

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

**POET QAZI NAZRUL ISLAM AND LALON SHAH  
CONTRIBUTION TO MYSTICISM & SUFISM IN  
BENGALI LITERATURE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Nazrul had a liberal family background and was very closer to Arabic and Persian literatures, and religious ones. His family moved from Mesopotamian, Present Iraq, to the Sub-Continent and first settled in Patna, capital of Bihar province of India. However in search of livelihood, the family finally moved to then prosperous Calcutta, West Bengal. Nazrul was born in Churilia and was brought up amidst hardship. Along his parents Nazrul as child used to visit 'Dargha' or 'Mazars' of saints. The serenity and solemnity at Mazars had deep impacts on sensibility of young Nazrul.

Nazrul while in search of truth was spell-bound by the charch of mysticism. The essence of mysticism – Love and devotion appealed to Nazrul most to find the truth. In course of journey to truth he comes in contact with Lalon Shah teaching. The mazar of Lalon Shah (1774-1890) is in Kushtia district (the place is well known for origin Bengali Language) in Bangladesh may be equated with Delhi or Lucknow, which is famous for Urdu language evolution.

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

Lalon shah is a great sufi poet and is widely revered in Muslim world. He through his inimitable songs preached 'Tariqat', the spiritual path to Allah.

## MYSTICISM AND SUFISM

Sufism first evolved in Iraq explaining the Islamic ideology at the end of the second century of the Hijra i.e, between A.D. 719 and 816.<sup>1</sup> On record saintly woman Rabeya of Basra (A.D.801) was the first exponent and hardliner in the mystical thinking of God in her verse. How ecstatic she was in contemplating her Beloved it would be perceived here:

I love you in two ways:  
Once is that selfish I am for your love.  
And in every thought above  
All for me you remain selfless.<sup>2</sup>

Here she sound herself satiated with the love of God. And that God is also praiseworthy to her in all respect. It appears to have been graced herself with the divinity of mystical unity with Him.

What Fakir Lalon Shah made in his deliberation:

'Man lives within—this Man.'

Qazi Nazrul Islam put it in different way:

To me Allah is the dearest one,  
He is not far away from me  
I am in love with Him.  
So near, He is the nearest one.'<sup>3</sup>

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Poetry of Qazi Nazrul Islam*,  
(Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000). p.229

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.229

<sup>3</sup> Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed.], *Nazrul Institute Journal*,  
(Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993). p.153

In all the sufistic heart Allah Himself is the living being Qazi Nazrul Islam was so devoted to Allah by heart that he could engross himself in his devoted songs too:

‘Sipping the wine of love for you, Khoda  
I have I come absolutely drunk.’  
Even he could be fair to see God by himself:  
‘I see my unseen parent  
within my own Self.’<sup>4</sup>

Nazrul rapped the spirit of the religion in his magnanimity:

What a distant sky  
Where the sun moves!  
But the sunflower  
Always keeps its face towards the sun.  
The same way I do keep my face also  
towards God;  
I hardly attribute any accounts to that.<sup>5</sup>  
Similarly Lalon postulates:  
His movement makes me move.  
When I enquire into my Self,  
I found in me  
What is I or my self.<sup>6</sup>

And sufistic trend of joy and ecstatic exuberance are well

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

textured in the verse of Jalaluddin Rumi's 'House of Love':

This house wherein is continually the sound of viol  
Ask of the Master, what House is this?  
If it is the Ka'ba, what means this idol form?  
O Master, bend down thy head once for this roof.  
For in they fair face is a token of fortune.  
Life a mirror, the soul has received thy image  
in this heart;  
The tip of thy curl has sunk into its heart like a comb.  
This is the Lord Heaven, who resembles Venus and  
the moon  
This is the House of Love, which hath no bound or end.<sup>7</sup>

Lalon also had his query in an irreversible manner that the sperm of human is not seen but housed mysteriously:

"To whom to ask about the mystery  
Who can make out its essence  
Whether the Merciful has any form or not  
Whence Shain came unseen but an afloated sperm  
In the womb  
What has his form in that  
And that has been developed thereafter".<sup>8</sup>

*(The Songs of Lalon Shah)*

<sup>4</sup> Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed.], *Nazrul Institute Journal*,  
(Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993). p.153

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.153

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.153

<sup>7</sup> Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*,  
(Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000). p.236

## Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.236

In Bangla Literature Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890) and Qazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) are the two most popular and noted poets and maestros who have become famous for their respective mystical trends in folklores and modern songs. They made most of the mystic rhymes of their own, as the two were interested to understand the mystery of life, hither to unknown.

The mysticism or the idea of Sufism in literature is not a new thing but it has emanated from the works on Islam. Bangla mystical songs composed by Fakir Lalon Shah and Qazi Nazrul Islam with reference to Mysticism in Islam need to be compiled.<sup>9</sup>

The mysticism sees life in the nature, communing with Allah, the Unseen. Sufis and Darveish always meditate God, the mystery. This sort of sensitivity can be sensed in one of the songs of Lalon Shah:

“I found this world illusory, funny and fake  
I know not who goes where by the tide of time  
For whom to build the buildings or acquire moneys  
And where to run thereafter for what illusion  
Who understands the deals of that Great Dealer  
Does He take away this being but where does he take  
But to whom would I ask this question  
And who will make out the intricacies of this queries  
I know not who that actual Actor is responsible for these  
But whom I to say ‘T’ and ‘T’ and ‘T’?

-The songs of Lalon Shah”<sup>10</sup>

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

Qazi Nazrul Islam composed songs almost on the same episode:

“Being at heart dear  
What makes you to be away  
so far away!

Being yourself like the moon in the sky above

Ever I weep as the lotus in the lake bellow:  
to entrap you

O dear,  
so far away You are...  
so far... so far

Stealthily you come being the image  
As the universe

But your graceful countenance  
is yet to be ruptured”<sup>11</sup>

-The Songs of Nazrul Islam.

Even in Nazrul’s rebellious self-aggrandisement we find the  
expressionism:

In my existence I have my person  
of the greatest form,  
Ever Invincible I am  
--“The Rebel”: Agnivina.

<sup>9</sup> Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed.], *Nazrul Institute Journal*, (Dhaka: Nazrul  
Institute, Volume-2, 1993). p.150

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.150

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.150

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

And he pronounced again,  
Know thy soul  
And Say,  
"I exist,  
My truth is my victory".<sup>12</sup>  
--'Satya Mantra' (Divine Incantation)

On the other, the folk-poet Lalon Shah observed in cohesion with the Islamic thought on the Self that whatever the difference in Sharia or must be surmounted. The egothesim he pronounced in his song:

"What's 'I'? Had I understood the mystery of the Self,  
My end could be achieved.  
The word 'I' is the most significant term.  
And 'I' is not  
That what I think of myself.  
Ever I hear the high sounding word 'I'  
What a brag! I could not coin it for myself  
Though I read Vedas like a madman  
As Mansure Hallaj could pronounce  
The truth 'I'  
And sing for himself by the law of the Shain (God)  
Sharia has taken him away and that's what working  
In the knowledge of Allah  
Lalon contradicts it in no sense  
Being himself a Ketho Mollah".<sup>13</sup>  
--The songs of Lalon Shah.

Lalon's rebellious communion is pragmatically intuitive here.

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

Here Lalon seems to be conceiving query between Nur Muhammad and God and their difference celestial lights in one of his songs:

“Should we know the difference  
of two celestial lights:  
What’s that distinction lies  
between the light of God  
And the light in the prophet Nur Muhammad  
But what sort of light  
That brings about rays  
of the unknown God?  
It’s forbidden to talk about the form of God  
in the Shariat.  
But if there’s no form,  
Then how can one discern light  
And from what source does it come?  
How this formless light is  
Put in this heart?  
Said Lalon, ‘if one knows that light,  
his darkness goes”.<sup>14</sup>  
(Lalon’s Song)

<sup>12</sup> Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed.], *Nazrul Institute Journal*,  
(Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993). p.150

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.150

<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*,  
(Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000).p.237



Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

That God who creates anything what He desires. He says,  
"Be", then and there that "Becomes".

"Inna Maa Amruhu Ijaa Arada Saaian Aii Ya Kula Lahu  
Kujn Faa Yakun"

(Surah Yasin: 82)

That He is but the great and sacred who exerts His  
sovereign power over everything and you will return to Him.

"Faa subhanallahji Bay Yadihi Malakuto Kulley Saaian Oah  
Illaihey Toorjaoon".

(Surah Yasin: 83)

Hence there is no doubt in it that the source of all creation is  
God and none else.

Lalon epitomized the whole body of the universe into  
eighteen dwellings where one single light of the Nur (God) is lighted  
all among:

'It's weird but a great wonder,  
Within eighteen dwellings  
One single light of the Nur (God)  
Is being lighted'.<sup>15</sup>

Now it appears that this light is the source of all creations.  
And this universe is existed within the exact existence of the creator.  
Here according to the conception of the Sufis man is the microcosm in  
which all but a few remarkable qualities of God have been attributed.  
Lalon probably followed Ibnul. Arabi in his thought:

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

That Man is living in this man.' And that is 'Perfect Man' of Ibnu'L Arabi. The first pronouncement of Ibnu'L Arabi was that God exists in every religion. Lalon had his resonance here:

"Go in quest of the root of your birth  
And there you have the acquaintance of Shain (God)".

Qazi Nazrul Islam put the similar idea in one of his most popular poems...

"I could discern the identity of my creator in my own  
"Being".<sup>16</sup>

Nazrul like Lalon had his pantheistic Monism. He denied pluralism of God. In his poem 'Maha Samar (The Great War)' he became the exponent of the monotheism.

"There's a great war breaks out between (Towheed)  
monotheism and (Bahutmabad) pluralism.  
Monotheist (La-Sharik) will be victorious, said,  
"Allah Ho Akbar".<sup>17</sup>

This is against the difference between the man and man, and between the nation and nation.

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*, (Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000).p.237

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.237

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.237

This difference will go in Ahad (monism of God) doctrine and

## Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalou Shah

all will sink difference to become equal into oneness.

Mysticism in Islam manifests the psyche of humanity in the oneness of God. This is the faith in which one can put his belief without distinction between man and man but understand the identity of one's own soul into the another. And by this way all artificial barriers in the aristocracy of the human society of its religious customs or traditions can be removed. Because the conception of the identity of human oneness after the image of the oneness of unseen God is revealed here. And this is the way how Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) could once remove the social interregnum of his time and consolidated the establishment of Islamic way of life for common welfare of all in the society irrespective of creed or caste of other religious people. His was the simplification of social orders to bring about peace and tranquility among different warring but heterogeneous elements of the people.

Nazrul was the staunch follower of Hazrat Muhammad (SM) but his belief in Allah's Supremacy appears to have been superseded almost all aspects of mysticism:

"Above every aspect of all colours one who has not seen

The supreme acts of the light of Allah,

He cannot understand the acts of Allah, in this world.

He is the first and foremost poet of all

Who writes poems of His creations for day in and

Day Out....

He foils the diabolic designs of the devils

Setting aside the social imbalance,

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

When His creations become most perfect and beautiful.  
Who will understand the acts of Ahad, the immortal?"<sup>18</sup>

(Ahad is the name of Allah whose Oneness cannot be parted.)  
Being the great protagonist of Tawhid (The Oneness of God),  
Nazrul's rebellious mind agitated:

This man forgot this Tawhid – (Monotheism) again and again  
and started conflict.

So how these men become formidable demons on earth!  
However the full text of the hymnal verses are as follows:-  
"Then even nothingness was not, nor existence.  
There was no air, not the heaven beyond it.  
What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?  
Was there then cosmic water in depths unfathomed?  
Then there was neither death nor immortality,  
Nor was there then the torch of night and day.  
The one breathed windlessly and self-sustaining.  
There was that one then and there was no other.  
At first was only darkness wrapped in darkness.  
All there was unlimited water,  
The one who came to be enclosed in nothing.  
Arose at last, born of the power of heat (Tapas)  
In the beginning desire descended on it-  
That was the primal seed, born of the mind.  
The Sages who have scorched their hearts with wisdom

<sup>18</sup>Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*,

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

(Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000).p.237

Know which is kin to which is not.  
And they have stretched their cord across the word.  
And know what was above and what below.  
Seminal powers made fertile mighty forces.  
Below was strength and over it was impulse.”<sup>19</sup>

The whole of this parable can be seen epitomized in the wise but poetic words of the poet Qazi Nazrul Islam:

“That lamp is lighted  
                  Throughout the world  
None of the building is true,  
None of your houses is true,  
                  That the sun and  
The moon render light ever  
                  but eternally.  
That the king may be the administrator  
Of the society of the people on earth,  
But the creator who created the vast universe  
Is the sole administrator,  
Who administers this earthly kind also.  
So there’s no scriptures above Him,  
So There’s no truth greater than Him,  
That God is with you,  
Then what makes you fear?  
Let the world of critics say what nonsense  
They would like to say,  
While you follow God’s commandments.  
Let anything stands on your way,

Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

Let anyone say you mad,  
Uphold your truth above everything else.  
Speak out the truth boldly.  
Uphold the truth anyway,  
There's no way out against the truth..."<sup>20</sup>  
--'Avoy Mantra' (Fearless Incantation)

Nazrul had his spiritual aspirations in all his rebellious emotions. He had nurtured the bohemian spirit in himself like Lalon what we learn in one of his Baul songs:

"I am  
But the bewildered Baul (Bohemian)  
My body is my temple;  
My God is my soul;  
And that is not far at all.  
At this heart's temple  
That Sum exists.  
And in another song Nazrul felt:  
Thread rended kite I am  
To fly with my soul  
And I go up with the stormy wind  
But I know not how and where to fall!"<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*,  
(Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000).p.237

<sup>20</sup> David De Santillana, "*Law & Society*"

Sir, Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, *The Legacy of Islam*,  
(London: Oxford University Press, 1939) p.165

## Poet Qazi Nazrul Islam and Lalon Shah

<sup>21</sup> Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed.], *Nazrul Institute Journal*, (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993). p.3

In Bengali folk-literature or mystic maestro Fakir Lalon Shah will remain ever memorable pioneer but in mystic modern songs Qazi Nazrul Islam will also be the guide of our mystic heart. The truth which has been soothing our heart can never be erased.

Both Lalon and Nazrul like other ancient or mediaeval mystics or Sufis, blend their mode of thinking into mysticism. Plainly speaking, they put their deliberate efforts to make sense of the mystery in their devotional or spiritual songs.

Our spiritual awareness tends us to be humanly good enough to understand the creator and the harmoniousness in his creations with the contradictions as well when we study or listen deeply to songs or poems blended mystically by the poets. There is every likelihood of misinterpretation of the mystery by the common folk. This may go against their common interest too. History gives a lot of evidence to that effect. To arrest any such misgivings our researching attitude must be fair and impartial as well as humanly welfare-oriented. Only through knowledge we can do away with the poison of ignorance and establish communal harmony among different communities or race or nations that exist now throughout the world. Love for God is love for the human, and should become the sacred feeling of every soul. Man cannot create anything but discover or invent and innovate something out of the discovered elements already existed on earth or being the substance of the earth.