

Poetics of Resistance and Revolution: Reading Nazrul in the Era of Neo-colonialism

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ABSTRACT

The article argues that poetry as a literary and cultural production can be an effective tool for resistance and revolution against the backdrop of postcolonial or neo-colonial context since it directly communicates with the masses. In this regard, it is worth exploring Kazi Nazrul Islam as a self-proclaimed rebel in relation to his contribution as a poet-activist to the awakening of revolutionary spirit in world literature in general and Bengali literature in particular. The article demonstrates how Nazrul transcends the common binary of the colonised and the coloniser and dwells in a space in which his poetic spirit blooms with boundless force and ferocity. The study further claims that Nazrul, for the first time in the history of national independence struggle in British India, demanded complete independence of Indian subcontinent openly in a newspaper (Dhumketu) article. It also argues that Nazrul's poetry poses a vital threat to both colonial and post-colonial or neo-colonial administrations in a global context. It, thus, points out the relevance of reading Nazrul and incorporating his message into national psyche in order to thwart neo-colonial practices and elements of discrimination, exclusion and oppression.

Keywords: Kazi Nazrul Islam, Postcolonial Poetry, Poetry as a Performative Art, Complete Independence of India, Language as a Mode of Resistance

Introduction and Background

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899- 1976) is considered one of the most remarkable poets of twentieth century world literature and perhaps the greatest revolutionary poet the world has ever witnessed. Just in his twenties he emerged as a rebellious spirit producing such revolutionary verses that were unknown to his contemporary poets, writers, political activists and common people. The oppressed people under the British colonial rule had every reason to welcome and celebrate the novel form of Nazrul's poetry as a tool of resistance to the colonial oppression. He was "applauded as 'The National Poet of Bengal'" in 1929 at the age of only thirty by the literary and political leaders of Kolkata at a grand National Civic Reception presided over by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, an eminent Bengali scientist and graced by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the celebrated political leader and freedom fighter as the chief guest (Huda 57; Rafiqul Islam 351- 53). The literary and artistic career of the great poet lasted

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only twenty four years— from 1919 to 1942. On 09 July 1942 during his story-telling programme for children at the Calcutta Radio Station he was attacked with a rare neurological disorder called, later on, “Picks Disease” by Dr. Hans Hoff. (ibid. 467). He could not speak, write, sing, and recite for what he would have spent nights and days inspiring and entertaining people of all ages. After Bangladesh was liberated from the colonial clutch of Pakistan in 1971, he was brought to the country in 1972 and honoured with the title of the “National Poet of Bangladesh”. (“Kazi Nazrul Islam Dies”).

In independent Bangladesh, Nazrul studies and cultural practice of Nazrul’s literary creations have attained a new force and dimension. Along with Nazrul Institute, several government and non-government educational, research and archival institutes, individual researchers, professors and so on have, up to now, published books, academic research, and translation of his works and thus contributed to a vast area of Nazrul studies. Besides, a specialised university namely Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in tribute to the poet was established in 2006 in Trishal, Mymensingh, Bangladesh where he used to live for a short while. In memory of the poet, the State Government of West Bengal, India also set up Kazi Nazrul University in 2012 in Asansol, India, which was the birthplace of the poet.

However, the nature and mode of practising Nazrul literature and culture, especially in Bangladesh and owning his ideals as a whole are not beyond questions. One may wonder whether Nazrul is reduced to some occasional celebrations of his cultural creations, especially songs for the sake of observing his birth and death anniversaries. It becomes worse when cultural rendering of Nazrul serves only entertaining purposes; and academic activities such as seminars, conferences and formal discussions often become mere displays of public show-off. Moreover, his non-communal spirit is found to be split in line with narrow national or communal boundaries. It is a reality that Nazrul has been divided among the Bengalis of India and those of Bangladesh. Mostly the divide is based on a thin line of narrow religious motives as in West Bengal, India Bengalis are not so interested in his poetry and songs except his Shyama songs and in Bangladesh he is much respected and practised, not just as a poet of humanity and revolution, but mostly as a Muslim poet. Ghulam Murshid in an interview argues that “This division is unliterary and untrue if one studies the secular and humanitarian views of Nazrul reflected both in his life and in his writings.” (Murshid). Azfar Hussain claims that proclaiming Nazrul “the National Poet of Bangladesh” is an irony, for, in his words, “our national ruling classes and their allies have long come to stand in for almost everything—every system of oppression—Nazrul himself continued to confront, challenge, and combat: capitalism, colonialism, communalism, racism, and patriarchy.” (Hussain, “Kazi Nazrul Islam”). Three causes of our failure to own Nazrul and his literary works are pointed out in an article: first, his philosophy of life that we hardly

understand; secondly, our failure to appreciate his non-communal thinking; and thirdly, the paradox of traditional faith and a divine faith of immersion that he himself through his creation offered. (Alam).

In fact, a fragmented Nazrul is found when his verses articulating revolutionary voices are not studied in the light of contemporary socio-political contexts. Especially, when one compares the present world and the world where Nazrul was born, grew up and came into being a poet, one cannot but think about making a link between his revolutionary works and the coercive forces of social institutions and state administrations. A crucial question is then raised on how far the state administrations accept, practice and are willing to materialise his spirit since they largely play the role of neo-colonialists. That is why, Nazrul's poetics of resistance and revolution needs to be re-examined and reassessed in this era of neo-colonialism.

In so doing, the article first connects Nazrul's poetic creation and his activism during his active years when he was a revolting bard enunciating "revolution, respect, freedom, love, and equality" (Schlund-Vials) and also sheds light on his artistic and political role against the British colonial rule. The article argues that poetry, a performative art works as a tool for cultural resistance against colonial or neo-colonial rule. It then focuses on the role of his poetry and songs during Bangladesh Liberation War and how the freedom fighters were inspired by them. It also points out how Nazrul is relevant in neo-colonial contexts since his anti-colonial and revolutionary verses can resist almost all elements of neo-colonialism. Finally, the article points out that Nazrul's message of democracy, egalitarianism and equity is much needed to bring about a real revolution in the countries of the Indian Subcontinent.

The Emergence of a Comet

When Nazrul's epoch-making poem "Bidrohi" ("The Rebel") was published in several magazines (first in *Saptahik Bijli* (Weekly Lightning)) and newspapers simultaneously in 1922 (Goswamy 67), Nazrul became an emblem of resistance and revolution overnight. Every line of the long poem touches the soul of every individual who aspires to independence. Every freedom-loving human heart vibrates with an utmost desire to break all bars of dominance and get themselves free when Nazrul utters with such an intensity:

Say, Valiant,
Say: High is my head!
Looking at my head
Is cast down the great Himalayan peak!
Say, Valiant,
Say: Ripping apart the wide sky of the universe,
Leaving behind the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars
Piercing the earth and the heavens,
Pushing through Almighty's sacred seat
Have I risen,

I, the perennial wonder of mother-earth!
The angry God shines on my forehead
Like some royal victory's gorgeous emblem.
Say, Valiant,
Ever high is my head!

(“Bidrohi”, Nazrul Islam, *Poetry* 12)

History has witnessed that this very poem, drafted with pencil¹ in a single night, caused a sudden tremor in Bengali literature, and rather the world literature. Like the speaker of the poem, Nazrul always kept his head high as a rebel and revolutionary. After composing “Bidrohi”, he was metamorphosed in the very morning and endowed with boundless power and energy to tear “apart the wide sky of the universe, leaving behind the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars.” (“Bidrohi”, N. Islam, *Poetry* 12). In fact, he had risen to compose the verses of vigour and vitality which would intensify a spirit of rebellion among common people as well as intellectuals and warn the colonisers of a forthcoming revolution. He thus proclaims in “Dhumketu” (“The Comet”),

I come in every age,
I come again and again.
Now I have come for the great revolution.
I am the creator's deadly foe,
 the devastating comet of all times,
On my forehead shines the burning fire
 of seven hundred hells.

(N. Islam, *Poetry* 36)

Through a metaphor “the comet”, he articulates most confidently that he was born to revolt against any oppressive force coming in his way. The political realities such as the British colonial rule gave him a reason for using his poetic talent as a tool of resistance. Hussain points out, “Nazrul takes poetry itself as a charged site of actions and interventions against different forms and forces of oppression and exploitation. As we would see, he takes poetry as an anti-colonial intervention in particular, . . .” (Hussain, “Kazi Nazrul Islam”).

Unlike most of his contemporary poets living and writing under colonial surveillance and servitude, Nazrul never developed a sense of ambivalence and compromised in any term with the colonisers or their agents. He was fully aware of what he was articulating. With his unprecedented poetic vigour he put himself merrily beyond the boundary of life and death while remaining uncompromising regarding the question of bringing about a true revolution that would crush not only the British colonial force, but any other oppressive force to be emerging in future. In this regard, Nazrul utters with utmost pride and joy—

¹ In *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, Muzaffar Ahmed describes, “I think Nazrul woke up and wrote this poem before or around dawn, or else he wouldn't have been able to come and read it to me so early in the morning. . . . This was around forty years ago and neither I, nor Nazrul had a fountain pen. His thoughts were flowing too fast for him to keep dipping his pen into the inkpot and write and so he first wrote this poem in pencil.” (qtd. in R. Islam 139)

Therefore I rebel and welcome Revolution,
Therefore I dance and sing merrily!
I spit at the face of death
and blow out burning fires
of a thousand hells.”
(“The Comet”, N. Islam, *Poetry* 37)

On 11 August 1922, a bi-weekly *Dhumketu* (The Comet) edited by Nazrul appeared as a mouthpiece of revolutionary voices and cultural resistance to colonial oppression in India. On the occasion of the publication of *Dhumketu*, the leading writers and poets of that time including Rabindranath Tagore sent message welcoming the Magazine. Tagore wrote to Nazrul—

Come, ye comet
Come to build a bridge of fire
across the dark.
Hoist up your flag of victory
On the top of the castle
of ominous time.
Let omens be curved
on the forehead of night
And awake by startling
those who are drowsing.
(Goswamy 73)

Thus, in the early stage of his poetic career Nazrul was recognised by the major poets of his time as a shining comet in the sky of Bengali literature. The uniqueness of his poetic exuberance in terms of contents and contours shows how effective his poetic expression was to shake the very foundation of the colonial rule. Let us then focus on how Nazrul’s poetry points to all through resistance thus leading to a timely demand for the complete independence of India.

Nazrul’s Poetics of Resistance and Call for Complete Independence

In September 26, *Dhumketu* published Nazrul’s poem “Anandamoyeer Agamoney” (“Coming of Goddess of Joy”). Anandamoyee (goddess of Joy) is another name of the goddess Durga. By using the mythological character Durga Nazrul, in fact, made a political satire in the context of British colonisation of India. The poem reads,

Heaven today is subjugated by merciless tyrants.
God’s children are getting whipped,
heroic youth— hanged.
India today is a butchery— when will
you arrive, O Destroyer?
(N. Islam, *Poetry* 608)

The message is quite apparent; that is, the goddess Durga is called for saving India from the occupation of the British tyrants accused of hanging Indian youths who would make any attempt to get their motherland free and independent.

Nazrul never wanted two nation states on the basis of religion in the Indian sub-continent, but rather a composite independent India free from any colonial or neo-colonial rule. He made his political goal clear in his article titled “The Path of the Comet” published in *Dhumketu* on 13 October 1922. He for the first time in the history of national independence struggle in British India demanded complete independence of Indian subcontinent openly in a newspaper (*Dhumketu*) article. (R. Islam 167)². Nazrul declares in “The Path of the Comet”, “First and foremost the Dhumketu wants full and complete independence of India.” (Goswamy 76). He even sketched out the process of gaining the independence and the nature of the government of the independent India. He explicates,

“Not an atom of the Indian subcontinent will remain under foreign occupation. The entire responsibility of the Indian subcontinent, protecting its independence, its governance, all of this will remain in the hands of the Indians. No foreigners will have the slightest right to interfere.” (R. Islam 167).

In the same article Nazrul made an evaluation of the then anti-British movement. He critiqued the followers of Mahatma Gandhi who were not fully committed to the cause of Non-violence Movement and the blind-followers of Tagore and Arabinda. (N. Islam, *The Path* 73). It is significant that even before the Indian National Congress or any other political party came up with a resolution³ for the demand of the full independence of India, Nazrul put forward a complete scheme of gaining and safeguarding India’s independence since protecting a nation’s independence is considered more difficult than gaining it. Therefore, Nazrul proved himself to be a poet-activist, that is, a freedom fighter in the true sense of the term.

However, threatened by such audacity and boldness of Nazrul, the colonial administration reacted fiercely by imprisoning him and proscribing the publication of *Dhumketu* and his other books. Charged with sedition he was sentenced to “one year rigorous imprisonment.” (R. Islam 199). Nevertheless, the colonial administrations could not stop him. Nazrul’s anti-colonial voice would continue despite their repressive treatment towards his poetic articulations. The revolutionary poems written in Alipur and Hooghly Jails include “Aaj Srishti Shukher Ullashe” (“In the Ecstasy of Creation Today”, Alipur), “Bondana” (“In Praise of the Jail Super”, Hooghly), a satirical parody song written in response to all sorts of oppressive treatments of the Jail Super, and “Shikol Porar Gaan” (“Song of Shackles”, Hooghly) to mention a few (R. Islam 204- 07). When he

² However, “in December 1921, Maulana Hasrat Mohani had raised the demand [orally] for full independence of the country at the Congress assembly in Ahmedabad and had faced opposition from Mahatma Gandhi. He had to face trial for that demand and was awarded life imprisonment.” (R. Islam 167). Nazrul was the first who demanded the complete independence of India openly in written form.

³ It was only in 1929 that Indian National Congress tabled the resolution of complete independence in its Lahore session. (Goswamy 77).

was transferred to Hooghly Jail from Alipur Jail he, along with his fellow prisoners was stripped of the status of political prisoners (ibid. 205). Nazrul and other political prisoners were shackled and faced with new types of oppression and torture everyday devised by the then Superintendent of Hooghly Jail Mr. Arston (ibid.). In order to protest the unjust and cruel treatments in the Jail, Nazrul started his 40-daylong hunger strike (R. Islam 207-08). During his strike the senior poet Rabindranath Tagore sent him a telegram urging him to give up the strike stating that “Bengali literature claims you.” (Ibid. 204). However, Tagore had dedicated earlier his song-play *Basanto* to the poet when he was in Alipur Jail (ibid. 209).

Language, Revolution and Power of Poetry

Proscribing Nazrul’s books and creating different obstacles against selling his books were an ongoing reaction of the colonial government. He was the only Indian poet whose books were confiscated in the greatest number. Sisir Kar in his book *British Raj and the Rebel Poet Nazrul* conducted a laborious study on his writings confiscated by the British Raj on political grounds. It is here to note that Nazrul did not have to write in the language of the coloniser for doing cultural resistance. For writing back to the Empire, that is, for doing cultural resistance he chose Bengali, his mother tongue. His vibrating verses would mobilise the Bengali freedom activists to the cause of complete independence of Indian Subcontinent. In fact, it was the colonisers who had to employ translators in doing quick translations of Nazrul’s message in his poetry and other writings (Iqbal)⁴. It is relevant to mention that regarding language as a medium of anti-colonial resistance, Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his discussion on the role of writers in a neo-colonial age, completely abandons the idea of using the coloniser’s language, putting emphasis on choosing the native, indigenous language. He opposes the use of European languages. (17- 20).

Analysing Nazrul’s myth-making use of the language one can have an understanding of the power of a vernacular or indigenous language. Nazrul exploited his own language, and rather appropriated and reinvented it to serve his purpose. The way he borrowed words, images, myths, meters and so on from myriad linguistic and cultural sources is unprecedented in Bengali-language literature. He proves that even if one does not have a rich language or a previous trend or tradition in the language to express his rebellious zeal, he has every chance and possibility to adapt and enrich it with his linguistic skills by

⁴ Bhuiya Iqbal in his edited book *Nazruler Kabita: Bajeyaptir Janyo Anubad (Nazrul’s Poems: Translated for Confiscation)* has compiled a number of translated excerpts of Nazrul’s writings done under the supervision of the British Governments. He mentions that the Bengali police officers rather than the British officers were more enthusiastic about translating Nazrul’s “objectionable message in his poetry. Some Bengali professors, poets and intellectuals such as Akshaykumar Duttagupta, a former professor of Dhaka College even worked as the local agents of the British Raj, having done purposeful translation of Nazrul’s poetry. (Iqbal 12-13).

borrowing from other languages. The British could not simply ignore his linguistic innovations in Bengali. Therefore, a vernacular or indigenous language can also be a powerful tool to convey one's revolutionary message.

Possibly, Nazrul for the first time in Bengali literature showed poetry as a performative mode of resistance, "using art as a vehicle for anti-colonial action." (Schlund-Vials). Poetry as a performative mode appeals to the minds of the masses who in fact play the most significant role in overthrowing any oppressive force. Nazneen Ahmed, analysing the role of poetry in 1952 and 1971, the two epoch making dates in Bangladesh's history, states, "Poetry, orally recited, often set to music, and published in home-made little magazines and single sheets, was a prominent feature of rallies and processions against the Pakistani state." (2).

Language is a dominant force to build national culture since it inculcates national consciousness in the minds of the masses. The language movement in 1950s demanding Bengali be the state language united the nation in terms of cultural identity that ultimately led to the Liberation War in 1971 and thus the Bengali's dream of a homeland of their own came true. In both cases, that is, the Language Movement and the Liberation War, Nazrul's revolutionary verses remained one of the most powerful tools to inspire the Bengalis aspiring to a homeland for their own.

India and Pakistan were created in 1947 but what was observed after the partition was the continuation of a newer, or rather "old wine in a new bottle" type of exploitation and domination, especially in Pakistan. It has been argued that "there was no real decolonisation after India's partition; what followed after partition was simply re-colonisation." (Hasan 84). This is, after the partition India and Pakistan largely emerged as neo-colonial countries in the Subcontinent. And that was the main reason for the struggle of the Bengalis of East Pakistan against the neo-colonial rule of the West Pakistanis. Nazrul's poetic spirits energised the freedom fighters and the freedom movement, and also the national leaders such as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1971. The vibrating slogan "Joy Bangla" during the Liberation War was derived from his poem "Purno-Ovinondon"⁵ and his song "Chal Chal Chal" ("Marching Song") was "adopted as the national military song of Bangladesh" after independence (Rahman). The birth of Bangladesh can be identified with Nazrul's revolutionary spirit in the sense that the country was created through a bloody war with a spirit of freedom and a protest against all sorts of exploitation existing in the Indian Subcontinent.

⁵ The poem was addressed to the revolutionary Purno Chandra Das who was imprisoned by the British. Nazrul articulated—

Bangla Bangalir hok;
Banglar joy hok, "Joy Bangla
(May Bangla belong to Bengali;
May the Bengal be victorious, victory to Bengal).

Nazrul and the Era of Neo-colonialism

Now we will attempt to situate Nazrul's revolutionary poetry in neo-colonial contexts. Let us first theorise neo-colonialism.

In the 1961 Resolution of the All-African Peoples' Conference (AAPC), Neo-colonialism was officially defined for the first time as "the deliberate and continued survival of the colonial system in independent African states, by turning these states into victims of political, mental, economic, social, military and technical forms of domination carried out through indirect and subtle means that did not include direct violence." (Afsi).

Neo-colonialism is a doctrine of the continuation of colonialism after the official end of colonisation and the creation of nation states. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it denotes "the control of less-developed countries by developed countries through indirect means." (Halperin). The term also refers to "a form of global power in which transnational corporations and global and multilateral institutions combine to perpetuate colonial forms of exploitation of developing countries." (ibid.). Neo-colonialism substantiates all parameters of global capitalism and enables "capitalist powers (both nations and corporations) to dominate subject nations through the operations of international capitalism rather than by means of direct rule." (ibid.) Neo-colonialism has widely been discussed in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre (*Colonialism and Neo-colonialism*, 1964) and Noam Chomsky (*The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, 1979). Kwame Nkrumah who is thought to have coined the term "neo-colonialism" wrote a book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* in 1965. He states, "The neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage." (ix). He further claims, "Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism." (xi). Though the book was written by focusing mainly on neo-colonialism in African context, the same scenario is evident in the countries of the Indian Subcontinent.

Let us then discuss how the power of poetry enacting different forms of revolution in the era of both colonisation and neo-colonisation is observed in poetic expressions of Nazrul. Nazrul was undoubtedly ahead of his time. His forceful utterances against the oppression of neo-colonial state are evident in many of his verses. Here is an excerpt from his "Those Iron Gates of Prison"—

Destroy those iron gates of prison,
Demolish the blood-stained stony altars
Of chain worshipping!
O youthful Israfil,
Blow your horn of universal cataclysm!
Let the flag of destruction
Rise amidst the rubble of prison walls
Of the East!!
Play the music of the festival of Shiva!
Who's the master? Who's the king?

Who is it that gives punishment
Having snatched away the truth which free and open?

(N. Islam, *Selected Works* 199)

Nazrul was not just a self-proclaimed rebel, but he led a life of struggle and revolution more of national or global than of personal nature. In Serajul Islam Chowdhury's words, "Nazrul Islam called himself a rebel and declared that he would not cease to fight till all oppressions in the world had been put to an end." (qtd. in Hussain, "Reading Nazrul's *Bidrohi*" 290). In fact, Nazrul dreamt of a society which would be free from class division and discrimination based on ethnic, racial and religious identities. Schlund-Vials points out that Nazrul's life and his artistic creations in terms of style and contents are juxtaposed in a synthesised spirit, the spirit of humanism "that extended well beyond the perimeters of race, class, and gender, . . ." In Nazrul's words,

No one bows down here before the horses' feet,
Or in front of the motor-cars' wheels.

...

Comrade, this is a place where all are equal,
Where the black and the white have no separate graveyards,
Where they have no separate rooms for offering their prayers.

("Equality", N. Islam, *Poetry* 305)

Nazrul also denies any spatial constraint as he proclaims to rip apart the earthly barriers to penetrate into the sky, the celestial space. He promises to tear apart all beings and all forces whether earthly or heavenly that try to suppress the very notion of freedom and liberation. He proudly proclaims,

I am cyclone, I am destruction,

...

I have no mercy,
I grind all to pieces.

...

I destroy all that I find in my path

...

I salute none but me!

("Bidrohi", N. Islam, *Poetry* 12- 13)

Although the British colonisation ended and the three independent countries were born out of British India, a true revolution had not taken place in the Subcontinent. No country in the Indian Subcontinent, or rather in the whole world could accommodate Nazrul's revolutionary spirit, the thundering force in his poetry committed to demolishing any form of discrimination, inequality and oppression. Since he declared his all through war against any system of oppression and domination whether colonial or neo-colonial, the present neo-colonial forces always tend to read his poetry selectively. Therefore, a split Nazrul is everywhere; Nazrul as a composer of Shyama songs is welcomed in Kolkata, West Bengal and Nazrul as a composer of Islamic songs is celebrated in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (McDermott 46, 47, 56, 57).

Neo-colonialism thrives on the spread of global capitalism. To understand how neo-colonialism works inside a third world or developing country, the connection between the global and the local power should be addressed. Foucault explains the global web of power in the following way—

“Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. . . . Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation.” (98).

Besides, power can pervade throughout “all strata of society like a capillary” and start emerging and functioning from regional to local levels (Hasan 71). To underscore a concrete neo-colonial scenario at a local level, that is, in a third world or developing country like Bangladesh or India what Fanon enunciated in *The Wretched of the Earth* is worth quoting—

[S]candals are numerous, ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, the members of Parliament feather their nests and there is not a soul down to the simple policemen or the customs officer who does not join in the great procession of corruption. (172).

In fact, the centre (global) and peripheral (local) countries (agents) work together for oppressing the poor people. As a result, the poor and workers suffer around the world. Let us see Nazrul’s global concerns in “Kuli Majur” (“Coolies and Labourers”).

Will the poor get beaten like this
Throughout the world and for ever?
Will they never conquer their tears and sighs?
The steam engines that run today in terrific speed
Were brought into being by the bones of these. . . [coolies],
(N. Islam, *Poetry* 309)

Nazrul even did not cease to attack such organisations as League of Nations (now United Nations) working as an exploiting organisation of global Empire from its inception in order to exploit the third world countries or ex-colonies and thus assist the developed or imperialist countries. He had called those imperialist organisations “robbers and dacoits” (N. Islam, *Poetry* 276) long before Thiong’o outlined the history and emergence of neo-colonialism in the world politics. Thiong’o points out that in the 1970s transition from imperialism to neo-colonialism took place (12). He states—

The decade saw the clear ascendancy of US-dominated transnational financial and industrial monopolies in most of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This ascendancy was to be symbolised by the dominance of [League of Nation/ United Nations,] the IMF and the World Bank in the determination of the economy and hence the politics and culture of the affected countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America (12).

And Nazrul in “Chor-Dakat” (“Robbers and Dacoits”) utters,

My Lord, raise your mace of justice and punish
Those wealthy and the rich who thrived

Robbing the humble poor and the deprived.
Today the greater the robber, the bigger the thief
And the cleverer the cheat
The more honourable, the more distinguished
And the more dignified his seat
In the assembly of nations (the United Nations).
(N. Islam, *Poetry* 276)

Besides, Nazrul is found to be vocal about human rights recognised by present day human rights organisations. In his poetry he is ever aware of the rights of the grass-root people. He celebrates the universality of egalitarian spirit and essence—

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,
(N. Islam, *Poetry* 262)

Thus, Nazrul's vehement attack on the oppressors and the ruling class acting as agents of colonisers and imperialists is evident in many of his verses. Unlike other poets living and writing under the surveillance of colonial or neo-colonial authority, Nazrul was never confused about his self-identity and the identity of the nation he aspired to. He intended to deconstruct the system through revolution in order to go ahead of his time and show the right directions to the nation.

Conclusion

In a neo-colonial context, Nazrul seems to be enemy to all, but friend to none since his stature as a poet goes beyond any construct and constraint of conventional rule and regime. In a colonial context, the colonised were not usually able to articulate their voice or agency. Nevertheless, if they had their voice in a limited and fixed form, they could only exercise it in an assumed binary form sanctioned and legitimised by the colonisers. But Nazrul not only prided on uttering his revolting voice but also denied any form of subjugated existence under the dynamics of binary set up by the colonisers of his time. He was the first poet-activist able to inscribe a sense of selfhood/subject-hood in the mind of colonised Bengalis. He fiercely denounced the very existence of colonial coercion and any type of authority whatever of the Raj or the administration or the religion.

The British administration was scared of Nazrul's voice, his poetic power and his indomitable spirit to stand upright. He did not carry any arms or he was not a warrior but he proclaimed a stronger form of war armed with his poetic power. His call to the oppressed/colonised Indians to unshackle the clutch of all types of

subjugation and oppression is exemplary. He by nature spontaneously kept himself away from any type of ambivalent existence with the rulers or their agents. He kept up his rebellious spirit throughout his life through his revolting words as lashes on the shameless faces of the colonisers, neo-colonisers and oppressors. He was anti-colonial in the strictest sense.

Nazrul was postcolonial before postcolonialism emerged as a literary theory. One could not but ponder how he would react to the US imperialism or the global imperialism of the present time if he were alive. The public intellectuals such as Edward Said pointed out various evils of imperialism and neo-colonialism through his scholarly works⁶ and activism. After Said's demise, Noam Chomsky has been doing the same for quite a long time. Nazrul would also have raised his fiery voice in a bid to disdain any imperialist or neo-colonial power whatever mighty that could be. Here lies his power of poetry effective across languages, cultures and nations. Which is exactly why, he is termed a "multicultural rebel." (Langley 152).

Thus, the article suggests that a real manifestation of Nazrul's visions and message conveyed in his works be made available to the global and local authorities, masses and intellectuals to build an exploitation-free egalitarian world in general and Bangladesh in particular where oppression, corruption and discrimination in any form would not prevail. "Amra aanibo ranga provat" ("we will bring out the rosy morning"; N. Islam, *Poetry* 489) could be the motto of a nation in order to found a real socialistic society on the basis of equity. Therefore, the message of Nazrul will remain relevant for combating any type of oppression even after ages whenever or wherever a neo-colonial force comes into being.

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⁶ See the "Works Cited" section.

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