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### Impacts of Kazi Nazrul Islam's Poem and Song Promote to Nationalism and Secularism: An Analysis

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#### Abstract

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the Rebel Poet of Bengal, played a pivotal role in shaping nationalism and secularism through his poetry and songs. His works served as a powerful medium to inspire anti-colonial sentiments, fostering a sense of unity among diverse communities. Through his literary expressions, Nazrul not only voiced resistance against oppression but also promoted communal harmony, advocating for an inclusive society beyond religious and social divisions. His compositions, infused with themes of equality and justice, continue to resonate in contemporary discourses on nationalism and secularism. This paper analyses the impact of Nazrul's poetry and music in mobilizing nationalistic fervour and reinforcing secular ideals, emphasizing their relevance in modern socio-political contexts.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Secularism, Anti- Colonial movement, Communal harmony, Rebel poet, Resistance literature, social justice, Cultural impact

#### Introduction:

Nazrul is most known as a poet, but he has also been recognized as a song-writer and composer. He is highly recognised as a poet, particularly a prominent "Rebel Poet". However, his musical pursuits reflect an unrivalled and diverse talent. Song and poetry are two aspects of the same essence; music conveys what poetry cannot. Lyrical poetry develops depth when placed to music, making musical talent more subtle and comprehensive than poetic genius alone. Nazrul the lyricist is not inferior to Nazrul the poet; in fact, he outperforms himself. This argument is supported by Narayan Chowdhury's book –

*"Nazrul is a poet and lyricist-composer, and the two are inseparable; one cannot be regarded without the other. Nazrul's identity is actually only partially revealed whether he is viewed as a poet or composer. Only when these two elements come together will his personality complete its circle."*<sup>1</sup>

Nazrul Geeti refers to a vibrant and melodious new world of music. Kazi Nazrul Islam has created a unique musical genre through the diversity of tunes, the beauty of lyrical poetry, the distinctiveness of word choice, the rhythm's elegance, the depth of emotions, and the enchanting imagery. This music can be enjoyed equally by those who practice music, connoisseurs of music, and even those who have no formal training in it. His songs are

<sup>1</sup> Narayan Chowdhury: Kazi Nazrul gaan, A Mukherjee & Sons Pvt. Ltd., June 1977, p. 2  
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open to all. For this reason, he is acclaimed as the people's artist. His songs have a natural acceptance across all sections of society.

Nazrul has a deep, intuitive connection with music. He spent his boyhood steeped in song tunes. His family had a rich musical background. This ancestral custom influenced him to join the Leto gang during his early infancy and adolescence. He was able to learn everything about music there, from the fundamentals to composition and song-writing. Maksudur Rahman Hilali's essay supports this discussion by stating:

*"Nazrul's natural musical skill was cultivated from a young age when he was out of school. In Churulia, Nazrul's musical talent first evolved through the village bard's Leto troupe, just as the great poet Shakespeare's dramatic creativity flourished through theatre organizations in England."*<sup>2</sup>

To analyse the concept of 'society' in Nazrul's literature, it is essential to first develop a clear understanding of what society entails. In a broader sense, society includes various aspects such as individuals, the state, politics, and religion. It represents the progressive evolution of humanity, marking the shift from a primitive state to a structured civilization.

Society can be defined as a community of people residing within a specific geographical area, bound by a shared consciousness, governed by effective leadership, and engaged in various collective social activities. In his definition of society, MacIver stated...

*"Society is a system of usages and procedure of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and discussing, of controls of human behaviour and liberties."*<sup>3</sup>

Kazi Nazrul Islam's literary genius seamlessly blended poetry and music, demonstrating that the two are not distinct forms but rather interconnected expressions of creativity. Many of his poems were set to music, transforming into songs, while several of his songs exhibited the depth and refinement of poetry. This synthesis was also evident in Rabindranath Tagore's works, as he incorporated melodies into numerous poems from *Geetabitan*. Similarly, Nazrul's *Bisher Banshi* is a compilation that includes both poetry and songs. His vast repertoire of compositions showcased remarkable musical diversity, encompassing various genres such as **jhumur**, **baul**, **bhatiyali**, **swadeshi**, **ghazal**, **devotional**, **nature-inspired**, **humorous**, **Vaishnav**, **thumri**, **kirtan**, and even melodies based on rare **ragas**. His amazing talent is shown by the fact that he can write both revolutionary marches and light romantic songs with the same level of skill. He also tried out songs from other countries, which added to his musical legacy. His unique place in music history is due to the sheer number and variety of his works, which are unmatched. It is important to look at the songs that deal with nationalism and current political issues in order to understand the social awareness and contextual significance of Nazrul's music. So, in this case, it would be wrong to talk about his music without also talking about how it affects society.

During the period of Bengal's nationalist movement, poets sought to transform nationalism into a literary form. Literature and the press became powerful tools for disseminating nationalist ideas among the masses. The development of national consciousness began in the early 19th century, with Indians aspiring for liberation from

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<sup>2</sup> Mokusudar Rahman Hilali: *Gitikar o Surakar Najrul*, June 1977, P. 478.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Amalendu Mukhapadhyay: "prasanga somajttba (Sociology of Context), Central book publication, January 1987, p. 32.

colonial oppression. From the mid-19th century, poets like Ishwar Gupta inspired the Indian people with patriotic themes. Similarly, Rangalal Bandopadhyay's patriotic poems played an important role.<sup>4</sup> Dinabandhu Mitra's play '*Neeldarpan*' also contributed to anti-colonial sentiment, which was crucial to the nationalist cause. Later, Bankim Chandra's '*Anandamath*' and the iconic song '*Vande Mataram*' played a pivotal role in strengthening the nationalist movement. In the years that followed, Rabindranath Tagore's "*Gora*" and numerous patriotic songs further enriched the nationalist ideology. Other poets such as Dwijendralal Ray, Rajanikanta, and Atulprasad also contributed to the nationalist discourse. During the Swadeshi movement, the songs of Dwijendralal and Atulprasad were particularly impactful in reinforcing the spirit of nationalism.

While the songs of earlier poets, including Nazrul's predecessors, undoubtedly carry a nationalist sentiment, they lack the same intensity of national consciousness. These songs evoke sympathy and inspire love for the homeland, but they do not encourage the formation of a mindset geared towards armed struggle. For instance, when compared to Dwijendralal Ray's "*Sakal Desher Sera*" or Atul Prasad's "*Mayer Dan*", Nazrul's "*Durgom Giri Kantar Moru*" (Kandari Hushiyar) stands in stark contrast. Although both sets of songs are nationalistic by nature, they differ fundamentally in their emotional tone and the way they appeal to the listeners.

Nazrul's personal life was shaped by his exposure to revolutionary terrorism. While studying at Raniganj Searsole School, he was influenced by his teacher, Nibarun Ghatak, who was a proponent of revolutionary violence. Subsequently, Nazrul became an advocate for terrorism. In this regard, a critic's observation is particularly significant –

*"Initially, Nazrul supported the Non-Cooperation Movement, but after witnessing its failure, he gradually adopted a stance in favor of terrorism."*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Nazrul wholeheartedly embraced nationalism and skilfully reflected it in his literary works. His patriotic songs played a crucial role in the nationalist movement, distinguished by their unique blend of melody and powerful lyrics. Moreover, his chorus songs further energized the national movement, resonating deeply with people through their artistic merit and emotional impact. This viewpoint is reinforced by Narayan Choudhury's analysis.

*"Kazi Nazrul Islam made a significant contribution to the composition of national songs. However, he was not the pioneer in this field. Before him, eminent lyricists such as Dwijendralal, Kanta Kabi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Atul Prasad played a crucial role in inspiring patriotism among Bengalis. His 'chorus songs' hold a distinct place in reinforcing national consciousness and self-awareness."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rangalal Bandopadhyay's (1827- 1887): "Swadhinata hinatay ke banchite chai he, ke banchite chai Dasatwa srnkhal bolo, ke paribe pai he, ke paribe pai?"

<sup>5</sup> In the *Saadharani* newspaper, Bankimchandra states: "As long as we are not on equal footing with the English, let the anti-caste sentiment persist among us." - *India in Search of Liberation* by Yogendra Chandra Bagal.

<sup>6</sup> Narayan Chowdhury: "Surakar & Gitikar Najrul (Composer and Lyricist Nazrul), A Mukherjee & Sons Pvt. Ltd., June 1977, P. 493.

Several of Kazi Nazrul Islam's patriotic songs were composed in response to specific socio-political contexts. These songs reflect a deep sense of social awareness and realism. A notable example is his composition during his imprisonment in Hooghly Jail in 1923. Armiton, the jail superintendent at the time, severely oppressed the inmates. The song "Tomari jele palichho thele, tumi dhanya dhanya he" was written by Nazrul in protest. As a show of resistance, the prisoners sang this song together whenever the superintendent paid them a visit. Later dubbed "Super Bandana," this composition was a part of "Bhangar Gaan."

### **Objective of the Study:**

In Bengali literature, Kazi Nazrul Islam's extensive body of work—including his poetry, fiction, essays, and musical creations—is readily available and widely studied, offering scholars and students valuable opportunities for literary and cultural research. However, in the discipline of Political Science, access to Nazrul's political philosophy, humanistic ideals, and egalitarian vision remains limited, as his contributions are not systematically included in the standard curriculum of Indian Political Thought, a core area of study in most Political Science programs. This exclusion has resulted in a significant academic gap, making it difficult for students and researchers in the field to engage critically with Nazrul's ideological perspectives.

### **Research Method:**

This exploratory study uses a qualitative research approach to analyse Nazrul's political philosophy, humanism, and equality concept. The study uses primary data from Nazrul's original manuscripts as well as secondary data from a variety of scholarly sources, such as journal articles, journals, essays, review articles, and pertinent websites, among others.

### **Literary Expression of Nationalism in Nazrul's Poetry:**

The nationalist ideology of Kazi Nazrul Islam placed a strong emphasis on solidarity across societal divides. He argued for a composite cultural identity based on shared history and coexistence, strongly opposing the idea of segregating people based on religious identity, particularly between Muslims and Hindus. Nazrul believed that nationalism was about creating a fair and inclusive society, not just about gaining territory free from colonial control. His writings reveal a strong dedication to human dignity and secularism, where equality and respect for one another were essential components of the national identity. As a result of centuries of cohabitation rather than conflict, Gandhi saw the Indian nation as a harmonious fusion of religious and cultural traditions. Through his writings and music, he called on people to rise above narrow sectarianism and unite in the fight against social injustice and imperialist forces. Thus, the nationalism of Nazrul was profoundly moral and revolutionary<sup>7</sup>. By overcoming religion and class differences in the pursuit of social harmony and freedom, it aimed to awaken a feeling of common destiny among the disadvantaged. His message is still relevant today because it opposes exclusive ideologies and advocates for equality and empathy as the foundation for unification.

### **Promotion of Secularism in Nazrul's Works:**

In his poetry, Kazi Nazrul Islam purposefully links himself with the secular reforming principles that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, often known as Kamal Pasha, embodied. Nazrul

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<sup>7</sup> Ray, S. (n.d.). Bridging the Divide: Kazi Nazrul Islam and Nationalism. *Erothanatos Journal*. Volume-XIII, Issue-IV, July 2025

embraces a particular Kamalist brand of secularism, which upholds the existence of religion while claiming the power of a contemporary, rational state, in contrast to Western secularism, which frequently completely isolates religion from public life. Although Nazrul commends Atatürk's broad reforms in Turkey for destroying institutions rooted in religion and reducing clerical power, he also appreciates how this model permitted religious identities to remain peacefully within a single national framework. Secularism in this sense is not anti-religious; rather, it is modernization driven by the state that turns religious symbols into a civic asset rather than a sectarian one. Nazrul chose this paradigm because he wanted a secularism that would work in South Asia and bring people of different religions together without removing religion from public life. In his poem, Kamal Pasha is portrayed as a representative of progressive plurality who calls on South Asian civilizations to embrace religious traditions as a component of their common national identity while simultaneously modernizing.<sup>8</sup>

### **Musical Contributions and National Identity:**

The musical legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam is shown to be a powerful force in shaping national identity during the time of anti-colonialism. His works, which later became known as Nazrul Sangeet, are shown not just as works of art but also as tools for raising political awareness and affirming culture. By combining powerful lyrics with a nationalist purpose, these songs expressed the hopes of a people who were oppressed. They talked about resisting colonial rule, calling for unity across religious and social lines, and honouring the sacrifices of revolutionaries. The work produced a distinctive sonic environment that cut over regional, social, and communal borders by using a wide range of musical traditions, such as Bengali folk melodies, Persian, Arabic, and devotional forms from both Hindu and Islamic contexts, as well as classical ragas. In addition to reflecting Bengal's diverse cultural legacy, this synthesis acted as a counternarrative to the divide and conquer tactics of colonialism. As a result, these musical interventions manifest as acts of cultural reclamation and resistance, highlighting the power of music to evoke public emotion and create collective memory during an independence movement, and bolstering a national identity based on pluralism and shared heritage.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The lasting impact of Kazi Nazrul Islam on Bengali culture and society is both profound and enduring. Generations of Bengalis looked to Nazrul as a source of inspiration and hope because of his prolific writings, passionate advocacy, and steadfast dedication to social justice. In summarising Nazrul's significance, it is clear that he became a cultural figure and a voice for the underprivileged, going beyond the boundaries of simple artistic expression. Readers of all ages continue to find great resonance in his poetry because of its lyrical beauty and moving social critique. His books recurring themes of equality, freedom, and human dignity serve as a moving reminder of the never-ending fight for justice and emancipation. Nazrul's works remain relevant not only in the historical context of colonial Bengal, but also for their universal themes. His dedication to fighting tyranny and

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<sup>8</sup> Uddin, M. J. (2020). Vigorous Appeal of Secularism in Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Kamal Pasha". *NUB Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 1(1), 45-57.

<sup>9</sup> Gupta, P. S. (1988). *Music and Political Consciousness (Regional, Pan-Indian and Communal): A Critical Study of D.L. Roy and Kazi Nazrul Islam*. Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

campaigning for the rights of marginalised groups is still relevant today. Nazrul's principles are a beacon of hope for those fighting for a more just and equitable society, especially in times of social and political turmoil. Nazrul's artistic talents extend beyond literature to music, where his works continue to captivate audiences with their beautiful melodies and emotional depth. His blend of classical and traditional traditions left an unprecedented musical legacy, both beautiful and complex.

In conclusion, it is impossible to overestimate Kazi Nazrul Islam's importance in Bengali culture and society. His life and creations serve as a tribute to the ability of art to spur societal change and motivate group efforts. We are reminded of the timeless value of his principles and the revolutionary influence of his creative contributions on Bengali society as we consider his legacy. Nazrul remains a beacon of hope for all who dare to envision a more compassionate, just, and free society through his activism, poetry, and music.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Promoting Nazrul's Works in Education-** To inculcate in students a sense of nationalism and secularism, educational institutions must to incorporate the poetry and songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam into their curricula. Discussions about social justice, intergroup peace, and defiance of oppression can be based on his writings.
2. **Encouraging Research and Scholarship-** Academics ought to delve deeper into Nazrul's contributions and examine how they have influenced secular thought, national identity, and socio-political movements. Additional multidisciplinary research can demonstrate how his literary and musical creations are still relevant today.
3. **Public Awareness and Cultural Programs-** Nazrul's thoughts and philosophy can be promoted by planning literary events, music festivals, and seminars devoted to his writings. His involvement in promoting nationalism and secularism can be better understood by the public thanks to these activities.
4. **Digital Archiving and Translation-** In order to make Nazrul's writings available to a worldwide audience, efforts should be made to translate and digitize them. His message of solidarity, defiance, and equality will transcend linguistic and geographic barriers thanks to this.

These recommendations may help maintain and increase the legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam's significance in modern political and cultural situations.

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