

# Romantic Par-excellence: Kazi Nazrul Islam's Selected Poems

<sup>1</sup>Joyshree Deb, <sup>2</sup>Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Sylhet International University, Sylhet-3114, Bangladesh; E-mail: joyshreedeb@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet-3114, Bangladesh; E-mail: msijewel@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Like most of the English romantic poets, Kazi Nazrul Islam sustains some themes such as love, subjectivity, humanism, and protest against injustice in his writing. Hence, this study tries to analyze Nazrul's poetry with special emphasis on the poems dealing with romantic elements - love, humanism, nature, subjectivity, mysticism, individualism and revolutionary zeal, which place Nazrul in the throne of a romantic poet. If a poet does not love humankind, he can never become a rebel. Nazrul's love is the main source of motion of his revolt. His poetic career is hardly complete if his poems of love, nature and humanity are not taken into account. His love poems have definitely proved him as a worshipper of love. His philosophy is very much akin to the second generation romantic poets viz., Shelley, Keats and Byron as all are revolutionaries. Nazrul compares himself with Keats and declares his intention is very much like Keats' "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" and in respect of revolution and passionate love, he is like Shelley. Nazrul finds symbol for his own state of mind. Thus, the focal point, of this article, is to examine how Kazi Nazrul Islam can be considered as a romantic poet who adorns his poems with the features of Romanticism.

**Keywords:** Love, Revolutionary, Romantic, Humanism, Rebellion, Freedom.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH Nazrul is a poet of rebellious tendencies in the first place, he is simultaneously a poet full of romantic ardour, rich imagination and intense emotion. In every genre (poetry, novel, drama, song and short story), he expresses his idea of love. His heart bleeds at the suffering and indignity that the poor ordinary people have to bear daily in their struggle for existence. Throughout his poetry, he exercises the concept of love, freedom, revolution, humanity, and symbolism. In some cases, his writing reflects the thinking and nature of the second generation of the romantic poets, such as Keats and Shelley. Basically, Nazrul is called the Shelley of Bengal as both are revolutionaries in their attitude and expression. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to substantiate that how Nazrul's poems support the contrivance that Nazrul is a romantic poet.

## 2 NAZRUL AS A ROMANTIC POET: AN ANALYSIS

Although Kazi Nazrul Islam is recognized as a poet of revolt all over the world, he can simultaneously be considered as a poet of love. He writes poems that light the fire against all

inequality or injustice and at the same time explore his poignant romantic ardors as well. Actually, he is romantic in imagination and rebellious in temperament. The title of the poem "The Rebel" apparently seems that the poem is only full of rebellion; actually it is rebellious in tone and in its depth the spirit of love, passion as well as sensitivity is imbibed. The first-half part of the poem expresses his arrogant mood which suddenly changes into passion and draws a romantic scene. As he says in the poem "The Rebel":

Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel,

Shall rest in quiet only when I find

The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed

Only when the battlefields are cleared of jingling bloody  
sabres

Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet, I, the great rebel. [1]

He expresses his utmost rage against these oppressors. He will take rest only when the atmosphere is free from bloody war, oppression, wailing and so on. He compares himself with various furious natural disasters and says he will smash all the

obstacles of the world. But, needless to say, amidst such tremendous speech, he makes his voice soft as well as romantic and pronounces in "The Rebel":

I am the trembling first touch of the virgin,

I am the throbbing tenderness of her first stolen kiss.

I am the fleeting glance of the veiled beloved,

I am her constant surreptitious gaze.

I am the gay gripping young girl's love. [1]

Obviously, his experience of trembling touch and stolen kiss is full of romance and excitement. His love is not bound only in one beloved, but for humankind for whom he declares that he will take rest only when all groaning of sufferers will be ended. His sword, while attacks the foreign rulers who torture the common people of the society, also comes out from his love for mankind. His love and rebellion are actually not different things- both flow from the same pitcher. The loving existence of Nazrul has turned him into a rebel. So, he is not only a rebel but also a love poet; concisely, a romantic poet.

Romanticism is a movement that emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and ended in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction against Neoclassicism, the age preceding the Romantic Movement, in which the style was full of emotion and beauty with many individualistic and exotic elements. However, the main source of inspiration for romanticism came from the events and ideologies of the French Revolution. Other than this, even the Industrial Revolution which began during the same period is also said to be responsible for the development of Romanticism. It is thought that the Romantic Age begins with the publication of "Lyrical Ballads" by Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge in 1798. Notable Romantic poets from Britain include William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. Any list of particular characteristics of the literature of Romanticism includes subjectivity, individualism, humanism,

love, the beliefs that imagination is superior to reason and worship of nature, and fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the Middle Ages and romantic nationalism. "The romantic, logically, has always been opposed to anything that circumscribes the imagination, tethers feelings and limits or subverts integrity. This commitment to integrity, spontaneity, purity and innocence is intimately linked not only to the imagination, in the thinking of the romantic, but also to the process and work of the imagination, which is involved in both the act of creating and the thing or thing created" [2].

In Nazrul's poems, one easily finds beauty and love, romantic agony, spirit of revolt against colonial domination and social injustice and especially, patriotic inspiration, Muslim Renaissance, message of Hindu-Muslim unity and craving for the emancipation of the distressed humanity. Humanity is one of the dominant phenomena of Romanticism. Nazrul is the ardent lover of humanity. In Nazrul's words, "trust me, I did not come this world to be a poet, to be a leader; I came to offer my love and to receive love. But disappointed and hurt, silently I bid goodbye to this loveless world" [3]. Henceforth, Nazrul is an exponent of humanism. Though he is a Muslim, he has named his sons combining both Hindu and Muslim names: Arindam Khaled, Krishna Mohammed, Kazi Aniruddha, and Kazi Sabyasachi. So to speak, humanism is the best religion to Nazrul who proclaims in the poem "I Sing of equality":

The heart is the mosque, the temple, the church.

This is where Jesus and Moses found the truth. [1]

Heart is the best holy place where there is no discrimination in the scale of race, color, religion and ethnicity. This sense of equality comes out from his humanistic belief, which is one of the features of Romanticism. He uses his pen as a sword to struggle against the British occupation of India and evokes everyone to stand against them. It is Nazrul's aim to remove

the discrimination between Hindu-Muslim and shorten the gap and uphold the greatness of humankind. To him, religion is created for humankind and is intended to advance the well-being of humankind. As a preacher, he calls up the whole humankind to love their fellowmen considering it is the best religion and in the poem "Human Being", he fervently declares:

I sing of equality -

There's nothing greater than a human being, nothing nobler!

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

Throughout all ages, all places, we're all a manifestation  
of our common humanity. [4]

His passionate belief in reform, the equality of the sexes and creeds, and the powers of love and imagination are frequently expressed in his poetry and this fact reminds us of the name of one English romantic poet, P. B. Shelley. "Professor Henry Glassie rated the poem 'The Rebel' as a most significant one written in the twentieth century. To him, Nazrul is one of the most leading humanists of the century, and his relevance to the whole of mankind depends on three aspects in the main: freedom, justice and love. These aspects are interwoven as an extension of a unified belief based on the argument that every freeman is prone to rear love for himself and others around him. And a person with love inside his being can do no injustice to himself and to others. So these are the three interwoven concepts required for a person as an individual and a member of collective entity. This is how Nazrul's rebellious self is inspired with righteousness and love for all. His revolt is an instrument for realizing this truth. Under this global perspective, Nazrul's identity remains to be reexamined and reevaluated. He is now a universal poet belonging to any part of the world" [5].

As romantics are highly dependent on consciousness of love and passion, which is expressed through their imagination,

Nazrul is also no exception to it. In his romantic poems, "the lover Nazrul displayed his emotions in an unabated manner. From pangs of separation, to descriptive imagery of his beloved, with very sensitive analogies he comes across as a man full of passion" [6]. This emotion of love finds enchanting expression in Nazrul's poems. His love attitude is the direct outcome of his personal experience in love-affair, or conjugal life and partly from his imagination. As in his article, "Kazi Nazrul Islam: His Revolt and Love" Kabir Chowdhury says, "Nazrul speaks of love as the fountainhead of inspiration that turned him into a poet" [7]. Nazrul is definitely a romantic poet in the sense that he has written many romantic poems. The poem "Hope" is a very lively indication of romantic contrivance. He says that he will meet his beloved in a solitary place and will pass time with romance and love. To him, nature is the place where love is more effective. That is why romantic poets take nature as a source for their poems. Nazrul portrays a romantic picture, that the beloved's hand will hold his hand, which is a great achievement as it is only possible through high sense of imagination. Undoubtedly, Nazrul's imagination about the place and his beloved is very young romantic imagination. This is evident in his poem "Hope":

Before returning to the woods,

Mischievous you! - You'll softly

Lay a kiss on my eyes! [1]

Nazrul's depiction of the actions of a bold lover with his beloved echoes the voice of Keats in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" wherein he depicts an impudent lover attempting to get a kiss which will never cause to appear in material form as they are frozen by time:

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,

Though winning near the goal-yet, do not grieve; [8]

Other well known love poems of Nazrul are "The Priestess", "The Secret Beloved", "The Nameless Lady", "The

Worshipper", "The Poet's Queen" and so on. The long poem "The Worshipper" reveals Nazrul's diverse perception of romantic love. It is not surprising that Nazrul's thoughts at that time of political turmoil should have turned to thoughts of love because his acquaintance with Promila had ripened to love. In the poem "The Worshipper", he proclaims:

Worshiper!

Thy voice, thy tune shaming the dove, thy eye, thy face,

Thy eye-brow, forehead, cheek,

Thy wanton ear-ring swinging to and fro

In dance surpassing a swan-

I know, I know! [4]

The extremity of emotion, even delirium is found there, but not any touch of imperceptible object. His explanation of beauty gets an exuberant shape with the touch of colorful imagination. Likewise, Karunamaya Goswami, 1996 [5] mentions "The Yellow flower" as chiefly the collection of poems of love and opines that "Nazrul's notion of love was not devoid of physical fascination. Body was never ignored. But sublimity was there. Extra physical considerations were never ignored, the question of eternal craving for woman in the heart of man had always burned there, the sense of love had always mixed up with high sense of beauty, but still the body was recognized as the temple of love" [5]. To Nazrul, beauty is the form of love, truth, justice, individuality and this very beauty incites imagination, love, and passion. He compares himself with Keats and declares his motto, which is very much like Keats' "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty", but his way of expressing beauty is different. He praises beauty more poignantly in his poem "You are so handsome":

You are so handsome that I can't take my eye off you,

Is that my crime?

.....

I've got the gift of vision so that I may see you, you beautiful  
being

Let this wish of mine be realized, my dearest one. [4]

Again, like a typical traditional romantic poet, Nazrul writes using familiar similes and metaphors, and still somehow efforts to adorn it with a flavor that is all his own. In his poem, "My Love", he proclaims:

Come darling and be my love!

I shall adorn thy hair with flowers of stars,

And thy ears with rings of the

Young spring moon,

And around thy neck shall I put a garland,

White as a row of swans. [4]

Nature is the dominant theme of the writing of romantic poets and their attitude to nature is different. In the book "The Romantic Imagination", Maurice Bowra, 1966 [9] has stated that "in nature all the Romantic poets find their initial inspiration. It is not everything to them, but they would have been nothing without it" [9]. Almost all poets adopt nature to express their inner appeal as it is a perennial source of inspiration and source of solace in grief to the romantic poets. To Nazrul, nature is the indivisible part of life. His treatment of nature is strong enough to prove how much romantic he is. Hereafter, when Nazrul writes on nature, he invests nature with a personality; natural objects in his poetry are alive, not mere spectators, but participants in human affairs. In some poems, he has used natural objects as symbols; but most of his nature poems are statements of relationship with and love for nature. He sees, interprets and appreciates nature in human terms. Even in love songs, metaphors are taken from nature; bird, star, flower, sky, sun, rain, sea, and so on- all these objects are presented as human terms. In the poem, "The Sea" he says:

Oh Sea! O my friend! O eternally separated!

Oh unsatisfied! Out of what agony

You effuse the brain again and again?

What do you want to say, to whom will you

Speak comrade...? [1]

He addresses the sea considering it as a human figure and gives the sense of anger, speech, hearing as well. In case of using nature, he is not like Wordsworth but adopts his way of expression. "He mentions the English romantic poets with respect but leaves out Wordsworth and Coleridge from his review. The omission is significant. Personally, he has not spiritualized nature, nor shown any interest in metaphysics. Nazrul Islam calls himself a poet of beauty and prefers to liken himself to Keats" [10]. As the Romantic Poets are individualistic and vitally separate from one another in their attitude to life and nature, Nazrul has also employed nature in his poetry in an individualistic way.

An emphasis on personal freedom and liberty is a distinction of romanticism. In his poetry, he has announced his very lofty sense of individualism. He would not surrender to any authority, not even to the Creator, as he once declared in a frenzy of passion, "I salute none but me!" [1]. This line reminds us of the first line "I celebrate myself" [11] of Whitman's "Song of Myself". Actually, Nazrul is not against God, rather against those activities which are performed in misinterpreting God's message. Nazrul's ultimate destination is a mixture of love, justice and liberty of humanity and this is how the individual 'I' of Kazi Nazrul Islam becomes a universal 'I' symbolizing his nation and humankind across the globe belonging to no particular timeframe and land. However, Nazrul is considered to be a subjectivist as he expresses his personal experiences and feelings in his poems through which he actually reflects the inner feelings of the

whole humankind. He raises his voice in favor of the suffering people. Even he recklessly expresses his innermost anguish and emotion, never cares for perilous situation. In fact, rebellion and romanticism walk side by side in him. Even he uses lots of mythical references in his poems. In the poem "The Rebel", he remarks:

I am the son of Indrani

With the moon in my head

And the sun on my temple

.....

I am Brahma's sound in the sky and on the earth,

I am the mighty roar of Israfil's bugle,

I am the great trident of Pinakpani,

I am the staff of the king of truth,

I am the Chakra and the great Shanka,

I am the mighty primordial shout!

I am Bishyamisra's pupil, Durbasha the furious [1]

Nazrul considers himself as a son of God Indrani as well as powerful like Shiva. Simultaneously he has personified all objects of nature and addresses them using various epithets "luminous moon", "brilliant sun" which reminds us Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "The Cloud" in which the moon is imagined as a young maiden:

That orb'd maiden with white fire laden

Whom mortals call the Moon [12]

While Shelley personifies all the natural objects giving a new significant change and endows his poetry with Greek myths, Nazrul's poetry is affluent with Hindu, Muslim and Greek mythology. He uses Hindu Philosophy more, for which he has to endure intense criticism from Muslim bigot. Basically, he has profound knowledge about Bengali, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and classical literature and puts it into practice through his works.

Throughout his whole life, Nazrul has to face different rebellions one after another. Two World Wars, Khilafat Movement, Ashajug Movement and lastly our national movement- the tremendous scene of these movements turns him into a rebel. As English Romantic poets like Shelley and Byron were inspired by the ideals of French Revolution, in the same way Nazrul was inspired by these movements. His poetry stands as a mouthpiece of the whole humankind. He writes poetry not as a source of pleasure, but as a weapon for emancipation and against oppression. Like Shelley, he wants to move his audience emotionally and awake the inner feeling of people. This is the phenomenon of romantic poets that they stand against the tyranny, corruption and oppression through pen-weapon.

### 3 Conclusion

In Short, it is universally acknowledged that the spirit of rebellion lies at the heart of Nazrul's poetry, but there is no consensus about the source of rebellion, which comes from the deep feelings of love. Nazrul is a romantic poet not because his writing is like that of the romantic poets, rather for his writing is adorned with the characteristics of Romanticism. Certainly, his deep sense of love and humanism make him a romantic poet. His works have been compared to the romantic poets- Shelley and Keats. Nazrul plays double roles at the same time- he is a rebel and passionate lover- both in him complement each other. Love acts as a fuel in his rebellion. From the mighty pen of Nazrul, two things come out all at once. Actually, in the depth of his rebellion lies his intense feeling of love- love for human being. Absolutely, his loving

heart incites eagerness to fight for the emancipation of the oppressed people. So, it can be affirmed that Kazi Nazrul Islam gloriously attains the throne of a romantic poet.

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