

THE COMPULSIVE VOICE OF DECOLONIZATION: A STUDY ON KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM AND HIS REBELLIOUS POEMS

Tanzin Sultana

Lecturer, Department of English, BGC Trust University Bangladesh

ABSTRACT: *Decolonization means restoring the independence of a country once occupied and controlled by another country. It is not an easy process for the colonized nations to build a hybrid culture. Determination to decolonize the European colonies in Africa and Asia is a remarkable historical process in the twentieth century. Many blazing boons were born in Africa and Asia to protest against British colony. In the Indian Subcontinent, the name of Kazi Nazrul Islam, rebellious poet of Bangladesh, is quite relevant. The most outstanding aspect of his poetry is a strange combination of ferocity with endurance, cruelty with softness. He knows that to stop the exploitation of the colonizers, the oppressed people must be united to overthrow the force of imperialism. Through his rebellious poems, he intends to make the Bengali territory, culture and also people's mind-independent from the Western colonization in the very colonial period. This research paper aims to study how Nazrul upholds decolonization his spirit and advances it in his poems to ensure complete freedom for his nation.*

KEYWORDS: *Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rebellious Poems, Indian Subcontinent, British Colonization, Decolonization.*

INTRODUCTION

Colonization is an action of appropriating a setting and control for own facility over areas of indigenous people but the affected indigenous do not let colonial influence spread over their nationality heedlessly. They always attempt to decolonize their territory and people's mind from the ruthless domination of colonial overlords in their presence or after their departure. Decolonization here challenges the colonial injustice to domestic people in their own countries. It is a silent or outburst movement where the colonized denounce not only the unblemished removal of the domination of European power from the territory and administration of the colonized but also from the colonized mind that makes the indigenous inferior in their own land.

For territorial, traditional and cultural decolonization, many intellectual figures prove their worthiness. They revolt through the mutual negotiation with the non-indigenous force or through the violent attacks in their writing, posturing, or through their well-armed face to face confrontation with them. An Indigenous Kenyan Novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o who protests in his writing to decolonize the native Gikuyu from British colony traces 'cultural bomb' as the worst weapon for the physical and psychological effects of colonization. In his *Decolonizing the Mind* he claims, "The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as a wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland" (Birds, 2013). In Bangladesh, national poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) strives boldly to decolonize the territory, old culture, and tradition of the Indian Subcontinent through the voice in his rebellious poetry. The dramatic virtue of his poetry draws directly upon the life he lived.

Nazrul Islam's life is an impressive record of a ceaseless struggle against the oppression and cruelty, the cowardice, meanness, and selfishness he had seen and encountered. According to Winston E. Langley (2001), Nazrul's voice is the resistance raised against all that is evil. His voice is deeply engaged in human beings' capability and freedom in their imagination and action, self-justification, social values, relationships and experience, and degrading political painful injustice.

NAZRUL IN BRITISH ARMY

Kazi Nazrul Islam is brazenly Anti-British and anti-colonial. So, it is conventionally expected from the British colony not to show interest in promoting his works. He considered himself a subaltern in his homeland. In his rebellious poems, he protests to restore the lost identity of the marginalized from the western exploitation. Nazrul voiced on behalf of the subalterns. "What he spoke was what they spoke... There was no invention involved here, no gap between his and their voices, or any self-satisfaction that at last people had spoken through him" (Islam, S, 2001). In *Culture and Imperialism*, about the ugly motive of the Imperial dominance Edward Said contends: "Imperialism, after all, is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally, brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for, and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination" (Hussain). Since anti-imperialist, Nazrul had an absolute conscience for the subalterns; he claimed the lost identity of the marginalized Indians in his blazing poems. He affirmed that he would not resist until the despotism of the imperialists abolished.

Nazrul's fire of resistance looked for political and spiritual freedom. Being a non-military race the Bengalis were neglected in the army. In the time of the First World War, the British rulers decided to require men from Bengal to establish a Double Company. Later on, it was called the 49th Bengali Regiment. Nazrul was then a throbbing young man. He found it a short contingency to get military training by joining the Double Company. His urge for military training derived very greatly from his radical patriotic feeling. Again his erupting outbreak for freedom took shape in the influence of revolutionary secret organizations for freedom of India. He decided to join the British army, not for safeguard of the British empire, but to fight with arms against it. Moreover, he got the vehement motivation from an insubordinate person like Nibaran Chandra Ghatak to supersede the British subjugation of India through armed struggle. Then for himself, he took armed training. After the retirement from the army, he trained up the local young men to stand against the Western rulers and their native collaborations. Then he spent most of his barrack-life in Karachi. That life gave him empiricism with a greater nobility in Bengali literature and music. Rabindranath Tagore admitted his valorous resistance in his message sent for 'The Dhumketu' (The Comet) Magazine-

"To Qazi Nazrul Islam.
Come, ye comet,
Come to build a bridge of fire across the dark,
Hoist up on the castle top of evil days
Your flag of victory!

Let omens be craved on the forehead of the night,
Awaken, startle those that drowse.” (Choudhury, 1974, 29)

TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Nazrul understood that liberation could be won only through the armed uprising. He himself boldly declared, “On one side is the crown, on the other the flames of the comet” (Choudhury, 1994, 52). To him, in the hand of justice, all are equal whether he is the king or common man. For re-establishing truth and justice in this Indian Subcontinent he more boldly declared, ‘Truth is self-evident. It cannot be destroyed by any angry eyed scepter. I am the instrument of that eternal self-evident truth, an instrument that voices forth the message of the ever-true. I am an instrument of God. The instrument is not unbreakable, but who is there to break God?’ (Choudhury, 1994, 53).

Nazrul was writing for decolonization at a time British colonization. In that time anti-colonial struggle had been launched not only in political ground but also in literature through the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Michael Madhusudan Dutta. Through their works, a new language with its promise indirectly challenged the ruling cultural ideology of colonialism which always tends to cripple the possible strength of the colonized. Nazrul also carried the anti-colonial linguistic struggle to stand against identity crises. Nazrul was the early man to make a direct hit to that sense of inferiority complex of the natives of his time. Nazrul understood that the buried life of the community of the Indian Subcontinent was the product of repression. So disposing of that repression was an important component for him to revive his traditional society. On the other hand, the British oppressors rightly understood that there was the fuel of revolution against them in Nazrul’s writing without any deviation. So, they declared most of his writing dangerous and treacherous and prohibited those writings to publish. Though his book, ‘Agni-veena’ (The Fiery Lute) got escaped from government’s accusation, some writings- ‘Jugbani’ (The Message of the Age), ‘Rudra Mangal’ (The Violent God), ‘Pralaya Shikha’ (Doomsday Flame), ‘Bhangar Gaan’ (The Bursting Song), ‘Durdiner Jatri’ (The Traveller through Rough Time) and Chandrabindu were banned while publishing. In spite of being prohibited those books were being brought and read secretly. The hidden revolutionists became so inspired by his fire-brand writings that without any hesitation and with higher hope they were ready to fight for the liberation of their nation even if they had to face a death sentence. Nazrul’s revolution was not only to uproot the British government but also to arouse truth in every Indian soul. While the colonial government was arresting Mahatma Gandhi, he reacted that truth could not be imprisoned though they arrested Gandhi.

BEING JAILED AND HUNGER STRIKE

For his resistant writing, Nazrul had to go to jail. Nazrul founded in 1922 as bi-weekly styled news named ‘The Dhumketu’ (The Comet). ‘The Dhumketu’ was virtually the literary counterpart of the terrorist movement in Bengal and it did not take time to acquire an unrivaled vogue. The police were concerned at that time. They pounced on its Editor and accused him of agitation and brought him forth in the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Mr. Swinhoe. Nazrul’s opposing statement before the Magistrate winded up a sensation. The public was impressed, but not the British Magistrate, who found the Poet guilty and sentenced him to a year’s rigorous imprisonment. He was sent firstly to the Alipore Central Jail in Kolkata and

then to the Hooghly jail. There were some prisoners in the Hooghly Jail who were punished like him on charges of agitation. He could make his day with them in that jail memorable with the songs he composed and sang. The insensitive jail authorities feeling insecure did not let him receive newspapers or writing materials from outside. Then Nazrul composed a comic song on the British Jailor and sang it in the chorus. The angry poet also decided to go on a hunger strike. Despite strict censorship, this news of his hunger strike went round and created a great in all parts of his circumferences. Rabindranath Tagore sent the striking poet a telegram that was never delivered to him. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay went to meet the poet but he did not abjure the hunger-strike. The anxious citizens of Calcutta organized a public meeting. That meeting requested the poet to give up the hunger strike. On the 39th day, Nazrul Islam agreed to eat making the jail authorities promise to be more civilized with the prisoners. After the strike, Nazrul was transferred from Hooghly to Baharpur. He was released finally on December 15, 1923. That imprisonment could not desist the blazing of his resisting movement. Though many forces tried to defeat him, he succeeded in creating his own audience. Buddhadeva Bose acknowledged his distinctive revolutionary introduction played in Bengali poetry: "He infused Bengali poetry with new vigor, new blood. He awakened aspirations and longings which, in their turn, inspired a widespread restless seeking. They demanded fulfillment. The hour of turning had struck for Bengali literature" (Islam, R. 2001, 19).

DECOLONIZATION OF TERRITORY AND MIND IN NAZRUL'S RESISTING POEMS

Keeping the contemporary situation ahead, Nazrul divided his poems into these five categories- "struggle against British Empire", "Struggle against exploiters", "struggle against class distinction", "Struggle against social inequality" and "struggle against communal riot". He himself says,

"I have not only seen the lute in her beautiful hand and lotus in her leg, but I have also seen tears in her eyes. I have looked at her moving on the cremation ground and graveyard with her hunger face and wounded legs. I've seen her on the battlefield, I have recognized her in the dark well of the prison, and I have discovered her on hanging stage. My song is to praise this charm of beauty." (Azad, 11) [Self-translation]

Nazrul's experience was worst when Britain was at the elevation of its imperial control of the Indian Subcontinent. The imperialist viewed the local culture as an onset of alien cultural influence and moral corruption. To them, celebrating the local culture means returning to the debasement and barbarism. In the name of civilization and development, they for establishing East India Company ruined the areas of economics law, artisanship, textiles, agriculture and economics. So, the violence that Nazrul Islam enforced was anti-bourgeois. To him, freedom was a wide concept. Apart from political freedom, it included freedom from anarchic rules and conventions, bonds and chains, prohibitions and taboos. He himself said, "I came to pardon what is ugly (not beautiful) and to kill the demon. You will bear witness to this. My best beauty- the truth- shall also testify to this" (Ahmed, 304).

The poems of 'Agni-veena' (The Burning Lute) sustain the spirit of the title. They seek to burn away, like a corrosive fire, the oppression of the weak and the cowardice in the oppressed. Some of the titles are: 'Bidrohi' (The Rebel), 'Kamal Pasha', 'Dhumketu' (The Comet), 'Ranabheri' (The War-drum), 'Muhurru', 'Shat-il-Arab' and 'Kheya-parer-toruni' (The Ferry Boat). The spirit of these fire-brand poems beset the social, political and economic injustice and persecution from the human society. Moreover, there are many poems like 'Chandrabindu', 'Fanimonsha', 'Bisher Banshi' and 'Pralaya Shikha', etc where he, directly or indirectly; ironically or symbolically, draws the horrendous image of British Empire in India. He had also hit upon the bestiality of the people of this human world and caused to bring about peace and happiness along with harmonious socio-religion-political harmony all over the world. As such, he bent much upon the justice and equality among all the human beings irrespective of their caste and creed.

'The Rebel' is his best resisting poem published in 1921. This poem is the life of revolution against the evil in 'Agni-veena'. Herewith the undaunted voice in the high head he confronted the red-eyed and iron-handed English ruler and raised a comet in the eastern sky:

"Say, O Hero, 'My head is held ever high...

My head is held so high that knows not to bow..." (Rahman, M, 51)

This poem is the poet's intensity to decolonize the colonized. Here, he considered himself unruly and ruthless like the tempest of summer. He himself was strong enough to crush the brutal pride of the alien government. He stressed in this poem that he would be silent only after all tyranny and oppression had been wiped out from his motherland. He blazed-

"I am irresistible, cruel and arrogant,

I am the king of great upheaval,

I am cyclone, I am destruction,

I am the great fear, the curse of this universe.

I have no mercy,

I grind all to pieces.

I am disorderly and lawless,

I trample under my feet all rules and discipline!" (Huda, 12)

Nazrul is the protector of helpless and deprived people. From his mind and soul desired the freedom of imprisoned India. His another revolutionary poem, 'The Ecstasy of Destruction' (Pralayollas) was published in Bangla year, 1329. In this poem, he motivated the dominated to stand against the British Raj forgetting the old pain and death. He said that if they stood against this faithlessness, fraudulence, injustice of the foreign oppressors, freedom of India subcontinent is sure. So he excited the natives to celebrate the renunciation of the foreign evil power in advance. He echoed -

"Come, make merry and rejoice!

What fear has he

for whom all this destruction and rebuilding

is but a game?

Come, make merry and rejoice,
and welcome the Beautiful
Who comes today in the garb of the Terrible.” (Huda, 6)

About ‘The Comet’, Ashraf (2010) noted Madhusudhan Basu's comment that the plot of this poem was the events of contemporary events and the freedom movement. It symbolizes the Poet's impedance against God's disorder. Here, by God he does not indicate any spiritual lordliness; rather, the barrenness of spirituality of the British exploiters who sucked the natives' blood by snatching their rights, culture, and tradition Like ‘The Rebel’, in this poem he shouted fiercely that he would not surrender himself to the unruly rulers. He boldly announced that he is more destructive, arrogant and insolent enough than the British oppressors to crush the despondency of this brutal god on the Indian land-

“I am the godless, unholy, bitter curse!
Flying the banner of ruination
I whirl madly through vast empty space,
I fight alone and strike at God
with my sharp poisoned arrow
Entwining the entire creation around my tail
I shower everywhere the flaming rains,
of a million meteors.” (Huda, 36)

The revolutionary spirit is also founded in Nazrul's poem, ‘The War-drum’. He exposed in this poem that every day, ruthlessly the devil was playing holy with blood in the motherland where the innocent natives were drowned. To resurrect the old rights of the natives, He passionately inflamed the common mass of India to resist against all odds of British tyrants to re-secure the independence of their motherland. He invoked-

“O come, come along!
There you can hear the ringing of the weapons!
Alas, how can one stay away
And tolerate this disgrace?
O come, come along!” (Huda, 76)

Moreover, decolonizing the land is not possible until the decolonization of the mind is executed. In his time the colonizers successfully broke the community among the natives. Different kinds of rifts like discrimination among some social classes and religious groups destroyed ethnicity in the country. In the name of freedom movement and nationalism, they were busy with their selfish motives like taking a position in parliament or government jobs and the general mass was suffering due to their selfish competition. This selfishness and fraudulent commitment of the Swaraj Movement could not escape from Nazrul's eyes. He threw ridiculous dust on this hollow nationalism. It was expressed in his poem, ‘My Answer’ (Amar Kaifiyat)-

“We know it well-by trying to bring Swaraj
We've ended up with a worthless pile of trash

By depriving crores of hungry children of their food
Came a crore rupees-but not Swaraj.” (Huda, 378)

To Nazrul, beating the British evil force in his homeland, the country-men had to show strong unity and sacrifice their blood. In ‘Boatman Beware’ (Kandari Hushiar), the poet expected Indian sun rising that set once in Plassey wilderness –

“There where the sword of Clive became red
With the blood of Bengalis!
In the near-by Ganges was set, alas!
The sun of India.
That sun shall rise again, red with our blood.
Those who sang of the victory of life on the scaffold
Are present here in spirit to witness
The sacrifice we offer.
This is the Great Ordeal, for the restoration
Of the nation;
The boat trembles, the ocean rolls,
Boatman, beware!” (Huda, 354)

The radical spirit of Kamal Pasha in Turkey motivated Kazi Nazrul Islam to create a new social order and to make advancement bringing about the age-old Bengali culture and tradition that was a must. Nazrul keenly observed the historic event of the defeat and fall of Tsars of Russia as a result of the Bolshevik revolution. In the victory of the Turkish people under the guidance of the valiant fighter Kamal Pasha, he noticed the defeat of the big powers in the hands of the united people of a small country. In his poem ‘Kamal Pasha’, he acclaimed his spirit:

“Bother Kamal, the desperate son of frenzied mother
Has gone furious; so the devil’s dens are full of hue and cry
Looking for self-protection everywhere;
Kamal, what a wonder you’ve worked!” (Huda, 55)

He wrote the ‘Bursting song’ (Bhangar Gaan) for those who were considered terrorists and were imprisoned because of their struggle against British rulers. In this poem, he exposed the conspiracy of the British colonial who jailed him and bloodily persecuted him to stop him. But that imprisonment and persecution could not kill his revolutionary spirit. Instead, it made him more sizzling and determined to the British demolish mission. He sang fiercely-

“The iron door of the jail
Break this with utter destruction
With the condensed blood
Enchain the pulpit of cruel worshippers!” (Mahmud, 2012, 69) [Self-translation]

In ‘The Complaint’ (Fariyad), Nazrul also wished to fight with the oppressed to re-establish the natives’ rights by decolonizing the unjust violation of the colonizers from the Indian Subcontinent. We see his indirect resistance in ‘The Complaint’ against the colonial unjust-

“This day and night, this sky and air, belong to none alone!”
The be-all and the end-all of this earth
The scented flowers and the juicy fruits,
The soothing earth, the nectared water and the songs of birds-
All have equal shares in these, O God, O God!” (Rahman, M, 52)

Nazrul’s ‘Sucking Blood of Indomitability’ (Dushasoner Roktopan), published in the Bangla year 1329 gave mental strength to the countrymen for the military movement against the British Empire. He wrote that the British existence in Indian land is illegal. They had been here for a long time with their mistreating power. So, it is the duty of Indians to cast them away at any cost, even if the way is a terrorized one. Withstanding the colonial bottom line Nazrul openly declared that abruptly and illogically few white-skinned men had come to strain natives in their homeland-

“O, this is tyranny
Giving thousand heroes in exile
Beating the infants tightened with rope
Creating anarchy
Molesting the mothers-sisters.
Heinously in the daylight.” (Mahmud, 2012, 74) [Self-translation]

NAZRUL NOT ANARCHIC

It may seem that Nazrul is anarchic against the existing Western government and against the country. If we study the anarchic philosophy, we can note that they always consider the government or rulers as their opposition. To a well-known Anarchic, Godwin, “Above all, we should not forget that Government is an evil, a usurpation upon the private judgment and individual conscience of mankind” (Rahman, A. 1989, 59). Another Anarchic Pain also says, “Society is produced by our wants and Government by our weakness. The one encourages intercourse, the other created distinction (Rahman, A. 1989, 55). Indeed, Nazrul is a realist and practical. He fought against the unlawful and hideous domination of the Western Empire on the Indian natives by singing the song of the enlightenment of humanity.

He is not blindly against the British rulers. He is opposed to the empire as they brutally usurp the native for their selfish motives. Even they created an elite class from the Indian natives which are pet to them. Creating violence and anarchy, they destroy the Indian subcontinent culturally and economically. They try to wipe out their identity, tradition, and history. To the British colonizers, the people of the Indian subcontinent are pre-civilized limbo. Indian history began after their arrival. So they had the sole contribution in making the natives civilized. But to Nazrul, burying the original identity of the indigenous and their territory, they start making them uncivilized and their slaves by imprisoning their soul and soil. It was a matter of great sorrow that the oppressed Indians are unable to or willing to trace it out. Indefinitely he created a counter-violence not with anarchy, but with the order through his writings. There were some hired and treacherous natives who secretly inspire the government to take action against him.

About 'Bisher Banshi' contemporary Bengal librarian Akshey Kumar Duttagupta's letter to the Bangla government proves this:

"Sir,

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of a book entitled 'Visher Vanshi' (The Flute of Venom) by one Kazi Nazrul Islam which was received in Bengal Library on the 21 August 1924. The extracts translated (which also are enclosed herewith) will show that the publication is of most objectionable nature, the writer reveling in revolutionary sentiments and inciting young and to rebellion and is law-breaking. The ideas, though often extremely vague have clearly dangerous intent as the fro fusion of such, words as blood, tyranny, death, fire, hell, demon and thunder will show. I may add that the writer was once convicted of seditions and is since being lionized by section of people. I recommended that the attention of the special branch of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) may drown to this publication. The copy submitted herewith may kindly be returned to the office when down with.

I have etc.

A.K. Dutta Gupta

Librarian, Bengal Library." (Mahmud, 2012, 67)

CONCLUSION

From the mid-eighteen century Indian Subcontinent became the biggest treasure trove for the British colony for two hundred years. This white-skinned race British used to think the Indians 'Exotic' and treated as second class citizens in their own nation. So, they considered it their responsibility to spread their superior ways of living to these inferior people. So they started exploiting by uprooting the natives from their human rights, tradition, and culture. The conscious colonized Indians did not tolerate their conspiracy much. They executed many uprisings and conflicts against the British colony and were able to decolonize India in 1947. Kazi Nazrul Islam is the first spokesman who in his rebellious poems, directly and indirectly, resisted against evil power to decolonize the colonized India from the early twentieth century. He accepted that violence must be met by counter-violence. We can apply the 'Decolonization' concept as his 'rebellion' and 'insurrection' to depict anticolonial resistance directed against the natives as criminal attempts to overthrow legitimate authority. Here he himself not only attempted to resist the colonial power but also encouraged the young natives to stand against that power. His target of drifting decolonization in the rebellious poems is to create anarchy free and peaceful nation by reviving the territory, culture, and heritage.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Tanzin Sultana is a Lecturer in the Department of English, BGC Trust University Bangladesh. She completed her BA (Honors) in English Language and Literature in 2015 and MA in English Language and Literature in 2016 from International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Bangladesh. Besides working as, a faculty of English at the university, she is also interested in working in the areas of Postcolonial Literature and Postmodern English Literature.