Nazrul's Poetics: a polyphonic discourse of the multitude.

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Nazrul's Poetics: a polyphonic discourse of the multitude.

Nazrul burst forth on the literary scene of Bengal at the end of the first world war like a Nietszchean 'dancing star'.[1]His meteoric rise to literary fame and political notoriety just as much as his untimely and tragic eclipse may have prevented the critics from a full and genuine assessment of his contributions. In post-1947 Pakistan as well as post-liberation Bangladesh, his identity as a Muslim(in truth a partial and complex identity at best) became politically primary for reasons that are too obvious and crude to consider. Unfortunately, the richness, depth and complex polyphony of Nazrul's creative life has been all but lost in this game of political and religious(and at times, politico-religious) representation. So much so that we are now finally forced to raise the seemingly simple question: who, or what phenomenon was Nazrul?

Like all simple questions,however, this one too, looks less and less simple the more one ponders. Or, to use the almost surreal and strangely effective language of Lewis Caroll, it gets '…curiouser and curiouser'. For example, was Nazrul simply one person? Or, in a slightly more postmodern rhetorical gesture, how many personas are projected by the signifier uttered as Nazrul? How many masks did he wear, and why? What accounts for the transformation of Dukhu Mia first into Habildar Kazi Nazrul Islam and then into Kazi Nazrul Islam, and ultimately into simply Nazrul--- as much of a packed signifier as Kaviguru or Viswa Kavi was for that other literary and cultural icon of modern Bengal--- Rabindranath Tagore ? Such questions can easily be followed by a whole set of others about writers of minor literature in minor languages along the lines of Deleuze and Guattari in their classic postmodern study of Kafka.[2,3]

It is, of course, impossible to focus on the entire opus of Nazrul in a short essay. The scope of the present endeavor is , therefore, rather limited. I want to focus on a few select poems after a rather broad brush picture of his activities as a poet in the interwar years. The focus here is to bring out the many voices of Nazrul that at the same time reflected and shaped the complex polyphony of cultures and classes in 'modern' India. I have put the word modern under quotation marks for two reasons. First, we need to be

[1] Cf. "Out of chaos shall burst forth the dancing star." Frederick Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*
[2] See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature,

Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c1986.

[3] Please see also my 'Octavio Paz: Textuality, Sexuality, Politics' , The Denver Quarterly, Summer, 1992and ' Charti Shado: Joyce, Derrida Bingsho Shatabdi', Jijnasa, Calcutta, 1997 for a fuller theoretical discussion of this aspect of writing and language.

aware and remind ourselves again and again that we never were able to generate a modernity of our own under colonialism. As Debesh Roy has argued with so much force and skillfully arranged historical evidence for Bengali novel, our so-called renaissance and modernity really took place under the imposed structures of an English modernity---mostly stifling what could be a historically continuous and less "western' version of our own endogenous modernity.
Second, as Derrida has shown time and again, a deconstructive gesture may actually require writing under erasure, writing *sous rature* that erases, obliterates and destroys even as it sets itself the task of creating anew. But there is not and cannot be any fixed origin.The deconstruction of both a signifier and signified called Nazrul is, of necessity an endless and destabilizing process, calling into question the received dogmas and shibboleths along the way.Modernity, it may be said, is perhaps the most enduring among the modern dogmas. One might even say that ihe idea of modernity is the 'modern myth'.

My strategy from the outset, then, is to contest the claims of an imposed and imported modernity and the whole imposing edifice of literary, political and cultural interpretations that stand on this imported and imposed foundation. This so called modernist critical tradition standing on what is in reality an insecure and ill-domesticated critical foundation has to be seen ultimately as what it really is----largely, a posturing and an imposture.Large parts of it, put baldly, can be characterized as '…a (canonical critical) tale told by an (learned) idiot (often)signifying (less than) nothing'.Such a defenestration of literary humbug will also help us pose the question of Nazrul more correctly. I will try to establish the claim that Nazrul was not really a modern but a postmodern poet *avant la lettre*, who captured, responded to and created--- almost all at the same time--- a significant part of the chaotic universe of multilayered cultures of the Indian subcontinent where the multitudes still fight one another even as they fight together for freedom from their imperial and domestic ruling class bondage.

The Two Modernities of Bengal:

> Our modernity that was born in the last century under English tutelage can be characterized by two different 'beginnings'[4]---separated by a distance of thirty to thirty five years--- in almost all branches of literature.[5]
>
> Debesh Roy begins his by now classic essay on the Bengali Novel with the above startling announcement. He goes on to present a series of novel theses on *Bangla Upannyash(Bengali Novel),* and establishes these theses with a set of brilliantly acute and analytical arguments buttressed by a close reading of both texts and historical evidence.
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> As in novel, so it was in poetry. In fact, Roy's fascinating essay which is full of original insights begins with a discussion, not of novels, but of the poetry of two

[4] As I have already stated, there can not be any rigid originanry beginnings. Hence the inverted commas. The formulation of Debesh Roy which I discuss favorably for the most part later, suffers from his giving insufficient attention to this 'dynamic' or flow aspect of history without an originary or foundational moment.
[5] Debesh Roy,*Uponnyash Niye(On Novel),* De's Publishing, Calcutta,1991, p.3.

different modernities, represented by Ishwar Gupta on the one hand, and by Michael Madhushudan Dutt, on the other. Just as *Alaler Ghorer Dulal(The Spoiled Son)* and *Durgeshnondini(The Fort Commandant's Daughter)* are two points of origin of the modern Bengali novel, so are the works of these two extraordinary modern Bengali poets the beginnings of two different modernities in poetry. Madhushudan became Michael, and as the saying goes, thereby hangs a tale of ambition and Europeanization. Though in his bitterness and disappointment, the erstwhile author of *The Captive Lady* would turn to '…the various treasures…' in the storehouse of mother Bengal , he would not abandon the romanticism of a Byron who inspired him to poetry to begin with.

It was otherwise with Ishwar Gupta, or as he was popularly known, Gupta Kavi. According to Roy, his poems were bereft of romanticism, and full of irony and sarcasm. Accordingly, his language was a mixture of 'modern' and medieval Bengali with occasional English words thrown in for good measure. To quote Roy:

> In his[Gupta's] construction of a poetic foot by mixing English words, we might have been able to read the secret autobiography of the Bengali middleclass of Calcutta. This self-reportage is what made him so acceptable, and ultimately this same self-reportage is what became a liability. Without the literary flourishes of Romanticism, this poetry in reality was simply the alter ego of prose, a reportage where the Bengali reader could not hide his own true face from himself…. However, 'the boy who has read A-B [6]in college' has become mature by then---he no longer wants to be a figure of fun in Ishwar Gupta. Therefore, the modernity that started with Gupta Kavi, the account of that same modernity with honest and forceful language became unacceptable to the Bengali society.[7]

Madhushudan, on the other hand wanted to write '…as a Greek would have done.' Or, like Virgil, '…sing of arms and men…',--- converting the intended epic unintentionally along the way to a model derived from the English romantics--- even if the subject, as in *Meghnad Badh(The Slaying of Meghnad),* is ostensibly from '… the grand mythology of our ancestors'.

Clearly, it was the modernity of Madhushudan which won out in modern Bengali poetry, just as it was the modernity of Bankimchandra's *Durgeshnondini*---modeled after Walter Scott's romances--- that won out over *Hutom*[8] in modern Bengali novel. But the secret subterranean flow of the other modern current that was suppressed continues even today. In particular, writers such as Roy himself, Mahashweta Devi, Akhtaruzzaman Ilias and others with various degrees of skill and self-consciousness, all belonging to a new postcolonial generation, have revived this lost cultural project which of necessity is also a political project.

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[6] Refers to the degree Ars Baccalaureate

[7] Ibid. p. 8.

[8] The full title is *Hutom Panchar Naksha* or Sketches of a Horned Owl, aseries of satirical sketches in a language that was much closer to the everyday language of Calcutta than the affected and artificial literary language created by the elite.

The claim that the cultural discourse on modernity in Bengal is a political discourse at the same time would seem innocuous but for the fact that politics here is often not just the confrontation with external powers that be, but also a relentless struggle against collective self-deception. Thus our cultural discourse takes on a new poignancy that in its tragic bitterness resembles that other great literary underdog nation--- the Irish. It is probably not accidental in a larger sense that Masterda Surya Sen adopted the date of the Irish uprising of the great Easter rebellion as the date of the uprising to seize arms from the Chittagong armory in 1930. Formed as it was under the boots and largesse of imperialism, our modernity from its very beginning has been characterized by at least two contradictory tendencies--- both deeply implicated in politics. In fact, the very existence of these two modernities is indicative of a deep problem of cultural and real politik that have not disappeared with our so-called independence.

Born in 1899, at the height of the triumph of the second modernity in Bengal, Nazrul's checkered early life was marked mainly by non-English institutions. Even the high school he went to was in the *Muffassil*---the hinterlands. And the *Daroga*, the police subinspector who had earlier become his benefactor was simultaneously both a symbol--- albeit a very low-ranking symbol--- of the English idea of imperial law and order, and a native son steeped deeply in the folk culture of Bengal. Add to this Nazrul's time in the *Leto* group where he learned to sing, act and play the harmonium--- the last item, a curious example of a missionary instrument transformed to serve the carnivalesque, is almost a classic demonstration of one of Bakhtin's theses of inversion of the ideology of the powerful at the hand of the masses--- and you get the makings of a man who could hardly fit into the stereotype of literary and cultural modernity created by the so-called Bengal renaissance. Of necessity, Nazrul would belong to the multitude.[9] But the stresses and faultlines of the second, more imitative modernity

[9] It may be useful to define the term 'multitude' more carefully here.I am using this term in the same way as Hardt and Negri (2000) do in their fascinating book, *Empire*. As they point out in the case of the revolutionary modernist movement that was ultimately destroyed and subverted,

" It all began with a revolution. In Europe, between 1200 and 1600, across distances that only merchants and armies could travel and only the invention of the printing press would later bring together, something extraordinary happened. Humans declared themselves masters of their own lives, producers of cities and history, and inventors of heaven….
William of Occam, for example, claimed that the church is the multitude of the faithful….Marsilius of Padua posed the same definition for the Republic: the power of the Republic and the power of its laws derive not from superior principles but from the assembley of citizens….By the time of Spinoza, in fact, the horizon of immanence and the horizon of democratic political order coincide completely. The plane of immanence is the one on which the powers of singularity are realized and the one on which the truth of the new humanity is determined historically,technically, and politically.For this very fact, because there cannot be any external mediation, the singular is presented as the multitude." Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Empire, Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2000:70,73.
However, by the time we get to Hobbes in the 17th century, the multitude has already been converted to the idea of a "people" in the framework of an oppressive bourgeois nation state. As Hobbes declared:

would affect him as he came to be better known. It will turn out, for good reasons, that his ambiguities and ambivalences will overall be formally and substantively close to the multitude in a way that even Sharatchandra, the only rival---and that too, in fiction only--- could never accomplish within the received form of the English novel that he inherited from his predecessors from Bankim onwards. On the otherhand, Nazrul's formal innovations in poetry,lyrics, musical forms and melodies would ultimately make him a genuine part of the grand carnival of the Bengali multitude.

Nazrul and the Great War

Although the evidence is sketchy, we know now from Shailajananda who was Nazrul's classmate and other sources that Nazrul's decision to join the war effort was not a random act. The two friends, in particular, discussed the matter, and although this would be too early a stage for either of them to have developed anything like a revolutionary consciousness, it will be accurate to draw a connection between their rebellious adolescent spirit and their later development as largely revolutionary writers.

Of course, Nazrul saw no action, except military drill. Readers of his prose pieces---for example, *Byathar Dan, or Rikter Bedon*, have sometimes been led to think that Nazrul went to the Middle-Eastern and other battlefronts. But the actual regimental records do not support this. What Nazrul was able to learn in leisure, however, was the deep and deformed connections that existed culturally between the Arabic-Persian world and India. He could also use the enforced leisure to read and write. There are also accounts of his learning the military marching band music which he later put to good use in composing the music for several of his lyrics about the struggle for freedom.Clearly,at this time there was in Nazrul a sense of martial virtues and at the same time a dim recognition that as a colonized people these virtues, such as they were, were always used to further the interests of the master.

But the greatest impact of war on Nazrul really was a sense of a developing self. It was the birth of a new I/eye. I/eye is , or at least should be recognized as one of the deepest puns in the English language. Using this, we can say that Nazrul's

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" It is a great hindrance to civil government, especially monarchical, that men distinguish not enough between a people and a multitude. The people is somewhat that is one, having one will, and to whom one action may be attributed; none of these can be properly said of the multitude. (Thomas Hobbes, De Cive, New York: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1949 Ch. XII, section 8, p. 135.
In Bengal in Chandidas's declaration,
Shabar upare manush shotto, tahar upare nai (humans are the only immanent truth; there is no transcendental truth beyond or above.), there is a direct resonance with the revolutionary modernity in Europe. In the character of Chand in Manasha Mangal, we also see an individualist--- a singularity, in Deleuze's and Hardt and Negri's terminology---- driven by his own inner volition. More broadly, in the various undercurrents in tantric Buddhism, Baul and Vaishnava movements as well as Sufism there are strong suggestions of the stirrings of an indigenous multitude in Bengal.

new 'I' also learned to see and grasp the world with a new 'eye'. It was during this experiential period that new forms in poetry started their germination. Later, these would would burst forth first in *Bidrohi(The Rebel*), which would become his defining mark in no time, and other poems and songs. But the mocking, parodying, carnivalesque side was already there. This side is shown in a subtle way as often as one would care to notice in his poems, songs, essays, addresses and novels. It is shown more directly and famously in his poem *Amar Kaifiya*t(My Defense) which I will analyze in detail later.

Nazrul: the Dancing Star

As the special Nazrul issue of *Kavita(Poetry)*, edited by Buddhadev Basu, acknowledged freely, Nazrul's fame among both the literary and the ordinary people was established more quickly and easily than that of any other contemporary poet. The reasons are not hard to fathom. Here was a poet who brought the cadences of poetry down to the fields and the streets without fear or compromise. The fluency with which he wrote, the ease with which he mixed with everyone, his jest for life, unbounded energy and acceptance of the joys and sorrows of his countrymen and women as one of them defined him as a poet apart. Most interestingly, this poet apart, did not stand apart from the masses, as the other modernists did. These others were again, mimicking the Pound-Eliot inspired modernism of English poetry imported freshly from abroad. In this group, Nazrul was clearly and perhaps the only exception.

One interesting contrast in this instance is between Nazrul and Jibananda Das. In the twenties, both published in the same *avant garde* and other journals.A careful reader can find many thematic and formal parallels in their poems. Abdul Mannan Sayed, in a somewhat different context, has noted this also. However, Both clearly went in different directions in the thirties--- Nazrul to the lucrative world of gramophone recording , and Jibananda to his inner world where even the beautiful Bengal he created is largely invisible in an ordinary topographical map, or for that matter, the ordinary literary map.

It was indeed a big leap for someone like Nazrul from being the *Goda Kavi* [10]of *Leto* to the avant garde *Bidrohi Kavi*[11] of the twenties. Yet, in another sense, it was entirely a natural development. As the title of his first published poem *Mukti*(Liberation) indicates, he was first and foremost a free spirit. Such a spirit would revolt against any and all forms of confinement. The one defining feature of such a spirit is the commitment to constant change, experimentation and restlessness. Nazrul demonstrated this to such a degree as to be almost a paradigm case. His first published prose piece, "*Bounduler Atma Kahini*", or the Autobiography of a Vagabond, which appeared in *Saugat* (first year, Issue 7)

[10]Literally,the leading poet. Nazrul's uncle, Kazi Bazle Karim was a singer-songwriter-poet and a Goda Kavi of the Leto until his death.

[11] Literally, the rebel poet. Both his poem "Rebel" and his political activities defending and deepening popular struggles earned him this title.

edited by Mohammad Nasiruddin also celebrates an almost anarchist view of freedom and spontaneity.[12]

Nazrul's audacious anarchy appears even bolder if one takes into account the cultural atmosphere of the first few decades of the twentieth century in Bengal. As Tazeen Murshid points out in her analysis of the Muslim discourse in Bengal:

> The composition of the Muslim middle class in Bengal induced certain attitudes to religion and to all questions with a potentially religious dimension. The upper *ashraf,*for example, unlike the rest of their co-religionists, were non-Bengali in their cultural orientation…the belief in a basic contradiction between Bengali and Muslim identities appears to have been accepted by all Bengali Muslims, Bengali Hindus and even the British. The fact that Bengali Muslims were identified as Muslims rather than as Bengalis in the first quarter of the twentieth century, emphasized the religious, at the cost of the cultural, basis of identity.[13] [Italics in the original]

The 1920s, however, were years of great turmoil and intellectual fermentation for Bengali Muslims. After the dismantling of the Turkish caliphate by Mustafa Kemal and his group, the powerful Khilafat movement met its natural demise. Nazrul welcomed Kemal by writing a poem in military style called—what else?—Kamal Pasha. Like his other poems, here too, one finds a natural use of not only Urdu, Arabic and Persian phrases, but also of English. The English should remind one of Gupta Kavi, and a fair comparison will show that Nazrul carried Ishwar Gupta's modernity and synthesized it with Michael's modernity. As a poet, he was clearly the one with superior gifts. But Nazrul did more than simply synthesize. He added a new dimension to our modernity by bringing the idioms of the Muslim Bangalee. In the process he also created a new poetics. Although *Kamal Pasha* as a poem has many weaknesses, some of the features of this new poetics can be illustrated even with this poem.

The poem begins with a short prose introduction, in the style of a dramatic introduction. Kamal Pasha is marching back with his forces. The 'poetry' part of the poem begins with a direct reference to Kamal Bhai, a very Bengali expression where a set of close community relations are conventionalized in familial terms. Thus Kamal Pasha becomes 'brother Kamal' to his soldier-comrades and to us, the readers. In just two opening lines (Oi khepeche pagli mayer damal chele Kamal Bhai/ Oshur pure

[12] It is tempting to present Nazrul's rebellion as Dean Moriarty- Neil Cassidy type spontaneity in Kerouac's "On the Road"; but in spite of many interesting characterological similarities, the comparison must fail on larger social and political grounds. Individuals who are unmoored in 50s America seek a different type of personalized fulfillment without political commitments in Kerouac's novel. This road was not open to Nazrul in colonial India.

[13] Tazeen M. Murshid, The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses 1871-1977,Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995: 87

shore uthechhe jorese shamal shamal tai) Nazrul uses pure Bengali words(e.g.,shamal shamal), Sanskritized words(e.g., Oshurpure), Arabic-Farsi-Urdu words(e.g.,shore,jorese). Next comes a refrain completely in Urdu:
Kamal tune kamal kiya bhai
Ho ho! Kamal tune kamal kiya bhai!

Apart from the surprisingly successful juxtaposition of Urdu there is also a play on the meaning of Kamal so that it is used both to signify a person(as a proper noun) and to describe a successfully completed action (i.e., as an adverb). The marching of the troops is punctuated by commands in English which of course, the Turkish nationalist army most probably didn't use. Here is an interesting example of the modernity identified by Debesh Roy earlier. But we also need to qualify his thesis in two important ways when confronted by Nazrul's work.

The first, which I will discuss here immediately is the fact that the use of English shows here, even more clearly than in Ishwar Gupta (who after all used it as parody most of the time) the further inroads the alien language and military machine has made in Asian societies and cultures. In particular, the exposure to the British imperial army and its ways brought out clearly what was happening in colonial Indian society at almost all levels--- the forcible intrusion of European ways that did not quite mix evenly with our domestic ways of doing things. However, in this superposition, the European signifying practices always had the upper hand.

The second point is that Nazrul manages to deconstruct in an intuitively forceful way this domination by almost reversing the terms of opposition. By giving priority to native Bengali, Sanskrit and derivative words, as well as Arabic-Farsi-Urdu words and expressions, he reduces the use of English to a serviceable side show. The fact that he is able to do it without premeditation shows how deeply he was connected to the culture of the multitude.

In a way, Nazrul's support for the secular nationalism of Mustafa Kamal later found an echo, if not an answer in the secular movement of *Buddhir Mukti* or the liberation of the intellect movement among the progressive Muslim intellectuals in the 1920s. This movement was launched in 1926 in Dhaka, and like the renaissance humanism in Italy, its goal was the emancipaption of mind through immanent practice of our human sensibilities. Like the earlier movement in Europe, this too saw in art a way of human liberation through human creation. Although it retreated against overwhelmimg opposition almost immediately, it nevertheless left its mark on creative people like Nazrul. It can even be said that in his

practice Nazrul was in fact a precursor of the movement from 1919 if not earlier.

It is instructive to follow Nazrul's literary and political life in the first half of the 1920s--- the period of his meteoric ascent---chronologically, starting with his first appearance on the literary scene.

Nazrul returned to Calcutta in January 1921. After initially staying with his childhood friend Shailajananda in Calcutta, he moved in with comrade Muzaffar Ahmed at the office of "Bangiya Mussalman Shahitya Shomiti" [Bengal Muslim Literary Society].

In May 1920 with the financial sponsorship of Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq, an evening daily "Navajug" (New Age) was started under the dual editorship of Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmad. In 1920 several of his poems - "Shat-il-Arab", "Kheyaparer Toroni", "Muharram", "Fatiha-e-Dowaz Dahom", "Qorbani" (sacrifice) etc. - were published in "Moslem Bharat" (Muslim India). Even before the electrifying effect of Bidrohi, he was already recognized as a genuine poet.In November/December of 1921, at the presence of Nazrul and others and under the leadership of Muzaffar Ahmad, it was decided to form the Communist Party of India at 3/4 C Taltola Lane. The effect on Nazrul can not be hard to imagine. For him, the defeat of the Khilafat movement only opened a new and broader arena of the struggle of the oppressed for freedom and equality.

From all available evidence *Bidrohi* was written just about this time.After the publication of "Bidrohi" and "Kamal Pasha" in Moslem Bharat in 1922 (Kartik 1328), the whole literary establishment had to take note. In January 1922 (22 Poush, 1328) "Bidrohi" was reprinted in Weekly Bijlee. During the same year (Kartik 1329) his first prose work "Jugbani" was published and the work was banned as "seditious literature".

The same year (3 Kartik, 1329) the first poetry collection of Nazrul, "Agnibina" and story "Byather Dan" were published.

On 12th August, 1922 (Srabon 1329), under his editorship a new periodical, Dhumketu (Comet), started. The following month (22nd September) an arrest warrant was issued against him for writing "Anondomoyir Agomone" and another essay in Dhumketu. His activities during this period finally led to his arrest in Comilla.

On 8 January, 1923 he was sentenced to one year's hard labor. In jail, Nazrul started a hunger strike in protest against abuse of political prisoners, which eventually lasted for 39 days. Both Rabindranath Tagore and Chittaranjon Das sent telegrams appealing to him to break his fast. He

was released from jail in December of the same year. The same year (Ashshin 1330) his works "Dolon Chapa" and "Rajbondir Jobanbondi" (Confessions of the Political Prisoner) were published.

In 1924 his work "Bisher Bashi" (Flute of Poison) was published and was immediately confiscated.. In rapid order , "Bhangar Gan" (The Song of Breaking) and "Chayanot"--- two very different poetic achievements-- were published.

In 1925 he became a member of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. Toward the end of the same year he participated in the formation of the "Mojur Swaraj Party" (Labor Independence Party), an organ of "Bharotiya Jatiya Mahashomiti" (The Great Indian National Association).

On 16 June, 1925, at the death of Chittoranjon Das, he wrote and published "Chittonama". On December 25 under Nazrul's directorship, the newspaper of *Swaraj* Party, *Langol*, started. The same year his book of poetry collection "Puber Hawa" [Eastern Wind] and the story "Rikter Bedon" [The agony of the deprived] were published.On the 12th August of 1926, *Langol* changed its name to "Ganobani" [People's voice]. His book of poetry "Sharbohara" [The Proletarians], and prose-work "Durdiner Jatri" [Traveller of hard times] appeared at about the same time.

Even from this altogether brief resume it is clear that Nazrul was at the forefront of the most advanced political movements of his time. Although there is no mechanical cause and effect relationship between politics and poetics, it is apparent that the substance of his writings combined a romanticism bordering on anarchism with all the vanguard struggles for the emancipation of the multitude. Here he was also distinctly his own voice. No learned Marxist or Islamic or Hindu scholar, he intuitively grasped the main line of the march for freedom and gave his own form to his literary creations. In this he was certainly influenced by the two modernist tendencies I have mentioned before. But his own life-experiences mixed with his individual genius created a point of singularity--- to use a Deleuzian phrase---that remains all but ungraspable for the pious and the secular nationalists alike. Formally speaking, Bidrohi is the quintessential poem of this poet as a point of singularity--- hence it is a poem of radically postmodern suggestions.

In order to grasp the significance of Nazrul’s innovations in *Bidrohi*, we need to remind ourselves of the limitations of the poetics of both the modernities in Bengali poetry upto then. Gupta’s modernity was limited to an impressive but somewhat superficial incorporation of the Anglicized

diction. Nevertheless it was close to the language of the newly emerging urban lower middle classes. Dutt's Europeanized and later Sanskritized diction clearly strove for a high culture of the ancient days modernized just as the English Romantics had looked at Greece and Rome not so long ago. Nazrul deepened both the tendencies; however, perhaps his lack of higher English education and the rootedness in the culture of the masses in a life that was always a form of chaotic nomadism saved him from the historical limits of earlier modernities. To this must be added the real history of the Great War and the turbulent twenties.

Bidrohi does not so much rebel against the existing poetics of the two modernities as completes their contradictions in the colonial context. There is no radical break with the existing prosodic paradigms or metrical structures, much less a self-conscious formal manifesto of overcoming previous literary forms, even in the manner of the "Lyrical Ballads". So, in a sense there is no apparent resemblance with the modern European literary *avant garde* practice. Yet the very title of the poem is a declaration of revolt. This revolt at first seems merely an individual one. But just as Whitman in the nineteenth century America apparently sang the song of all democratic Americans, Nazrul's revolt can also be seen as the revolt of the colonized mind. It is different from Whitman's individualism precisely because Nazrul was no white pioneer with vast expanses of a continent to conquer; he was a colored native, a mere ex-Habildar in the colonial army, a man whose very essence was chained until and unless it could be freed by revolt. Frantz Fanon, in his *Wretched of the Earth* makes an analogous point forcefully from a psychoanalytic point of view. However, Nazrul's approach cuts deeper than a project of freedom based on collective and individual violence. Nazrul also draws upon the cultural resources of the tradition of *Prem*(love) from both Hindu and Islamic traditions. The marvel of the *Rebel* is the juxtaposition of these apparently opposing themes:love-hatred, violence-non-violence, restlessness-peaceable meditation, eternal striving- quiet meditation. The accretion of tensions throughout the poem and their attempted dialectical resolution are what generate the almost unique dynamic movement of this poem. Thus, in effect a new, nearly inimitable form is created in the process without a frontal attack against the existing forms as in the European modernist movement, or its imitators in Bengal in the thirties.

In Bidrohi, Nazrul begins with traditional stanzaic form, and the meter seems innocuous at the beginning. In fact, it begins with just six letters without even any *Juktakkhor*(double letters with strong consonantal sound):

Balo Beer--- Speak! Oh Valiant!

In the next line we encounter a bald declaration of unbending individuality:

Chiro unnata mamo shir--- Ever unbent is my head.

The two parts rhyme in seeming resemblance to the traditional *payar* scheme of Bengali meter. However, even here, the variation of the line-lengths and what the American poet and theorist Charles Olson would later call "breath", creates a dynamic that will reach many crescendos and repeated diminuendos as well before reaching its final climax.The structural innovations are seen from here on in the juxtaposition of such stanzas with almost opposing internal dynamics that nevertheless proceed inexorably to the final declaration of the rebel's ultimate aim:

When the cry of the oppressed will no longer echo through the sky and the air

When the scimitars and the swords of the oppressor will no longer battle in the grim battlefield---

The rebel will then tire of battle

Only then shall I become quiet.

The poem ends by reaffirming the self-apotheosis of the rebel:

I am the rebel eternal

I have arisen alone beyond this universe with the head held ever high

In various parts of the poem there are references to many Hindu mythic figures. To mention just a few:

Vrigu, Vishnu, Chandi, Parashuram and his axe,Balaram and his plough, Shyam(Krishna) and his flute, Vasuki the snake, Byomkesh(Shiva), Gongotri,Shiva Nataraj etc.

There are equally prominent references to Arabic-Persian, even Mongol images:

Khoda and his Arosh(seat),Bedouin, Chengis, Israfil and his Shinga(trumpet),Borrak the divine carrier, Jibrail, Hadia Dozakh(hell),Jahannam etc.

There are even references to both types of mythic creatures in the same line:

The mighty Borrak and Ucchaisrava are my carriers….

There are also references to Orpheus' flute(sic) and other contemporary Western images as in:

I sink entirely the loaded ships , I am the torpedoe the terror-striking floating mine.

And then there are references to the various Indian ragas at the end of which he reverts to a completely indigenous Bengali expression in

… fing dia dii tin dol…[14]

Lack of space prevents my giving other examples of this type. However, enough has been shown by way of these syncretic examples that Nazrul's quick maturity as a poet came from an early assimilation of the culture of the Indian multitude which then was augmented by his contact with the western influences.

One last point about the form of Bidrohi that needs to be made is the spontaneous fusion of the masculine and the feminine personas--- the Jungian animus-anima or the East Asian yin-yang, as it were. For example, there is the following masculine part(Kabir Choudhury's translation):

I am the mighty primordial shout !
I am Bishyamitra's pupil, Durbasha the furious,
I am the fury of the wild fire,
I burn to ashes this universe !
I am the gay laughter of the generous heart,
I am the enemy of creation, the mighty terror !
I am the eclipse of the twelve suns,
I herald the final destruction !
Sometimes I am quiet and serene,

[14] In Kabir Choudhury's translation:
I am the hurricane, I am the cyclone,
I destroy all that I find in my path !
I am the dance-intoxicated rhythm,
I dance at my own pleasure,
I am the unfettered joy of life !
I am Hambeer, I am Chhayanata, I am Hindole,
I am ever restless,
I caper and dance as I move !
However, the English translation of "*fing dia dii tin dol"* can not convey the flirting, fleeting, fickle sense of movement that the Bengali version does.

I am in a frenzy at other times,
I am the new youth of dawn,
I crush under my feet the vain glory of the Almighty !

This is followed almost immediately by the feminine:

I am the maiden's dark glossy hair,
I am the sparkle of fire in her blazing eyes.
In the sixteen year old's heart,
I am happy beyond measure !
I am the pining soul of the lovesick,
I am the bitter tears in the widow's heart…

(Translation: Kabir Choudhury)

And then by:

I am the trembling first touch of the virgin,
I am the throbbing tenderness of her first stolen kiss.

I am the fleeting glance of the veiled beloved,
I am her constant surreptitious gaze.
I am the gay tripping young girl's love,
I am the jingling music of her bangles !
I am the eternal-child, the adolescent of all times,
I am the shy village maiden frightened by her
own budding youth. (translation: Kabir Choudhury)

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It is because of this polyphonic voice in himself that Nazrul could write in "Amar Kaifiyat"(My Defense):

I am the poet of the present, not a prophet of the future…

In this "Menippean" poem Nazrul gently mocks the narrowmindedness of both the Hindu Pandits and the Muslim Mullahs:

Wondering whether I am a hindu or Muslim

I search for the physical signs and shake my head

Then he goes on to criticize and satirize much more forcefully the self-aggrandizing leaders of the *Swaraj* movbement.

Millions of rupees were given but Swaraj didn't come…

we ourselves know that in the name of Swaraj

we have brought only burnt tobacco of a special blend

At the very end of this long, satirical, "Menippean" poem Nazrul forcefully presents his mission as a poet:

I pray that those who rob the food from the mouths of our children

Those are the people who will be doomed by what I write with my blood.

This is probably as good a way to sum up Nazrul's poetry as any other, more aesthetic ways. Nazrul's aesthetics and politics are not separate, just as they are never separate in the popular "Menippean" satirical barbs at the mighty and their follies. But Nazrul refined and gave furthjer edge to the popular cultural expressions. Through his assimilation of several different tendencies and the sheer force of his genius, Nazrul managed to create a whole new dimension in Bengali poetry that went beyond both the earlier modernities in Bengali poetry. Therefore, in a deep historical and anti-imperialist sense, Nazrul is the first postcolonial, revolutionary postmodern poet of Bengal *even in a colonial and modernist environment.* This makes his achievements all the more impressive--- indeed astonishing, given the limits imposed by both colonialism-imperialism and modernisms on his contemporaries. Nazrul was indeed a new kind of "dancing star" that arose ultimately from the voices of the multitude and the depth of the stirrings in their souls..