

Nazrul's Persia in his decolonizing melodies

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Abstract

Kazi Nazrul Islam of Bangla literature may be best described as a poet of humanity. Besides the anti-colonial and spiritual dimensions of his melodies, there is also a decolonizing tone in his literature. His songs, especially those that recuperate and include rich Persian heritage of Bangla literature, significantly contribute to decolonizing the colonially victimized Bangla literature in British India. Thus, this paper initially attempts to examine how distinctly and strongly Persian language, nature and culture remain as an important heritage for Bangla literature while Nazrul writes songs imbued with the Persian elements. Then, this paper has the prime aim to explore how the poet, in a colonial backdrop, robustly endeavors a comprehensive decolonization of Bangla literature with his Persia-attached songs. Thus, the study examines the poet's measures of decolonization with efforts to revive successful Bangla literature, have it compete with or even exceed English literature and place Bengali Muslims again in their rightful literary domain.

Keywords A poet of humanity, Comprehensive decolonization, Nazrul's Persia, Persia-attached songs, The colonially victimized Bangla literature

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is perhaps the most versatile and prolific literary figure of Bangla literature if his literary career of only twenty-three years is concerned. More importantly, he is universally acclaimed as a poet of humanity which he brings into focus by writing prose, poetry and songs against injustice in society and colonialism in British India. There is also the conspicuous presence of spiritual elements in his literature. Accordingly, there have been critical discussions on his literary productions to explore this spiritual aspect. But the poet has literary pieces that are decolonizing too with an innovative elan by being attached to Persia. To speak precisely, his songs that have Persian attachment play a very remarkable role in decolonizing Bangla literature and culture in colonized India. The reason behind the poet's adherence to Persia is that Persia, with its rich language, culture, nature and Sufism, has been the heritage for Bangla literature since ancient times. But quite predictably, British colonizers, realizing the richness



and strength of Persian heritage for Bengal and Bangla literature, take measures against this trend to perpetuate their linguistic, academic, intellectual and cultural colonialism which is actually implicit, if the military one is explicit. The implicit colonialism of the British prevails for a century until Nazrul's arrival in literature in the first quarter of the twentieth century occurs with one of his major decolonizing attempts through Persia-attached songs.

In his Bangla musical oeuvre of 3174 songs, Nazrul is multifaceted and innovative by using Persian besides Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Sanskrit, and becomes one avant-garde song writer of the rarest aptitude (Nabi, 2018). A scholarly view states, "In the 1000-year history of Bengali music, Nazrul was perhaps the most original creative talent" (Islam, 2021: para. 2). Nazrul's original creative literary power, coupled with his anti-colonial and decolonizing standpoint, makes him an extraordinary poet in the whole world. Langley (2007) posits, "What is certain is that he wombed within himself a spirit of rebellion and creation that has few peers in literary history" (p. 38).

So, we argue that Nazrul attempts to decolonize Bangla literature with his Persia-attached songs. Decolonization, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2020a) is "a process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country" (para. 1). This viewpoint limits the meaning by focusing decolonization solely as a political change in favor of the colonized. Another viewpoint rightly defines decolonization by stating "it was initially a political phenomenon soon extended in meaning to include all elements incurred in the colonial experience, 'whether political, economic, cultural or psychological'" (as cited in Betts, 2012: 23). Thus, we can pinpoint decolonization as the long process of full removal of colonial impact from indigenous economy, religion, culture, literature, education etc. Decolonization and anti-colonial struggle of independence are mutually linked in the sense that colonized country's independence (which is the materialization of political decolonization) from the colonizers is the most important goal decolonization achieves and, in turn, independence accelerates the ongoing decolonization until the fulfillment of the process. This is the decolonization which a colonized nation essentially aims at.

Nazrul seems to realize the full meaning of decolonization, and hence, in order to materialize linguistic, literary and cultural decolonization of Bengal and Bangla literature, the poet earnestly and robustly appears with his Persia-attached decolonizing melodies. In other words, he writes songs in attachment to Persian culture, nature, language and Sufism. Nazrul aims at achieving three objectives to make the decolonization possible. The first

objective is to resume the successful trend of Persia-attached Bangla literature. The second objective is to have Bangla literature compete with or excel English literature brought and encouraged by the colonizers. The third and last objective is to re-include in Bangla literature mutually linked Sufism and Persia to re-establish Muslim ties with Bangla literature to culturally unite colonized Bengal.

Literature review

If the review of literature is done with regard to Nazrul's attempts of decolonization, and use of Persia, we see researchers focusing on Nazrul's use of Persian heritage throughout the whole range of his literature with a view to shedding light on his spirituality amounting to Sufism. We see research on the comparative study of Nazrul with Western poets on the issues of spirituality as well as national and international spirit. Separate researches have been done on specific poems that have abundant use of Persian words, on poems opposing colonial occupation, and on how Nazrul, in his entire literature, is both Sufistic and rebellious.

This is how research concentration tries to explore how humanitarian Nazrul's literature pertains to Sufism, in which his Persian learning plays a very vital role, in addition to his firm belief on the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, teaching of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Sattar, 1999). Nazrul is also compared with Yeats in general with a view to showing how they wage life-long literary wars against injustice in their respective contexts (Geeti & Habibullah, 2016). Nazrul's use of Persian words is studied with reference to the five poems – "*Shat-il-Arab*", "*Moharram*", "*Kamal Pasha*", "*Qorbani*" and "*The 12th Fateha*" (Al Rashid & Nur, 2017). Showing anti-colonial poems as the poems of decolonization, researchers have attempted to study Nazrul's rebellious poems to examine in them the elements of decolonization (Sultana, 2020). Research endeavors make efforts to show that Nazrul harmoniously unites within him his rebellious and mystic selves while the latter is built up with Nazrul's attachment to Persian language, literature and Sufism. The researcher writes, "the rebel lives in a harmonious interaction with the mystic in the esoteric and aesthetic self of Nazrul." (Huda, 2021: "Meditative mood", para. 6). He keeps the use of Persia within the issue of the poet's mystic self.

But perhaps no research, to date, has investigated Nazrul's attempt of decolonization by including in his songs the rich Persian heritage of Bangla literature. The present study addresses this research gap.

Methodology

This qualitative research has been done based on the thematic analysis of Nazrul's Persia-attached songs. While doing it, we have studied the historical background of Persia as associated with Bangla literature. Then we have analyzed British colonial aggression on the Persian words that had naturally occupied a position in Bangla language and literature. Afterwards, we have analyzed how Nazrul attempted the decolonization and how in the decolonizing attempt there is comprehensive epistemology. For the accomplishment of the research, related books, articles, essays in printed form and from online sources have been collected. Then the data have been judiciously obtained and carefully analyzed. This is how we have ventured to reach our findings and draw a conclusion from them.

Results and discussion

The historical context for Nazrul's persia-attached songs

At first, we should see what historical context of Persia was present for the Persia-attached songs of the poet Nazrul.

From ancient times, the Persian world was in contact with India and Bengal. The contact occurred through the relationship of trade and commerce between the two regions. During the contact, people of different professions came with the Persian or Iranian traders. There also came Arabic-speaking preachers of Islam and Persian-speaking Sufis who preached Islam. Resultantly, the people of Bengal and India started to convert to Islam. Thus, along with the Arabic, the Persian civilization also started to influence the region even when the Muslim rulers were yet to achieve their conquest. In the section "Persia", *Banglapedia* (2015b) records Bengal and Iran established relationship of trade and commerce in ancient times. Bengal ports like Tamralipi, Gange and Saptagram were involved in this business affair. With Iranian traders, Arabic speaking preachers of Islam would come. Persian speaking Sufis would come as well. Receiving the Islamic messages of the preachers and the Sufis, people of Bengal were converting to Islam. Thus Persian and Arabic languages were flourishing besides having impact on Bangla language. Afterwards, the languages flourished more during Muslim rules in Bengal.

Muslim rule in Bengal started with the conquest of the region by a Turk Army chief Ikhtiyaruddin Mohammad in 1203 AD. Later during this Muslim rule, Persian language and culture became most influential by being the court language. In the section "Persia", *Banglapedia* (2015b) writes,

In 1203 AD Ikhtiyaruddin Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, an army chief of Kutubuddin Eibek, the Emperor of Delhi, conquered Nadia and Gouda. Later, he spread his domain over all of Northern Bengal. The Muslim rule of Bengal changed the entire course of history...Persian as the Muslim court language, became the most influential language. (para. 11)

The Persian language enjoyed the status of the state language in Bengal for six hundred years. During this time a galaxy of poets wrote numerous poems of literature in Persian. The language earned immense popularity. In the section "Persia", *Banglapedia* (2015b) writes, "For more than 600 years (from 1203-1837 AD) Persian was the state language in Bengal. During this long period, thousands of books were written in Persian, and hundreds of poets composed their poems in Persian" (para. 13).

Even the noticeable impact which the Persian language had on Bengal during the time span starting from the ancient times till 1837 is actually the enrichment of Bangla with many Persian words. To Sukumar Sen, the Bangla language with inherent Persian as well as Arabic words was the "working language or the "language of usage" till the establishment of British colonialism in Bengal (as cited in *Banglapedia*, 2021b: para 7). Thus, Persian words, along with Arabic, have tremendous impact upon Bangla vocabulary. On Bangla etymology, Bari (2019) writes, "Some 10,000 Bengali words came to be influenced by Persian, and around 5,000 were borrowed directly from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish" (para. 4).

Thus, the presence and impact of the Persian language and the Persian culture on Bengal and Bangla literature, by being more than legitimate, is a very common phenomenon of the linguistic world. Sofa (2011) recognizes the impact of the Persian language on Bangla as "an evolution that Bangla underwent till the time of the Battle of Palashy [or the Battle of Plassey]" in 1757 when Bengal lost its independence to the British colonizers (p. 126). Sofa furthermore identifies the Persian impact on Bangla as "a remarkable turn in a river if language is compared with it" (p. 127). It means, to Sofa, the Persian impact is a natural occurrence in the field of language. Actually, the gradual connection of one culture, language and civilization with another is an inevitable and a needful phenomenon too because a nation or a population living in a particular place of the world and having its own language, culture, heritage, religion etc. must come in contact with others because they live in the same planet. From that contact, various exchanges that are essential, true and beautiful are expected to take place. This is how welfare and wellbeing continue to take place among mankind. Without the exchange, civilization cannot exist. Cesaire wants to say "that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself

atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen” (as cited in Uddin, 2015: 91).

Notably, in a peaceful condition of the subcontinent during the Sultan and the Mughal rules, Persian language and literature were flourishing. In the case of Bengal, Azad (2008) recognizes the peaceful condition, when he says during the Muslim rule from 1350 to 1800 A.D “bright lights of various colors were lit in the arena of Bangla literature” (p.19). At that time a myriad of Hindu and Muslim poets produced literature. Of the poets the most famous were Chondidas, Muhammad Sagir, Mukundoram, Bidyapoti, Gyandas, Alaol, Kaji Dowlat, Bahram Kha, Syed Sultan; and in addition to them there were many others. The whole nation seemed to hum because there was peace. In that peaceful condition of society under Muslim rule, communal harmony was an important factor that contributed to peace. Hossain (1998) writes, “No communalism took place between the Hindus and the Muslims though all were believers in religion” (p.47). Thus, the Persian language and literature were almost spontaneously evolving during the reigns of the Sultans and the Mughals.

This is how there was a legitimate and natural historical context of Persia to serve as a resourceful heritage for the songs of Nazrul as well as entire Bangla literature. So, later when Nazrul feels the undeniable urge to decolonize colonially victimized Bangla literature, he finds it inevitable and indispensable to include Persian heritage in his literature, especially his songs.

Colonial aggression on the resourceful Persian heritage

With the defeat of Nawab Siraz-ud-Dowla in 1757 at the hand of the British East India Company, the British colonizers took full control of the administration of Bengal. Quite contrary to the Muslim rulers, they plundered so much wealth from the region that their rule later significantly contributed to intensifying the sufferings of the deadly famine of 1769 and 1770. In the section “Famine”, *Banglapedia* (2015a) writes that under the administration of the East India Company, the revenue collection in 1768 was Rs 15.21million and in 1771 it increased by Rs 52,200 eventually giving birth to the famine that killed one third of the population.

In course of time, the imperialist British rule was directly imposed upon the subcontinent to prod cultural and intellectual hegemony beside the military rule. Accordingly, British educationist and politician Macaulay produced his “Minutes on Education” (1835) where in point 34 he mentioned,

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -- a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.

Based on the minutes produced by Macaulay on 2 February, 1835, Bentinck, the Governor-General of British India, officially introduced English education in India on 7 March, 1835 (Ghosh, 1995). Thus, English education was introduced into educational institutions, which was bound to be imparted in the English language. And of course, the aim of the education was to produce collaborators among the native Indians to make the colonial influence long-lasting. Notably, the first theme of Macaulay's minutes was "English should replace Persian as the official language..." (Ghosh, 1995:17). If seen more minutely, as pointed out by Huque, "...English replaced Persian as the language of the administration, the judiciary and revenue proceedings by the dispatch of 1830 ..." (as cited in Ali, 2004:10). To this dispatch was added "[The] Act XXIX of 1837" (Ali, 2004:10). Ali (2004) views, "The dispatch of 1830 and Act XXIX of 1837 were actually the beginning of the havoc to be played with the culture of the Muslims in Bengal by the exclusion of Arabic and Persian from their education" (p. 15). Prior to 1835, "following the establishment of the Bengali Department at Fort William College in Calcutta in 1801, the efforts of its head, William Carey, and his associate Bengali scholars, made Bangla fit for fine prose" (*Banglapedia*, 2021a: para. 12). Actually, it was not an effort to make Bangla "fit for fine prose"; it was rather an effort to remove Persian and Arabic words from Bangla. Sofa (2011) writes, "They [Fort William College Pundits] tried to construct a Sanskrit-centric Bangla language by obliterating all Arabic-Persian words" (p.127). Thus, the English colonizers thought that their moments' denial and deception could erase the history of centuries, when Persian words almost in a natural process had entered Bangla and enriched it. Actually, from the colonizers' side, it was neither for the love of the purity of Bangla nor love for Sanskrit that they were to reconstruct Bangla overloading it with Sanskrit. They considered Sanskrit was representing Hindus and Persian Muslims, and accordingly, they tried to create a dichotomy through "divide and rule policy" from linguistic perspective in order to sow the seed of communalism among the Hindus and the Muslims of the Subcontinent.

The linguistic colonialism, which was bound to generate cultural, literary, academic, and intellectual colonialism, continued to prevail almost for a century.

Nazrul's attempts of decolonization

Then into this tragically fragile scenario, in the first quarter of the twentieth century appears the robust voice of the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam whose literary output is both anti-colonial and decolonizing. When colonial action is explicit, the poet's creations are anti-colonial. When it is implicit as we see it in making English the state language and in Fort William's attempt to remove Perso-Arabic words from Bangla, Nazrul's literary works are decolonizing. Here, to make the decolonization possible, he tries to achieve three objectives.

Showing the Success of Persia-Attached Bangla Literature

In his decolonizing literary works, Nazrul's Persia-attached songs play a vital role. We can at first reflect upon the song "Bulbuli nirob Nargis bone" or "Bulbuli silent in a forest of Nargis". It has been based on an extremely personal pain resulting from the death of Nazrul's four-year old son Arindam Khaled Bulbul in 1930. Bulbul was suffering from Chicken Pox. The death has been such a shock to Nazrul that he, as a poet out and outs, could not but need an outlet for his unbearable feeling of pain by spontaneously writing the song. The full song is,

*Bulbuli nirob Nargis bone
 Jhora bono Golaper bilap sbune
 Bulbuli nirob Nargis bone
 Sirazer Nowruze Falghun mashe
 Jeno tar priyar shomadbir pashe
 Torun Iran kobi kade nirojone
 Jhora bono Golaper bilap sbune
 Udashin akash sthir hoye ashe
 Jol vora megh loye buker majhe
 Saakir sharaber peyalar pore
 Shokoron asrur belful jhore
 Cheye ache vangha chaand molin anone
 Jhora bono Golaper bilap sbune
 Bulbuli nirob Nargis bone. (Islam, 2018: 485-486)*

Translation:

Silent is *Bulbuli* in the forest of *Nargis*
 The wail over a fallen wild rose it hears speechless. In
Nowruz of Siraz during Spring fair
 As if beside the grave of his beloved dear,
 Cries the young Iranian poet desolate.
 The wail over a fallen wild rose it hears speechless.
 Stiffened sky remains motionless still,
 Vapor-filled cloud harboring within.
 On the cup of *sharab Saaki* delivers
 The *belful* of tears profound falls and quivers,
 Staring remains the broken moon with a face of sadness.
 The wail over a fallen wild rose it hears speechless. (trans. mine)

The first two lines state that a song bird called *Bulbuli* (a kind of Nightingale) in a forest of flower trees or *Nargis bon* (*Nargis* being a flower of Iranian origin, *bon* being forest) is quite silent with pain on hearing the poet's lamentation or *bilap* over a fallen wild rose or *bono Golap*. Here, the poet's son Bulbul is metaphorically recognized as the wild rose which has experienced its fall off the branch over which the poet or the father laments. The lamentation is actually the song itself. *Bulbuli*, forgetting its ever-present habit of singing and chirping remains silent, listens to the poet's lamentation silently with close attention. Nazrul wants to mean that his pain is understood even by a bird. Then the poet mentions Siraz which is an Iranian city famous for its wine and *Nowruz* which is the Iranian first day of the year in the Persian calendar observed with colorful celebrations in the region. Thus Nazrul imagines that on the day of *Nowruz* during Spring season in Siraz, a young Iranian poet expresses his heart-breaking emotion beside the grave of his beloved in a lonely place. When all the people in the city are celebrating the occasion of *Nowruz* and nature is jubilant because it is spring, the only contrast is the young Iranian poet. Nazrul implies that his inner condition after the loss of his son is like that young Iranian poet. Then, to the agonized mind of the poet, the sky appears to be still filled with painful astonishment that has within its chest a great amount of vapor-filled cloud. Here the sky is the poet's heart and the vapor-filled cloud is his pain. On the cup of wine or *sbarab* which is brought by the beloved or *Saaki*, tears similar to a kind of small white fragrant flower or *belful* falls. It means wine or the worldly delight is unable to propitiate the poet. Even the moon in its crescent shape appears to be a source of anguish. So, the crescent with a sad face keeps on looking at him.

Nazrul's remarkable power of imagination is clear here. Moreover, immediately after his son Bulbul's death, he writes it instantly by going outside his home and facing the beautiful nature which he seems to share his pain with. The poet's unique aptitude of spontaneity turns the song into an authentic representation of life's pain void of artificiality. To the romantic poet Wordsworth, good poetry is written when a poet generates in his poetry "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" originating "from emotions recollected in tranquility" (1802, para. 31). By not waiting for the recollection of emotions in a tranquil atmosphere and needing instant outlet for his painful feeling, Nazrul seems more romantic than Wordsworth. However, one painful event of Nazrul's personal life is the center of attention in this song while the simultaneous poetic world which is imagined is dominated by the bird *Bulbuli*. The poet also conjures up the Iranian city of Siraz through references to the occasion of *Nowruz*, delineation of a young

Iranian poet, *Golap* (rose), *sharab* and *Saaki* all of which are Persian words.

In many other songs the poet Nazrul poetically shifts to idyllic Iran or Persia. In “*Shuknu patar nupur paye*” or “Putting on the anklet of dry leaves”, he compares the swift movement of the whirlwind with an Iranian girl or *Irani balika* nimbly moving about in the desert (Islam, 2018: 15). The song concentrates on the whirlwind as a part of beautiful nature. So, his capability of making an ordinary object of nature extra-ordinary is indeed a romantic quality. Another song “*Pori jafrani ghagri*” or “Putting on a saffron-colored long robe”, written to mark the beauty of a young girl, begins by showing an Iranian girl who goes laughing putting on a saffron colored *ghagri* (Islam, 2018: 62-63). *Ghagri* is a luxury robe for girls in Iran and elsewhere in the East. To the poet, the girl is as beautiful as a fairy of Shiraz. Even the bird *Bulbul* is attracted to see her. The poet’s power of suave imagination is clear here.

“*Bagichai Bulbuli tui phul-shakhate dish ne aji dol*” or “Don’t swing the branch of the flowers you *Bulbuli*” is the song where the poet appeals to the bird *Bulbuli* not to swing the branch of the flowers because the flowers are still asleep in the shape of buds (Islam, 2018: 57). The poet metaphorically laments that his beloved is unable to understand his approach of love. “*Muhammader nam jopechili Bulbuli tui aghe*” or “Muhammad’s name *Bulbuli* you chanted earlier” is an Islamic song in praise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Islam, 2018:169). To the poet, Prophet Mohammad (PBHU) is the greatest of mankind. So, the beauty of that greatness is such that beautiful nature - sweetness of *Bulbuli*’s song, fragrance of rose or *Golap*, the light of the moon, the happiness of the bee in the flower garden or *Gulbaag*- owe their beauty to the Prophet.

So far as the romantic qualities like nature, imagination, emotion and spontaneity are concerned, the songs that are included for discussion so far have an inexplicable beauty besides being flawlessly perfect. There are many more songs by Nazrul, where we see supreme romantic qualities. In all these songs Nazrul poetically switches over to Iran or Persian nature and civilization. Actually, some elements that are inseparably common among Iranian poems are noticed and appreciated by the poet. Thus the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (2016) himself corroborates, “Iranian poets cannot think of writing poems without *sharab*, *Saaki*, *Golap* and *Bulbul*” (p. 6). Likewise, in the songs by Nazrul that have been discussed so far, there is romantic inclusion of the Persian elements such as *Bulbul*, *sharab*, *Saaki*, *Golap*, *ghagri*, *Nowruz*, Siraz, Iranian beautiful girl and Iranian young poet to romanticize the songs. With its beautiful nature and rich cultural heritage, Iran is Nazrul’s dream land as Ali (2016) points out:

Kazi is a romantic poet. In the same manner in which the water, wind, bamboo, grass of Bangladesh would take him from the real world to the dream land, in the same manner he tried to transform the dream land of Iran-Turan into reality in the sphere of Bengali Poems. (p.55)

Thus, Iran or the Persian world becomes a trove with which he is so intimate that he seems to know each and everything of the region as if it were his motherland. It has been the case though the poet never visited Iran. Ali (2016) writes, "But the garden (*bagicha*) *Bulbul* and the *Saaki* of *Sirazi* created around him such a known and unknown world that he could easily move everywhere in that place without a guide-book or time-table" (p. 55).

This is how, into his songs, Nazrul successfully brings back the Persian heritage of Bangla literature, and produces powerful romantic songs. This is Nazrul's attempt at decolonization of Bangla literature.

His Persia-Attached Songs Competing or Overshadowing English Literature

In a colonially subjugated country, colonizers produce cultural hegemony by negatively portraying native culture and literature. We can cite the example of colonialist educationist Macaulay who deems native culture as "debasement and barbarism" (Langley, 2007: 40). So, Nazrul rightly concentrates on creating native literature by writing songs imbued with their Persian heritage which must express their original strength of equalizing or overshadowing the British authors available in colonized India. Though it is a normal and needful phenomenon that in the world authors of different literatures will do exchange amongst them, it does not apply in a colonial setting. British authors like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Philip Meadows Taylor, Rudyard Kipling, and E. M. Forster are either utilized or responsible for cultural colonialism among the educated class of the subcontinent. About such literary figures responsible for cultural colonialism, a viewpoint says, "They [British authors] even used God to justify imperialism itself" (as cited in Alam, 2010: 5). Tennyson, for example, by including God, tries to provide the disguise of sacredness on British colonial politics. Tennyson, in his poem "Hail Briton", prays to God for the British Empire and the then queen. He writes,

God keep thee strong as thou art free,
Free in the freedom of His law,
And brave all wrong to overawe,
Strong in the strength of unity!

God bless our work!

God save our Empress-Queen! (as cited in Elridge, 1996:23)

Whenever in this manner colonial hegemony is directly mentioned in literature or produced in other fields by the British, there is available the poet Nazrul's vehement anti-colonial song "*karar oi louho kopat*" meaning "Those iron bars of the prison" (Islam, 2018: 221), or the song "*Ei shikol pora chol*" meaning "Our disguise is this chain" (Islam, 2018: 268). In these songs the poet powerfully appeals to destroy the jail and subjugation of the colonizers, and the power with which he appeals is very violent and chaotic (of course, chaotic with a purpose to build). Perhaps no literature in the world has experienced so far such intense violence and chaos.

However, in many cases English literature ostensibly has no obvious element of colonialism. Yet it does contribute to cultural and literary hegemony. The literature in itself does have strength, and one of the reasons of this strength is its attachment to ancient Greek literature and Greek mythology. Actually, the Renaissance of Europe that covers a time range from 14th to 17th century is, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2020b), the "period in European civilization immediately following the Middle Ages and conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in Classical scholarship [or the study of ancient Greece and Rome] and values" (para. 1). Thus, Renaissance causes among the English authors the rebirth of interest in ancient Greek learning.

With its strength, English literature in a colonial setting does occupy the mindset of the native readers, and even that of the native intellectuals. Victimized, the native intellectuals continue to support the ideas of the colonizers, and are always "ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal" (Fanon, 1963a: 46).

In colonial India in English literature numerous literary pieces show their strength by being closely attached to Greek mythology and literature, and expresses Englishness. Nazrul in his songs which immensely enrich Bangla literature luxuriates in rich Persian nature, culture and civilization, creating the true indigenous spirit of Bangla literature. Ali (2016) rightly says, "In case of Nazrul, the motherlands were Bangla and Iran. In case of Keats and Byron, they were England and Greece" (p. 55). Here Keats's poems may be esteemed as representing all English literary pieces. Whereas English authors have an opportunity to be inspired by ancient Greece because of the Renaissance, Nazrul enthuses over Persia by turning himself into a renaissance figure. No other author of his contemporary time has done it, or no author within one hundred years' time prior to him did it. Meanwhile, this

is how the poet Nazrul robustly attempts at the decolonization of Bangla literature by re-including in it its rich Persian heritage.

The wide variety of subject matters which the poet Nazrul treats in his Persia-attached songs is hardly to be found in one English romantic poet alone. Nazrul treats personal pain resulting from the loss of his child, beauty of whirlwind, beauty of a young girl, doleful longing for the disclosure of love from a loved one and the beauty of the greatness of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as the subject matters of his songs. William Wordsworth deals with the urgency of attachment to nature and God in his major poems "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", "Tintern Abbey" and "The Lucy Poems". John Keats concentrates on beauty of nature, brevity of human life and undying aspect of art in "Ode to a Nightingale", "To Autumn" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn". Percy Bysshe Shelley focuses on a revolutionary change in the society in "Ode to the West Wind" and on nature-life comparison in "To a Skylark". These pioneering Romantic poets of English literature, in terms of the variation of subject matter, seem to be equal to Nazrul only when they are together.

If the English authors treat love and nature, and philosophize human life, so does Nazrul. Ghosh (2014) writes, "In his concentration on love and nature, Nazrul goes beyond the limit of emotion and gradually transcends into a world of philosophy" (p. 27).

Clearly, in a society under British colonial rule, Nazrul supplies scopes of decolonization by writing Persia-attached songs that almost excel or successfully compete with the literary works of the poets of English Romantic Age which is called the greatest literary period for English poems.

Inclusion of the Inalienably Linked Sufism and Persia to Revive Muslim Tie with Bangla Literature

If we look at the history of Sufism in Bengal, we see Sufis came from Iran to the region in ancient times along with traders. If Banglapedia (2015b) is quoted again, we find, "... Bengal came into contact with the Middle East and Iran. Along with Iranian merchants and commodities came soldiers and generals, engineers and craftsmen, Sufis and darwishes [Arabic-speaking Islamic preachers]" (para. 9). The Iranian Sufis and the Arabic-speaking Islamic preachers could come together because the Iranian Sufis, in their love, awe and loyalty to the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or the Sunnah, were similar to the Arabic-speaking Islamic preachers. Afterwards, Sufis did come to Bengal from other parts of the world too.

Thus, in the period from the ancient times of Iran-Bengal relationship till his time in the early quarter of the twentieth century, for the poet Nazrul there has been a Sufi tradition of many centuries. In this way, Sufi tradition and Iran have been in an inseparable bonding in Bengal which Nazrul must have noticed and does not forget to include them in his writings, especially in his songs. To define Sufism, in the section “Sufism” *Banglapedia* (2015c) writes, “Sufism (Arabic *tasawwuf*) deals mainly with mental, spiritual and philosophical aspects of Islam, the essence of which is to establish a direct relationship with Allah by purifying the soul” (para. 1). So, Sufism requires a soul to follow a complex trajectory to be intimate with the Creator. Nazrul pronounces this Sufism in his songs.

However, among many Sufism- and Persia-attached songs by Nazrul, there is “*Kbodar premer sharab piye behush hoye roi pode / Chede masjid amar Murshid elo je ei poth dhore (hai)*” or “Drinking the sharab of love for God faint I remain / Coming out of masjid this path my guide would gain” (Islam, 2018: 20). There is also the song “*E kon modhur sharab dile al Arabi Saaki / Nesbai holam dimana je rongin holo ankehi*” or “What a sweet *sharab* have you brought the Arabian *Saaki*, oh dear / Self-lost am I with drunkenness and eyes full of color” (Islam, 2018: 183). Here we see how Sufism, as the priceless heritage of Bangla literature from Persia, is conspicuously present. In both the songs Nazrul expresses his exuberance by being profoundly in love with God. The profoundness is like drinking the nectar or wine (*sharab*) of love which he feels for God. Drinking the nectar or wine, he faints or forgets his selfhood. Such unfathomably deep is his love for God.

Actually, when it comes to humanity, in his flesh and blood, and soul, Nazrul is unequivocally a lover of mankind and “With an earnest eagerness to remove sorrowful social discrimination, he was sleepless in his entire life” (Sayeed, 2008: 47). That humanity, Nazrul believes, is the true essence of Islam. From that standpoint he opposes whatever is unjust, and tries to revive the Muslims so that they can serve humanity, the gist of Islam. Sattar (1999) writes, “Nazrul Islam understood too the real meaning of Islam for which in his entire life he fought against falsehood and injustice, and continued to sing the song of Muslim renaissance” (p. 10).

With this belief and its implementation, Nazrul goes through a process of purification and tries to go close to God. Here, poet’s transcendental ability from the visible world is noteworthy. Langley (2007) writes. “[...] Nazrul, very much like the Indian mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan, as well as Pushkin and Iqbal, took the position that the source of his poetic voice was transcendental” (p. 31). It means legendary Indian mathematician

Ramanujan, Russian poet Pushkin and the Pakistani poet Mohammad Iqbal go beyond the visible world in their meditation and, thus, make extraordinary contribution to their respective fields. So does Nazrul in the field of Bangla literature. With this transcendental ability and true spirituality, Nazrul forgets his self-hood and loses his sense. The poet talks about his sense being lost in songs like “*Khodar premer sharab piye behush boye roi pode*” and “*E kon modbur sharab dile al Arabi saaki*”. Thus, of the four stages of Sufism – *Sbariot* (rules), *Haquiqot* (significance), *Tariqat* (means) and *Marefot* (selfhood abolition), Nazrul reaches *Marefot* or the fourth and ultimate stage of Sufism. Sattar writes,

Keeping oneself pure and sacred, the one who can be close to Him making oneself beautiful by cleaning oneself with the light of truth is actually the upholder of spirituality. And so was Nazrul Islam. As he was of this attribute, he, reaching the stage of selfhood-abolition or *fanafillah*, realized that he was “paghol” (hysteric) or “behush” (faint). ... It is to be mentioned that there are the four stages of Sufism- *Sbariot*, *Haquiqot*, *Tariqat* and *Marefot* – and when one reaches the stage of *Marefot* crossing the three stages prior to it then the real spirit of Sufism can be felt-which is called *fanafillah* or the stage of the abolition of selfhood.” (pp. 12-13)

Thus, Nazrul includes in him and upholds Sufism. He also draws a Persian image by using some Persian words (*sharab*-wine or nectar, *masjid*-mosque, *namaj*-Muslim devotional activities and prayer, *saaki*-the one who brings wine or nectar and *Khoda*-Allah/God). Thus, in the songs Sufism is supposed to have its source in Persia and Bengali history recognized this fact century after century. This fact has been accepted in many other songs by Nazrul.

By removing Persian language, the colonizers in Bengal wanted to remove Muslim presence from all spheres of life including Bangla literature to materialize their “divide and rule” policy for their colonial convenience and the injurious indoctrination of the educated Bengalis. Nazrul puts forth vehement efforts to resist the colonial predatory strategy by writing songs based on Sufism and Persia, and reviving Muslim ties with Bengali literature. This is one important step towards the decolonization of Bangla literature by Nazrul.

Nazrul's translation of Khayyam and Hafiz

Including Persian heritage, Nazrul not only writes songs, but also translates into Bangla poems by the Persian poets Omar Khayyam and Hafiz. Before Nazrul, no translator has translated those Persian poets directly from Persian, informs Islam (New Age, 2017). Nazrul's knowledge of Persian has been so

deep that in all the one hundred ninety-seven rubais (rubai- a form of poem containing four lines) of *Rubaiyat-e-Omar Khayyam* by Khayyam, the poet successfully maintains the original rhyme scheme aaba. Moreover, Nazrul contains the original philosophical aspect too. Biswajit Ghosh views, “Nazrul’s translations of Khayyam and Hafiz are not mere typically translations. He was able to preserve the philosophical messages of Khayyam and Hafiz through his skillful use of words and rhythm” (as cited in New Age, 2017: n.p.). These translations, by enriching Bangla literature, must have contributed to its decolonization.

The decolonizing approach with comprehensive epistemology
As mentioned earlier, Azad (2008) views pre-colonial Muslim rule from 1350 to 1800 A.D as a period when “bright lights of various colors were lit in the arena of Bangla literature” (p.19). It means that numerous poets, both Hindu and Muslim by religion, tried their hand at Bengali poetry and enriched Bangla literature. We can identify that literature as the national literature of Bengal as the region, like today, was inhabited mostly by Hindus and Muslims. And national literature is the written document of the entire culture or national culture because literature is the direct reservoir of culture. So, the British colonizers, to produce cultural hegemony, tried to shatter the national culture by ostracizing Muslim presence from national literature and other walks of life by taking measures against the Persian language. They did it by replacing it with English as the state language and expelling Persian and Persian words from the Bangla language with the help of Fort William College pundits. Notably, in national literature and other areas of life in pre-colonial Bengal, the Muslims were exclusively represented by Perso-Arabic elements while the Hindus by Sanskrit. The national culture being shattered, the alienated representative cultures were parochialized or inferiorized or even demonized by the Fort William College Indo-British pundits. Slowly there came into being a culture based on the so-called culture patronized by the Euro-colonizers, where native people could not see the true reflection of their own culture. It happens to colonized Africa too on which Fanon (1963b) writes,

Colonialism's insistence that "niggers" have no culture, and Arabs are by nature barbaric, inevitably leads to a glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national, and singularly racialized. In Africa, the reasoning of the intellectual is Black-African or Arab-Islamic. It is not specifically national. Culture is increasingly cut off from reality. (p. 154)

But Nazrul, on realizing the horror of an unresisted cultural aggression on the native culture by the colonizers, makes necessary attempts where his Persia-attached songs are an important protest. As a protest, the poet effectively tries to revive the national literature of pre-colonial Bengal to reinvigorate national culture by attempting to decolonize the Bengali literature of colonial Bengal.

When a colonized nation makes efforts to re-introduce its own cultural structure for essential cultural decolonization, the efforts are made sporadically. Thus, the decolonizing attempts are undoubtedly weak. Fanon (1963b) views, "The colonial situation brings national culture virtually to a halt. There are scattered instances of a bold attempt to revive a cultural dynamism, and reshape themes, forms, and tones" (p.171). But the poet Nazrul alone, differing with Fanon's observation, in a well-structured process, confidently and comprehensively encounters cultural colonialism of the British. Writing of Persia-attached songs is one such decolonizing measure.

It has already been discussed that Nazrul has also written anti-colonial songs besides the decolonizing ones. A country's independence is a must to save humanity and culture. If independence is not ultimately gained, humanity cannot be saved; also, all decolonization process will fail because culture and literature themselves face extinction in long perpetual subjugation. Fanon (1963b) opines, "In the colonial context, culture, when deprived of the twin supports of the nation and the state, perishes and dies" (p.177). Nazrul seems to realize the truth, and thus, writes anti-colonial songs for gaining country's independence and the realization surely increases the worth of his decolonization process with Persia-attached songs.

Colonizers have the intellectual mission to inferiorize the nature, religion, history, culture and education of the Orient, and the colonized by placing theirs in a superior position. This inferiorizing or colonizing mission they accomplish by holding for themselves a superior position to evaluate, interpret, examine and classify the essential possessions of the colonized. Marking this colonial tendency as Orientalism, Said (1978) writes,

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (p. 11)

The impression is that the colonizers are superior because they are the judges. It is actually the academic formalization of the common yet

predatory, illusive and inferiorizing European view about the Orient which, in Said's words, is that "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (p. 9). But the Bengal poet Nazrul, besides making other efforts, upholds the strength of Bangla literature by writing songs filled with their Persian heritage. He heralds indigenious Bangla literature as equal or superior to the colonizers' literature. He replies to the Orientalism of the British colonizers and attempts the essential decolonization of Bangla literature.

In a post-colonial setting the peripheral (or the post-colonially colonized) fight to meet their basic needs and later, over text, language and politics, reveal a weak resistance to the central (or the post-colonial colonizers). But the effort is never enough. The rebels against the colonization of their literature, history and culture have to situate their resistance in their tradition, geo-politics, culture and history. Only then they may be emancipated and decolonized. Canagarajah (1999) writes,

For periphery subjects who experience multiple form of oppressions and very pressing needs of food, clothing, and shelter, a diet of linguistic guerilla warfare, textual resistance, and micro-politics will not suffice. Therefore, they have endeavored to connect the interrogation of discourses with larger concerns relating to their traditions, geopolitical realities, and historical conditions. The contribution of post-colonial thinkers has thus served to historicize and materialize resistance thinking. (p. 34)

Thus, what is thought of in a post-colonial setting was realized by Nazrul much early in his colonial environment. His early realization vindicates the designation of the rich indigenized Persian heritage of Bangla literature for his songs.

When Nazrul depends on Persian elements as the heritage and tradition for writing native literature in the shape of songs, he, in term of idea, does not even adhere to modernist or post-modernist poets because they are western, not native to Bengal or India, and the western ideas in India are represented by the British colonizers. The truth is "exchange [among civilization] is oxygen", provided that the "exchange" is taking place between two free nations (as cited in Uddin, 2015: 91). But with Britain, India's relationship is between the colonizer and the colonized where exchange is never possible. So, Nazrul is conscious enough of avoiding western ideas. Correspondingly, Langley (2007) writes, "[Nazrul] did not share the despair of those who had identified with modernity. Nor was he preoccupied with the post-modernist type of concern for a unified experience" (p. 90). This fact about Nazrul applies to the poet's Persia-attached songs too.

When literature or culture, and education are mutually related, it is important to see whether the poet Nazrul, while venturing into decolonization of Bangla literature with Persia-attached songs, attempts at decolonizing education of colonized Bengal. We see that Nazrul properly realizes the victimizing and commercial motive behind the academic and intellectual measures the colonizers adopted in India. His realization seems to reflect Canagarajah's opinion which states "behind this avowedly altruistic mission was the West's need to find more raw materials for its industry, and more market to sell its products (p. 18). Actually, Nazrul has always nurtured the vision of having a truly native educational system. Alam (2010) writes, "Kazi Nazrul Islam always advocated a home-grown educational objective. To him, true education must not ignore the identity of a people including its own language, culture, tradition, custom, heritage, etc" (p. 5). Hence Nazrul tries to decolonize the education system of colonized Bengal which makes the poet's attempt at decolonizing Bangla literature more extensive and fruitful.

Thus, already visible are the comprehensive epistemologies in Nazrul's attempts of decolonizing Bangla literature with his songs that celebrate the Persian heritage of Bangla literature.

Conclusion

In fine, for writing native literature, Nazrul rightly notices the importance of its Persian heritage which British colonizers try to erase from every sphere of the native life in Bengal for their cultural, literary, linguistic and intellectual hegemony. As it is an implicit or indirect colonialism which must be replied to with decolonization, the poet Nazrul chooses songs as his literary genre which people in the subcontinent instinctively prefer to other forms. Thus, he writes songs reminiscent of quintessentially indigenized Persian heritage and attempts comprehensive decolonization of Bangla literature. Thus, the poet Nazrul's songs filled with Persian opulence turn out to be his decolonizing melodies against the British maladies of the colonization of Bangla literature. This dimension in Nazrul's songs vibrant with Persian reminiscence may culturally contribute to re-emphasizing among men the need to be historically conscious and properly human-centric.

Note:

All songs and quotations by Kazi Nazrul Islam mentioned are in my translation from Bangla to English. Likewise, in our English translation mentioned are the quotations from Syed Mujtaba Ali, Humayun Azad, Biswajit Ghosh, Kamal Uddin Hossain, Abdus Sattar, Abdullah Abu Sayeed and Ahmed Sofa.

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