

## **Root, Resistance and Revolution: A Comparative Study on the Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam and Aimé Césaire**

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**Abstract:** The article attempts a comparative study on Bangladesh's National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, evaluating how root, resistance and revolution become the central themes in their poetry. Both Nazrul and Césaire were poet-activists and major figures of anticolonial movements in two different contexts. The main objective of the study is to show that both the poets possess resisting voices articulated powerfully in their poetry in the context of colonial occupation and oppression. The article also points out how they were committed to their cultural root and thus produced verses calling the respective colonised nations to come into being by constructing identity, e. g. Negritude in the case of Césaire and Bengaliness in the case of Nazrul. The methods of the new comparative literature outlined by Steven Totosy de Zepetnek are adopted in doing textual analysis, subverting the Eurocentric approach to comparative literature. As a whole, the article contends that a comparative study on the writers or poets from similar backgrounds, e. g. ex-colonies, is more nuanced than the study attempting to standardise the works of a third world poet in comparison with those of a first world/Western poet.

**Keywords:** Comparative Literature, Negritude, Bengaliness, Postcolonial Poetry, Identity

Comparative Literature has emerged as a well-established academic field that studies literary and cultural works across linguistic, national, and disciplinary boundaries. In the comparative literature field of the Indian subcontinent, a common practice of comparing a sub-continental author or poet such as Bangladeshi or Indian author or poet with that of an English or European origin is found. One of the major objectives of such Eurocentric comparison is to judge a third world poet and his works in the scale of European standard and thus make a claim that the poets of this world could write like an English poet and their literary creations are of European standard. However, this study would argue that such tendency has resulted from a sense of inferiority complex which has grown out of a long period of exposure to colonial education, literature and culture.

The present article attempts to offer a comparative study of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the National Poet of Bangladesh and Aimé Césaire, a Martinican poet,

playwright and politician as poets of resistance and revolution. What has inspired the researcher to attempt this comparative study is some striking similarities found in their poetic oeuvre. The study analyses some of their poetic works to point out that these two poets had anticolonial voices growing stronger under the oppressive force of the colonisers. The article also points out how they were committed to their cultural root and thus produced verses calling the respective colonised nations to come into being by constructing identity, e. g. Negritude in the case of Césaire and Bengality in the case of Nazrul. In so doing, the article first outlines the shift of comparative literature studies from a Eurocentric approach to a localised/postcolonial approach and attempts to postulate a methodological framework or what can be called proposed approaches and methods for studying the two respective poets and their works comparatively.

Having appeared in European contexts (first in France) at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a model of comparing and contrasting pieces of literature in European languages, the discipline of comparative literature was developed mainly by the then European authors and critics (Bassnett 12- 30). Robert J. C. Young has stated, “For the bulk of its history, comparative literature created the universal literature of Europe, keeping its distance from the Africanists and the Orientalists.” (687). Susan Bassnett in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* has pointed out some key characteristics of Eurocentric comparative literature. One is “influence study”; that is, the study of the influence of a superior author or text on an inferior author or text, and it “has always occupied an important place in Comparative Literature.” (13). This influence study has, in fact, remained as an Oriental or colonial approach to the study of literature comparatively, especially in the contexts of British colonies such as India. In this approach, an “imperial perspective”, to quote Bassnett, is employed in which European/English literature is positioned as superior to any other literature produced in colonised or peripheral countries. To be specific, in this comparative literature framework, “Homer and the Greeks, the plays of Shakespeare, the poetry of Spenser and Milton, these were the texts against which other works were measured and found wanting.” (Bassnett 18). As a consequence of such comparison, “cultural colonialism” prevails and “native writers were evaluated negatively in comparison.” (ibid. 19). In (colonial) Indian contexts, in the beginning phase, comparative literature was influenced by the European model in which European literature was introduced as yardsticks of literary excellence by which local and vernacular literature in Indian languages was evaluated and appropriated.

Against the backdrop of the above mentioned Eurocentric features of comparative literature, in the 1960s and 70s, the necessity of devising the methods and approaches of “New Comparative Literature” was felt in the US

academia and subsequently in the Indian subcontinent with the emergence of “American School” and several departments and courses at Indian universities respectively<sup>1</sup>. Besides, after the end of British and European colonisation, national consciousness and awareness of “the need to move beyond the colonial legacy” grew which has “led significantly to the development of comparative literature in many parts of the world, even as the subject enters a period of crisis and decay in the West.” (Bassnett 8). Thus, at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a shift occurred in the nature of comparative literature studies in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere (Patil 299-310; Dasgupta 10-19). In fact, in recent times, comparative literature has appeared as a radical subject asking for “a widening of perspectives”, avoiding local sentiments and being transgressive and trans-disciplinary (Bassnett 4- 5).

Regarding methods and approaches of comparative literature, no definite or coherent model and framework can be found (Bassnett 5). In a talk entitled “The Crisis of Comparative Literature”, René Wellek argued that as a discipline comparative literature had “not been able to establish a distinct subject matter and a specific methodology.” (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 47). And this condition is described as a crisis of method (Palumbo-Liu 47). However, from a peripheral or postcolonial viewpoint, a shift of perspective is obvious as the superiority of Western literature is challenged and scrutinised by Indian comparatists (Bassnett 6). Besides, postcolonial literature itself is comparative as it is always in the position of being compared with other works of literature (Young 688). Young has pointed out that the postcolonial perspective “involves the most radical form of comparative literature: it compares the hitherto incomparable.” (687). Therefore, keeping this radical perspective at the centre, the present comparative study on Nazrul and Césaire focuses on analysing respective texts spanning across cultures, languages and contexts. Besides, in the absence of any particular method in the discipline, a few principles are considered relevant to the study of the respective poems by Nazrul and Césaire. In this regard, Steven Totosy de Zepetnek in *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* proposed ten general principles of comparative literature of which the following are slightly adapted as a theoretical basis for the present study.

First of all, the “how”, that is, the method is of concern and importance rather than “what”. Secondly, the discussion and analysis in a comparative literature framework enact “dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines” on a basis of equality (Zepetnek 16). Thirdly, it must maintain “its theoretical, methodological as well as ideological and political approach of inclusion. This inclusion extends to all other, all marginal, minority, and peripheral and it encompasses both form and substance.” (ibid.). Fourthly, as

a principle, the analysis focuses on different types of literature “within the context of culture.” (ibid.). Lastly, as “a composite principle of approach and methodology” of comparative literature study, English is used as a *lingua franca* or neutral language of communication and “the use of English should not represent any form of colonialism.” (ibid. 17).

Now, before doing a comparative analysis of the poetry of Nazrul and Césaire, let us draw a short review on what has been attempted in the context of comparison between Nazrul and other poets.

In this regard, attempts to compare the poetic works of Nazrul with those of English poets in order to legitimise and standardise his position as one of the greatest Bengali poets having the qualities of a major English poet are evident in most comparative studies. After having a quick look at the available literary research, one can find that his poetic works have been amply compared with those of English and American poets such as Keats, Shelley, Byron, Yeats, Whitman and so on. Primarily, two approaches are found in those studies: the imperial/Eurocentric approach and the neutral approach. The imperial approach is largely maintained in the comparative study of Nazrul and any other English poet, for instance, Syed Ali Ahsan’s attempt in his essay on Whitman and Nazrul. From the beginning to several pages onward, the essay seems to offer a thematic and stylistic treatise on Whitman (Ahsan 191- 95). Then Nazrul is brought about in the discussion to prove that he was deeply influenced by Whitman (ibid. 198). Besides, it is argued that Nazrul in his poetry was not coherent and polished, but rather self-contradictory (ibid. 203). By comparing Nazrul with Shelley, Ahsan also claims that “unlike Shelley, he [Nazrul] lacked the support of an organised philosophical system.” (203). The overall tone of the essay indicates that the author applied “influence study” in his comparison between Whitman and Nazrul. Nazrul is widely known as the National Poet of Bangladesh; yet, to highlight his standard as equal to one of the “greatest” English poets (as if English poets were the greatest poets of the world!) he is popularly called “Shelley and Byron of Bangladesh” in journalistic essays (Ahmed). However, this Eurocentric approach was sincerely adopted quite a long ago by Buddhadeva Bose, a noted Bengali poet, translator and literary critic. One example can be traced out in his essay titled “Modern Bengali Poetry and Nazrul Islam.” (61-68).

In the second approach, Nazrul is compared with other sub-continental poets of a different language. S. Krishnamoorthy in “Subramania Bharathi and Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Comparative Study” has done a detailed comparative study on two poets covering their poetic works as well as journalistic and political careers. Subramania Bharathi was a Tamil poet who was “well-acquainted with the literary genius of Rabindranath Tagore” but was not familiar with Nazrul’s poems (Krishnamoorthy 204). In his article, Krishnamoorthy applies

the new approach of Indian comparatists in which both the poets along with their works are given equal importance. Gulshan Ara Kazi in her book compares Nazrul and Maya Angelou, a contemporary American poet, through a neutral perspective. They are presented as “two geniuses from the East and the West” through “issues study” as a method of comparison. That is why, similarities between the lyrics of these two poets are traced out, focusing on universal themes and issues such as “equality and human rights”, “labour rights”, “spirituality”, “poverty and hunger” and so forth (Kazi). Besides, some fragmented discussions based on comparative approaches are located in literary articles on Nazrul such as a short aesthetic as well as thematic evaluation of Nazrul’s “Bidrohi” [“The Rebel”] and Yeats’ “The Second Coming” in “Bidrohi: an Aesthetic Charter of Human Emancipation” by Mohammad Nurul Huda (42-43).

However, any detailed comparative study on Nazrul and an anticolonial poet has not been made so far. Therefore, considering the time, context and reality of the age— the age of British colonial rule when the national and cultural identity of Bengalis was at stake, it is relevant to attempt a comparative study of Nazrul’s works and the works of the poets who used to live in the similar time, context and reality. Like Nazrul with his revolutionary verses such as “Say, Valiant,/ Ever high is my head!” (“Bidrohi”, Nazrul Islam, *Poetry* 12), the poets from the occupied or colonised lands of Africa, Latin America, Palestine, Kashmir and so on are found to articulate almost the same revolting verses. And here lies the departure from the Eurocentric comparative studies of Nazrul in a bid to study his anticolonial poems in comparison with those of Césaire by analysing how their poetry expands upon the root, resistance and revolution in the context of colonial occupation.

Nazrul wrote in many languages; but he primarily wrote in Bengali and the poems analysed here were originally composed in Bengali and later on translated into English by several translators. Césaire wrote in French with innovation and experiment as he was educated in French and was highly articulate in the language. The English translation of his poetry, mainly his long poem “Notebook of a Return to the Native Land” is considered for textual references.

Aimé Césaire who was born in Martinique on 26 June 1913, is regarded as the pioneer of anticolonial and postcolonial discourses. His pivotal work *Discourse on Colonialism* is a ground-breaking treatise of the anticolonial struggle. Postcolonial theory is deeply indebted to Frantz Fanon’s seminal works such as *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon is more incorporated in postcolonial studies than Césaire though he was a disciple and follower of the latter. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* published in 1939 as a book is the first significant poetic

work by Césaire, which is described as the “greatest lyrical monument of our times” by the poet André Breton (qtd. in Snyder 197). With regard to its exceptional richness of vocabulary and unique and forceful rhythm of French verse, Sartre pointed out that “no French poet handles the French language as the black poet Aimé Césaire” (ibid.). Apart from being a powerful poet and playwright, Césaire was a great scholar and radical politician, a founder and editor of journals, Mayor of Fort de France and a member of the French senate (Crispin).

On the other hand, Kazi Nazrul Islam is considered as one of the greatest revolutionary poets of the twentieth-century world literature. He was born in 1899 and was awarded the title “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 (Huda, *Nazrul’s Aesthetics* 57; Rafiqul Islam 351-53). After Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971, he was brought to Dhaka, the capital of the country in 1972 and honoured with the title of the National Poet of Bangladesh.

When Nazrul’s most remarkable work “Bidrohi” was published in 1921, Césaire was only eight years old. “Bidrohi” brought a fiery lash as a comet in the field of Bengali literary tradition since nobody was familiar with such type of poetic creation ever before. Just in his twenties after the publication of a series of revolutionary poems including “Bidrohi”, Nazrul was recognised as a rebellious bard enthralling the contemporary intellectuals as well as common people. Now, a striking similarity found between these two poets is that they published their most remarkable works at early ages. Nazrul was only 22 years old when “Bidrohi” was published and Césaire was 26 when his *Notebook* was published.

Both Nazrul and Césaire were the poet-activists in the sense that their poetic or dramatic messages were manifested through their activities. They were the members of Marxist or communist parties and were the editors of Marxist literary magazines serving anticolonial purposes. Nazrul worked closely with Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed who was one of the founder members of the Communist Party of India. Besides, Nazrul signed the founding manifesto of the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress (established on 01 November 1925) as one of the founding leaders (“Sramik Praja Swaraj Dal”). The Socialist Party later named as Workers and Peasants Party of Bengal was committed to national independence and the service of the working class. Apart from being the editor of *Nabajug* [New Age] and *Dhumketu* [The Comet], on 16 December 1925, Nazrul began publishing the *Lungal* [Plough], a weekly, and served as its chief editor. (R. Islam 245). During his study in France, Césaire along with Léopold Senghor launched a journal titled *The Black Student* [*L’Étudiant noir*] featuring the works of writers from Africa

and the Caribbean (Césaire, *Notebook* 69). After joining the French Communist Party by the end of the Second World War Césaire made the following statement, “I joined the Communist party because, in a world not yet cured of racism, where the fierce exploitation of colonial populations still persists, the Communist party embodies the will to work effectively for the coming of the only social and political order we can accept . . .” (*The Collected Works* 4). However, in 1956, he left the Communist Party “partly because of the privileging of proletarian revolution over anti-colonial struggles.” (Wickramasinghe). Thus Césaire took a principled stand against the colonial force unlike many communist intellectuals in France who remained compromising and mute (*ibid.*).

Like Césaire, Nazrul came across colonial experiences and grew up as a poet-revolutionary under the colonial rule though in a different context. Nazrul encountered British colonisation and Césaire French colonisation; and they developed strong anticolonial consciousness due to the oppressive rule of the colonisers. Though Césaire wrote in French, a language of the colonisers, he largely experimented with the language by fusing the idioms of his native language and literary French, coining new words, creating surrealist images, and “reversing traditional metaphors. . .” (Pupavac). Some of his coined words found entries in the French language. For instance, “Negritude” entered French dictionaries in 1948 (Beebee 414). His poetry articulates new ways of speaking and being. By altering the metaphors he shows how “white” becomes the colour of evil and of death. He forcefully states,

What is mine  
 a lone man imprisoned in whiteness  
 a lone man defying the white screams of white death  
 a man who mesmerizes the white sparrow hawk of white death  
 a man alone in the sterile sea of white sand (*Notebook* 21)

Concerning the language and style, Nazrul is considered one of the greatest experimental poets Bengali literature has ever produced. He experimented, appropriated, and rather reinvented the Bangla language to bring about vivacity and diversity in his poetry. A broad body of Bangla literature witnesses that Nazrul enriched Bangla by borrowing and adapting words, myths, and meters from numerous sources of world languages and literatures.

Now we will elaborate upon how root, resistance and revolution are interconnected and synchronised in their poetry, and create a vibrant and vital force that is able to challenge any oppressive entity and construct egalitarian values and a sense of equity.

Both Nazrul and Césaire showed a unique loyalty to their cultural roots and became an emblem of resistance. They have thus inspired and enlightened their contemporaries as well as critics and the masses till today. Specifically,

the ultimate recognition of Nazrul's Bengali nationalism was materialised with the creation of Bangladesh through a nine-month long Liberation War in 1971 and the black African nationalism termed "Negritude" by Césaire was recognised by the end of colonial rule in African nations. Césaire was educated in European tradition and attained consciousness of his African Caribbean identity. He then called for a return to his native cultural root. Césaire, in an interview with Rene Depestre, explains the background to the composition of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*—

It is an autobiographical book, but at the same time it is a book in which I tried to gain an understanding of myself. . . . I wrote it just after I had finished my studies and had come back to Martinique. (qtd. in *Discourse on Colonialism* 78-79)

At the very beginning of *Notebook*, Césaire urges all the colonised to get up from the stupor and defy the calamity, disaster and disease caused by European colonialism.

At the end of first light burgeoning with frail coves the hungry Antilles,  
the Antilles pitted with smallpox, the Antilles dynamited by alcohol,  
stranded in the mud of this bay, in the dust of this town sinisterly stranded  
(*Notebook* 3).

On the other hand, Nazrul's stern anticolonial voice earned him at the very beginning of his poetic career the titles "rebel poet" and Bengal's National Poet, and he remained so essentially and uncompromisingly throughout his life. In the following verses, he asks for the intervention of goddess Durga in order to drive out the British colonisers.

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?  
(“Coming of Anandamoyee”, *Poetry* 608, Translation: Sajed Kamal)

Nazrul in his seminal works such as “Bidrohi” and “Dhumketu” basically celebrates self-awareness, self-assertion and an indomitable spirit of revolution. For becoming a revolutionary one has to know oneself first, learn to celebrate his immense potentiality and proclaim with confidence as Nazrul does:

I am creation, I am destruction,  
I am habitation, I am the grave-yard.  
I am the end, the end of night!  
...  
I salute none but me! (“The Rebel”, *Poetry* 13, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

Césaire also celebrates such self-assertion and self-realisation in the following:

make me into a man for the termination  
 make me into a man for the initiation  
 make me into a man of meditation  
 but also make me into a man of germination  
 make me into the executor of these lofty works (*Notebook 41*)

Césaire's Negritude was an international black consciousness movement that would challenge colonialism and racial discrimination. Negritude defined as "black consciousness" speaks for the value of black or African culture and identity. Philip Crispin states that "Negritude sought to decolonize the mind." Characterising the term "Negritude" Césaire declares in *Notebook*—

my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day  
 my negritude is not leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye  
 my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral  
 it takes root in the red flesh of the soil  
 it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky  
 it breaks through the opaque prostration with its upright patience. (37)

Thus, through powerful images, he articulates his Negritude which is deeply rooted in his native soil and in the open sky. The Africans must not feel insecure of their vulnerable status, nor do they be afraid of any form of oppression. These lines celebrate freedom and assert self-confidence and self-dignity, mentioning the vastness of the earth and the sky. Negritude, as outlined by Thomas O. Beebee, "conveys the awareness of one's own roots in Africa and of the need to spread this awareness to other peoples in the African diaspora." (413). In fact, the negritude movement was not only a call for a unity of African nations on the basis of their commitment to African root and celebration of black identity but also a signal of revolt against any type of colonial or oppressive force.

On the other hand, Nazrul's sense of Bengali identity was inclusive and devoid of the practice of the then communal and elitist literary figures of Bengali literature. One could argue that the movement of Bengali Renaissance constructing Bengaliness and Bengali identity was already in process before Nazrul appeared on the stage of Bengali literature. But how effective and inclusive the Renaissance benefitting mainly the Bengali bourgeoisie became is not beyond question. Serajul Islam Choudhury calls the Bengali Renaissance in the nineteenth century "artificial" and "limited" (136). One can frankly question the colonial bent of mind of the then Bengali revivalists and "debate the outcomes of Bengali renaissance and wonder whether the reformist movement resulted in the creation of half-educated and deformed Bengali Babus (*Bhadralok*) or in the awakening of Bengali minds in the true sense." (Hasan, *The Vortex* 123)<sup>2</sup>. But Nazrul's Bengaliness<sup>3</sup> resulted from his awareness of surrounding experiences of the helpless and rootless condition of Bengalis due to the long existence of British colonial rule. As a poet-activist,

he could perceive the very nature of Bengali identity in which an egalitarian sense of equity is evident. For instance, he states,

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 (“Man”, *Poetry* 262, Translation: Abdul Hakim)

And Nazrul’s “Man” is not identified in terms of cast, colour and religion as he further articulates in “Shamyabadi”—

Of equality I sing:  
 where all barriers and differences  
 between man and man have vanished,  
 where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians  
 have mingled together.  
 (“Of Equality”, *Poetry* 249, Translation: Bashudha Chakravarty)

Besides, when Nazrul mentions “Bangladesh” as a sacred land for Bengalis in the following poem, his Bengaliness underscores a composite nature of Bengali identity that can accommodate all Bengalis irrespective of caste and religion. His essay “The Bengal of the Bengalis”, which explores the cultural root of Bengalis, ends with a short poem. Some lines are as follows—

Teach the Bengalis,  
 The boys and girls of the Bengalis  
 Just this one mantra from their childhood:  
 This sacred *Bangladesh*  
 Belongs to the Bengalis, to us;  
 . . .  
 May Bengal be of the Bengalis!  
 Let Bengal be victorious [Joy Bangla]!  
 May the Bengalis be victorious [Joy Bengali]! (Translation: Custers 108)

It is to note that in the face of West Pakistan’s oppression in East Bengal in the 1950s and 60s, “Joy Bangla”<sup>4</sup> and “Bangladesh” became the essence of the national and cultural identity of Bengalis. Therefore, it can undoubtedly be claimed that Nazrul was one of the greatest forerunners of the movement of Bengaliness who left an indelible mark on the independence struggle of Bengalis through his revolutionary works.

A vital characteristic common in both Nazrul and Césaire is that they believed in the power of poetry and knew very well that poetry can be better weapons against oppression. Césaire sought to “awaken the revolutionary power of language.” (Pupavac). To him words would function as weapons. Thus, he proclaims the power of words—

words, ah yes, words! but  
 words of fresh blood, words that are  
 tidal waves and erysipelas  
 malarias and lave and brush  
 fires, and blazes of flesh,  
 and blazes of cities . . . (*Collected Poems 57*)

And Nazrul makes self-reference in “Bidrohi”—

In one hand of mine is the tender flute  
 while in the other I hold the war bugle.  
 (“The Rebel”, *Poetry 13*, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

In “Those Iron Gates of Prison”, which is a powerful song of protest, Nazrul further confirms the power of words:

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! (*Selected Works 199*)

Thus, words as weapons can set fire on any oppressive force, demolish the foundation of exploitation and inequality and thus celebrate the victory. Here lies the spirit of resistance, of course, cultural.

In “Bidrohi” Nazrul mentions “dance”, death and madness in a sequence.

I am the hurricane, I am the cyclone  
 I destroy all that I found in the path!  
 I am the dance-intoxicated rhythm,  
 I dance at my own pleasure,  
 I am the unfettered joy of life!  
 I am Hambeer, I am Chhayana, I am Hindole,  
 I am ever restless,  
 I caper and dance as I move!  
 I do whatever appeals to me, whenever I like,  
 I embrace the enemy and wrestle with death,  
 I am mad. I am the tornado!  
 I am pestilence, the great fear,  
 I am the death of all reigns of terror,  
 I am full of a warm restlessness for ever!  
 Say, Valiant,  
 Ever high is my head!  
 (“The Rebel”, *Poetry 13*, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

Astonishingly, Césaire maintains in his *Notebook* the same symmetrical force of powerful flow though in a slightly different sequence such as first “Death”, then “Madness” and then “Dance”—

death is a struck bird  
 death wanes  
 death flickers  
 . . .  
 death expires in a white pool of silence.  
 . . .  
 The madness that remembers  
 The madness that howls  
 The madness that sees  
 The madness that is unleashed  
 . . .  
 rally to my side my dances  
 you bad nigger dances  
 the carcan-cracker dance  
 the prison-break dance (*The Collected Poetry* 49, 83)

More similarities can be found between them in terms of images, ways of self-assertion, spirit of utmost madness, impulse of carelessness, declaration of deconstruction, and so on. For examples—

Césaire: grant me the courage of the martyr  
 grant me the savage faith of the sorcerer  
 grant my hands the power to mold  
 grant my soul the sword’s temper  
 I won’t flinch. Make my head into a figurehead (*Notebook* 39)

Nazrul: A dozen suns glitter and shine in his burning eyes  
 And the sorrows of the world cluster in his  
 tangled and dishevelled hair.  
 A single drop of his tear  
 makes the seven seas roll and swell.  
 In his giant arms he crackles the mother –earth  
 and cries out, “Welcome, Destruction!”  
 (“The Ecstasy of Destruction”, *Poetry* 04, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

Césaire: I and oh, only I  
 Secure the first  
 Drops of vaginal milk through a straw! (*The Collected Poetry* 59)

Nazrul: I am the trembling first touch of the virgin,  
 I am the throbbing tenderness of her first stolen kiss  
 (“The Rebel”, *Poetry* 14, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

Césaire: The master of laughter??  
 The master of hope and despair?  
 The master of laziness? Master of the dance? (*The Collected Poetry* 83)

Nazrul: Maddened with an intense joy I rush onward,  
 I am insane! I am insane!  
 . . .  
 I am the rising, I am the fall  
 . . .  
 Sitting in the burning pit of Hell  
 I smile as the innocent flower!  
 (“The Rebel”, *Poetry* 15, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

Césaire: I have assassinated God with my laziness with  
 my words with my gestures  
 with my obscene songs (*The Collected Poetry* 53)

Nazrul: 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.  
 (“The Rebel”, *Poetry* 12, Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)

Césaire is described as “a leader of cultural struggle.” (Crispin). Like Nazrul, Césaire did cultural resistance, e. g. creating powerful and ground-breaking pieces of literature by responding to the propagandist literature of the colonisers. Besides, their political resistance included their involvement in communist parties. Nazrul was sent to jail and his several books were proscribed by the British colonial government. But his resistance never stopped as he continued writing in jails with newer and more vibrant spirits. He never compromised with the British and developed a sense of ambivalence. But Césaire was quite ambivalent, serving in the colonial government as a deputy in France's National Assembly for several decades; so his resistance is more cultural than political. As a poet he got more global exposure than Nazrul since he wrote in French, an influential European language. Moreover, due to the English translation of Césaire's works and their international circulation, he got more recognition than Nazrul and has even been described as “perhaps the greatest poet of the anti-colonial movement.” (Pupavac).

More revolutionary elements can be traced out when one compares how Nazrul and Césaire speak of the indomitable spirit and energy of the labourers, the wretched and the downtrodden. Césaire's *Notebook* along with other poems speaks against all types of inhuman and brutal treatments, especially slavery and racism carried out by the colonisers in Africa and the Caribbean. Césaire declares, “I am on the side of those who are oppressed.” (qtd. in Crispin). Nazrul also proved through his works that he was the poet of all people; he was always on the side of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the outcaste, and so on. He confirms in “The Rebel”—



aesthetic force lies in their firm commitment to their root, but the modes of their resistance are occasionally different.

Through this comparative study, one thing has become obvious that Nazrul's "Bidrohi" and Césaire's *Notebook* have striking similarities though *Notebook* was published after 18 years of the publication of "Bidrohi". Sisir Kar's *British Raj and the Rebel Poet Nazrul* has recorded that just after the publication of Nazrul's poems and other works, the British government had them translated or some pro-British so-called local elites would translate them to relay the anti-colonial elements to the British administrators so that his books could be proscribed. Besides, there were early translations of Nazrul's poetry and it may not be wrong to assume that Césaire might have read Nazrul's "Bidrohi" and got inspired to write his *Notebook*. Whatever might be the case as we have discussed so far, both can be called strong warning voices against any type of oppressive force, for instance, a neo-colonial government of the present age.

Thus, it is a modest attempt to draw a comparison between Nazrul, a revolutionary of Bengal and Césaire, a resistance poet from Martinique in order to point to the ways they sing the songs of resistance and revolution for the rise of humanity, the rise of equity, and the rise of life and love. The article, however, ends with a note of hope that in future, researchers will come forward to do more comparative studies of Nazrul and the poets such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, a leftist revolutionary from Pakistan, Roque Dalton from El Salvador, Mahmoud Darwish from Palestine and so on. Let us then conclude with a few more lines from Césaire's *Notebook* and Nazrul's "Resurrection" to mark the end of the present comparative study with an expectation for a rise, rebirth, revolution, and regeneration.

Césaire: And blind me without remorse  
 blind me with your vast arms to the luminous clay  
 blind my black vibration to the very navel of the world  
 Blind, blind me, bitter brotherhood  
 Then, strangling me with your lasso of stars  
 rise, Dove  
 rise  
 rise  
 rise (*Notebook* 57)

Nazrul: Wake up  
 You captives of hunger, arise.  
 You harassed, down-trodden masses,  
 Spell thunder at the oppressors—  
 . . .  
 Wake up,

Ye, hapless masses, arise,

...

On a new foundation

A young world shall dawn.

Listen, you tyrant!

Listen, you rich!

...

Our rights

We shall recover

With the unity of sufferers

All the world over. (*Poetry* 398, Translation: Syed Mujibul Huq)

## Notes

1. See Bassnett 31; Patil 299-310; Dasgupta 10-19.
2. Hasan argues that “the great effort of English-educated Bengalis like Ram Mohan to eradicate *Sathi* and other anti-humanistic and barbaric practices from Hindu society” cannot be ignored. But how they regarded the colonisers “as rescuers sent by God”, introduced Babu English and Sanskritised Bengali, and were involved in mimicry and flattery in the use of English, ignoring the fact that the colonisers were looters, “would rule out the possibility of any rigorous reform that could liberate Bengali minds in that era.” (*The Vortex* 123). For details see Choudhury 12-13.
3. Bengaliness or Bengali identity is a debatable issue. Hasan in “Bangabandhu, Bengaliness and Bengali Identity” addresses the debate on the twofold dimensions of Bengali identity and outlines its essential and inclusive components (see Hasan 159- 183). Nazrul’s inclusive understanding of Bengali identity is found in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s political theory and practice (see *The Unfinished Memoirs*). Thus, Bengaliness is not exclusionary in nature.
4. The High Court of Bangladesh, on 10 March 2020, declared that “Joy Bangla” will be the national slogan of the country (Rahman, “High Court declares ‘Joy Bangla’ as the national slogan”).
5. Among many essays, just two of his essays “Bartaman Biswasahitya” [Contemporary World Literature] and “Turk Ramonir Ghomta Khola” [Opening the Veil of a Turkish Woman] can be mentioned in this regard (See Islam, *The Path of the Comet* 34-40 & 79-82). And poems such as “Kamal Pasha” [Kemal Pasha], “Chor-Dakat” [Robbers and Dacoits], and many more testify to this (see Islam, *Poetry*).

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