

Kazi Nazrul Islam's Use of Myths: A Critical Study of Selected Poems

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Abstract: The article tends to focus on Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetic style especially his use of the mythological allusions as well as a unique and successful incorporation of Arabic, Persian words in Bengali literature from a wider spectrum of backgrounds. It also ascertains how Nazrul, as a poet, activist and humanist while fighting against the colonial misrule detects the divisive political policy of the colonising British rulers. Thus, the poet's literary enterprise turns out to be a deliberate attempt to address the issues like the socio-politico-cultural enslavement, communalism, oppression and misrule. To reflect on the perspectives of the use of myth in the poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the present article investigates into two prominent rationales. Firstly, it examines how the poet's indiscriminate use of the mythological allusions from the Hindu, Muslim, Christian religious backgrounds help to alleviate the interreligious uneasiness and prejudices prevailing at that time. Secondly, it probes into the application of the myth in the context of the colonised realities that enkindles a revolutionary resistance in the mass people's psyche with the timeless and universal traits of the mythological stories.

Introduction

'Are they Hindus or Muslims?'
Who ask this question, I say.
Tell him, my Captain,
The children of the motherland are drowning today
(Huda 351, "Beware My Captain").

Kazi Nazrul Islam "not only a rebel but also a revolutionary poet" marked his robust articulation against all forms of discriminatory and sectarian attitudes and ideologies in the society through his poems, essays, journals and writings (Hussain). Growing up in the British colony during the First World War (1914-18) amid the atmosphere of anticolonial resistance from his countrymen and different socio-political incidents Nazrul had his own way of experiencing the life through thick and thin. The humble family background with economic constraints and some other unfavourable circumstances compelled him to start supporting his family with working in the Muktab as Muajjin, in the bread shop, in the musical Leto group etc. Though he had a religious schooling in the muktab, Nazrul's family was liberal enough to inculcate a non-communal attitude in the young Nazrul's mind. Moreover, they had a Hindu majority locale where the Hindus and Muslims maintained a communal harmony. Nevertheless, in the Leto musical group his role as an actor, singer and composer helped his life to be moulded as a man of liberal psyche. Notably, his joining the 49th Bengali Regiment in 1917 to participate in the World War I and his training and staying in Karachi provided him the opportunity to be introduced with the works and thoughts of Persian poets and philosophers Omar Khayyam (1048-1131), Rumi (1207-1273), Hafiz (1315-1390) whose broader outlooks and unconventional way of thinking taught Nazrul to uphold the ideals of humanity above everything. Returning from Karachi, he came to a close contact with Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed (1889-1973), Barindra Kumar Ghose (1880-1959), Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925) and a literary and cultural circle to exchange ideas and pass the quality time with them.

In the history of literature and art there has been a close relationship between myth and literature. Literature is indeed treated as a carrier of myths. Like all branches of literature poetry is also keeping the mythological elements as its integral part. Acclaimed Canadian literary critic and literary theorist Northrop Frye states: "the interest of poets in myth and mythology having been remarkable and constant since Homer's time" (21). Though almost every civilization has its own history, heritage and myths, we tend to be guided by the Eurocentric outlooks and consider Greek and Latin literature "as a foundation for modern myth-making, providing the mythological archive for characters and themes in literature and art" (Baumbach 2). However, like the two Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of the west, the Indian civilization is gifted with another two epics the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. As India was under the British colony for a pretty long period, reasonably, the Indian literature is influenced by both the Indian as well as the western myths. Moreover, sub continental cultural and literary tradition is also enriched with Islamic religio-cultural identities and resources. Many poets have used classical and folk myths in

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poetry before and after Nazrul in their own way. However, in the Bengali literary tradition, the synchronised incorporation of the myths of both the Hindus and Muslims along with other cultural sources in Nazrul's poems is really matchless.

As an Indian and Muslim Nazrul had the added privilege to inherit and uphold the two cultural traditions, i.e., the Indian tradition and the tradition from the West Asia. Consciously and artistically, he had inculcated a racial and religious respect that ultimately led him to foster a vision and forward-looking mission to convey a message of love and amity to make a bridge between the two leading communities Hindus and Muslims (Ghosh). The unconditional love Nazrul cherished for the humanity compelled him to be a truly revolutionary against the oppressive colonised forces. To serve the motherland through the literary enterprise, he had introduced his own way of style. Drawing on an in-depth analysis of the selected poems, the present article attempts to explore the use and perspectives of mythological characters and elements in Nazrul's poems in the context of the colonised India. In so doing, the paper primarily delineates how the poet's liberal and indiscriminate spirit of using the myths of a varied cultural backgrounds contribute to eliminate the interreligious uneasiness and prejudices prevailing at that time. The article also investigates into the application of the myth in the milieu of the colonised realities that ignites a revolutionary resistance in the mass people's psyche with the timeless and universal traits of the mythological stories.

What has inspired the researcher to attempt the study is to evaluate Nazrul's uses of myths and the relevance of that in the present realities also. Even after achieving independence from the colonised condition, in the prevailing socio-politico-cultural contexts of religious dogmatism, parochial outlooks and oppressive structures, the poet's all-embracing egalitarian ideology and revolutionary stance make the study still pertinent. The paper undertakes both textual and theoretical investigations to elucidate the context and relevance of Nazrul's use of myths drawing on some critical reflections of Fanon, wa Thing'o, Paolo Freire in terms of resistance and revolutionary stance against the oppressive colonial forces.

Literature Review

Although a few studies are available in Bengali on the application of mythological elements in the poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam, there is little focus on the perspectives of the application. Especially in English almost no attempt has yet been taken to investigate the use and perspectives of myth in Nazrul's poems. In some critical studies, the egalitarian and non-communal voices of the poet is analysed where Nazrul is portrayed as the fighter against all forms of oppressions and dogmatism.

Mahbub Hasan in his book *Nazruler Kobitay Myth O Loko Upadan (The Elements of Myth and Folk in the Poetry of Nazrul)* delineates the mythical and folk elements extensively used in the poems of Nazrul. He analyses not only the uses of the elements but also delves deep into the motives, enthusiasm and craftsmanship of the poet dealing with the elements in the poems. He contends that in the poems of Nazrul, the god Nataraj Shiva captures the central position among the varied mythical characters and pinpoints the reason behind preferring the god as a dominant imagery is to arouse the indomitable spirits among the people of colonised India. Besides, Hasan, in his book, presents how the myths of Indian, Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic and post-Islamic traditions are incorporated in the poems of Nazrul. In the second chapter of the book, the folk elements applied in the poems are highlighted.

In another study titled *Nazrul Sahitye Puran Prosongo (The Perspective of Myths in Nazrul Literature)*, Shimul Mahmud touches upon all the genres of the poet that relate the uses of myths. Along with the in-dept analysis of the classical and folk myths, he brings the issues of legends, stories, customs, values, totem, taboo etc. To discuss all these he explores the relationships of human civilisation and literature. On top of all, Mahmud critically evaluates Nazrul's uses of myths in a comparative focus putting him along with the contemporary poets and literateurs of Bengali literature.

Islam and Mahmud in the essay "Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Stern Voice against Communalism", examine the poet's wholehearted and lifelong engagement and activism to eliminate communal antagonism. Drawing a background history of the communalism in the subcontinent, they pinpoint Nazrul's such a devoted stance in reaction to his realisation of the exploitative and divisive policy of the British imperialist rulers. In the essay they emphasise the philosophy of communal tolerance and free thinking of the poet upholding his indomitable spirit to go against "dogmatism, social prejudices and religious fanaticism".

Noted literary and political critic Azfar Hossain puts his own critical evaluations and observations on certain aspects of Nazrul in a good number of articles. In one of his articles entitled "Kazi Nazrul Islam: More than a rebel poet" Hussain explicates that Nazrul is a timeless combatant of "capitalism, colonialism, communalism, racism, and patriarchy". He maintains that Nazrul is a "revolutionary poet" in the context of global realities and the poet's revolutionary articulations universally resonate the anger and protestations of the oppressed. Hossain, in the essay, also observes that the poet's deep-rooted attachments with the proletariat, poor peasants and workers accentuate his position as an "organic intellectual" whose literary productions naturally mirror his strong commitment for the cause of justice and equality.

Another critical study by Rachel Fell McDermott entitled “A “Muslim” Poet in the Lap of a “Hindu” Mother” projects some ideas that can be related with the present article i.e., Nazrul’s revolutionary and non-communal ideology, his “literary, political” and “emotional” attachments with the goddess Kali, his composition of Syama Sangeet (songs on and to Kali) devoted to the goddess. While investigating into the unconventional association with the goddess, McDermott, in her essay, reveals the poet’s profound enthusiasm and ability to embrace the cultural tradition of different religions and sects, his effortless ability to switch from one to the other. She further observes how the poet engages himself to make a bridge between the communities based on mutual trust and “common sensibility”. She also reflects on Nazrul’s strong belongingness to Bengali literature considering it as a literature “of both Hindus and Muslims”, his spontaneous and successful literary experiment intermingling the riches and traditions of both the communities.

The above research has basically examined the elements of myths in the poetry of Nazrul without analyzing the politico-cultural implications. Except Hasan and Mahmud’s take-on of focusing the perspectives of the use of myths, though lacking in any theoretical grounding, all of them have not been able to ascertain Nazrul’s uses of myths in the contexts of elimination of religious contentions and prejudices as well as enkindling rebellious resistance.

Nazrul’s Liberal Outlooks

“Bhool hoye gechhe bilkul/ aar shob kichhu bhaag hoye gechhe, bhaag hoiniko Nazrul/,” - the great Bengali poet and essayist Annada Shankar Ray expressed his profound reflection in his rhyming couplet that can be translated as- “It’s been completely mistaken. All else has been divided but for Nazrul”.

Nazrul with his deeper thoughts and literary prowess consolidated his identity as a Muslim and Bengali overcoming the age-old ambivalence of the Muslims of this subcontinent. The Muslims’ dilemma having their Middle Eastern religious tradition and Bengali native identity got resolved through the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam who proclaimed him as a poet of “all countries and to the entirety of humanity” (qtd. in Hossain). Here in this respect, Nazrul’s role in the field of literature is unlike Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), Ismail Hossain Siraji (1880-1931) or Farrukh Ahmad (1918-1974) who with an unfailing zeal exclusively aimed to focus the arts and culture of a particular community in their literary ventures. He believed the greatness of the litterateur depends on the greatness and openness of his heart. To him literature was something universal and it should not be parochially confined. In the truest sense, the “Bengali

Muslim’s quest for identity culminated in Kazi Nazrul Islam” (Bardhan). Moreover, from the childhood Nazrul had enjoyed an environment rich with communal harmony and cultural exchange. At the early stage, at Maktab and traditional school, he learnt Arabic, Persian and Islamic knowledge. Later on, at the tender age, the folk phase of his life impacted hugely on shaping his knowledge on the mythological aspects as in the *leto* musical period to prepare the scripts and perform the musical folk drama he was exposed with the myth and stories of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita etc. Therefore, the Islamic as well as the Sanatan knowledge got a united stream in Nazrul (Islam 23).

Nazrul, the boundless son of the soil “derived energy and inspiration, on the one hand, from the indigenous “humanist” tradition associated with Kabir-Nanok-Cahitannya-Tukaram-Chandidas, and, on the other, from the trinity of the Revolutions Nazrul came to admire deeply – the Turkish Revolution, the Irish Revolution, and, above all, the Russian Revolution” (Hussain). Nazrul was resolutely guided by the *Samyabadi* (communistic) philosophy that helped him to believe in the co-existence of Hindu and Muslim as he expressed in the poem “Hindu-Musalman”: “Hindu-Muslim, we are brothers/ Two flowers from the same stem.” (qtd.in Krishnamoorthy 218). As a result, uplifting the tradition of humanity beyond everything he could raise the voice universally appealing to all. Representing the oppressed and suffering population, with the unconventional and radical approach Nazrul proved to be a glaring threat against the ruling class. In the poems like “Kandari Hushiar” (Beware, My captain), “Samyabadi” (Communist) the unequivocal declaration of the unity of the Hindu and Muslim is pervasively notable in the egalitarian ideology of the poet who takes the seat with farmers, labourers and the have-nots to continue his crusade against the upper lords of the society. He desires to “transcend not only the social and economic barriers, and he dreams of the day when all inequality between man and man shall cease” (Moniruzzaman 155). This kind of ideology of equality and amity is Nazrul’s weapon to stand against the misrule and divisive policy of the foreign rulers.

Nazrul’s Uses of Myth

Before attempting the analysis of the treatment of myth in the poems of Nazrul and the perspectives of the use I would like to focus briefly on the idea of myth and the trend of its uses in Bengali literature.

Myth is a very familiar concept usually used in the literary and cultural arena that has deeper implications on our society and life. Like English and other literatures Bengali literature is also rich with the trend of applying mythological allusions, references in poetry, fictions and other branches of literature. “Myth”, derived from the Greek word *mythos*, means “word” to

be defined. According to J.A. Cuddon “myth is a story which is not ‘true’ and which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings --- or at any rate supra-human beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. Myth explains how something came to exist” (Cuddon 526). Myth is considered as the mother of poetry and history. Therefore, myth, history and poetry are strongly related. Wilfred F. Feuser in his essay “Myth, History and Literature in Africa” explores the relationships of myth, history, poetry and literature keeping the focus on African literature. He contends that, “Myth and history operate on different levels of consciousness: the first being poetic, métonymie and perceptual, based primarily on emotion; the second cognitive and conceptual, derived from observation and memory” (Feuser 146). Job Y. Jindo in his article “On Myth and History in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology” puts his observation on the history-myth relationship. He states: “Myth and history differ from each other in their representation of time: myth is cyclical, while history is linear. Myth is a worldview, a way in which people view and relate themselves to the world, stories that express the values of the culture and its deepest aspirations” (Jindo 412).

In the history of the modern era of the Bengali literature Madhusudan Dutta, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyaya, Nabin Chandra Sen applied plenty of myths in their literary juncture. Rabindranath applied Indian Hindu and Buddhist myths, referents in his literary creation as a part of associating them with perennial human emotions and ideals. Kazi Nazrul Islam though appeared much later than the literary giant Rabindranath and other leading figures, his emergence implied some new promises. The treatment of myths in the hand of Nazrul was marked by the unconventional, artistic and cultural significance. No other poet during his time or before him has used the mythic elements as extensively as Nazrul. The myth of olden time has been contextualised and modernised by his craftsmanship. One special feature of his uses of myths is the variety of sources from which he takes those to incorporate in his works notably in his poetry. Nazrul’s unique ability “to move effortlessly and with enthusiasm between different cultural, linguistic, and religious worlds” (McDermott 287) is reflected in many poems of the volumes like *Agnivina* (The Burning Lute), *Bisher Banshi* (The Poison Lute), *Bangar Gan* (The Song of Destruction), *Samyabadi* (The Socialist), *Sarbahara* (The Proletariat), *Fanimanasa* (The Cactus) that showcase the incorporation of myths in multidimensional perspectives.

In the first phase of his poetic career while portraying the colonial misrule as well as socio-political injustices, Nazrul used the mythical elements in poetry to create an imagery of youthfulness and robust rebellion. It is noteworthy that, among the twelve poems of Nazrul’s first volume of poems *Agniveena* (The Burning Lute), “Kamal Pasha”, “Anowar”,

“Ranoveri”, “Sat-el-Arab”, “Kheyaparer Tarani”, “Korbani” and “Muharram” are written on Islamic or Muslim themes. And of the other five poems, titled “Proloyullash”, “Raktamber Dharini Ma” and “Agamoni” incorporate Hindu myth while the remaining two poems named “Bidrohi” and “Dhumketu” project the myth and tradition of both the communities that dominantly convey the message of integrity, justice and equality. However, in terms of the purpose, all the poems are mainly woven in the single string as those are equally and “unmistakably imprinted with Nazrul’s own style and they advocate the cause of humanity. Whether the subject is Hindu or Muslim the poet’s aim is to awaken Humanism” (Moniruzzaman 151).

In many of the poems we observe the presence of Nataraj Shiva as a perpetual source of energy. This Hindu god of annihilation or destruction is the chief of the Hindu Trinity that includes Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In one form the god is ascetic and meditative and in the other way he is associated with evil spirits, ghosts and devastation. The wild, violent and destructive role of Shiva attracted Nazrul much more than anything else. In himself, Nazrul also felt the boundless and fathomless energy and agility of the god as he associated his own love and admiration for all the lawlessness. In mythology Shiva also represents matchless self-sacrifice as for the wellbeing of the humanity he drinks the venom of Vasuki, the king of serpents. He is also recognised as Nilakantha or Blue Throat as the venom burnt his throat and left a permanent blue scar. In Nazrul’s poems the god Shiva recurrently appears as imagery of Destroyer and upon the heaps of destruction something originally new and promising emerges. At least in the three representative poems “Proloyullash” (Ecstasy of Destruction), “Bidrohi” (The Rebel) and “Dhumketu” (The Comet), the god Shiva appears as a dominant imagery to represent his terrible forces.

In the poem “Proloyullash” (Ecstasy of Destruction), the prime action to be accomplished is to destroy the age-long conservative social, cultural and religious establishment and here the god Shiva, the Destroyer is invited by the speaker of the poem. The terrible “destruction” is welcome to bring into play “a new creation” to annihilate all the injustices and hypocrisies existing in society. Shiva, the “executioner of eternal time” is supposed to appear amidst the summer storm, the “wild tumultuous turmoil” to exterminate the oppressive, exploitative and tyrannical structure to rebuild it with the promise of equality, equity and justice. The grand and terrible Shiva is portrayed in the following lines:

A dozen suns glitter and shine in his burning eyes
And the sorrows of the world cluster in his tangled and disheveled hair.
A single drop of his tear makes the seven seas roll and swell. (Huda 4).

The magnanimity, ferocity and limitless vitality of the god Shiva suggest the indigenous strength and vigour of this land which is unfortunately under the colonial forces. It also implies that if once the inner strength is regained, no forces will be ever able to keep the people oppressed and subjugated.

In “Bidrohi” (The Rebel) the revolutionary and destructive spirits are also invoked to settle a world free from the cries and agonies of the oppressed. The poet's concern for the suffering souls is evoked from the sensibility of his profound love. The blending of the rebellious zeal along with a perennial romantic desire makes the poem timeless and unparalleled. While the god Shiva represents all acts of annihilation and destruction, the intensity of love is represented by the Lord Krishna which is wonderfully reflected in the articulation:

In one hand of mine is the tender flute
While in the other I hold the war bugle! (Huda 13)

The poem “Bidrohi” is a constant source of self-esteem, soulful strength and the sense and sensibility to uplift one's inner beauty and potentials. The loftiness and magnanimity of the self of every Indian, indiscriminate of caste, creed, religion, is mostly aspired to free the motherland from the clutches of the foreign power.

The poem “Dhumketu” (The Comet), like “Bidrohi” (The Rebel) and “Proloyullash” (Ecstasy of Destruction), has its dramatic qualities with radical and loud assertion, a declaration of the will force, paramount self-confidence and self-sufficiency that go closely tuned with Nazrul's life and personality. Likewise, the dark, destructive and devastating comet also resembles the craziness of wild Shiva. The speaker of the poem, proclaiming as the harbinger of “the great revolution”, “the creator's deadly foe”, with “the burning fire” on the forehead throws an unprecedented challenge to the God “sitting in his throne” (Huda 36). He asserts:

I, a fierce Comet-cobra, the bitterest curse of all time,
whirl round God as he sits there
trembling in fear like that snake-encircled
helpless child. (Huda 38)

However, in the poetry of Nazrul, the imagery of goddess is a dominant feature. In literature and politics of India, there is a tradition of assuming the homeland as mother. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay through composing the song “Bande Mataram” (1875) and introducing it in his famous novel *Anandamath* (1882) disseminates the idea of *Bharatmata* for the first time. During the partition of Bengal on the basis of communal and divisive policy in 1905, the immense patriotic feelings were aroused and again through the painting of acclaimed artist Abanindranath Thakur (Tagore), the idea of

Bharat Mata came into focus. Ultimately, the idea of comparing India as mother and attributing the supra-mundane qualities with the women of the colonised motherland were deliberate strategy to propel the nationalist and revolutionary zeal. Later on, the nationalist political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose also thought of involving the women in the freedom movement of India. Therefore, to mobilise the movements against the foreign rulers, the women were inspired and the godly attributes were associated with their sacrificing and rebellious roles. While Gandhiji emphasised on the devotional and sacrificing virtues of women like deity Sita, S.C. Bose “explicitly incited women to emulate Durga and come to the rescue of the struggling nation” (Lama n.p.). In 1930, while visiting Bengal he articulated: “...women had not only duties to their family, but they had also a greater duty to their country. When the gods found their silver almost vanquished in their fight with the demons, they invoked the help of ‘sakti’ in the form of mother. The country was in a sad plight, therefore the country looked up to the mothers to come forward and inspire the whole nation” (qtd. in Lama).

The use of the imagery of “mother goddess” is notable who represents “ideas of power, autonomy and primacy in the widest sense of the term. She conveys not so much the idea of physical motherhood but a world view in which the creative power of femininity is central; the goddess mediates between life and death and contains in herself the possibility of regeneration” (Ganesh 58). In the poems of Kazi Nazrul, like Shiva another strong imagery is created by goddess Durga, a major deity of Hinduism who represents protection, power, motherhood, war and destruction. She is a glaring threat for the evils and demonic forces on her way to bring back peace, prosperity and Dharma. Durga's (also called as Chandi, Anandamoyee, Chhinnamasta etc.) presence is immensely vivid and suggestive in the poems like “Raktamber Dharini Ma”, “Agamane”, “Anandamoyeer Agamone” (Coming of Anandamoyee). In these poems more or less, the goddess is invoked in the present context of the colonial India where the fellow countrymen of Nazrul are undergoing limitless sufferings as they have lost their freedom, safety and security. The goddess as the mighty deity, is invited to destroy the misrule and tyranny of the British Government. As the noted critic Abu Mohammad Habibullah contends that, the goddess is invoked “to appear in the most terrible and destructive aspect and descend in a mad dance to destroy the vile oppressive rule of the foreigners” (Habibullah 16). The same poet who had composed the poem “Anandamoyeer Agamone” (Coming of Anandamoyee), did also demand for India's complete freedom from the British Government (Huda 738) for the first time as an Indian in the bi-weekly *Dhumketu* edited by him which led his being charged with sedition and imprisonment. In the poem “Agamonee” as the poem goes:

See the great battle of the warring world-mother
 In ten directions her ten hands are giving ten beatings;
 Mahisashur is under her feet,
 The great mother, that lion rider will inform
 The inhabitants of the world:
 Demon power is not eternal,
 The beast-head is crushed under feet (qtd. in Moniruzzaman 152).

In the perspective of the present India, Devi Durga like the myth of the war between the good and evil, the war among the gods and the demons, will reappear to annihilate the evil for the establishment of the good. To revitalise the spirits of the people under the colonial rule, the goddess plays a pivotal role.

Likewise, in the poem “Raktambardharini Ma”, Mother Chandi emerges to be as destructive as the violent Shiva:

Not the white lotus sitter today
 Mother is in blood-red-attire
 O Mother! Let your full moon of creation laugh
 On the breast of destruction (qtd. in Moniruzzaman 152).

Among the trio poems on deity Durga the one that infuriated the British rulers most is “Anandamoyeer Agamone” (Coming of Anandamoyee), a poem with heavy mythological allusions and Bengali-Indian cultural references. In the poem the deity is invited to come with a different and unconventional manner to demolish the oppressive social and economic structure. The poet bringing the patriots and heroes of the history of India like the queen of Jhansi, Siraj-ud-daula, Tipu Sultan, Mir Kassim as references, “invites [the goddess] to save the country in her horrific, angry form, not only from oppressors but also from weak Indian cowards” (McDermott 285).

However, besides Shiva or Durga from the myth, some other remarkable characters like Krishna, Balaram, Jagannath, Sabyachachi, Durbasha, Parshuram, Bhriugu, Vishwamitra, Dushshasan and so on are also masterly used in the poems to relate the mythological story and context in the present scenario. The poem “Sabyasachi”, from the volume *Fanimanasha* (The Cactus) predominantly sketches the invincible tyranny of the ruling class associating the mythological references. India, a battlefield like Kurukshetra is again experiencing the horrendous war of good and evil. Here the evil is represented by the imperialist, exploitative British Raj. To make the country free the rebellious youths are sacrificing their blood like Dadhichi, an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva who sacrificed his life for the gods to reclaim their heaven. However, to break the shackles of tyrannical rule, no ordinary warrior is enough to combat, rather a central heroic figure like Sabyasachi

(also called Partha or Arjuna) is essential. In another poem “Duhshasaner Raktapan” (Drinking the blood of Duhshasan) the mythological character Duhshsan, the younger brother of Duryadhan, the arch enemy of Panchapandava, represents the tyrant and exploiter of our beloved motherland.

Interestingly and matchlessly, we come across a parallel use of Hindu Purana and Islamic Quaranic images and symbols in the same poem or even in the same stanza. In this respect the poems like “Bidrohi” (The Rebel), “Manush” (Man), are noteworthy. The mixed Hindu and Muslim referents used in one of the landmark poems “Bidrohi” (The Rebel) written in 1921, is notably significant. In the poem, while reading, we discover a variety of dictions not only of the myth and culture of India but also from West Asia or even from Europe. The words like Khoda (Creator), Chengis Khan, and Taji Borrak (the winged horse that took Muhammad to Allah), Israfil intermingled with Bhagavan, the dancing Siva (Pinakpani), Krisna, and the goddess Candi etc. are woven in the same poem. The spontaneous flow of words, similes, and metaphors emanated from both Hindu and Muslim culture is really matchless as we find:

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 Shankha, (Huda 13)

Here, along with the gods and angels namely Brahma, Israfil, Pinakpani two tools of the preserver god Vishnu, i.e., Chakra and Shankha are associated with the line of poetic narration. Brahma is the creator god of Hindu mythology who created the universe and all beings and Israfil is the angel of Islamic mythology who will blow the trumpet announcing the end of the world. Interestingly the role of Pinakpani or Shiva, the god of destruction is similar with Israfil.

In another stanza of “Bidrohi”, the mentioning of serpent king Vasuki related to Hindu and Buddhist religion and myth along with Gabriel, the archangel of the Abrahamic traditions is really befitting:

Thou dost seize the stupendous hood of
 Eternal Vasuki in thy arms,
 Thou dost clasp the wings of fire
 Of Heaven's ambassador Gabriel! (Huda 20)

Likewise, in the poem “Manush” (Man) the supremacy and equality of human being is asserted with a visionary zeal to treat the whole world as a big family without any dispute and distinction. In the poem the infinite power of a human is assumed to be fathomless and the religious scriptures

are for the sake of a human being. The truth that neglecting the humanity nobody can attain the salvation at all, is focused in the poem. It is also elucidated that; all the iconic religious leaders have the common motto to arouse this sense and sensibility:

Adam, David, Messaih, Moses,
Abraham, Muhammad, Krishna,
Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, ---
the treasure of the whole world,
they are our great ancestors; (Huda 263)

The prophets and religious leaders of Abrahamic traditions are put together with that of Hindu, Buddhist and other Indian leading spiritual leaders in a synchronised manner.

It is rightly said, “while Nazrul’s poetry took him to prison, the language of his poetry ends up breaking the walls of that prison” (Hussain). Through this statement the revolutionary aspects of his poetic praxis against any forms of injustices and parochial outlooks are implied. The fathomless sense of freedom and resistance is reflected in the poetry of Nazrul. Naturally, in case of the poet’s use of the words, the special trend is that he neglects the differences of words i.e., whether it is Islamic or Sanskrit. Therefore, he uses them putting very close in the same line or in the same poem. However, it is interesting enough that the artistic combination of the diction makes the reader unaware of the distinction.

Nazrul was a poet and activist who contributed to dissolve the difference between the Hindus and Muslim. Therefore, he turns to be an unparalleled figure to make a bridge between the communities. In the poem “Samyabadi” (Of Equality) he sings the song of equality avoiding all the external identities of different religion, caste or creed. He appeals to the people of society to dive into their souls to discover the underlying truth of humanity and morality. As he asserts:

Of equality I sing:
Where all barriers and differences
Between man and man have vanished,
Where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians
Have mingled together (Huda 249).

“Samyabadi” (Of Equality) is a wonderful piece of poetry that upholds the supremacy of humanity and the strength of the soul. To elaborate this philosophy the poem brings people of different cultures and identities. However, all the identities are based on the external phenomena whereas the heart is the only catalyst to integrate them. The poems blend the myths, words of varied religious and cultural background that carry an imagery of

totality where the human heart is glorified to be the supreme entity that surpasses any temple or kaba.

Perspectives of Using the Myths

In the British colonial India Nazrul realised the truth that the ruling forces maintained a policy to create a division between the two major communities Hindus and Muslims. The partition of Bengal and the emergence of Muslim League and the sectarian conflicts made him aware of the “divide and rule” policy of the colonial ruler. Identifying the ill intention “[h]e voiced the concern of Hindu-Muslim unity in his poetry, very loudly indeed- a voice quite unheard of in Bengali literature” (Bardhan). Primarily, Mohammad Nasiruddin (1888-1994), the then editor of *Sawgat* suggested Nazrul “to use Arabic, Persian words and to uphold the Islamic culture in his writings” (Bardhan). Though at the beginning, the poet was not much convinced, later on for the sake of integrating and assimilating the identity and culture of both the communities Nazrul found his spontaneous creativity and passion to follow the suggestion of Nasiruddin. In this very literary magazine *the Saugat*, Nazrul unequivocally contends: “...Bengali literature is both for the Hindus and the Muslims... I am wholeheartedly a believer in the togetherness of the Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, to strike at their prejudiced psyche I deliberately use Islamic words or utter the names of Hindu gods and goddesses” (qtd. in Ghosh) [Self Translation].

The liberal outlooks and open-mindedness that Nazrul inculcated and meaningfully carried forward through his personal and literary practices, made a quarter of people jealous and hostile against the poet. The mention and imagery of the Hindu gods and goddesses infuriated the Muslims while the Hindus were equally exasperated as they got the referents from the West Asian culture and tradition (Ghosh). It is really surprising to discover that Nazrul is “perhaps the best and most popular of all the composers of the genre, [Syama Sangeet or sung devotional poetry to the goddess Kali]” (McDermott 281). However, Nazrul’s uses of the mythological referents of varied religious and cultural backgrounds were motivated by his cultural and political sensibilities.

Nazrul’s poems, like any of his piece of writing, carry the cultural and political conviction which plays an instrumental role in respect of the identity formation. Under the colonisation of foreign forces when to combat and confront the mental slavery instilled in the psyche of the people was a pivotal striving to Nazrul, the mythological references ultimately function as tool to represent the indigenous and cultural strength. Notably one important aspect of using the mythological characters is Nazrul’s sincere identification of his self with the particular character. The vigour and spectacular strength of the character of myth get infused with the aspiring

vitality of the poet's self. Moreover, to break the shackles of the hegemonic and coercive power of the colonial regime Nazrul incorporates the revolutionary mythological characters like Shiva, Vimsena, Sabyasachi, Israfil, Gabriel, Adam, Isac, Moses to create the imagery of both the oppressor as well as the paramount vigour and vitality to destroy those oppressive forces. The characters and incidents from the epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Purana or Islamic traditions carry the implied and bigger suggestions to convey the sharp antagonistic and war situation prevailing in India. Sometimes India, the motherland is treated as Bharat Mata whose sons are fighting to uphold the dignity of the holy mother. Sometimes the mother India is compared with goddess Durga or Kali who as the epitome of good is fighting the evil forces. Or in some cases India under the colonisation, is allegorically treated as the Battlefield Kurukshetra where the oppressed Indians are representing the Pandavas ...the just and virtues and the oppressor colonisers are the representing of evil Duryodhana, Dushasana. It is suggested that to regain the long-cherished independence, India needs great warrior like Sabyasachi, also known as Arjuna or Partha.

In the colonised India, it was an urgent call of the time to raise "a national culture" (Fanon 188) to propel the struggle for freedom dismantling the political and cultural subversion. From the perspective of the colonised and the oppressed Nazrul invested a lot of efforts "for the rediscovery of the real language of humankind: the language of struggle" (wa Thiong'o 108) to usher a countercultural and counter political battle. To Nazrul the process of achieving "national liberation" was not possible in the Gandhian non-violent manner, rather the "full independence" that he demanded was a Favonian "violent phenomenon". He befittingly picks up the mythical and cultural heritage to disseminate the voices of fearlessness in the countrymen to shed the "fear of freedom" (Freire 47) to dismantle "the structure of domination" (Freire 47). He, through the invocation of radical strengths from the mythological stories and characters in an inclusive manner upholds the spirits of solidarity and humanity to materialise the struggle for freedom in "the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion" (Freire 47). The mythological characters mostly revolutionary in nature, the gods and goddesses or angels of multicultural and multi-religious backgrounds transcend from one particular parochial identity to a universal height to be the rebellious powerhouse to provide hope, strength and vigour to the weak, oppressed and suffering humanity.

In the age of dominant colonial structure and psychological subjugation, Nazrul's stylistic and thematic individuality marks a sharp deviation from the Eurocentric literary praxis of the time. Indeed, the treatment of myth in the poetry of Nazrul tends to add an invigorating and soul-searching call

among the people. One significant aspect of Nazrul's use of mythical character is that he masterly infuses the radical vigour and spirit of it into him. Moreover, his style of incorporating the myth marks a sharp difference in literary history in his uniquely inclusive attempt to raise issues applicable to people of all communities.

Conclusion

Nazrul who was a son begotten from the fiery moments of the history of the colonial India, had put his brilliant and unique marks on the literary genres that he attempted. During the turbulent time amidst the nationalist and anti-British movements, to alleviate the sectarian antagonism between the two representative communities and to dismantle the continuous provocative policy of the ruler, Nazrul strived to portray an all-inclusive literary praxis. The uses of myth in his poems unconventionally worked to serve the literary, political and cultural awakening that touched and influenced the mass people. Breaking the parochial shackles of the mythology and the politics of language he really introduced a new dimension. Moreover, in the art of employing the spell of rhythmic sound patterns and vivid imagery, the linguistic and metrical innovations and the choice of words—all proved to be instrumental to create a difference. Through the interplay of his personal, political, cultural and literary praxis he consolidated the ground embedded on a non-communal and humanitarian platform.

His boundless emotion and revolutionary sensibilities got their own channel to be portrayed and reflected. The broadness of his ideals and revolutionary outlooks found the language unparalleled not only during his time but also for all the ages in the tradition of Bengali literature and culture.

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