

# Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Greatest Singer of Equity

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## ABSTRACT

*On one hand there is inequality, oppression, colonialism, tyranny, hypocrisy of all kinds- religious, moral or political-greed, fanaticism, violence, racism, communalism, sorrow, alienation from nature-from ourselves, from life's unifying essence-and global existence on the brink of termination, annihilation, collapse. On the other hand, humanity is indomitable and conscientious striving for equality, freedom, empowerment, justice, renewal of nature, idealism, romance, love, a vision of unity and community of co-existence and peace. These are the stuff of our world. So, in order to remove the social discrimination, unjust, oppression, Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) has come to the earth with pen as equality and social justice which are central themes in his works. This paper aims to show that his writings are speaking in favour of equity. In order to establish the aim, I have selected some of his prose and poems as it is quite difficult to analyze all his prose and poems as he has written a number of prose and poems which tell equity of all human beings.*

**Keywords:** equality; discrimination; oppression; social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

Nazrul has to overcome insurmountable obstacles and fight against cruel tyranny in order to establish humanity over colonialism. He gets success for his talents, enormous courage, energy and determination. He has repeatedly proven that with strong principle, conviction and determination one can overcome all impediments to reach one's goal. Throughout his works, we see he believes in a world of equality, peace and harmony. His "appeals are undeniably universal and they will continue to show ways to build a harmonious world." [Dr. Gulshan Ara Kazi 2014:15] His work focuses mostly on the subjects of equality, justice, human rights and international peace.

Nazrul comes with a mission: a mission to preach equality and establish truth and justice. An exceptionally brave, dynamic, charismatic and confident man having a burning desire to change the world while working at a full speed, he was suddenly stopped by a cruel blow from his ill fate. [Kazi 2014:15]

Geographically, culturally and linguistically set far apart and yet, in spirit- pervading his entire life as poet, as writer, as human being-he was in quest of answers to life's mysterious, anguishing, struggling, rebelling, affirming, creating, evolving- as if he were living parallel lives. [Sajed Kamal 2000:30]

**Idea of equity in Nazrul's Prose and Poems:** We know people were being discriminated on the basis of religion, race, cast and gender, economic and political affiliation under British rule (1757-1947) in Indian subcontinent. Through poems, songs, articles and powerful editorials, Nazrul repeatedly pronounced that all human beings deserve to be free and treated with equal respect and dignity. According to him, human being should be judged principally by two parameters, their morality and self dignity. The way to reach the pinnacle of morality and self dignity is to believe in equality, truth and justice. With this belief Nazrul has written extensively on the subject of "Equality and Human Rights".

On this day of our great awaking, we must not forget a power source upon which much of our lies, yet which we have constantly denied. This is the so-called "low class" community. It's our arrogant aristocracy which has given such a label to an unfortunate lot. But if you can find an instrument with which to look into the hearts of these two classes, then you would see that the heart of the so-called "low class" is clear as a mirror and that the heart of the aristocratic "gentleman" community. This poor "low class" fellow who's been subjected to such contempt and disagreed ever since he (or she) was born- consequently thinking so little of

himself, internationalizing such a sense of hesitancy and inertness-that he totally forgets that he too is a human being like any of us, that he too is a creature of the same God, that he too has equal rights to his human destiny. If anyone ever rebels against this oppression, immediately the "gentleman" community casts a tremendous blow on his head, making him unconscious. It's our disregard for this unfortunate lot-this true humanity-that has led to such a downfall for us. [Kazi Nazrul Islam 2000:198]

In his poem "Coolies & Labourers", he tells against the so-called class discrimination. He utters:

Whose sacred bodies gathered dust  
carrying you around upon their shoulders-  
they are the true human beings,  
they are the true gods,  
I sing for them-  
their pained chests  
will be the foundation for a new uprising! [Islam 2007:94]

Do we ever expect to free our country or form a nation with this arrogant, hypocrite and liar "gentleman" community (most of whom have no real love for the country and people)? The "gentleman" community- I admit that we are aware of the country's miserable condition and suffering of its people that we can make people understand all that enough to the point of shedding tears. But do we have the power to do anything about it? [Islam 2000:199] Though we have no power to resist these arrogant and discrimination and suppression, we can go through Kazi Nazrul Islam's works and get the inspiration and ability to make a society of equity of human rights.

In "Coolies & Laborers", he also tells:

And if one human being is hurt, then  
let each of us of the whole humanity  
feel the pain equally.  
if one human being is humiliated, then  
let it be considered humiliation  
of the whole humanity. [Islam 2007:94-95]

Here we see Narzul strongly asks for human equity. Kazi Nazrul Islam himself believes that

this humiliation of the soul is to humiliate the eternal, great Soul. Doesn't the fear of doing that shoulder your body? God's joyous creation is the human being- who has given you the right to despise him? Who has given you the right to greatness, what makes you consider yourself as "gentle" (or "superior")? It's all your own fabrication- playing good over God.-[Islam 2000:200]

And even, we see the same reflection in his poem, "Kings and Subjects" where he says:

I sing of equality  
where through our common suffering  
we're united as one family.  
...  
It's a simple question:  
We're all children of the same Earth-

yet why is it that some of us are kings  
while some others, subjects? A strange philosophy  
indeed-  
if I speak this simple truth, my friend, I'll be  
charged with sedition. [Islam 2007:91]

Kazi Nazrul Islam most of the time tries to awake the people about their rights and encourages us not to be self-centered. Awaking people he says:

The one to arouse people with an idea should also be akin to a sage with a life of unselfish service and sacrifice. He should awaken the deep senses and ideas in people to serve humanity, not to serve himself. He should infuse people with ideas with noble purposes, for their own welfare. [Islam 2000:205]

Awaking people, he also tells us to be aware of some people because "In the wrong hands, more harm is done than good. One must work out a plan of action or an area of action before waking up people with a magic wand".[Islam 2000:205] Then he continues saying, "Throughout the ages it is the idealists who have brought joy, peace and equality to this world. It is only the ones who can think big who can bring about large scale welfare to the world". [Islam 2000:207]

A country, which pursues protection under the human rights regime, must also be prepared to act likewise on behalf of other human beings with whom it shares no bonds of nationality, religion, race, ethnicity, and language, among other relationships, whenever and wherever the need arises.[Winston E. Langley 2009:116]

We are human beings before we are women, blacks, Muslims, Hindus, or peasants; and consistent with global citizenship, the order of our moral obligations should be co-extensive with the order of being. [Islam 2007:79-80] In his poem "I sing of Equality", he writes:

I sing of equality  
in which dissolves  
all the barriers and estrangements,  
in which are united  
Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians.  
I sing of equality.  
Who are you?-A Parsee? A Jain? A Jew?  
A Santal, A Bheel or a Garo?  
A Confucian? A disciple of Charbak?  
Go on- tell me what else!  
Whoever you are, my friend,  
whatever holy books or scriptures  
you stomach or carry on your shoulder  
or stuff your brains with - the Quran, the Puranas,  
the Vedas, the Bible, the Tripitak, the Zend-Avesta,  
the Grantha Sheb- why do you waste your labor?  
Why inject all this into your brain?  
Why all this - like petty bargaining in a shop  
when the roads are adorned with blossoming flowers?  
Open your heart- within you lie  
all the scriptures,  
all the wisdom of all ages.  
Within you lie the religious,  
all the prophets- your heart  
is the universal temple

of all the gods and goddesses.  
What I've heard, my friend, is not a lie:  
there's no temple or Ka'aba  
greater than this heart! [Islam 2007:79-80]

He is also aware about the women rights and seeing the injustice and unequal behave with women. In "Women" he writes:

I sing of equality.  
I don't see any difference  
between a man and a woman.  
Whatever great or benevolent achievements  
there are in this world,  
half of that was by woman,  
the other half by man .  
Whatever sin, grief, pain, tears-  
half of that was brought by man  
the other half by woman.  
Who calls you a hello-pit, woman?  
tell him – the Original Sin  
wasn't a woman-  
it was the male Satan!  
Or, the Sin or Satan  
is neither a man nor a woman  
but neuter, equally  
mixed with man and woman.[Kamal 2000: 214]

This is the Nazrul who is not going to be caught upon the web of preferential relationships; who is committed to illuminating "timeless. . . revelations"; who is not so much rebelling against specific rules- although he opposed Britain's oppression of his people – but the human degradation and the injustice that all oppression represents. This also the Nazrul whose battle cry was "on behalf of . . . distressed global humanity" [Langley 2009: 217]

He could not understand why the humans, the sacred human being, once dressed with the name of "prostitute", "peasant", "laborer", "beggar", "women", "coolie", "untouchable", "Jew", "Muslim", "communist", or "Haitian" should be less morally noble less socially entitled, or should be insulted, rejected, and even killed.<sup>18</sup> He in favour of social equity writes in his another great poems "Human Being"; where Nazrul writes:

I sing of equality  
There's nothing greater than a human being,  
nothing nobler!  
caste creed, religion- there's no difference.  
Throughout all ages, all places,  
we're all a manifestation  
of our common humanity.

Who is he? An untouchable?  
Why do you startle? He's not to be despised!  
He may turn out to be Harishchandra or Lord Shiva.  
Today an untouchable- tomorrow he may become  
a supremely revered yogi-emperor.  
You'll come to him with offerings, sing eulogy  
Why do look down upon a shepherd?  
Perhaps he's Krishna in shepherd's disguise!  
Don't hate him for being a peasant-[Islam 2007:81]

Subsequently, declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims that: "Everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.[Langley 2009:115]

So, one finds Nazrul, in his poem "Coolies and Laborers", championing human unity. And, almost as in case of Jesus, who in the Book of Mathew noted that those who fed the hungry clothed the naked took in the stranger, and gave drink to the thirsty, did so to Jesus himself, Nazrul writes:

Let the heaven dawn upon all  
Let the people of all ages, all countries  
Stand on the shore and listen to the flute-call of unity.  
And one of human being is hurt, then let the whole of  
Humanity feel the pain equally.  
If one human being is humiliated, then let it be considered  
Humiliation for the whole of humanity.[Langley  
2009:218]

The capacity of universal empathy, so forcefully stated in his poem "Collies and Laborers", is inherent in the very definition of what it means to be human, Nazrul is saying. He potential of that self which is universal is boundless and infinite. He writes,

Don't laugh, my friends- the self within us  
Is fathomless and infinite,  
Do I – does anyone- know what greatness  
May lie within that self? [Islam 2007:81-82]

Nazrul, however, sees God in humans to establish his idea of equity in human society. In his poem "God", we find:

The whole creation looks at you  
While your own eyes are shut.  
You search for the creator  
Instead of searching for yourself.  
O self-inflicted Blind-open your eyes,  
Look at yourself in the mirror.  
You'll see- His shadow falls on your body. . .  
We are all His manifestation,  
He is present in us all,  
Seeing myself, I see the unseen Creator. [Islam 2007:112]

It is in the context of the essential divinity of man (human), as he conceives of man, that Nazrul is moved to proclaim that "there is nothing nobler than he". [Islam 2007:112]

Come forward to embrace these outcaste, low-caste, low class friends as your own, dress humbly as them, connect with them through your hearts, and stand up with pride on Indian's soil – you'll see, the world will bow before you in respect. Come, holding hands with our ignored brothers and sisters, standing before the after of India. [Islam 2000:202]

## CONCLUSION

A major theme of his work – one that is not explicitly said, but is obvious from the emphasized one finds in the chatters- is Nazrul's relevance to the twenty-first century (and , most likely, many centuries to come). The relevance is particularly evident in areas such as development, multiculturalism, nationalism, and globalism, post-modernism, the environment, and human nature as well as human capabilities. One finds his work focusing on human identity and human rights, also including those rights associated with our democratic entitlement. [Langley 2009: 13]

To him, we cannot set the time table for other people's liberation, for an end to the robbery from the common granary that the earth –which is a vast "gift of everyone"- offers, or for a taste of the "fragrance of life", which all human beings should smell. [Langley 2009: 17] So finally, without doubt Nazrul should be said the greatest singer of equity.

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