growing his attitudes towards literature. He understood that literature is important in society, it creates insights to its readers. Literature provides a window into the past, allowing readers to see how their ancestors and others dealt with day-to-day life. Readers can see where their own people came from, and how the country they live in became what it is today. Literature can also let its readers look back at the mistakes made by their predecessors, and hopefully avoid those same mistakes. Regarding this aspect, Barry brings forth examples of Marcel Proust and James Joyce who were stigmatized as exemplars of 'bourgeois decadence'. At the 1934 Congress, Joyce's *Ulysses* was denounced as 'a heap of dung crawling with worms' and straight realism was imposed in the name of 'Socialist Realism'. "In George Steiner's words, these conditions made literature impossible above the level of, say, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Steiner calls the two main streams of Marxist criticism the 'Engelsian' kind, which stresses the necessary freedom of art from direct political determinism, and the 'Leninist', which insists on the need for art to be explicitly committed to the political cause of the left" (Barry3). In 1934 Congress, 'Leninist' views were crystallized hence, what was called 'Vulgar Marxism' beforehand in 1930s, brought about a change between the relationship of literature and economics. It drew a border line for all the writers which trapped them within the intellectual limits of their social - class position. In this regard Barry exemplifies Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* as a rigid kind of Marxist criticism. However, the entire Leninist idea has been presented to show the stand of literature for its use in political discourse.

### **2.1.3 Marxist Feminism**

Despite having similar strategies Marxist Feminism and feminism strives to reach slightly different goals, often not clearly demarcated though. Feminism, rather liberal feminism, often

bypasses the evils that women are subjugated to in a capitalist society and direct their criticism of false social beliefs and actions, both direct and indirect, that these beliefs often prompt.

Marx did not talk about women's oppression directly but his works have provided powerful tools to understand the inequality faced by women. Marx himself was influenced by Friedrich Engels's book *The Origin of Family, Property and the State* where he examined the formation of state and the simultaneous shifts in the family. The origin of private property undermined an egalitarian tribal order, creating families as economic units, inequality of property ownership, and finally, exploitative class societies. He observed that women's social position declined as private property gained strength and communistic trend can provide women a stronger position whereas public property deteriorated it.

In Engel's view, the historic defeat of the female sex and the emergences of patriarchy led to a devaluing of female tasks, roles and responsibilities, and a consequent valorization of male roles and functions. Marxist analysis had no place for housewives in the analysis of capitalism. It is Marxist feminism that put housewives into the structure of capitalism. Capitalism talked about only production, working class, resources and the owner of the properties but the one who does care giving function left aside. Inequalities created within different institutions including the family led to oppression of women. Women were oppressed not just as individuals but through systems of capitalism and private property. Women's rights will be met through a complete restructuring of the current capitalist system wherein most of women's labor goes unrecognized. Marxist feminism says housewives are vital to capitalism. Unpaid work in the home maintains bosses and workers and reproduces the next generation of bosses and workers. Taking care of elder and children are not counted as work and left aside in GDP. Women's subordination is a function of class oppression because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling class, divides men against women, privileges working class men

relatively within the capitalist system in order to secure their support; and legitimates the capitalist class's refusal to pay for the domestic labor assigned, unpaid, to women.

The other book *Gender and Sexuality: Sociological Approaches* by Rahman and Jackson focused on women's subordination as a result of capitalism. In their point of view, women are disadvantaged in the labor market as they are paid less, have fewer options of work, employed less continuously than men. In addition to that apart from paid employment they are also engaged in unpaid domestic work at home. They are saying Women's labor as 'reserve labor.' During the world wars, women's were employed and when this changed they went back to domestic work. Housework services the existing labor force and rears future workers and hence is necessary for capitalism.

A popular YouTube channel "Vidya-mitra" uploaded an educational video based on a paper related to gender and social work. The presenter reviews different groups of Marxist Feminist theorist for example; V. Geetha, Christan Delphy, Juliet Mitchel and many more who shared their different opinions on this particular area. She says that the Marxist feminists located women's subordination in relations of reproduction rather than production. This process of exchange became the reason for women's subordination. Men's relationship with each other was through women, demanding women as brides and offering their labor in return. It led to objectification of women who were reduced to their reproductive worth. According to V. Geetha, "children were considered the property of men therefore childbirth became another alienating experience. Patriarchy was an old system which existed before private property and monogamy. Exchange of women, abduction and rape were through which female sexuality was sought to be controlled. This control was gradually institutionalized at several levels: work, culture, custom, religion and education."

Christine Delphy in this regard says that “Relation with the household is patriarchal and men systematically exploit and benefit from women’s labor within a domestic mode of production.” She Assimilated women’s sexuality to the category of exploited labor. The unpaid domestic labor of women may have benefited capitalism but Delphy argued it was labor that was more immediately exploited by men rather than by the capitalist class. Marriage with a man from the capitalist class can raise a woman’s standard of living but does not make her a member of that class. She is not the owner of means of production. “Her position is not dependent on class relationship but on her serf relations of production with her husband.” “Women’s work within the household becomes limitless with no fixed job description, no fixed amount of work and no return for the work done. Even employed women who earn enough to meet their own maintenances costs are still expected to do housework. In this case, she is clearly working for nothing.” (Delphy and Leonard)

Juliet Mitchell on the other hand argued that “neither of them is solely responsible for exploitation and subordination of women. The social and economic structure that comprises of four levels perpetuates male dominance and ensures female submission. These four levels are- Production, reproduction, socialization and sexuality. Control at the level of production was linked to nature of work and not just sexual division of labor. Under capitalism women worked in jobs which were less paid, less technological expertise and were largely in service. For example, secretaries, nurses and so on. This cycle was maintained by the gender educational system wherein most course for women quip them for service functions only for example beauty training, tailoring and other vocational works which are not very highly paid. All these are of long working hours with low paid. Therefore, the civil society organization and the then feminist movement thought for alternative programs including entrepreneurial training, driving so that women can run a small business or work elsewhere. Mitchell also talked about child rearing and child bearing in which family was the production site. Socialization was one of the

main functions of the family, was the responsibility of the woman. Sexuality has been subsumed under reproduction and women have very little control over their sexuality. For her, just entry of women into work force would not suffice; women had to be freed from forced child bearing, child rearing and sexually dissatisfied relationships.

However, critiques of Marxist Feminism ignored the displays of agency of the individual. Women are not just passive receivers of what the society provides for them they also actively engage with systems. There was an overemphasis on class relations in the economic sphere and ignoring female experiences outside the labor market. Classical feminist discourses, because of their inherent western ideologies, failed to address the issues concerning women of color and this is why racial and geo-political circumstances had been weighed less important compared to the issues that involved white, European more. Moreover, this wing of feminism was limited in its scope and naïve in its understanding of problems faced by women who differed from them in numerous ways.

## **2.2 Post Colonialism**

Post Colonialism arose as a distinct school of thought in the West after the emergence of Post Structuralism, particularly influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Many Scholars of Indian and African origin voiced their concern about the misrepresentation of Asian and African people in European discourses. They also outlined some plans in challenging and the changing these misinterpretations through their critical and creative works. Together, all these works are now readily addressed as Postcolonial literature and theories. Being theoretical approach "Post colonialism is of various disciplines analyzing, explaining, and responding to the cultural legacy of the lasting impact of imperialism in former colonized spaces of the world. The term 'post-colonial' is resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of the many

different cultural experiences it implicates, and as the extracts in this Reader demonstrate, it addresses all aspects of colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1). The ambiguity and complexity are in the sense that even after being independent from the former colonizers; the colonized people become unable to decolonize their mind. Also, the development of internal divisions, emergences of new power structure, disparities of class and economic status, and vice versa still hold the colonial reflection which proving that post-colonialism is a constant process of resistance and reconstruction.

Further, post-colonial theory and literary texts discuss about various kinds of experiences such as migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place etc. and also responses to the influential imperial discourses of the West such as Philosophy, history and linguistics. By taking the Western discourses into consideration, the post-colonial writers represent and criticize the continuing process of imperial suppression and exchanges in different colonized spaces. Thus, the post-colonial literatures describe and address the horror of imperialism, human problems and consequences due to the internal and external control and exploitation of the colonized people. Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory, an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* says that “Postcolonial critics develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, popularity and perceived ‘Otherness’ are seen as sources of energy and potential change.”(Barry 201)

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

#### 3.1 Inter-religious Harmony

Nazrul used a singular identity but worked as a plural conscious being in regard of culture and religion. He freed himself from a human's confines of dogmatic religions and became a free man of secular icon. Through his mighty pen Nazrul spreads the words of inter-religious harmony even after coming of a Muslim family. He accepts the lexical meaning of every religion which says to believe and worship God but he is unwilling to discriminate human being according to those religions. Therefore, inter religious harmony becomes an important perennial theme in his writing.

Dr. Soumitra Sekhar in his book *Nazrul: Antadharmiya Shampriti Ebang Shilpir Bodh* brings forth different religious views and connects them with Nazrul's literary works in order to describe him as a secular icon. Starting with Stephen Hawking's viewpoint of death "A belief that heaven or an afterlife awaits us is a fairy story for people who afraid of death" he gives few ardent examples from popular religions in Indian subcontinent to clarify the fact that every religion talk about peace and harmony. He presents Shekh Fazlal Karim's poem

“কোথায় স্বর্গ? কোথায় নরক? কে বলে তা বহুদূর  
 মানুষেরি মাঝে স্বর্গ নরক- মানুষেতেই সুরাসুর।  
 রিপূর তাড়ণে যখনি মোদের বিবেক পায়গো লয়,  
 আত্মগ্লানির নরক অনলে তখনি পুড়িতে হয়।  
 প্রীতি- প্রেমের পূণ্য বাঁধনে যবে মিলি পরস্পরে  
 স্বর্গ আসিয়া দাঁড়ায় তখন আমাদেরি কুঁড়েঘরে।” (“স্বর্গ ও নরক”)

How far is hell from heaven? Who says they are far apart?  
They live together amongst the people like the God and Devil do.

When the seven deadly sins bite our soul  
We must be remorseful as if we are in hell!

When love ties us together  
Heaven comes down to our little hut. (“Heaven and Hell”)

[Translated by me]

The purpose of worldly life is well described in both Hawking’s speech and Fazlal Karim’s poem in different words. Both of them convey similar message that human being should concentrate their actions and refine them in order to bring peace and harmony to humankind. Sekhar also juxtaposes the messages of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism to create an aura of inter-religious harmony.

First of all, Ananta Badu Chandidas says – “শুনহ মানুষ ভাই, সবার ওপরে মানুষ সত্য তাহার ওপরে নাই” which means “Listen to me you guys, nothing is above human being” (Translated by me). In Islam, the Quran says – “Lakum Deenukum valiya deen” which means “For you is your religion and for me is my religion.” The Christian says to hate the sin not the sinner. Buddhism says- “সবের সত্তা সুখীতা ভবন্তু” which literary means “May all the lives of the world remain in peace.” In Hindu religion there is a verse on peace in Vedas-

“সর্বে ভবন্তু সুখিন, সর্বে সন্তু নিরাময়া, সর্বে ভদ্রানি পশ্যন্তু,  
মাকশ্চিদ দুঃখ মাপ্নুয়াত,  
ওম শান্তি শান্তি শান্তি।” (বৃহদারণ্যক উপনিষদ১/৪/১৪)

May everyone be happy and healthy  
May the humankind gain celestial peace  
May not anyone get into troubles for a moment

May God's blessing be upon you all. (Brihadaranyak Upanishad 1/4/14)

[Translated by me]

However, Sekhar highlights on Nazrul's personal life and literary works and depicts Nazrul as an icon of secularism. In his first book of poems *Agnibina* he unified the magnificence of both Islam and Hindu, two major religions of Indian subcontinent. In this anthology he includes many poems that apotheosize Islam and its culture. "Moharram," "Qurbani," "Kheya Parer Toroni," "Shat-el-Arab" are few examples of them. In the same collection, he also includes poems that glorify Hindu Goddess with equal respect. On this perspective, Sekhar mentions that in the poem "Agamoni" Nazrul's utterance of 'Vande Mataram' sounds louder and more passionate than Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's.

The time when the majority of young Muslim boys showed eagerness on Pan-Islamism, Nazrul wrote Kamal Pasha on the basis of the-then Turkish president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was ideologically a secularist and nationalist. He writes-

“আজ স্বাধীন এদেশ। আজাদ মোরা বেহেশত না চাই।  
আর বেহেশতও না চাই।  
ঐ ক্ষেপেছে পাগলী মায়ের দামাল ছেলে কামাল ভাই,  
অসুর-পুরে শোর উঠেছে জোরসে সামাল সামাল তাই।”

“We no more want paradise even, now that the land is free.

Heaven we don't want, we're free.

Brother Kamal, the desperate son of a frenzied mother

Has gone furious: so the devils's dens are full of hue and cry.”

[Translated by Mohammad Nurul Huda]

This poem certainly presents Nazrul's priority towards motherland and its people above heaven. It might raise a question of him being nationalist but Nazrul certainly was not a nationalist like many of his contemporaries. It will be discussed in other sections. Nazrul's most striking and extremely agitating poem "বিদ্রোহী" (The Rebel) was first published in *The Bijli*. "বিদ্রোহী" took Nazrul in a different dimension and reveals his true self as a preacher of inter religious harmony. He juxtaposes the context of different religions and announces himself a rebel. If one scrutinizes this poem through the lense of religion, Nazrul can be identified as a non-believer but he is not. The poem is a celebration of the existing poetic persona in it who eventually becomes the reflection of the poet himself. In many places, he showed the audacity to go beyond God. He says-

ভুলোকে দুলোকে গোলক ভেদিয়া  
 খোদার আসন 'আরশ' ছেদিয়া  
 উঠিয়াছি চির-বিস্ময় আমি বিশ্ব-বিধাত্রীর

Cutting a path through Earth and Heaven and celestial spheres

Across the Great Throne of Eternal God,

Thou dost stand a wonder of the whole creation!

On thy forehead doth blaze the fiery

Lord like a radiant royal symbol of victory!

[Translated by Abdul Hakim]

A synchronization of various religion including Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian is open- and-shut in the poem through the rendition of religious metamorphosis. In the same

verse he declares himself both a Bedouin<sup>6</sup> and a Chenghiz<sup>7</sup> As a whole, his collaborative celebration of oneself reflects his equal concern for human being above religion. This is how the conscious use of various examples regardless caste and religion definitely proves him as a secular icon.

Sufism and mysticism remain at Nazrul's core. He was highly inspired by Persian literature and philosophy He lauded to philanthropy and learns about Persian poets Omar Khayyam, Rumi, and Hafez by heart. They lauded the joys of love and wine but also targeted religious hypocrisy. Nazrul was immensely inspired by their life and it reflects in his every literary work including songs. For a short span of time, he worked in the radio and wrote both 'Islamic Ghazals<sup>8</sup>' and 'Shyama Sangeet<sup>9</sup>' which are full of devotion to prophet and God. In Islamic Ghazals, he presents himself completely as a Muslim. On the other hand, in the chant Shyama Sangeet, *Bhajan* or *Kirtan*<sup>10</sup> he worships God and Goddesses perfectly like a Hindu or Vaishnva. In his song he says-

'মোরা এক বৃন্তে দুটি কুসুম হিন্দু-মুসলমান।

মুসলিম তার নয়ন-মণি, হিন্দু তাহার প্রাণ।

.....

এক সে দেশেতে মাটিতে পাই

কেউ গোরে কেউ শ্মশানে ঠাই,

মোরা এক ভাষাতে মাকে ডাকি, এক সুরে গাই গান।।

(১৮নং গানঃসুর-সাকী)

<sup>6</sup> *Bedouin* or *Bedu* are a grouping of nomadic Arab people.

<sup>7</sup> *Chenghiz* (Genghis Khan) was the founder and first Great Khan of the Mongol Empire.

<sup>8</sup> The *Ghazals* is a form of amatory poem or ode.

<sup>9</sup> *Shyama Sangeet* is a genre of Bengali devotional songs dedicated to the Hindu goddess Shyama or Kali which is a form of supreme universal mother goddess Durga or Pravati.

<sup>10</sup> *Bhajan* or *Kirtan* refers to devotional song with religious theme or spiritual ideas mostly common in Hindu religion.

We are two flowers in one petiole

The heart belongs to Muslim where the Hindu gets the soul

.....

On the land of dear motherland

Our bodies dissolve in demise

Our mothers have one name and we sing alike.

(Song number 18. Tune- Saki)

[Translated by me]

This is how he bravely unified two religion and made the path to bring religious harmony. His books were banned and he was captivated as a traitor during British rule. He understood that religious conflict within mother country is a hinder to the path of freedom. That is why he presented secularism with his aesthetics remaining in the boundaries of political phenomenon. He purposefully presented two religious viewpoints in his writings in order to unite the Hindu and Muslim folks. Therefore, he calls for equality in his poem “সাম্য” (Equality). Even in his personal life he did not step back to unify religions. His marriage to Asha Lata Sengupta, a daughter of Brahmin wedlock family is an ardent proof of this unification. He did not ask Asha Lata to convert to Islam. Like many other contemporary poets, he also gave a loving name to his beloved, which is Pramila Debi. Nazrul named their children adjusting Bangla and Arabic words. His first son was named Krishna Mohammad who died in his childhood. The second son was named Arindam Khaled. This mixture of Bangla and Arabic words is merely not about language, it is also an expression of having a clear cognition about religious harmony.

### 3.2 Kazi Nazrul Islam and Walt Whitman

Bengali literature is affluent with many poets of versatile brilliance. Along with the gifted minds there might be always something or someone which or whom they follow to find their own path. For instance, Michael Madhusudan Dutta the pioneer of modern Bengali literature was hugely inspired by western literature but it never complains that the author was abortive to come up with his individuality. The literati say that Modhusudan might take the storyline from Valmiki's *The Ramayana* but he borrowed style, content, characterization, poetic thoughts, philosophy of life, use of diction and imagery from Homer's *Iliad* to compose the epic *MeghnadBadh Kavya* (1861). The epic would not gain ground unless he would have applied his own thoughts and style along with that thoroughly learned knowledge from Homer. Likewise, prominent writer of West Bengal Protap Narayan Biswas in his book *রবীন্দ্রনাথ ও বিশ্বসাহিত্য (Rabindranath and World Literature)* asserts few similarities between Edger Elen Poe's detective stories and Tagore's few short stories. More specifically, he compared Tagore's *Kshudhita Pashan* to Poe's *Under the Ragged Mountains*. Then again he compared George Eliot's *Felix Holt the Radical* to *Gora*'s storyline and characters. Moreover, he explained that *Yogayog*, *Raktakarabi* and *The Post Office* are influenced by Western literature. What Protap Narayan explains in his book might be true but that does not influence or lessen the readers' literary taste for Tagore. Over and above, this is the caliber of the legends that they safeguard their individuality. About Walt Whitman and Nazrul, it is very important to understand the differences between stemming from and plagiarism. These two distinguished terms would describe that like many other poets of the world Nazrul also stemmed from Whitman's *Song of Myself*, "Pioneer", *Leaves of Grass* but he can hardly be accused for plagiarism.

Nazrul and Whitman are often juxtaposed to display their equivalent visions of life. Nazrul used to call Whitman a simple man with good soul. Coincidentally they have many things in common in their personal lives. These similarities are unnecessary but remarkable indeed. First of all, both of them went through a hard life, started working due to the financial crisis in the family. Whitman left formal schooling to go to work and joined as a lawyer's clerk whereas the story of Nazrul's being a *Moulobi*<sup>11</sup>, *Mazar's*<sup>12</sup> attendant and working in a bakery as a roti maker is quite known to all. Secondly, at Whitman's time although America was independent but racism was at its core. The Black slaves were obnoxiously oppressed by White Americans and they got no penalty. This conflict was legalized and silence as if it was a cold war. Whitman worked for the Black and the peasants, also to establish democracy and equality. On the other hand, Nazrul's mighty pen always wrote against oppression and for equality. Thirdly, Whitman witnessed the civil war of 1861 and joined in 1863. Likewise, Nazrul reached in Karachi in order to join the First World War. Although he did not experience the war in real but inside his minds he must have engaged himself into battles otherwise "Kamal Pasha" or "বরণ-ভেরী" ("The War-drum") would not turn out so lively. Both of them suffered from inmedicable disease for a long time at their last age. Nazrul lost his voice and Whitman became paralyzed. Most surprisingly, they share the same birth month- May and Nazrul's first published book of poems *Agnibina* is consisted of 12 poems of which "Vidrohi" is the longest one. On the other hand, Whitman's first published book *Leaves of Grass* is consists of 12 poems in its first edition where "Song of Myself" is the longest one.

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<sup>11</sup> *Moulobi* or Mawlawi is an Islamic religious title given to Muslim religious scholars.

<sup>12</sup> *Mazar* is an Arabic word synonymous to dargah. It literally means a place for visit and usually the tomb of a saint and Dervish.

Whether Nazrul read Whitman or not is an important question to ask because “Vidrohi” and “Song of Myself” to some extent share a common ground like Whitman and Nazrul do. The similarities are of many kinds including choosing diction, setting and cognition. In “Walt Whitman’s selective poems”, Syed Ali Ahsan discussed that “Vidrohi” and “Song of Myself” can be read together because “Vidrohi” gives the resonance of “Song of Myself.” He also asserts that Whitman’s influence in Nazrul is ardent and visible enough to figure out.

Whenever he wrote about being rebel or revolution and youth he followed Whitman without any hesitation. Another critic of Bengali literature Abdul Mannan in his essay “Vidrohi: An answer to the condemnation” completely disagrees with Syed Ali Ahsan. He wrote against all the critics of “Vidrohi” Kazi Abdul Wadud, Golam Mostofa and Ahmed Sharif. However, in Personal life Nazrul hardly answered to any of his critics in spite of tolerating unbearable criticism but in his poem “My Apology” shared grief.

Whitman becomes popular during 1870, his fame spread worldwide and almost everyone came to know about him or read him by dint of newspaper. At that time, Nazrul was a young fellow and passionate to learn whatever attracts him. In many of his works, he mentions Whitman. When the poem “Agra-Patheek” was published in *Saogat* in 1927, he mentions ‘On the resonance of Whitman’ as recognition on footnotes. A certain amount of similarities between these two poems met the curiosity that Nazrul read Whitman. In his essay “Today’s World Literature”, he mentions many famous writers including Whitman. Therefore, it is assured that Nazrul read Whitman and learned him by heart. “Agra-Patheek” was the product of reading “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” It is mentionable that “Song of Myself” is not an autogenous by itself too. In regard to “Vidrohi” and “Song of Myself”, they might look similar to each other but they are different in terms of consciousness. The difference between

their philosophical viewpoints of life might be one reason behind this dissimilarity. There are 1346 lines and 5 sections in “Song of Myself” whereas “Vidrohi” has 139 lines. In addition, they are contextually different but both of them celebrate selfhood. Whitman starts the poem with an invitation to himself-

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume, you shall assume,  
For Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  
I loaf and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of  
Summer grass.”

This visible singularity in this poem changed at times and sometimes became plural but “Vidrohi” completely shows the audacity to celebrate the poetic persona, which is the ultimate reflection of Nazrul himself. For many times, he used first person singular number in the poem. He pronounces ‘I’ for 144 times, which prioritizes the celebration of selfhood out and out. In this perspective Whitman feels hostile to fix this ‘I’. Being an American it was not an easy path to write for democracy and equality going against the-then most crucial phenomenon racism. Perhaps that is why Whitman felt an identity crisis and failed to remain in ‘I.’ On the other hand, Nazrul successfully uttered ‘I’ without any hesitation. He says-

“ভুলোকে দুলোকে গোলক ভেদিয়া  
খোদার আসন 'আরশ' ছেদিয়া  
উঠিয়াছি চির-বিস্ময় আমি বিশ্ব-বিধাত্রীর”

Cutting a path through Earth and Heaven and celestial spheres

Across the Great Throne of Eternal God,  
Thou dost stand a wonder of the whole creation!  
On thy forehead doth blaze the fiery  
Lord like a radiant royal symbol of victory!

[Translated by Abdul Hakim]

The audacity Nazrul showed to cross over God's Throne is absent in Whitman. Moreover, his singularity is surrendered to God. From contextual reference-

“And I know that the hand of God is the  
Promises of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own.”

In this perspective, Nazrul does not follow Whitman's mysticism. An acute observation on “Vidrohi” confirms that Indian mythology and *Puranas* were well versed by Nazrul. Different characters from *Purana* are depicted in this poem-

“I'm Parashuram's merciless axe.  
I'll rid the world of all the war *mongers*  
And bring peace.”

[Translated by Sajed Kamal]

Here, the 'I' does not remain in the timeline of present rather it goes back to the past and think about the future. The 'I' becomes the center of everything.

There are few similarities as well. Both Whitman and Nazrul talk about physical touch and presents sexuality without obnoxious approach. Nazrul mentions –

“I’m the trembling passion of the first kiss  
The fleeting glance of the secret lover.”

[Translated by Sajed Kamal]

Meanwhile Whitman says-

“My voice is the wife’s voice,  
The screech by the rail of the stairs,  
They fetch my man’s body up dripping and drowne’d.”

In this regard, Syed Ali Ahsan was right. He juxtaposes Whitman’s “I am satisfied, I see, I dance, laugh, sing” and Nazrul’s “I’m the dance-loving rhythm; I dance to my own beats. I’m the delight of a life of freedom.” [Translated by Sajed Kamal]

Furthermore, “I Pass death with the dying and birth with the new-washed babe’ by Whitman and Nazrul’s “I’m creation, I’m destruction, I’m habitation, I’m the cremation ground.”[Translated by Sajed Kamal] reveals the truth that “Vidrohi” is not the translation of “Song of Myself” rather a conscious adoption of poetic elements are present there.

## Chapter 4

### Nazrul and His Contemporaries

#### 4.1 Nazrul and Rabindranath

“The nonpareil relationship between Nazrul and Tagore is often misstated” said by Professor Soumitra Sekhar on a recently observed Nazrul conference in Narayanganj. This former director of Nazrul Research Institution assessed that “while comparing Nazrul with Tagore, many misinterpret the fact that Nazrul was not a Nobel Laureate like Tagore. In fact, both Rabindranath and Nazrul are two integral wholes of Benglai literature with their distinctive styles, themes and perigees. Without the oeuvre of these two legendary poets, Bengali literature would not be such overflowing and non-uniform. As Sekhar says, “Nazrul should not be misrepresented with parallel comparison to Tagore. They are distinguished in their own gyre.”

From Nazrul’s memoir, it is discovered that Nazrul and Tagore shared a well-disposed relationship with each other from distance. In many ways, Tagore emblazoned Nazrul, wrote poems about him and dedicated one of his revue, *Bashanta* to him. On the other hand, Nazrul also dedicated one of his books of poems *Sanchita* to Tagore and wrote few poems and songs on Tagore. In this regard, Abu Mohammad Habibullah in his essay “The Personality and Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam” remarks that “For two decades Nazrul Islam almost equaled Tagore as a literary power although he retained and afterwards, wrote of his deep reverence for the Guru Dev, who also showed his affection for the young genius and blessed his virile attacks on the drowsiness of his people” (Habibullah 9).

It is almost impossible to bring Nazrul's oeuvre in light without referring to Rabindranath Tagore. Although widely known as post Tagorian poet, Nazrul started blooming as a poet in Tagore's lifetime. Nevertheless, the socio political situation of that time as not fair-weathered for him. Referring to Habibullah's essay again- "Like a meteor he (Nazrul) burst in on the literary firmament of Bengal, when Tagore was the undisputed Kabi Guru or the master Poet and immediately struck a note that set the tune of poetry" (Habibullah 9). Another essay "Testament of Nazrul" by Gopal Halder begins with a comparative statement which is- "In contemporary Bengali life and literature, Nazrul is ranked by many as our second poet in 'Rabindra Yuga' (Tagore Period) at least in its later phase" (Halder24). Further he compares Nazrul with other contemporaries and says that- "Among the few other Bangali poets of recent times who, in spite of their debt to Tagore, succeeded in making a mark are Satyendranath Dutta, Jatindranath Sengupta and Mohitlal Majumdar. However, unlike them or any other poet of this phase Nazrul never wanted to achieve originality by trying to escape Tagorean influences at any cost and by employing formalistic beginning is a 'Non-Tagorean' mainly because he is essentially different in his thought and manner, which, however, has not always been an advantage" (Halder24).

As revealed by the memoirs of Nazrul, their amicable relationship is proven by the letters they sent to each other which were also published subsequently. Critics also take these letters seriously in order to scrutinize the purport of each letter. Quazi Motahar Hossain in his essay "Nazrul Islam, the Singer and Writer of Songs" shares his experiences while meeting Nazrul in person. In chapter six of the essay named 'Tagore and Nazrul' he informs that "Between Tagore and Nazrul the relationship was one of teacher and disciple, rather than one of rivalry, not only in region of poetry and literature but also in the region of composition and singing"(Hossain 53). On the occasion of publication of the *Dhumketu* (the Comet) Tagore's affection and blessing are vividly seen in the greetings-

“Come on, come on O comet! Build a bridge of fire over utter darkness.

On top of the fort of calamities unfurl your flag of victory

When all is black night, what harm is there in putting up a danger signal?

Awake by drum-beats those that are only half-awake.” (Hossain54).

Hossain also comments on the number of songs composed by Nazrul and Tagore. According to him, Tagore wrote 3000 songs while Nazrul’s number of songs increased in 4000 including gramophone records. In this regard he says- “Not all the songs mostly of either are of first quality. Tagore’s songs were written voluntarily for the sake of earning a livelihood and yet we cannot say that he did not put his whole heart into it” (Hussain55).

There are innumerable evidences of Tagore-Nazrul’s open-hearted relationship. Hossain says that “Nazrul was conscious of his indebtedness to the great Tagore” (Hussain56). Tagore also bestowed his affection to this genius junior in numerous ways. One remarkable incident was that of Tagore’s telegram to Nazrul advising him to give up hunger strike in the Hoogly Jail. He clearly showed his deep anxiety about this rising star in the region of poetry and literature. Then again Rafiqul Islam in his Essay “Tagore and Nazrul” published in *Crossing: ULAB Journal of English Studies* asserts that Nishikanta Roy Chowdhury, brother of the then Private Secretary to Rabindranath, reminisces the meeting between Nazrul and Tagore in Shanti Niketon in his essay “Nazrul in the Memory of My Youth”.

Moreover, the shared tribute by Nazrul and Tagore to each other conveys the message of their ungrudging mentation, which also presents the characteristics of true legends. The misrepresentation mentioned earlier proves vague thereafter.

## 4.2. Nazrul and Other Relatable Contemporaries

The literary career of Nazrul spans a period of roughly 23 years from 1919 to 1942, which is amidst of two World Wars. During that period many other poets and authors were rising alongside Nazrul but not all of them sustained as Nazrul did. Some of them are remembered with dignity but many of them sank into oblivion. In the world of Bangali literature, Tagore emerged at his adolescence when Nazrul had not stepped into his literary career yet. Although Nazrul appeared at a very early age, Tagore was already established by then and he published many of his books including *Geetanjali* for which he won the Nobel Prize. Besides, Satyendranath Dutta published all of his books of poetry before Nazrul started his literary career. Many books by both Tagore and Dutta had been published before Nazrul's career was started. It points to the fact that Bengali poems were already established by its form and mode before Nazrul's appearance. Before the First World War was started, few poets such as Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay (1877-1955), Jatindramohan Bagchi (1877-1948), Kumud Ranjan Mullick (1883), Kalidas Roy (1889) and many more came to the light but all of their works were highly influenced by Tagore's style. Consciously or unconsciously they carried away Tagore's essence of writing hence that era was called the era of Tagore's echo. On the other hand, Promatha Chaudhuri (1868-1946), Dwijendralal Roy (1860-1913), Satyendranath Dutta (1882-1922), Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876- 1938), Jatindranath Sengupta (1880-1954), Mohitlal Majumdar (1888-1952), Jasimuddin (1903-1976), Jibananda Das (1899-1954) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) and some other poets and authors successfully went beyond the most common 'Rabindrik' style and elicited their uniqueness distinctively. However, among all of the remarkable poets and authors Kazi Nazrul Islam was the most criticized poet of his time because of bringing up different argumentative opinions in his poems as well as creating his own style of writing. Being a secular icon and a philanthropist, Nazrul brushed all

the comments aside and day by day proved him a fire band who represented his class with his writings, which are quite atypical.

*Nazrul O Ter Boiripaksha* (Nazrul and His Antagonists) by Anwarul Hoque provides many valuable information regarding Nazrul's contemporaries who happened to stand against Nazrul in many ways. In his book, it is found that a weekly published newspaper named *Shanibarar Chithi* (26<sup>th</sup> July, 1924) which literary means 'The Letter of Saturday' was used against Nazrul by mainly two of his contemporaries Sajjanikanta Das and Mohitlal Majumdar with a view to blaspheming him by making parody of some of his poems which were flourished and felicitated by many meritorious of Nazrul's time.<sup>13</sup> The reason behind such aggression was mainly personal. Many could not accept Nazrul's popularity because neither had he received any institutional degree nor he belonged to any upper class like Tagor or Pramatha Choudhuri. Therefore, he was called the poet who has knack of illiteracy by his antagonists (Hoque 50).

A lifelong critic of Nazrul was Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri, an Indian English-language writer who continuously wrote against him. In the pseudonym Shri Balahak Nandi he criticized "Vidrohi" saying that it is an outcome of Nazrul's childishness. In his last book *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* Written in 1987. He did not change his opinion regarding Nazrul. "While Tagore saying 'Our literature claims you' in his letter to Nazrul, Nirad Chandra showed his rigidity towards him. Regarding all these aspects Nazrul said time is the best critic" (Hoque 50). Another picked critic of Nazrul's time was Mohitlal Majumdar. He denied 'poetic justice' a literary device coined by Thomas Rhymer while criticizing Nazrul's poem. In this regard Hoque mentions Gopal Haldar, another critic of Bengali literature who said that it was

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<sup>13</sup> "Vidrohi" (The Rebel), "Anamika" (Nameless), "Kuli-Mazur" (Coolies and Labourers), "Barangana" (Prostitute), "KandariHushiyar" (Beware My Captain) and few more poems and songs were made parody out of jealousy.

unfortunate of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee that he was not liberal enough to accept the fact of 'poetic justice.' Hoque further says that similarly, "neither Mohitlal Majumdar was enough open minded when he criticized the poem of Nazrul. Therefore, he purposefully ignored 'poetic justice' as a literary device. Otherwise, he would not accuse Nazrul as a naked poet only because of using different words from different languages like Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Bangla and would not address him as a presenter of obnoxious sexuality" (Hoque 46). On the contrary, initially he claimed that Nazrul's "Vidrohi" reflects his "Ami" (Myself) which he read out to Nazrul in 1920 but he failed to provide any evidence to support his claim. However, the most attacked poem of Nazrul was "Vidrohi" for which he is now known as the rebel poet. Moreover, what Nazrul said eventually has come true which is 'time is the best critic. Here, once again Nazrul proves himself a visionary with prudence.

Apart from *Shanibarar Chithi*, there are few other newspapers and journals where Nazrul was brutally criticised for showing secularism in his writings. *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Jibon o Srijon* (Life and creations) by Rafiqul Islam discusses about Nazrul's life including his contemporaries. In chapter 14, "Mohammadi Bonam Saogat" (Mohammadi vs Saogat), he mentions that Munshi Mohammad Reyajuddin wrote about Nazrul in a monthly published newspaper named *Islam-Darshan* (Philosophy of Islam). There he exclaims the doubt about Nazrulsaying 'Is he a human or Satan!' Another monthly-published journal *Mohammadi* was used to take a stand against Nazrul. It claimed that Nazrul is a Kaffir<sup>14</sup>) (Haque 64). Many Muslim writers who were envious of Nazrul's reputation and popularity all on a sudden started supporting *Mohammadi*. Among them, poet Gulam Mustafa (1897-1964) is specifically mentionable (Islam 193). Syed Sajjad Hussain in his essay "Nazrul Islam: An Assessment" juxtaposes Gulam Mustafa and Nazrul. In a comparative study, he asserts that "Gulam Mustafa

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<sup>14</sup> *Kaffir* or Kafir may refer to racial and religious Arabic term alluding to a person who rejects or disbelieves in Allah, God.

used to consider himself his rival and often criticized his challenges to orthodoxy. Being a deeply religious person he alike in his verse and prose tried to uphold the values of Islam. His biography of the prophet is justly celebrated yet it is impossible to recall a single poem by Mustafa which either artistically or emotionally is any approximation to the two poems of Nazrul Islam wrote on the birth and death date of the prophet" (Hussain71, 72). For further comparison, Hussain also talks about Nazrulz's "Shat-il Arab" and other poems that glorify Muslim history thematically. Referring to Gulam Mustafa, he asserts, "it is impossible to imagine anything more fervid which could have come from the pen of an orthodox Muslim" (Hussain 72).

Nazrul's works are of versatile characters whereas most of his contemporary writers' work fails to provide such variousness like his. Therefore, they are hardly comparable in most cases.

It is already discussed that Nazrul freed himself from Tagore's style although he showed gratitude towards *Kaviguru*<sup>15</sup> in many ways. Likewise, Jasimuddin, Pramatha Choudhuri, Jibonanda Das, Sarat Chandra's works can be referred for a juxtaposition. In regard to Jasimuddin, Hussain further explains in his essay saying that "Jasimuddin has his own place in Modern Bengali literature, but he remained to the end of his life at countryman at heart unable to move away from the idyllic world of his childhood" (Hussain 71). Besides, he asserts the fact of Jasimuddin's experience of obtaining a university degree and wide travelling to compare with Nazrul's inexperience of any of them. However, it is important to have a conscious mind in order to read Nazrul. On the contrary, such consciousness is not fully required to read Jasimuddin. In regard to the presence of cognition, Rafiqul Islam in his book once again mentions about Tagore saying that "in spite of experiencing the malice of First World War, it did not interrupt Tagores's spiritual cognition" (Islam 286). In case of Nazrul, post war malice

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<sup>15</sup> Rabindranath Tagore is devotedly called as *Kaviguru* or the master poet.

broke him down and his works carry a reflection of it. Above all, while comparing Nazrul with his contemporary writers, it is found that he faced difficulties in every phase of his career but it failed to become a hinder to his path of becoming a great poet. He is still remembered and celebrated for his versatile literary works whereas those of his contemporaries who stood against him in every steps of his life are hardly known by people.

## Chapter 5

### Nazrul's Spirit of Humanitarianism

#### 5.1 Examining Selected Works of Nazrul

Like all other great poets, Kazi Nazrul Islam also never stood at one point. He did not care if his contemporaries or the critics did not regard him as a poet and if his writings did not serve the test of time. Writing was in his blood and as time passed by gradually, Nazrul was discovered in versatile features. His dual rendition as a writer and a fighter provides the essence of being two peas in a pod who can be both a rebel and romantic poet at the same time. His mighty pen continued to confront, challenge and combat: capitalism, colonialism, communalism, racism and patriarchy. The principle of his writings was to sing of equality.

First of all, the beginning of Nazrul's literary career started with poetry and initially he kept on writing mostly poems. Rofiqul Islam in his book *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Jibon o Srijon* (Life and creations), divided all of Nazrul's poetry mainly in two sections which are named as 'stimulating poems' and 'poems of nature and love' including few subsections in them. In this book, 'stimulating poems' are categorized into 6 stages whereas 'poems of nature and love' is categorized into 5 stages. The stages of stimulating poems are of revolt, revolution, democracy, Islam, youth and characters or figurers. On the other hand, the 'poems of love and nature' are staged numerically based on his biography.

Second of all, Nazrul also wrote prose including articles, stories, plays and novels. The number of articles he wrote is found 96 in *Nazruler Prabandha Samagra* which is a collection of his articles published from Kabi Nazrul Institute. These articles are portioned into 7 different headings containing the rest with their authentic titles. The first one named as "Yugbani" which contains 21 articles in it. The second one is "Rajbondir Jobanbondi" which does not have any

articles in it. The third one's headline is "Durdiner Jatri" which has 7 articles. The fourth one is "Rudra-Mangal" which has 13 articles. The fifth one's name is "Onnanno Prabandha" which also contains 21 articles, the sixth one is "Sahitya Parichiti" which contains 22 articles and last but not the least the seventh category is named as "Chanachur" which has 11 articles in it. However, the quantity of the articles does not lack of quality in any way. Each article is distinguished from another. They were written about socio-cultural, political, anti-patriarchal and literal aspects but mostly the articles sound as if they were speech towards the young generation. Few articles were written as a response to his contemporary writers' mockery and parody towards his writings. Being constantly attacked by both of his Muslim and non-Muslim contemporaries, he started writing to defend his stand point. In one way it can be considered as contrapuntal texts as those were his counterpoint. Rofiquel Islam says that "Chanachur" was the response from *Saogat to Mohammadi* (Islam 187).

Nazrul did not write many novels and the number of his novels looks pale while comparing his number of poetry. Among three of his novels, the first one *Bandhon Hara* (1927) is a letter novel by genre. A letter novel is a novel written in the form of series of written letters. The second one is *Mrityukshudha* (1930) and the last one is *Kuhelika* (1931). Niaz Zaman in her *Mrityukshudha Love and Death in Krishnanagar*, a translated version of *Mrityukshudha* asserts that "each of Nazrul's novels has a rebel as the central character if not the protagonist (Zaman9). Except *Mrityukshudha*, the other two novels are about battlers and their battles. *Mrityukshudha* also deals with battle but this battle is against hunger. Above all, the struggle of a rebel is portrayed along with the then political and socio economical phenomenon. It is also a depiction of women in the patriarchal society. Both *Kuhelika* and *Mrityukshudha* are the outcome of Nazrul's persuasion of feminism.

The collection of Nazrul's stories are compiled mainly in three books which are *Byathar Dan* (Offering of Pain) (1922), *Rikter Bedon* (The Sorrows of Destitute) (1925) and *Shiulimala* (Garland of Shiuli) (1931). Rafiqul Islam says, "While living in the Karachi Senanibash, Nazrul wrote few stories such as *Baunduler Attmakahini*, *Shwamihara*, *Hena*, *Byathar Dan*, *Meher Negar*, *Ghumer Ghore* etc. Among them *Baunduler Attmakahini* was written based on his childhood. Later, *Byathar Dan* and *Rikter Bedon* were compiled as story books. However, his stories contain the essence of creative Bengali prose writing that started earlier" (Islam 667).

The number of Nazrul's play in terms of propriety and completeness in all parts are penurious. According to Rafiqul Islam's book, there are few playlets and revues. In his book *Jhilimili* (Window Shutter) (1930), a collection of playlets contains few other short dramas in it such as *Jhilimili* itself, *Setubandha*, *Shilpi* and *Bhuter Bhoy*. Few of his revues were staged in Calcutta's professional theater during his lifetime. Among them *Aleya* (Mirage) (1931) and *Madhumala* (Garland of Honeysuckle) (1960) are remarkable musical plays. Some other plays were written purposefully for radio, gramophone and film. *Debistuti*, *Eid*, *Gul-Baagicha*, *Atonur Desh*, *Biddyapoti*, *Bishnupriya*, *Bijoya*, *Shrimanta*, *Boner Bede* etc. were rescued from different publications after he had fallen ill. Besides, *Putuler Biye* (Doll's Marriage) (1933) which is a children's play, *Jhar* (Storm) (1960), a juvenile poems and play, *Pile Patka Putuler Biye* (Doll's Marriage)(1964) another juvenile poems and play and *Shilpi* (Artist) are also other remarkable plays by Nazrul (Islam 687-696).

Finally, this paragraph will briefly introduce Nazrul Sangeet, the songs of Nazrul. These songs were written, composed and often sung by him. The number of songs he wrote is about 4,000 including gramophone records, which exceed Tagore's number of songs which is approximately 3,000. Regarding the number of their songs, a natural comparison arises whether

the quantity runs over the quality of Nazrul's song. Quazi Motahar Hossain in his article "Nazrul Islam, the Singer and Writer of Songs" says "not all the songs of either are of the first quality. Tagore's songs were written voluntarily for art's sake and Nazrul wrote songs mostly for the sake of earning a livelihood and yet we cannot say that he did not put his whole heart into it" (Hussain 55). Moreover, Nazrul has created a new genre in the world of modern Bengali music. According to Rafiqul Islam, "there are five main figures behind modern Bengali music. They are Rbindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Dwejendralal (1863-1913), Rajanikanta (1865-1910), Atul Prasad (1871-1934) and Nazrul 1899-1976)" (Islam 697). Nazrul also wrote a number of Islamic ghazals and Shyama Sangeet both of which offer religious appeal and interest, which once again present him a secular icon of a free man.

## **5.2 Existing Universalism in Nazrul**

Universalism is the philosophical and theological concept that some ideas have universal application or applicability. What essence does present Nazrul's universalism' is an important research question here. In order to answer to this question, once again it is required to juxtapose him with other contemporary writers across the world. In doing so, few remarks on Nazrul by different scholars, professors and critics will be added herewith.

Firstly, equality justice and dignity are the three principals that summarize Nazrul's entire works. His own line 'of equality I sing' constitutes a leitmotif in a number of his poems. Remarkably, "Samyabadi" (Of equality), "Ishwar" (God), "Manush" (Human Being), "Paap" (Sin), "Barangana" (Prostitute), "Nari" (Woman), "Kuli-Majur" (Coolies and Labourers) and few more poems reflect all these three principals. Thematically, these poems provoke that Nazrul organically rooted in his own land and becomes first and foremost a poet of his

own people -peasants and workers. The kind of poetic language he tries to evolve is not only a breakthrough in the literary history but is also a political act intended to enhance a cultural struggle against colonialism and imperialism. He offers words and works that are decisively forged in the fire of his people's struggles against oppression and injustice in colonial India that is being practiced for years. His language itself is an effective political weapon which mainly questions and demands for an anti-colonial nation. Regarding this aspect, Azfar Hussain, in his essay "Rereading Nazrul's *Vidrohi: The Politics of its Language*" asserts that "Nazrul is only customarily read as a poet rising to revolt against all forms of oppression and discrimination. True, Nazrul both at the poetic and political levels, fought uncompromisingly against colonial and feudal oppressions, but this particular aspect of the poet is often pushed to the extent of making it a settled norm in Nazrul criticisms, while circumscribing or undermining the poet's language – struggle which essentially involves the politics of the language- or the politics of the text, as Edward said calls it" (Hussain287). It is clear from Hussain's statement that Nazrul's words are of anti-colonial rhetoric of resistance accompanied by the barrier breaking spatial and celestial images of movements.

On the other hand, Nurul Huda in his book *Nazrul's Aesthetics and Other Aspects* brings a different scenario where Nazrul is depicted as a representative of the third world. He says, "Despite his local identity within the wider connotation of Indianness (in the prospective of sub-continent), Nazrul crossed the border of geography and contemporaneity as an all-time advocate for suffering humanity. He is the true spokesman for the exploited masses of the third world countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America" (Huda14). To support his statement Nazrul's comment on himself can be read with. In *Dhumketu* (The Comet) Nazrul declares that "I've come now for the great revolution." In his article "The Path of the Comet" translated by

Nashid Kamal he says that, “the comet wants the full independence of India. I don’t understand the concept of ‘nationalist’ because different leaders have offered different explanations to the same” (Kamal 71). It is mentionable that the year *Dhumketu* was published was the centenary year of the Russian revolution which provides a sidelight and reminds the fact that this revolution is the fundamental inspiration found in many of his works. Above all, his revolt was in favor of liberating mankind in its totality, bringing all the individuals to a uniform forum- a plane where privileges will be shared on the basis of equal distribution of wealth. “His revolt was both political and poetical....both politics and poetics become complementary in the making of person lore in Nazrul: (Huda 14).

Secondly, Nazrul’s revolt is international in character. A large segment of his literary works has been produced from his unrest desire to liberate the down-trodden proletarian struggling for social justice, especially those in the third world countries. In this prospect, Nazrul is widely connectable with other rebel writers of the third world. In making connections between Nazrul and other poets a different article by Azfar Hussain “Kazi Nazrul Islam: More than a rebel poet” published in *Dhaka Tribune* asserts that “one might begin by placing Nazrul in the company of his own predecessors such as Nanok Chandidas and Lalon. On the one hand, in the company of such third-world revolutionary poets as Nazim Hikmet from Turkey, Pablo Neruda from Chile, Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Julia de Burgos from Puerto Rico, Faiz Ahmed Faiz from Pakistan, Roque Dalton from El Salvador, Otto Rene Castillo from Guatemala, Kim Chi Ha from Korea, Mahmoud Darwish from Palestine, Jose Maria Sison from the Philippines, to name but a few” (Hussain).

In the same article Hussain highlights a cogent argument on Nazrul’s universalism. He shares two of his personal experiences of getting opportunity to discuss about Nazrul with Ngugi wa Thiong’o and few Cuban Black communists. In his words, “I cannot help recalling two

conversations surrounding Nazrul's work in places outside Bangladesh. In January this year (2017), I met a group of black communists in Havana, Cuba. I shared with them Nazrul's poems that are both explosively political and intimately lyrical. Their immediate response registered their solidarity: 'Nazrul is our poet- a Cuban poet as well.' I also had the chance to discuss Nazrul with the great Kenyan writer-activist Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Pullman, Washington, back in 2005. Ngugi wondered if I was talking about a "Kenyan poet" (Hussain). From Hussain's point of view, Nazrul might not be familiar with either Cuban or Kenyan poetry but the fact that his lines resonate with other revolutionaries from the third world instructively points to the very character and content of Nazrul's own work. Such work underlines his internationalism and universalism - a universalism from below. In this regard, he quotes from a Caribbean Marxist CLR James's phrase which is "Nazrul is the only major Bengali poet to have come from the rural proletariat, one who effortlessly relates to the oppressed of the world." For instance, in his poem "Coolies and Laborers," Nazrul raises his usual question: "How long will the oppressed be treated like this throughout the world?" However, the spontaneous solidarity shown towards the oppressed proletariat by Nazrul is naturally comparable to the third world's rebel poets. His writings contain cohesions with some Cuban or Kenyan poets that cannot be reduced to a matter of mere well-meaning solidarity or appropriation.

Azfar Hussain also talks about European Enlightenment in his article. According to his viewpoint, "universalism itself is not exclusively the property of the European Enlightenment. It has long remained in indigenous, Islamic, and revolutionary traditions in different parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (Hussain). Hence, there is no place of imposing censorship on presenting Nazrul from a revolutionary universal standpoint rather it is the other way around. Nazrul's literary works echoes a universal revolutionary icon. Hussain further mentions about Leslie Marmon Silko that she eagerly endorses

Marx's articulation of a revolutionary universalism. From her point of view he argues that Nazrul can surely be situated within this framework of revolutionary universalism.

Thirdly, from the days of yore literary works and the poets had been kept under surveillance as people are greatly influenced by them. The authority would ban the writings and send the authors to prison or kill sometimes if they would have gone against the rules and the ruling class. In case of Nazrul the scenario of this prehistory was well repeated. Nazrul was one of those remarkable rebel poets of his time who frequently was victimized by the British rulers of the then India. Due to writing against colonialism and imperialism he was accused as a rebel and arrested so that nobody gets influenced by him. A number of his literary works were banned such as *Yugabani*, *BisherBashi*, *VangarGaan*, *ProloyShikha*, *Chandrabindu*, *Agnibina*, *Sarbahara*, *Rudramangal*, *Fonimonasha* and *Sanchitaby* the British Rulers. The book *Nazrul O Tar Boiripaksha* by Anwarul Hoque provides much valuable information regarding this aspect. A British officer's comment on *Yugabani* clarifies how dreadful his writings were to them - "I have examined the book *Yugabani*. It breathes bitter racial hatred directed mainly against the British, preaches revolt against the existing administration in the country and abuses in the very strong language the 'slave minded' Indians who uphold the administration... are specially objectionable. I don't think it would be advisable to remove the ban on this book in the present crisis. On the whole it is a dangerous book, forceful and vindictive" (Hoque 13). In fact, Nazrul was sent to prison several times. In many of his personal letters he described how badly he was tormented in jail by the authority which eventually made mischief both his physical and mental health. In this context also, Nazrul can be placed in the company of some of those third-world revolutionary poet-activists that was mentioned earlier- Hikmet, Dalton, Castillo, Faiz, Darwish, Kim Chi Ha, and Maria Sison

and so on. Like Nazrul, they also had to experience the torment of authoritarian oppression and eventually had to go to jail because of their activist poetry that continues to threaten and unsettle the powerful and the dominant.

To sum up, being a poet of versatile features a number of existing elements in his literary works can be associated with universalism. His returns from First World War with an unequalled martial spirit differs from his all other contemporaries. Even those of his unremarkable works also contain the elements of such spirit. His cognition regarding freedom was ageless and genderless. Further, the image of patriarchal society with inequality, discrimination and subjugation are portrayed acutely in many of his poems, articles, stories and novels. Such depiction in his time was rare and well judged by Marxist Feminism's stand point. Nevertheless, his enormous literary significance continues to remain ignored in contemporary studies of world literature and even in postcolonial literary criticism today. Further, comparative literary criticism in our parts of the world has hardly done justice to Nazrul's poetic interventions. However, this injustice towards this great poet hardly reduces his eligibility to be fittest within the framework of universal poet.

## **5.2 The Humanitarian Poet of All Time**

It is important to bear the context in mind that Nazrul emerged in British regime from the colonial subjugation. The impact of colonialism led him to join politics too. His writings against the ruling class people brought about many uncertain incidents in his life. For many times he was sent to prison as a mutineer only because of writing against the authority. Returning from the jail, he did not quit writing rather he started rebelling as an ever

uncompromising dissenting self. He knew the fact that writing against the authority might be a crime to the rulers but he believed in speaking of the truth. Through his writings, he created and reared such visual within his conscious till he ran out of sense in the early forties. He was an intrepid advocate of human emancipation. The message of human wellbeing comes around in his writings again and again. Based on this information Nazrul can be called a humanitarian poet who promotes the message of human welfare regardless gender and religion. His writings bears the testimony of those doctrine that humanity's obligations are concerned wholly with the welfare of the human race.

Regarding women, he was not an apparent feminist like many of his times but two of his poems "Nari" (Woman) and "Barangona" (Prostitute) depicts him as a celebrated feminist of all time. In these two poems he wrote about both the traditional and non-traditional women of the society. By the term traditional he refers to those women who have shelter and social recognition as someone's wife, mother, sister, daughter and other relationships. On the contrary, non-traditional women indicates those women who are underrated by the society as a prostitute. In his poem "Prostitute" he address the prostitutes as mother and says-

"Who calls you a prostitute, mother?  
 who spits at you?  
 perhaps you were sucked by someone  
 as chaste as seeta.  
 and if the son of an unchaste mother  
 is 'illegitimate,  
 so is the son of an unchaste father."

[Translated by Mohammad Nurul Huda]

The other poem "Woman" claims that women deserve equal respect like men.

"I sing of equality.  
 I don't see any difference  
 Between a man and a woman.  
 Whatever great or benevolent achievements  
 There are in this world,  
 Half of that was by woman,

The other half by man.”

[Translated by Sajed Kamal]

Above all, the contextualization of women in Nazrul’s literary works was not an opposite entity rather a complementary one, the combination of the two making rightful advancement of human civilization.

Nazrul was a singular entity or an individual but worked as a conscious social being in the diversity of multiculturalism in Bengali society. The interaction of diverse cultures originated from non-Arya, Arya, Buddhists, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and other tribes of the subcontinent is presented from the humanitarian perspective in his writings. He was also conscious while presenting different classes. The conscious use of different languages also presents his distinctive style of humanitarian expression. In this regard, Mohammad Nurul Huda says that, “His language, both prose and poetry, aptly synchronized diverse words and elements from different sources in a bid to purify the language of his tribe. His was a language pidgin in nature and the culture he conceptualized was akin to creolization. (Huda 21). Instead of celebrating institutional religions, he emphasizes on celebrating human heart. In his words, God lives within us therefore, in order to satisfy God we do not need to pay a visit to the pilgrimages rather we should offer better treatment to all the human being around us. In his poem “Iswar” (God), he utters that human heart is the abode of all wisdom and scriptures. He says-

The whole creation looks at you  
 While your own eyes are shut.  
 You search for the creator  
 Instead of searching for yourself.  
 O self-inflicted Blind- open your eyes,  
 Look at yourself in the mirror.  
 You’ll see – His shadow falls on your body.

[Translated by Sajed Kamal]

The humanitarian expression is boldly found in his other poems too. For example, the poem “Manush” (Man/Human Being) portray his true self as a humanitarian poet. The very first few lines of this poem says it all-

“I sing the Hymn of Equality-  
Nothing is higher than Man, nothing nobler!  
There’s no distinction of clime, age,  
and person; there’s one indivisible,  
Universal Brotherhood,”

[Translated by Abdul Hakim]

The other poem “Paap” (Sin) Nazrul addresses all the sinners as his siblings. In Nazrul’s words, it is society who defines what sin is. It is a man-made process. Therefore, he utters-

“The world is a domain of sin-  
Half of it is God, the other half is Satan!  
Listen, O fanatics! Before counting  
another’s sins, count thy own!”

[Translated by Abdul Hakim]

Nazrul’s personal life and the creative life are inseparable, running parallel to each other. He is the portrait of a global Bengali embodying almost all the ingredients drawn from contradictory faiths and rival traits. The rebel in Nazrul freed himself from a human confines of dogmatic religions and multifarious exploitations and started an endless war against fanatics, colonizers, and exploiters residing at home and in the rest of the world. Altogether, he is discovered as the truest presenter of humanism which is why he deserve to be recognized worldwide as a humanitarian poet of all time.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

There is a saying that ‘poets are a special breed in that they feel intensely and react strongly.’ It is also true that not every poets feel in the same way. Kazi Nazrul Islam’s emergence as a fearless poet from the post war malice, colonial phenomenon along with his individualism reminds the fact that a poet like Nazrul does not born over and again. The poetic mind of Nazrul is a combination of both sensuousness and passion. He went through an extremely hard life since childhood to youth and youth to last age therefore this combination grew spontaneously. He overcame all the boundaries surrounding him and lived life in every possible way as vigorously as he could. This dauntless character led him to unavoidable troubles yet he little cared about being himself. Despite being undertreated in world literature, his inner cry to achieve equality in society and free itself from all forms of discrimination reverberates through every page. Many of his contemporaries sank into the oblivion but Nazrul remains evergreen like a young. To re-read his words do not give any oldie vibes rather provides a universal appeal. The connotation of ‘youth’ to Nazrul is quite positive whereas the connotation of ‘old’ is very negative. In his message to the youth Nazrul makes a very important point, his definition of ‘youth’ is not limited by age. He says, “By the word old I mean those values which adhere to lies and death. Old people are those who are not only a burden of the soft hearted glittering journey of the new human beings, but they are also deterrents. Those who do not know how to march past with the rhythm of the century, they are living beings but actually dead” (Translated by Nashid Kamal). Therefore, it is clear that Nazrul is a poet of ‘young people’. Here young metaphorically can be associated with the connotation of universalism which neither gets old nor dies. To conclude the argument, it is required to state that what Nazrul has become today was his effortless reproductive and regenerative

knack which exploded out of his spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings aided by stream of consciousness.

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