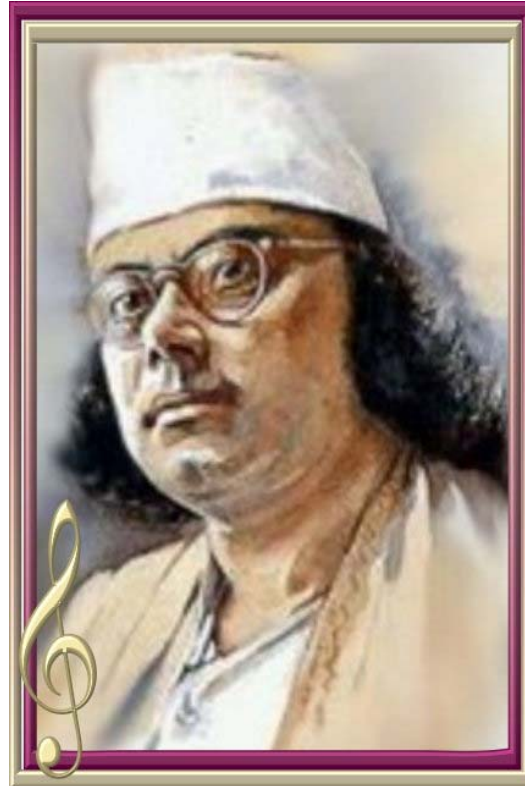


# Kazi Nazrul Islam

## Brief Biography

Compiled By: Muhammad Anwar Hossain

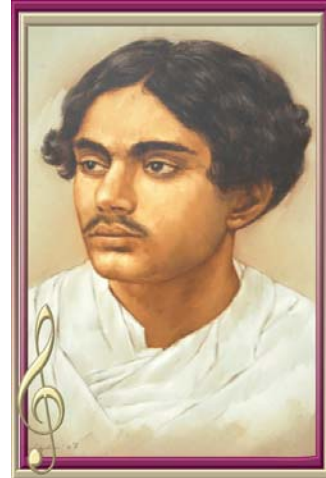


**Kazi Nazrul Islam**, the national and rebel poet of Bangladesh, is the name of a reverend personality in Bengali literature whose contribution to Bengali literature is unprecedented. He enriched different wings of literature with his profound creations. He didn't leave any genre of literature untouched. In addition, he was an exemplary political figure during his time and yet today. He perceived our pathos, observed the irregularities existing in our society and tried to dispel all ominous exercise out of our society. He also tried to reshape our so-called autocratic system and dreamt a utopian world. Throughout his life, he devoted himself to establish a world free from all evils through his exploding writings and subsequently he became an ideal person in the political arena. Because of his very insurgent movement he was bestowed with a title 'BIDROHI KOBI (The Rebel Poet)'. He composed a good number of poems, songs, essays, short stories, novels in his life. Most of his compositions are subjected to establish and retain due rights of proletariats, and reform the society. Through his compositions, he encouraged destitute people to take active part in sweeping out misrules of then autocratic authority and that's why some of his poems, essays were banned by the then British authority. Right then he was also sentenced to one year imprisonment. He created a record number of songs and it's said that only did Nazrul pioneer to add Ghazal (Love songs), a new genre of music, to Bengali music. He was credited for creating a large number of love songs, patriotic songs, religious songs, etc.

Born into a very poor family, Kazi Nazrul passed his early life through utter hardship. He was born on 24 May, 1899 (11 Jaishtha, 1306 Bengali year) at the village of Churulia in Asansul Sub-division under the district of Bardwan, in West Bengal of India. His father was Kazi Fakir Ahmed and mother Zaheda Khatun. It's known that his forefathers were come from Patna, capital of Bihar, a province of India and settled in Churulia. The title 'Kazi' means 'judge of the Muslim' and the Kazis used rule several parts of Muslim dwelled area in India. When Kazi

Nazrul was born the title 'Kazi' was retained but the remnant material properties were lost. On March, 1908 Nazrul's father passed away and the next year Nazrul accomplished his lower primary education from a Moktab, a lower Islamic primary school. After his father's passing away, the plight of his family turned into more aggravated and to maintain his family Nazrul couldn't continue his study and got involved in serving as a teacher and Muazzin, who calls for prayer, in the same Moktab wherein he used to read.

In 1911, joining the LETO group was a turning point of Nazrul's life. LETO is stage performance based on a poetic debate on a particular subject matter by two poets before an audience. It's a folk musical group. Kazi Bazle Karim, Nazrul's uncle, was a leader of a Leto group. He composed songs in Bengali as well as Urdu and set them into tune. Young Nazrul followed his uncle with keen attention and soon knew how to compose songs, and setting them into tunes. Observing his poetic talent, many a person at that time encouraged him to compose songs for various contemporary Leto groups. It was very inspiring for Nazrul to devote to composing songs because it coincided with the very nature of his creative power which was poetic and musical at the same time. Nazrul had the power of impromptu composition on the topic of dissimilar subject matters. Thus the career of a great ever poet commenced with folk musical group, Leto. Nazrul didn't work with Leto for a very long time because then too he encountered financial crisis.



In 1911, he took admission in class six, in Nabinchandra Institute at the village of Mathrun in Bardwan district. For the poverty-stricken fate, again he discontinued his study and next year he worked in a bakery shop, then in the house of a railway guard to accompany him. During the year 1912-13, a police Sub-Inspector Kazi Rafizullah arranged free study for him at Darirampur High School in Mymensingh district, Bangladesh. After completing class VII he went back to Churulia. Nazrul stayed at Mymensingh less than a year.

After returning from Mymensingh, a distant relative of Nazrul Kazi Manjoor Hossain took Nazrul to Searsol, a place near Raniganj in Bardwan. There he got admitted himself into class VIII in Searsol Raj High School in 1915. Studying at Searsol put a significant impact on shaping the future course of Nazrul's life. Satishchandra Kanjilal, a teacher of Searsol School, excelled in classical music, imparted Nazrul some lessons on classical music. That was



inspiring for Nazrul because he could then refurbish his musical talent and collect newer ones. Apart from musical aspects of things, the influence on Nazrul during the time of reading at Searsol was more significant and far reaching because the first seed of politics was sown in the unblemished mind of young Nazrul there. It was that time when he was newly acquainted with politics and came close to revolutionary secret organizations, and was highly impressed with their concept of armed struggle against the British colonial rulers. Nabinchandra Ghatak, a teacher of Searsol School, was an active member of such a revolutionary group, YUGANTAR. The objectives of this group were to compel the British rulers to leave India through a violent way. Observing the spirit of Nazrul, Nibaranchandra drew Nazrul close to himself and inculcated in him a patriotic feeling. The proximity to this political figure left a deep mark in entire life of Nazrul. He wrote a novel, KHUELIKA (The Misty), based on the backdrop of anti-

movement against the British rulers and portrayed a character of a school teacher in his novel which shadowed Nibaranchandra, the person Nazrul loved best.

In 1917, when the First World War was running, the then British authority created a Double Company with the men from Bengal in its armed forces, requiring more men to fight fronts. Later this Double Company was renamed and became 49<sup>th</sup> Bengalee Regiment. To get armed

training and with the great patriotic urge, Nazrul left his studies in final year of school course in 1917 and enlisted himself in the Double Company. At first he was posted in Naushera and then Karachi, the capital city of Pakistan. Staying with the 49<sup>th</sup> Bengali Regiment as a Havilder, a British-Indian commissioned officer, he spent most his barrack-life in Karachi. His stay there with Bengali Regiment is quite significant from the point of his literary as well as musical perception. By the time he was able to gather experiences on music and literature, which had gone a long way in shaping his life as a great builder of Bengali literature and music.

Nazrul's first story entitled BAUNDELER ATMA KAHINI (An Autobiography of a Vagabond) was published in SAOGAT (The Gift) edited by Mohammad Nasiruddin in its May-June issue, 1919. His first poem MUKTI (Emancipation) was also published in the same year in BANGIYA MUSLIM SAHITYA PATRIKA (Bengali Muslim Literary Magazine) in July-August issue. Nazrul considered BANGIYA MUSLIM SAHITYA PATRIKA as a strong platform for his writings. Two of his short stories entitled HENA (a name) and BYATHAR DAN (Offerings out of pain) came out in the successive issue of it in the year 1919.

The First World War came to a close by the middle of 1919. Nazrul's regiment was abolished early in March 1920. After the regiment being demobilized, he returned to Calcutta without further delay with the hope of an opportunity to settle there. At first he stayed with Shailajananda and then with Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad, who inculcated in him the doctrine of equality of man in respect of rights and duties as a born-free human being. In the beginning of 1920 when Nazrul came back to Calcutta from Karachi, he stood determined to stay on the side of masses, struggle for freedom and shape a literary career. During those days in Calcutta, he used to sing the songs of Rabindranath Tagore and it was really a matter of immense wonder that a good number of Tagor's songs he got by heart. Though his musical voice was not so-called melodious but it was lively and with this voice he was able to establish a popular image of a singer by the time. He was invited to sing in various family functions and functions arranged by students. This is how, it may be said here, his real active life began by then in Calcutta at the age of 21. Nazrul could not earn his bread by writing alone. It was difficult in those days even today to survive by writing. Nazrul was looking for job and later he took profession as a journalist and was appointed joint-editor with Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed of Daily NABAYUG (The Daily New Age) founded by Sher-E-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Haque, a veteran political leader of Bangladesh.

In the office of Muslem Bharat (Muslim India) Nazrul met one Ali Akber Khan, a writer and publisher of children's text books, and author of some other books. Gradually the intimate relation between Nazrul and Mr. Khan grew deeper and responding to an invitation of Mr. Khan he paid a visit to the village home of Mr. Khan at Daulatpur in Comilla. He stayed there at about two months. During that time he fell in love with Sayeda Khatun, Mr. Khan's niece. Sayeda Khatun was also known as Nargis Asar Khanam in eloquent language. He got married to Nargis in the middle of June 1921. For some unknown reason, not yet know clearly, Nazrul left Nargis in the very night of marriage. After then he never kept in touch with Nargis and didn't accept her as his wife. Later on in several times Nargis tried to reinstate their lost relation through writing letters but Nazrul, on his part, showed reluctance to respond to the letters. Rather in 1937 only once he composed a song and urged the lady to forget him once for all. The song reads as follows:



*Why remember him  
Whom you couldn't give the garland of your love?  
Forget me, forget me once for all.*

*I sing out of my sorrow  
Why do you come to stand before me?*

*Don't invite me like an apparition  
Into the darkness of night  
Take pity on me, do take pity on me  
Don't play with me the cruel game.*

*The auspicious hour will not return  
Over limited lamentation.  
I fare along the way not to grieve any one  
Why do you stand with eyes of tearful request?  
I have never stood at your door even by mistake.*

*Forget me, forget me once for all.*

The year 1921 was tumultuous in point of political agitations under the impact of KHILAFAT ANDOLAN (Non Co-operation Movement). That time the political unrest touched the peak and became stronger day by day. The then British Government took stern measures to quell the agitations, issuing arrest warrant against a large number of political leaders. It was that political situations which Kazi Nazrul Islam had to face after returning to Calcutta from Comilla. On December 10, 1921, Deshbandu Chittaranjan Das was arrested and put into jail, and his wife Basanti Debi sent a request to Nazrul to contribute to the weekly BANGLAR KATHA (The Voice of Bengal) run by Basanti Devi herself. Nazrul himself was an admirer of Deshbandhu and that's why he accepted the request, and instantly, after having the message, he composed a historical songs for the weekly titled BANGAR GAAN (The song of destruction), which has immortalized him in the history of Bengali patriotic poetry. Few lines of the songs are as follows:

*Break down the iron gate of prison  
And break down into pieces  
The blood-bathed  
Stone-altar of the goddess of fetters.  
O! Young God of Destruction  
Play on your doomsday drum  
Let the flag of destruction  
Flutter on the wall of the East.*

It was the first patriotic song of Nazrul which stood for the spirit of the violent age.

Composing a long grand poem titled 'The Rebel', Nazrul brought about a wonder in the history of Bengali Poetry. In the last week of December 1921 he wrote a poem. He was then living with Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed. Mr. Ahmed was maiden person who listened to the recitation of the poem "The Rebel" by the poet himself. Muzaffar Ahmed narrated the background of the creation of the poem. In the last week of December, 1921, Nazrul wrote down the poem whole night till it was morning. In the morning of the next day, as soon as Muzaffar Ahmed woke up, Nazrul read the poem out to him. 'The Rebel' is long grand poem written in a kind of exploding language. It seldom happens in the history of literature that only one poem raises its composer to the pinnacle of glory and the poem 'The rebel' made it happened. With the publication of this poem Nazrul became the Rebel Poet of Bengal. The time when the poem Bidrohi (The Rebel) was composed was the age of rebellion. By the end of 1921, he was with the working people devoid of their basic rights. He responded to the rebellion tendencies most sensitively and the poem Bidrohi for which he is known as the Rebel Poet was his patriotic response to the call of the age. Through the poem "The Rebel" he became the voice of Bengali people of those tumultuous days. If Rabindranath Tagore was the poet of Swadeshi Movement, Nazrul Islam was the poet of Bengal under the Khilafat Andolan (Non-cooperation Movement).

He published his first story book BYATHAR DAN (Offerings of Pain) in 1922. On October 1922, his poetry book AGNIBEENA (The Fiery Lute) was published. In this year his first collection of essays titled YUGABANI (The Message of the Age) was published and proscribed immediately after publication. For this book an arrest warrant was issued against him on the charge of

sedition. He started publishing his first Bi-Weekly magazine DHUMKETU (The Comet). AGNIBEENA is one of the most notable collections of verses by Nazrul and certainly a significant poetry book in Bengali language because it's the first book of poems of the rebel poet including the historical poem BIDROHI itself. No less a man than Abanindranath Tagore, a renowned painter of India and a member of Tagore's family, was the designer of the cover page of this book.

On November 1922 Nazrul was arrested from Comilla and put into Jail. A sentence of one year rigorous imprisonment on the charge of sedition was passed against Nazrul. Prior to That Nazrul read out a statement from the dock in the form of deposition that is said to be written in the Presidency Jail, Calcutta on January 7, 1923. He termed that statement as RAJBANDIR JABANDBANDI (Deposition of a Political Prisoner). This statement was entirely inspiring and it has no parallel in the history of Bengali literature. After the announcement of verdict against Nazrul the whole nation protested it. Rabindranath Tagore dedicated his song-play BASANTA (The Spring) to Nazrul. Inside the Jail he went on 40-day long hunger strike in protest against the oppression with the political prisoners by the jail authority. Rabindranath Tagore sent a telegram from Shilong to Nazrul to give up the strike. Sharathchandra Chattapadhyay himself met Nazrul in the jail and requested him to leave the strike. So he gave it up at the request of the literary and political personalities of his time. The same year on December he was released from jail.

Nazrul Islam settled in Hoogly after being released from Jail. On April 25, 1924, he got married to Ashalata Sengupta, daughter of Giribala Devi in Comilla. Ashalata was popularly known as Pramila. Their first son Azad Kamal (also named Krishna Mohammad) was born but no longer had he survived.

Two books of poems named BANGAR GAAN (The song of Destruction) and BISHER BANSHI (The Poisonous Flute) were published but proscribed instantly by the British authority. The year 1925 is more political than poetical to Nazrul. This year he met Mahatma Gandhi, wrote and announced the pamphlet of THE LABOUR SWARAJ PARTY OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRES. His poem SAMYABADI (The Communist) on the theme of equality was published in the party magazine named LANGAL (The Plough). In 1926 LANGAL was renamed and became GANABANI (The Voice of Masses). His second son Arindam Khalid (Bulbul) was born. That time he composed a famous song titled KANDARI HUNSHIAR (Beware My Captain) marking the inauguration ceremony of Krishnanagar Congress and the first Ghazal of Bengali Language "Bulbuli Tui Phool Shakhate Disne Aaji Dool (O nightingale, don't swinging on the flower-laden branches today)". His family was moved to Krishnanagar from Calcutta.

During the year 1927, his family encountered serious financial problem, since he was being continually deprived by the publishers who made huge money by selling his books. That time he emerged as the best seller among the Bengali speaking people and amazingly enough, he still retains his position among the poets. However, he attended the annual conference of MUSLIM SAHITYA SAMAJ (Muslim Literary Society) in Dhaka. His friends around Saogat tried to help him financially considering his acute poverty and growing illness. He agreed to work with Saogat on salaried basis. In 1928, two separate editions of SANCHITA (Selected poems) were published. His friends and associates tried to make a trust fund. That year he lost his mother, too. Contrary to it, Nazrul was honoured from Rangpur, Rajshahi and other parts of the country. He wrote and sang two inaugural songs for NIKHIL BHARAT KRISHAK O SRAMIK DAL (All India Farmers and Workers Party) and All India Youth Congress, presided over by Pandit Jawharlal Nehru, at Calcutta. In 1929 Nazrul was honoured by several organizations at Chittagong during his journey visit to attend the inaugural session of MUSLIM SHIKSHMA SAMITI (Muslim Education Association). He was also honoured by BOGRA AKKELPUR YOUNGMEN'S SOCEITY.

On December 1929, he was accorded a Grand National Civic Reception at Calcutta Albert Hall under the chairmanship of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray. He was declared THE POET OF BENGALI NATION by Netajee Subash Chandra Bose, the Chief Guest. His son Kazi Sabyasachi was born this year and Kazi Aniruddha the next year. In 1930, his two books titled PRALAYSHIKHA (The Doomsday Flame) and CHANDRABINDU (The last character of Bengali

alphabet symbolizing a nasal mark), collection of songs and poems, were published and also proscribed.

The year 1930 was one of the most tragic years of his life. His son Bulbul died of small pox on May 7, and he was shattered violently. He did never get rid of the trauma he conceded for his son's death. This year was also significant for various aspects. He entered into various roles including music composer, music director, film director, actor in film and play, radio programmer and above all a regular artist of Garmophone Companies. Nazrul's success soon brought him into Indian theater and the then-nascent film industry. The first picture with which he worked was based on Girish Chandra Ghosh's story "Bhakta Dhruva" in 1934. Nazrul acted in the role of 'Narada' and directed the film also. He also composed

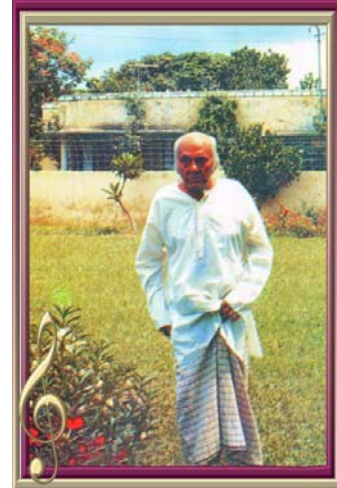


songs for it, directed the music and served as a playback singer. The film "Vidyapati" ("Master of Knowledge") was produced based on his recorded play in 1936, and Nazrul served as the music director for the film adaptation of Tagore's novel Gora. Nazrul wrote songs and directed music for Sachin Sengupta's bioepic play "Siraj-ud-Daula". He also gained profusely from the Companies that gave him money, fame and immense popularity. Completely devoted to music, this time he developed close association with a host of noted musicians like Ustad Jamiruddin Khan, Kader Bukhs, Dabir Khan, Manju Shahib, Mastan Gama, Pandit Jnanendraprashad Goswami, Pandit Sursh Chakrawarty and many others. Dilip Kumar Ray played key role to shape Nazrul's musical career. In 1931 he met Rabindranath Tagore and accompanied by Jahanara Chowdhury, editor of BARSHABANI (Message of year) he traveled to Darjiling. He wrote a series of poems eulogizing the lady. Those poems would soon come out from Nazrul Institute placing original manuscript side by side with its printed text. The next few years he presided over several conferences at various parts of Bengal. Some of them were SIRAJGANJ BANGIYA MUSLIM TARUN SOMMELAN (Sirajganj Bengali Muslim Youth Conference, 1932), Faridpur Muslim Students Conference (1936), BANGIYA MUSALMAN SAHITYA SAMMELAN (Bengali Muslim Literary Conference in Calcutta, 1938), etc.

In 1938 a family disaster occurred and the lower part of Pramila's body got paralyzed and Nazrul fell in acute financial crisis again. NABAYUG (The New Age) was published in 1940 and he was Chief Editor. This year he also attended the year-end ceremony of Dhaka Radio. In 1941, the BANGAON LITERARY SOCIETY started its annual conference under his chairmanship and he delivered the final address of his life on April 5-6, while presiding over the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the BANGIYA MUSLIM SMAITI. The speech is known as 'JADI AAR BANSHI NA BAJE (If the flute plays no more)'. On May 25, Nazrul's birthday was celebrated in Calcutta, presided over by poet Jatindra Mohan Bagchi. On August 7, Rabindranath Tagore passed away and he wrote a poem instantly titled "RABIHARA (Rabi is no more) on Tagore's forever departure.

On July 10, 1942, Nazrul lost his voice at a time when he was conducting a Children's programme in All India Radio. He was hospitalized within a week. Later he was admitted to Lumbini Park Mental Hospital Calcutta, on October 7 and stayed there for six months. The doctors had earlier detected symptoms of mental insanity in him. In 1943, NAZRUL NIRAMAY SAMAITI (Nazrul Healing Committee) was formed. But there was no sign of recovery in him by any effort. Two year later, JAGATTARINI GOLD MEDAL was awarded to Nazrul in 1945 by the Calcutta University. Nazrul stayed back in Calcutta despite the fact that India became independent in 1947 and the Eastern part of Bengal (the Muslim dominated zone) joined the then Pakistan as one of its provinces. On July 1952, both Nazrul and Pramila were sent to Ranchi asylum for four months with no improvements. Afterwards, the Niramay Samiti sent them first to London and then to Vienna in 1953 for medical treatment but there was also no improvement.

The year 1960 was one of the most coveted for Nazrul since he was decorated with PADMABHUSHAN, the highest literary award conferred by the Indian government. Two years later, Pramila died on June 30, 1962 and was buried at Churulia, the place where the poet himself was supposed to be buried after his demise. On May 24, 1972, Kazi Nazrul Islam was brought to the Independent Bangladesh that wrested its freedom in a blood-smeared fight against the non-colonial Pakistani forces. The struggle of freedom was conducted under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the nation. It's also because of Bangladeshi's personal initiative that Nazrul came to Bangladesh. The poet was allotted a suitable house in Dhanmandi, Road 28 Old (House 330B), now converted into Nazrul Museum under the guidance of the Nazrul Institute, the official organization established by the government of Bangladesh to study and conduct research on the life, works and related issues of the poet. In 1974, he was made Guest of Honour at the International Conference of Writers held in Bangla Academy. He was then only a silent walker. This year Kazi Aniruddha died. In 1975, Dhaka University conferred an Honourary D. Lit. on him. In 1976, he was conferred Citizenship of Bangladesh. He was also awarded Ekushey Padak by the government of Bangladesh.



The same year (1976) on August 29, Sunday, 10 A.M. Nazrul breathed his last in the PG Hospital at Dhaka. According to his desire [He expressed his intention through one of his most popular Islami Song "Masjider-e Pashe Amay Kabar Dio Bhai (Bury me beside a mosque)] he was finally placed in eternal rest beside Dhaka University Mosque.

(Curtsy: 1. Nurul Huda, Mohammad; "Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam"; 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, June 1997; Dhaka, Bangladesh.  
2. Goswami, Karunamaya; 'Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Biography'; 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, May 2006, Dhaka Bangladesh.)