

## **Nazrul's Struggles against Poverty and His Love for the Poor: An Analysis**

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**ABSTRACT :** *Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh, affectionately called as Dhukku Meah (Prince of Sorrow or son of Sorrow) by people, expresses a deep love for the poor and spoke against all causes of poverty in his poems. Because of his own poverty-stricken life, and being a true lover of humanity, Nazrul not only spoke against the contemporary oppressive British regime but also against all evils forces-whether widespread corruption, communal or vested interests of a particular group, false principles supporting oppressive social and political structures or elements- that are virtually responsible for creating widespread poverty and starvation. Though many contemporary writers wrote for the poor and lowly, this paper argues that Nazrul was unparalleled in expressing his love for the poor and violent in his protest against all evil forces of society. Nazrul was successful to create mass awareness among the people in his own time against poverty and starvation by protesting against all oppressive social and political structures, including the British imperialism. Based on the historical context this paper makes an analysis of Nazrul's poetry and his career as a poet to show how Nazrul reveals, in his poems, his unalloyed love for the poor, speaks against the causes of poverty, and also unmasks the exploiters, who really eternalize poverty in different forms in society. Though Nazrul played his role as a writer in fighting poverty and protested against its causes in a particular socio-political and historical context and expressed his deep love for the poor in a supreme stature, his writings against poverty and exploitation can enlighten us till today.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Kazi Nazrul Islam, poverty, love for the poor, corruption, oppressive socio-political and economic structures, mass awareness*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh, is also called *the poet Rebel (Vidrohi Kobi)* because of his rebellious writing against all sorts of oppression and exploitation in the world. He was a true lover of humanity and expressed a deep love for the poor in his poems and protested against all causes of poverty and exploitation in the society. He himself was the victim of poverty from his childhood and therefore understood truly the pain and sufferings of the poor and thus developed a razor edged-sharp tongue against the oppressors of the society, especially the British regime, which he thought of as responsible for many social and economic evils and wide spread corruption and poverty in the Indian subcontinent. For Nazrul's own struggles with poverty he is affectionately called as *Dhukku Meah*(Prince of sorrow) and his poverty-stricken life must have enabled him to understand the sufferings of the poor in the true sense. So he sympathized with the poor, wrote for them and tried to create awareness among them and his other countrymen against all evil forces- social, political, economic and cultural. Nazrul Islam inspired millions of Indians whether the Hindus or the Muslims with his writing to rise against all socio-political and economic oppression, or poverty or oppressive structures like other humanitarian writers in the world history. Nazrul Islam not only fought against existing British political regime but also unmasked the nature of exploitation working in different socio-economic and political levels. His writings still inspire the oppressed section of the society and horrify the despots in the world. His writings still can challenge all oppressive socio-political and narrow cultural values that create poverty and miseries of people all over the world by inspiring the mass people to fight against all these false values and structures thereby help them change their fate. Nazrul's love for the poor and his struggles against poverty its causes as expressed in the poems are many way unparalleled and varied in the sense that he deals the issues of the poor and the poverty not only in a socio-economic and political context but also in the context of people's moral and religious faiths. Nazrul's struggle against poverty involves greater socio-economic reality along with people's larger moral notions and social values. Thus his dealings with the issues of poverty and the poor take on a larger spectrum.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dr. Razia Sultana writes, "Nazrul believed in equality and believed that the discrimination of society would not be solved unless the life of the working class people were changed (Razia, 1969, p.278). Professor Sirajul Islam says, "Nazrul first showed genuine warmth to the lowly and the poor, unlike other contemporary writers" (Islam, 1994, p. 17). Shafi Chaklader writes, "Nazrul is the first and foremost poet in Bengali literature who spoke for the poor and the oppressed in the highest degree" (Chaklader, 2003, pp.89-98). However, nowhere is mentioned elaborately how Nazrul spoke for the poor and expressed his love for the poor in the larger socio-economic and political context of his time and tried to change people's attitude to the poor and the needy, in the light of people's moral and religious beliefs.

## III. OBJECTIVE

This paper aims at analyzing the issue of poverty and the poor in the poetry of Nazrul Islam in a larger socio-economic and political context, along with contemporary people's wrong moral notions, religious and false social values. By the studies on Nazrul's poems and his career we see that Nazrul inspires and teaches us how to fight against all social, economic and political discrimination and all types of oppression. Because of Nazrul's practical and a down to earth approach to the contemporary socio-political and economic issues and problems such as poverty, hunger, oppressive imperialism and other false social cultural values based on his timeless and universal vision of humanity, his writings are still appealing and relevant to the present.

## IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is one of those millions of Muslims of the Indian subcontinent who became victims of widespread poverty as a result of the British imperialism after the downfall of Nawab Sirazuddin, in the war of Palashi in 1757. Abul Asad, quoting historian W.W. Hunter, in his book *Ekso Bochorer Razniti (Politics of Hundred Years)*, says, "The Muslims not only lost their empire to the English in 1757 but also lost everything. The Muslims, who had never thought of being poor earlier, became wood-cutters and beggars." (Asad, 2010, p.9). Hunter's comment only proves the truth that the establishment of an unjust political structure whether imposed from outside or inside could cause a lot of damage to the fate of millions of people. The Indian people- whether the Muslims or the Hindus, who were the victims of economic or political injustice under the British, - had experienced the same suppression and oppression like all other colonized nations of the world. Nazrul's fore fathers who lived in Patna were rich during the Moghuls' regime. One of his forefathers came to Asansole in Bhardhman beside Churulia, a famous place for producing weapons, taking the job of Kazi(judge) appointed by Moghul's authority. In such a family line Nazrul's grandfather Kazi Amanullah was born, but poverty struck the family when the judiciary system (kazi system) was abolished by the British *Raj*. As a result, as the Nazrul researchers say, the grandfather and Nazrul's own father Kazi Fakir Ahamed had to struggle for their livelihood. They became now 'caretakers of a shrine of Hazi Pahloan in Churulia village and Imam of Mosques to earn their livelihood' (Mukul, 2002, p.7). For Nazrul situation became worse because after his birth in 1899 he became an orphan when he was just close to his nine. Though the economic problem of Nazrul's forefather and his own was seemingly very individual, actually it was typically an effect of that greater political change due to the British imperialism that resulted in poverty and miseries for the many in India.

A great poet, composer, playwright and a very enthusiastic journalist Nazrul Islam began his career as a member of *letto party* when he just crossed his twelve. *The letto* was then a popular form of entertainment in the west Bengal with the combination of a kind of stage song with poet-battle, which later shaped Nazrul's career as a great composer. Nazrul had had great experience of life and people because of his vagabond life and extensive travelling throughout India. Sirajul Islam writes about Nazrul, comparing him with another 19<sup>th</sup> century great American poet, Walt Whitman: "Like Whitman who was an influence on him, Nazrul Islam was essentially a traveler along the open road" (Islam, 1994, p. 10). Nazrul lived under the oppressive British rule, which he thought of responsible for all kinds of social evils or economic oppression, Nazrul Islam dedicated his whole life and poetic career to destroy this regime. As an age conscious poet he never kept him aloof from social and political agenda of his time. M. Habibullah says: "Though Nazrul Islam was himself, yet he is the product of the situation" (Islam, 1999). As a whole all Indians or the Muslims rejected the oppressive British political regime and its occupation and imperialism from the very beginning. Unlike some Hindus, who generally accepted the British and began to enjoy some economic facilities, the Muslims rejected the British imperialism because it created a lot of social, political and economic evils in the Indian subcontinent especially for the Muslims. Nazrul Islam was not an exception in this regard but he was exceptional as a poet or writer in his criticism of the British regime.

When Nazrul Islam arrived on the literary scene, Bengal, like the rest of India, saw and became victim of oppressive economic structures created by the British imperialist. Economically the province was in misery. The reason is that the English introduced that oppressive feudal system of land which was once a very active means of exploitation for the kings and barons in England, but later the English peasants got rid of that oppressive system through the historic Meghna Carta. The English rulers did introduce the system in India, thereby, had helped the setting up of a local bourgeois comprising mostly their agents and employees. It began with Lord Cornwallis, who had introduced new system of land tenure. People were divided by the new system. Thus began the tragedy- poverty and economic exploitation- of the Bengal peasants and workers who were the majority of the total population of India.

Members of the local bourgeois enjoyed certain economic and social privileges in cooperation with the ruling class; and considered themselves to be cultivated elite. But the vast majority of the population, who were tillers of the soil, lived in semi-primitive darkness. The situation became worse for the peasants because they were dependent mostly on agriculture for their livelihood. The peasants and the common grew to be poorer than ever due to the new system of land tenure. The new system created some heartless absentee landlords who lived in large mansions in Calcutta and led the life of luxury. And the money, of course came from the nameless peasants sweating in the sun and rain. Thus the discrimination between the rich and the poor was widening very fast under the protection of law. However, the commons, no matter they were Hindus or Muslims, were being exploited and oppressed. And their common enemies were the heartless landlords. In such a time what Bengal needed is a "radical change" (Islam, 1994,p.41) for which Nazrul dedicated himself to writing poems, songs, essays in the newspaper and delivering speeches ceaselessly with a view to raising awareness for the unity against the British rulers and the cruel landlords. However, it should be noted that Nazrul not only fought against the external British repressive forces but also all types of internal evil forces—communal rioting, discrimination between the lower and upper classes et.—in contemporary India. Unfortunately, as it happens in history, literature was not unbiased. Though Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Tagore wrote about the poor and lowly, they still kept a distance from the common men and poor class. The cause is clear—"the writers belonged to the same class as the land lords" (Islam, 1994, pp.-17-18). It was Nazrul Islam who first showed the warmth, the openness, and the complete identification of himself with the common and the poor. Nazrul's extraordinary mode of defiance and anger against the oppressors was completely new in the Bengali literature. He wrote many poems on working class people who are really playing a very important role in economic production, but their roles are not acknowledged by the so called elite of the society. Nazrul writes about peasant or farmers who are producing food for all, but are themselves victims of poverty and false social vanity. Nazrul reminds all so called elite of the contribution of farmers:

Do not call a peasant ignorant  
and scorn him so;  
none of us survive  
if this farm-hand were to go.  
Scorching in the sun, drenching in the rain,  
Day and night-all the same,  
He gives us food to feed our hunger  
Yet never driven by fame. Peasant: (*krisok*)

In most of his poems of his book, *SHARBAHARA* (The Proletariat) published in 1926 he never forgets to point out his finger at the British exploitation of the poor Bengal, even if Nazrul was writing for the mass awareness. In the poem, *Krishaner Ghan* (Song of Farmers) Nazrul raises the consequence of losing our freedom and happiness due to the arrival of the western imperialism and commercialism by the East India Company:

Wake up farmer hold fast your plough,  
We are dying-so die a well death, so move forward  
Our yards were full with crops and land with smile until  
Those merchant looters of the land  
Came to create humiliation for us;  
And to damage our fate. (Lines-1-6)

With his conviction in the inherent or dormant strength of the common people who could change the world order or socio-economic structure as we see in the French Revolution (1789) and Russian Revolution

(1917), he asks the farmers to shed off their fear and to rise against the oppressors with their power of poverty and hunger:

.....  
Today! Wake up farmer, fear not when you lost everything,  
Conquer the world by the power of hunger  
Do say "never" to the "yes" of the looter king for ever  
The world will see the strength of the farmer. (Lines: 23-26)

Nazrul always thought of the cause of poverty in this region as an outcome of the loss of people's freedom under the tyrannical rule of the British Empire. So Nazrul always attacked tyranny and despots. Nazrul always believed that the despots by means of their misrule create oppressive political and economic structures as means of exploitation that finally result in widespread poverty and miseries for the people. Naturally as an age conscious writer, he began to attack the despots by his writing. A short excerpt from "Anandamyeeer Agamaney", a poem heavily stepped in allusions and references to Bengali-Indian culture and history equally appealing to the local mass, can be read as follows:

How much longer will you  
Stay hidden behind a clay statue?  
Heaven today is subjugated by merciless tyrants.  
God's children are getting whipped,  
Heroic youth- hanged.  
India today is a butchery-when  
Will you arrive, O Destroyer?  
God's soldiers are serving terms of hard labor  
Exiled to desolate island.  
Who will come to the battlefield,  
unless you come with your sword in your hand?

While portraying the torture by the British tyrant government with a hope of its destruction Nazrul also portrayed the sacrifices (rebel's dying at gallows) of the Indian to get back their lost freedom in the poem, "Anandamyeeer Agamaney"(Coming of Anandamoyee). It is one of the most "historically significant" poems of Nazrul- both as a literary creation as well as a "political statement" (Kamal, 1999, p. 73). It was written in 1922, and was first published in the bi-weekly *Dhumketu*(*The Comet*) which Nazrul edited. The British colonial government charged Nazrul with sedition for writing this poem, and sentenced him to one year of hard labor imprisonment.

To get back the *freedom* lost in Palashi war (1757) Nazrul inspires the Indian Muslims and Hindu equally in his poem, "KANDARI HUSHIER" (Helmsman Beware):

Ahead there lies the battlefield  
Where ages since we lost to Clive;  
And there the Ganges' currents flow  
In which the country's fortune sank.

Our fortune's star shall rise again  
Tinged with our blood. The silent shades  
Of those who, daring boldly, died  
Upon the gallows, haunt us still.

They watch and wait to see what price  
We may afford for freedom's sake. (Lines: 19- 23)

Though Nazrul Islam was not an economist like Amartya Sen, he shows an affinity with Mr. Sen especially in his realization of the value of *freedom* in relation to man's economic prosperity and alleviation or eradication of poverty. To get rid of abject poverty Dr. Sen suggests for individual's choice or freedom in choosing jobs in the "free markets" in his book, *Development as Freedom* (1999). In the sense of freedom, Sen talks about political and economic freedom in the modern states---western or third world countries-- asking their government to facilitate opportunities for people to achieve such freedom thereby freeing them from abject poverty. According to Sen the main purpose of development is to spread freedom. Values, institution,

developments and freedom are interrelated. Sen also thinks that millions of people are still living *unfree* by economic poverty, social deprivation, political tyranny and cultural authoritarianism. Therefore, Nazrul, like Sen, talks about freedom from a “repressive imperialism”—a repressive political structure existed in his own time, which was not based on the morality and sense of justice. Also, Nazrul Islam, who was fully aware of the triumphant step of capitalism in the presence of imperialism which is responsible for creating a gap between the rich and poor, attacks the social bourgeois by his writings. He was also attacking equally against the inherent social and cultural evils, false cultural notions and beliefs—caste system or difference between *gentlemen* and *downtrodden*-- of India. Like Sen, Nazrul was totally against the “communal rioting”. According to Sen “Communal violence” is nothing but an offshoot of social injustice which promotes poverty; therefore, it (communal violence) is antithetical to Sen’s advocacy for social justice and freedom. To clarify his idea of “social unfreedom” (Sen., 2013, Web) -- a term Sen used for the lack of a better word—and its consequences, he describes one of his experiences while living in Dhaka with his father during 1943 famine in British India. The famine killed 3 million people. He talks about one Kader Mia, a Muslim, affected by hunger sought job in Hindu area and finally got killed by the Hindus because of the communal riot. Kader Meah’s situation is, what Sen to say, the outcome of “social unfreedom” and social injustice. In the greater socio economic and political panorama of India under the despotic British rule, people’s freedom in every sphere of life was hampered and exploitation and oppression, therefore, were widespread. That is why poverty was everywhere—of which the commons were mostly victims. Nazrul’s belief was that the fate of the Indians would never be changed unless the complete imperial political structure was destroyed, unless Indian freedom is regained.

That a despotic misrule could create abject poverty and miseries is very clear in the history of the world. The despotic monarchy of Luis XVI of 18<sup>th</sup> century France before the French Revolution (1789) was responsible for widespread poverty and sufferings of the French people. The regime was destroyed later by the upheaval of the oppressed people who had been under economic and political torture for long time. Many philosophers and thinkers- Voltaire, Rousseau and others- played their roles in bringing down the regime of Luis XVI of France by their inspiring writings. Pre-revolution era of France saw the economic and political discrimination between the so called *privileged* and *unprivileged* class, the miseries of farmers, the luxury of king and queen and the exploitation of the different provinces by the so called elite. The same condition was prevailing almost throughout other countries of Europe, but why the Revolution took place in France, rather than other countries of Europe, is the inspiration or inspirational writings of the French philosophers. Rousseau who is considered to be the pioneer of the French Revolution spoke for *freedom, equality* and *brotherhood* which were really the catch-words of the Revolution. Rousseau justified people’s moral right of dethroning the oppressive regime of king Luis-XVI in his famous books, *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. His writings like those of Nazrul were confiscated by the regime and he fled France and had experienced paranoia throughout his life. Like Nazrul he was the supporter of democracy- a system of government that allows individual freedom, equality and ensures economic freedom as opposed to an autocratic regime as of Luis XVI or of Hitler, Mussolini or of Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in recent history of the world. Nazrul Islam played his own role in creating awareness among people against social, economic discrimination and injustice. In his poem, “King and Subjects” (*Raja o Praja*), Nazrul speaks for equality and celebrates the subjects not the king:

I am the bard of equality.  
At the crossroads I sing,  
Where pity and sympathy  
Have made us all comrades and brothers. (Lines: 1-4)  
.....  
But can you tell me  
Why are some kings, rolling in luxury  
And some subjects, starving in gutters?( Lines:5-8)  
.....  
It is the people who create kings  
And not the kings the people. (19-20)

In the same poem Nazrul mocks and taunts at the incapability of people who could do nothing in bringing up a change in India as if all people turned them to be slaves to the British king:

How can we smile friend?  
We are only coolies and servants  
In our home and land.  
We have given up our manliness,

Our strength, and power.  
And what have you got?  
Rendered eunuchs we are guarding today  
The lascivious harem of the tyrant king.

To create true mass awareness against any sort of social and economic oppression and discrimination or poverty is crucial one, and is possible now through the mass media--whether print media or electronic media--by free and unrestricted flow of information. Journalism can play a vital role in this regard to create considerable awareness among people in any parts of the world against misrule and oppressive political structures that are responsible for corruption and social injustice. The roles of writers, philosophers and intellectuals, who can create such awareness, are truly understood and materialized through freedom of expression with "functioning democracy", together with unbiased journalism (Sen, 2013, Web). Amartya Sen, who is the "champion of democracy" (Sen, 2013, Web) speaks high of democracy and freedom of the mass media in eradicating poverty and corruption from society. Amartya Sen also emphasized the effective role of the judiciary--the preserver of justice-- to resist corruption. Islamic thinker Al Turabi considers Judges as "Guardians" (Patwary, 2005, p. 127). Amartya Sen rightly says in his books such as *Poverty and Famine and Hunger and Public Action*, "a Functioning democracy" – with an open clamour of diverse views rather than mere *majoritarian* tyranny– keeps people alive". Sen says, "freedom fills the bellies"(Sen,2013,web). Sen also says that "authoritarianism" or despotic misrule can flourish not only by "stifling opposition", but also by systematically "suppressing information" (Sen, November, 2003) indirectly suppressing the awareness of people.

"Suppressing information" means to a large extent suppressing the truth. All tyrants of the world did the same in suppressing the mass media or journalism or people's views. The case is the same with Nazrul Islam, who dedicated his career of journalism to the truth and the wellbeing of the society. He faced the same tyrannical approach from the authoritarian British regime. When Nazrul began to edit a newspaper called *Nobojog*(New Age) from Calcutta in 1922, and wrote many essays and treatises in support of farmers and workers criticizing the British Imperialism(Mukul,2002,p.17), the paper and its publication was confiscated immediately by the government. Later, he was arrested for his bi-weekly called *Dhumketo* (The Comet) and was imprisoned for one year. Even today many journalists are being harassed and torured, many are killed by dictators throughout the world for their truthful statements in journalism. We can think about Editor Mahmudur Rahman of the *Daily Amar Desh* in Bangladesh or the fate of some Al Jazera- journalists who are yet imprisoned in Egypt by the present Abdul Fattah CC's military government. However, during the court trial and prosecution, what Nazrul asserted in front of the judge as to the duty and responsibility of him as a poet for his countrymen is remarkable and very insightful for poets and writers of every age. Nazrul delivered his *Rrajbandir Jabanbondi*(Deposition of a Political Prisoner) which not only expresses his commitment as a poet or writer to his countryman, but also relates his role in support of truth and justice, a role which was followed by all prophets of God in human history. Nazrul speaks out:

*"The charge against me: I am a rebel against the Crown. Therefore, I'm now a prisoner, convicted by a royal court... I am a poet, sent by God to speak the unspoken Truth, to give form to the formless creation. God speaks through the voice of the poet. The message is the revelation of the Truth... My purpose is to worship God; on behalf of the oppressed, distressed global humanity... I have not rebelled against a mere king, I have rebelled against injustice ..."* and so on (Kamal, 1999, pp. 213-214).

What Nazrul has emphasized here, is the rebellion of all writers, thinkers against all sorts of oppression and corruption locally or universally, and also emphasized the idea of writers' taking the side of what is morally right and just. Nazrul understands the necessity of uprooting corruption from every sphere of social and political life for the sake of long lasting peace and prosperity of the poor farmers and workers (as Karl Marx thought of a revolution: *Communism*). If political and social corruption or injustice based on repressive political ideas and system of the established powers were not uprooted, there would be less possibility of the emancipation of poverty from a particular society in a maximum degree. Other attempts to alleviate poverty, rather than changing and challenging oppressive economic and political structures, will be mere a dot in the big canvas of overall poverty problems. Perhaps, here lies the value and significance of Nazrul's fighting against repressive imperialism and oppressive socio-political structures. And here is a great lesson, from Nazrul, for the poets, writers and philosophers of any country that they must work together to challenge and change oppressive economic and political bases or structures to eradicate poverty from society to the maximum. It is through constant *criticism* by writing books, pamphlet, essays or poems the writers, intellectual or poets (as Nazrul did in his own time) can challenge the existing power and thereby can bring a change or revolution.

*Criticism* can change the world as Karl Marx believed by creating an “intellectual front” (Lavine, 1984, p. 266) of battle against oppressive established powers. Marx seized upon “intellectual criticism as the crucial means by which to change the world” (266). Thinking of a world revolution namely communism, Karl Marx, who saw the inhuman condition of poverty of the working class people in post industrial revolution era in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, once wrote to his friend Arnold Ruge urging that what is now needed is:

“A merciless criticism of everything existing, merciless in two senses: this criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions and must not shrink from a collision with the established powers.” (266).

Marx is still talking about criticism as a means to change the world in an article he wrote soon after.

‘Criticism, he says now, is not an anatomic knife but a weapon. Its object is its enemy, which it wants not to refute but to destroy (266).’

Later Karl Marx became the editor of a liberal Journal, the *Rehnlsh News*, and “under his leadership the journal soon began to speak very recklessly”. In a short time the journal was officially banned. (268-269) Nazrul was violent and equally fearless in his criticism against the established powers: “I have no fear, no regrets, because God is with me. My unfinished duty will be completed by someone else. The truth cannot be suppressed...” he spoke to the court when he was being trialed in the court convicted of sedition by the British government.

The Marxist ideas of equality and the “divinity of man” (1984) influenced Nazrul greatly. He wrote many poems on Marxism such as *Sammabady*( Of Equality), *Issar*(God), *Manush*(Human Beings), *Chor Dakkat*(Thief and Robber), *Barnanghana*(Prostitute), *Nari*(Woman), *Paap*(Sin), *Coolie Majurs*( Coolie and Labourers) and many other. Like Marx he uplifts the dignity of human beings of all classes and all ranks. In the poem, *Manush*(Human Beings) Nazrul writes:

I sing of equality.  
There is nothing greater than a human being,  
Nothing nobler!  
Caste, Creed, religion—there is no difference.  
Throughout all ages, all places,  
We are all a manifestations  
Of our common humanity.(Lines:1-7)

Nazrul highlights the futility of religiosity or piety of an individual when he has no love for the poor and the destitute or the common humanity regardless of caste, creed and religion:

Who are they—hating human beings  
Yet kissing the Quran, the Vedas, the Bible?  
Snatch away those books from them.  
The hypocrites pretend worshipping those books  
By killing the human beings....

Nazrul's concern for the poor and the destitute reminds us of the saying of the prophet of Islam, Mohammad (peace be upon him): “He is not a believer who sleeps full-bellied, but his neighbor suffers from hunger” (*Bukhari*). Out of many Quranic verses on charity (additional charity, besides *Zakat*, a compulsory charity of Islam) one verse says: [108:1-2] *We have blessed you with many a bounty. Therefore, you shall pray to your Lord (Salat/salah), and give to charity.* Also, another verse in the Quran commands the Muslims to be sympathetic to the poor beggars and not to be harsh to them including the orphan: “So you (Mohammad) be not harsh to the orphans and scold not the beggars”(Surrah *Waddua*:9,10). When Nazrul emphasizes the teachings of sacrifice besides *Salah*, in his poem, *Shahidi Eid*( *The Eid of Martyrdom*), we understand that he spreads the message of Islam: love, sympathy and sacrifice:

নামায-রোজার শুধু ভরং,  
ইয়া উয়া পড়ে সেজেছ সং  
ত্যাগ নাই তোর একছিদাম!  
কাঁড়ি কাঁড়ি টাকা করো জড়,  
ত্যাগের বেলায় জড় সড়  
তোর নামাযের কি আছে দাম? “শহীদি ঈদ”

**Translation:**

You are very gorgeous in your fasting and prayer,  
And upon uttering some mystic hocus-pocus  
Have turned you a *JOKER*,  
And you have no sacrifice even meager!  
But pile up your wealth larger and larger,  
When asked to sacrifice, you shrink,  
What is the worth of your *PRAYER*?

(*Eid of Martyrdom*)

In the poem, *Amar Khaijiut* (My Answer) Nazrul writes about the needy and poor when his heart aches seeing the poverty:

But the hungry children do not want *Swaraj*  
They want some rice and a bit of salt.  
Day passes hour by hour their tender bellies are in fire from hunger.  
I cry out madly!

.....  
I cry out in tears: "O God, are you still there?  
Why is not there a touch of embarrassment  
In the faces of those  
Who suck the blood of these hungry children?"

.....  
Mother is begging out  
While her child lies dead at home.  
My heart is burning with pain.  
I have gone mad from seeing all these  
And I say whatever comes to my tongue.  
I cannot shed blood alone,  
So I write all this down in bloody letters.

Nazrul wants embarrassment for the "faces of those who suck (exploit) the blood" of the poor children depriving them of their basic rights of food and shelter. So the leftist movement, *Sawraj* in contemporary India makes no sense for the poet when a lot of people are still suffering from hunger. Nazrul draws the attention of the Muslims, stirs their spirit to humanitarian teachings of Islam and reminds them of their duty to the poor and needy by his Islamic songs and poems. Though Nazrul loved the Marxist ideas of communism for its support of equality and dignity of human beings, he was neither a wholehearted supporter of atheistic communism nor a supporter of atheism. Rather Nazrul was deeply inspired by the spirit of Islam and the Islamic values of the universality of humanity, partly inspired by the liberal teachings of *Sufism*. Nazrul's religiosity is based on his convictions of the greater well being of humanity which is true religion (Rashid, 1996, p. 30). Being influenced by the Islamic spirit of humanity and equality Nazrul writes many poems on different Islamic events and the life of the prophet of Islam, Mohammad (pbuh), and others. Poems such as *Truthful Mohammad*, *Khalid*, *Omar Farooq*, *Khadija*, and poems on Islamic events such as *Eider Chad* (Moon of the Eid), *Naton Chad* (New Moon), *Krisoker Eid* (Eid of the Farmers), *Mohram*, *Eid Mubarak* and many others strongly highlight the Islamic teachings of sacrifice, tolerance, bravery, charity, generosity, and nobility of heart. In many songs written in honor of the Prophet Mohammad(S) Nazrul sings of prophet's love for the poor and equality. "Human sympathy is the keynote of the teachings of the prophet..." (Abbasi, 1996, p. 79). He (the prophet) was always a great help to the poor and needy and protection to the widows and orphans (79). There is a saying of the prophet: "All God's creatures are His family, and he is the most beloved of God, who does most good to God's creatures" (*Sahi Muslim*). Nazrul reminds the Muslims of their duty to the poor and the needy. Few examples are as follows:

Coming to this world for the poor, the downtrodden,  
The destitute, Hazrat,  
Despite your royalty, you choose the life of fasting.  
You did not want that some shall be rich  
And some be beggars in the streets,  
That some have no place to live.

.....  
Today there is no one to think about human sufferings and needs.  
The rich Muslims are constantly immersed  
in pleasures and luxury.

In another song he writes:

Once again Hazrat, send from Heaven  
I can no longer bear the sight of human beings  
Fighting each other hatefully.

Tell them O Hazrat,  
That those who are your royal followers  
Love human beings as creatures of God, knowing that all are creatures of God.(1-8)

Nazrul believes that there should be a shift or change in people's and society's attitude to the poor and the destitute. Nazrul carefully noted the importance of such awareness derived from religion and social values of humanity. In many of his poems Nazrul tried to create awareness among the people of his country to see human beings as human beings not as another entity in terms of different caste, creed or profession and ranks. When once the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) was asked: *What actions are most excellent?*; he answers: *to gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the aggrieved(Sahi Muslim)*. Nazrul's attitude to the poor is the same and is expressed in a poem, *Pain of the Poor*, in which he tells the rich that a meager portion of their *hoarded wealth* could save the destitute and poor street boys who are deprived of their basic rights: food and shelter--

These children—suffering  
From a lack of mother's care,  
In rags, their bodies covered with dirt,  
Faces dried up from starving all day, scornful,  
Their bodies feverish, skin chapped all over

Ignoring them—O Rich, O Ruler,  
.....  
Shame on you...  
All that rice you store in your bins...  
Just a portion of it could save them.

After the failure of the *Boycott Movement* by Gandhi against the British, Nazrul delivered his speech to a gathering of farmers in Mymensingh, Bangladesh. In the speech he quotes some lines from the great noble laureate poet, Rabindranath Tagore, and spoke against those so called *gentlemen* who believed in the caste system and discrimination and never acknowledged that *the downtrodden*(Kamal:189-01) of the society are human beings. Nazrul starts his speech quoting the following lines from Tagore's *Gitanjali* (Songs Offerings), song no.108:

হে মোর দুর্ভাগা দেশ , যাদের করেছ অপমান ,  
অপমানে হতে হবে তাহাদের সবার সমান!  
মানুষের অধিকারে  
বঞ্চিত করেছ যারে ,  
সম্মুখে দাঁড়িয়ে রেখে তবু কোলে দাও নাই স্থান ,  
অপমানে হতে হবে তাহাদের সবার সমান ।

**Translation:**

O my unfortunate land!  
Some there are  
Whom you have treated badly and dishonored;  
You must share insults  
Equally with them.  
Some you have deprived  
Of their human rights;  
You stood before them  
But did not take them into your embrace;  
You must share insults and dishonor equally with them

(*Gitanjali*: 108) (Lines: 1-6)

Tagore did not deny the rights of the downtrodden people of Indian society like Nazrul Isalm. Tagore criticized in this poem the Indian culture of the caste system or divisions of ranks among the same people of the one India between the so called *gentlemen* and the *downtrodden*.

We often see Tagore encouraging and motivating the masses who are the downtrodden in the society and poor. He says that the Lord (God) walks in the midst of the poorest the lowest and the lost people who have no hopes and the Lord is there with them to love and take care of them:

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the  
poorest, and lowliest, and lost.  
When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to  
the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.  
Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes  
of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost  
My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest  
company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.  
(Gitanjali- X, p.21)

Though Tagore talks about the poor and the down trodden of the society, he is not yet violent in temper of his expression like Nazrul .Also, Nazrul's attitude or approach to the poor and oppressed section of society is more practical and realistic than that of Tagore. So we see Nazrul's attitude to a prostitute (*Branghana*) is quite insightful and very realistic. He does not blame the prostitute for her vile profession; rather Nazrul blames the capitalism which created such social immoral demeanor and moral degeneration with prostitution. According to Nazrul the shame of a prostitute is a shame on us who are equally responsible for such social evils, because we are only hoarding and piling up our wealth without sharing with and caring for other men and women suffering from poverty. Nazrul addresses a prostitute as mother:

Who calls you a prostitute, Mother?  
Who spits at you?  
.....  
You may not be chaste,  
Yet you are one of the families  
Of all our mothers and sisters.

In the Marxist poem, *Chor Dakat* (Thief and Robber) he unmask the faces of those real *thief* and *dacoit* of society who hold power in their hands and exploit people in a different manner and ways with the protection of law. If we think about share market fraud, quick rental electricity plant, bank scandal in recent history of Bangladesh, along with the story of the Wall Street, the bank village of the USA, in connection with the recent American economic recession which made a lot of people jobless, we can easily unmask the faces of those *big thief* and *dacoit*. Michel Moore, the famous American film celebrity, exposes and unmask the nature of fraud, bank scandal of the Wall Street in a documentary called, *Capitalism: A Love Story* (web: Moor, October, 2014). Nazrul calls the lower-level thief and dacoit as his friends who steal from those *big thieves* and *dacoits* who steal from people's money and country's treasury with the aid of *notorious indemnity* or protection of law. For Nazrul those corrupt people are the heinous frauds who steal from people's fund and create poverty with their corruption:

কে তোমায় বলে ডাকাত বন্ধু, কে তোমায় চোর বলে?  
চারিদিকে বাজে ডাকাতি ডাকা, চোরেরই রাজ্য চলে।  
ছোটদের সব চুরি করে বড়রা আজ হয়েছে বড়!  
.....  
যারা যত বড় ডাকাত-দস্যু জোন্সোর দাগবাজ  
তারা তত বেশি সম্মানি গুণী জাতি-সংঘেতে আজ। (Chor Dakat: lines:1-7))

In order to understand the message of Nazrul's poems on poverty and the poor a story may be cited here. A story goes on that during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Harun -Al- Rashid known as *the Just*; a judge punished the angry mob when a poor woman convicted of theft was brought up to the court. When the judge came to know that the woman was suffering from hunger and starvation with her two orphan children, he charged the people instead of the woman because of their irresponsibility and indifference to her suffering and fined every one of them (with gold coins) to help that poor woman. The judge declared that a society and its

people are equally criminals that do not care for the poor. Later the Caliph himself asked forgiveness from the woman. Perhaps, Nazrul tried to create such awareness among his contemporary people.

Like Nazrul Karl Marx was very critical of capitalism and its greed and lust for profit without caring for others. It is capitalism which increases the gap between the rich and the poor. Karl Marx believed that capitalism is the result of "labor exploitation" and the industrialists earned "surplus capital" (Baym, 2003, p. 1073) through the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe "by paying the least possible amount to the workers" (2003). Perhaps Marx was right to say "surplus money" or "capital" created immoral capitalism, and immoral capitalism created the economic imbalance--the gap between the rich and the poor, the poverty and other social evils. So Karl Marx imagined of overcoming the economic "alienation"(Lavine, pp. 280-282 )and the freedom of the proletariat through communism which is antagonistic to capitalism. Marx only emphasized the change of social and economic system through communism, and later socialism came as its offspring to curb the wound of the repressive capitalism.

However, later the ultimate failures of communism or socialism in many parts of the world, because of its atrocities in killing its rival in the name of "class struggle" as Marx viewed; and the creation of cold war tension through the rivalry between communist bloc of the Soviet Union and capitalistic bloc of the US and its allies throughout the world and subsequent fall of the Soviet Union in 1985, raised the question regarding the success of communism as an alternative to capitalism. Rather, seemingly "Stifling opposition" (as Sen used the term) of communism (2013) to the strong capitalism made capitalism stronger. Therefore, it may be said, in the same tone of Sen's saying, that atheistic Communism could neither fully destroy the capitalism nor emancipate the proletariat. Rather, because of the fall of communism, capitalism became stronger than ever. Capitalism is on its triumphant phase now under the political covering of democracy by the western powers. Western *Capitalistic greed* is not only (just) increasing the so called "surplus capital" money, of which Marx was very critical and concerned, through the imbalanced distribution of wealth globally, but also waging wars to full fill the demands of the inhuman consumer society of the western materialistic world. We see, with the open eyes, the failures of the western democracy and its showy and hollow cries of global justice and equality when we see still Israeli illegal wars on Gaza, American aggression on Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world especially exploitation over African nations in the recent time. When dogs are well- fed in the western consumer society, sufficient foods do not yet reach to the many half-starved poor all over the world or famine- affected people of Somalia. The hypocrisy of the present western democracy is manifested through different political agenda of the so called democratic countries by which they impose dominance over other parts of the world, thus creating refugees problems with poverty through proxy wars such as in Syria, Iraq and Libya or elsewhere. The problem of poverty and its solution, therefore, lie rather deeper, in the change of the mind of people. The solution to poverty problem consists in the change of human values and notions regarding the poor and poverty. So Nazrul, through his writings, tried to uplift values of humanity to change human attitude and their general notions and values regarding the poor and poverty.

Virtually, all external changes- institutional, economic, political and cultural- are the true manifestation of human values. For examples, the west became victims of two great World Wars (1914&1939) and destruction because of their confusing social and political values: the wrong ideas of Darwinism, belief in so called evolution theory-*the survival of the fittest* or the then political imperialism as of Hitler and others, and even now unfortunately, behind the curtain of western liberalism, we still see the same imperialism. According to German philosopher Nietzsche Darwinism lowered human beings down to "mere animalism" (Stumph, 1975, pp. 391-96). The humanity saw the tragedy of mankind because of the false western values and its consequences: the largest killing fields in human history through the two World Wars. Capitalism and present western democracy have no other values than *profit, consumerism* and occupation or *dominance* over other countries just as communism has no other values than the will of *annihilation* of its rival. As a result of such immoral dehumanizing aggressive and destructive global stand both Capitalism and Communism utterly failed to solve the poverty problem globally, to establish equality and social justice. Nazrul unlike Karl Marx turned to strong Islamic values as solution to the problem of poverty and social injustice emphasizing the *Zakat* (compulsory system of charity) system. According to Dr. Zakir Naik poverty will be eradicated from the world if every rich person of the world pays 2.5 percent of their total savings as charity (*Zakat*) every lunar year. Nazrul reminds us that Islam believes in global humanity and brotherhood not just in words but in actions: He writes in the poem *Eid Mubarak* that the surplus money or wealth of the rich has to be shared with the poor and needy:

Is it ordained for some people  
To shed tears and for others to  
Light up the chandeliers!

And just two people to have princely  
Luck, millions to suffer from bad luck?  
That is not the prescription of Islam.  
So has Idul-Fitr ushered in the new dispensation  
You who are hoarding up, you should

Give away all *surpluses*,  
You must have food to satisfy your hunger!

Also Nazrul, without thinking individual's freedom in so called "free markets" of new western global notion of New World order ( as Dr.Sen speaks for freedom to free individual from abject poverty), reminds us the social and economic justice of Islam with his poem, *Omar Farooq*, highlighting the sense of justice and equality of the Second Caliph of Islam Omar Farooq(R) with reference to Omar's attitude to his servant during his Jerusalem visit, his implementation of justice to his own son and Omar's carrying foods on his shoulder to the orphan family at midnight etc. Nazrul Islam, however, presents *Islam* and *Islamic values* in parallel to western democracy as an alternative to the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of both communism and western democracy, highlighting the global Islamic values of equality and justice. When Omar(R) visited Jerusalem, the Christians and Jews were fascinated by his sense of justice. Nazrul writes about this event:

”ইসলামের এ নহে ক ‘ধর্ম’, নহে খোদার বিধান,  
কারো মন্দির গির্জারে করে মসজিদ মুসলমান“!  
কেঁদে কহে যত ইসাই-ইহুদি অক্ষ-সিক্ত-আঁখি  
”এই যদি হয় ইসলাম-তবে কেহ রহিবেনা বাকি,  
সকলে আসিবে ফিরে  
গনতন্ত্রের ন্যায় সাম্যের শূভ্র এই মন্দিরে“! “উমর ফারুক”(Umar Farooq)

Nazrul wants to say that no Muslim should try to occupy the temple of other people or religion. a Omar, the caliph of Islam, teaches the Muslims a great lesson during his Jerusalem visit. All the Christian and Jewish were amazed at the nobility of heart of Umar, when they saw Umar's respect for human equality and human dignity-which are also values of democracy.

One great American poet, Walt Whitman (1819-1992), who is well known as a great lover of humanity and spokesman of "spiritual democracy", writes in his famous poem, "Song of Myself";

I speak the pass- word primeval; I give the sign of democracy,  
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their  
Counter part of on the same terms. (Section: 24)

Whitman's "spiritual democracy" which equalizes all human beings or all citizens: king or subjects, master or slave: on equal terms of sharing and enjoying life is nowhere seen in the world except in the reign or kingship of Omar(R).Omar as a caliph never thought of himself as a king, but a servant to the people.

Because of the common bond of humanity, any degradation to any other human, by poverty, torture or oppression, means degradation to every one of us. So Whitman, who was also a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln, writes:

Whoever degrades another degrades me,  
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me. ("Song of Myself": section: 24)

Poverty, famine, hunger or starvations which mean degradation and dishonor to humanity, are due to social, political and economic injustices not due to the shortage of food and production. These are outcome of human corruption, political misrule and suppression of freedom and lack of awareness and sense of responsibility among the people. As Dr. Amartya Sen thought of 1943's famine in British India as the outcome of "Social Unfreedom", we may think of 1974's famine of Bangladesh as the result of the political corruption, misrule, tyranny and suppression of information( by declaring the publications of many newspapers closed) of contemporary government. In this regard Nazrul's fighting and his writings against all sorts of political injustice are synonymous with his fighting against poverty and human miseries of all kinds. Nazrul' fighting against poverty, hunger, social and political tyranny through his writing was continuous and ceaseless. He came to be

called *the poet Rebel*, (*Vidrohi Kobi*) by his constant rebellion against all injustices. His determination of constant fight against the oppressor and oppression of all kinds, along with his love for the oppressed, is expressed in the poem; *Vidrohi (The Rebel)* for which he is famous and known as the poet Rebel. He writes that he will not stop until all types of oppressions come to an end in the world:

I'm Parashuram's merciless axe.  
I'll rid the world of all war mongers  
And bring peace  
.....  
I'll uproot this subjugated world  
In the joy of recreating it.  
Weary of battles. I, the Great Rebel,  
Shall rest in peace only when  
The anguished cry of the oppressed  
Shall no longer reverberate in the sky and the air,  
And the tyrant's bloody sword  
Will no longer rattle in battlefields.  
Only then I, the Rebel,  
Rest in peace. (176-89)

Instead of the global western hegemonic capitalistic mind, a true *Global Mind* which is strongly motivated by strong values based on global humanity and spirituality independent of time, place and races, can solve problems of poverty and other social and economic evils.

## V. CONCLUSION

Our study on Nazrul and his works above is very little as compared with the vastness of the volumes of his works. Still, by the studies above, we see that Nazrul was greatly shocked at observing the wide spread poverty, starvation and miseries of people in the Indian subcontinent during the British rule. Nazrul Islam as an age conscious poet and writer began his struggles against the misrule and tyranny of the British Empire, along with all internal cultural social evil forces, which he thought are equally responsible for the miseries and sufferings of the people. Nazrul absorbed his country and his country absorbed him. As Emerson, the great American poet and essayist, says that a great poet is the "speaker" and "representative" of his countrymen (Clarke, 1969, p. 43). Nazrul turned himself to be the speaker and representative of the oppressed section of his own country and fought against all oppressive socio-political and repressive structures, along with false notions, belief and customs of his own time, to eradicate poverty, starvation and sufferings from society. He inspired the people, as Rousseau and Voltaire inspired the French to bring up the French revolution or Marx inspired the proletariat for communism. In this regard Hugo's comment may be relevant. The French novelist Victor Hugo, who wrote his famous novel, *Les Miserable (the wretched)* after the French Revolution, carefully noted and presented the poverty and miseries of people due to the so called "reign of terror" (Wilde, October, 2014): the reversals of the revolution with the emergence of tyranny and political oppression in new forms. Hugo shows in this novel the collapse of the fate of a woman by the name Fontine who lost her job based on a false social notion that she became pregnant. So her pregnancy, which is actually identical with her nature as a woman, was regarded as a crime. Finally, Fontin's joblessness led her to prostitution to earn livelihood for her and her daughter. Hugo thus refers to the fall of individual's fate (as of Fontine's) due to the external failures and collapse of political structures or false notions and values of society.

Hugo, keeping in mind the socio-economic, political and cultural causes of poverty or other forms of evils in every age, writes in the introduction (preface) to his novel: "so long as there shall exist, by reason or law and custom, a social condemnation, injustice, misery of the common, tyranny and oppression, inhumanity, inequality that artificially create hells on earth and complicate the destiny of the humanity, so long as the problem of the age—the degradation of man by poverty, the ruin of man and women by starvation and the oppression of common humanity are not solved, so long as in certain regions, social, political and economic injustice shall be possible, so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth novel like this one will never lose its value (Hugo, 2002, p.17)". Associating Nazrul's fight and his views on socio-economic corruption and structures in a particular phase of history, with those of Hugo's comments on social injustice, poverty and starvation we can say that our national poet Nazrul, the poet Rebel, and his writings still can inspire the writers, poets, intellectuals and philosophers of every country in the recent time or coming future to understand their strength and play their own roles as to eradicating all oppressive socio-political structures thereby alleviating or eradicating poverty from their own society by their inspirational writings in the context of their respective social milieu. Thus, Nazrul provides all writers: poets, intellectuals and philosophers: with the deep insight into their

endeavor as to fighting against poverty, starvation and discrimination today and the days to come. Virtually, Nazrul emphasized both the internal change of men's values and external actions to change the society at the same time. This is how Nazrul struggled against poverty to eradicate it and thus spoke for the poor and expressed a deep love for them.

**NOTE** English Translation of the poetry of Nazrul is taken from mainly two books:(1) *Kazi Nazrul Islam, a new anthology*, Edited by Rafiqul Islam, ,1990, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Print. & (2) *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Selected Works*, Edited by Sajed Kamal, 1999, Nazrul Institute, Dhaka. And some poems have been translated by the author himself.

**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE** English Translation of Nazrul's poems from Bengali loses its original taste as expressed in Bangla, because in translation the original rhythm, rhapsody of Bangla language cannot be expressed in the true spirit as Nazrul used them. However, the translation is the only way for readers whose mother tongue is not Bangla

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