

## **Kazi Nazrul Islam and Decolonisation: Poetry as a Praxis of Political Intervention and Cultural Ecology**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores how Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry aligns with the leitmotifs of decolonisation. Nazrul Islam grapples with the race-gender-based regimens of his society. His activism and creative oeuvre harp on a subversive praxis, which interrogates the British colonial regime and racist norms ingrained in colonial India. As the paper examines, decolonisation not only foregrounds anti-colonial interventions and emancipation of the colonised, but envisages a continuing cultural revolution against colonialism. Analysing Nazrul Islam's emblematic political poems and his intellectual struggle, the paper ascertains how his poetry and authorial-political life mirror the philosophy of decolonisation, and thus radically contends colonialism. His poetry pits a cultural wholeness – composed by nature, human, men, women, and global religions and myths – against the western ideology of culture, race, anthropocentrism, and androcentrism that remains agentive in shaping, consolidating, and validating global colonialism.

### **Keywords**

Bangladeshi literature, Nazrul Islam and colonialism, colonisation and Indian women, co-humanness and non-anthropocentric philosophy, literature and decolonisation

### **Introduction**

This paper investigates the decolonial voice and spirit as reflected in the political life and literary activism of Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), the national poet of Bangladesh. His rebellious poems call for a “national culture of revolution” to “describe, justify and praise the actions” (Fanon 233) that shape a tangible praxis of anti-colonial intervention and thus endorse the pedigree of politico-cultural decolonisation of the global colonised. His work resonates with Fanon's decolonial dictum: “We must remember in any case that a colonized people are not just a dominated people” (Fanon 184). The paper elucidates how

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Nazrul Islam's poetry signals an exponential decolonial poetics and then how his thematic and stylistic nuances register what Edward Said labels "contrapuntal reading" or a post-colonial subversion (51) of colonial-imperial incarceration.

Nazrul Islam's decolonial poetics contests colonial constructs of Indian identity that was morphed into a suppressed, obsequious, and sequestered entity. That the British colonial regime stereotyped the natives as, in Albert Memmi's terms, a "hopeless weakling" necessitating colonial "protection" (125-26) runs contrary to Nazrul Islam's vindication of the power of the colonised in India who might "mean little to the colonizer" but are merely "not this... or not that." Instead, Nazrul Islam exhorts India to realise what Jean-Paul Sartre affirms: its "misfortune will become its courage; will make, of its endless rejection by colonialism, the absolute rejection of colonisation" (25). Besides, his poetry espouses a cultural heterogeneity – as opposed to western colonial, racial, patriarchal, and anthropocentric binaries – which cemented western coloniality worldwide. Indian society was also entrenched in a binary politics based on caste, gender, region, and religion. The following discussion examines how Nazrul Islam's poetry gestures towards a subaltern globalism through an anti-colonial poetics that amalgamates natural, gender, mythological, and religious symbols. All of these facets indicate Nazrul Islam's decolonial liberalism that does not suffer any "essentialist and anti-European" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 43), anti-western, and third-worldist intent.

### **Nazrul Islam and the colonial-racial milieu**

Established in the early 1600s, the British East India Company was the prototype of the protracted colonial subjugation of India (1757-1947). Imperial advocacy or what Shashi Tharoor posits as "self-serving justifications of the British for their long and shameless record of rapacity in India" (24) continued to legitimate British colonial rule in India. Of note, John Stuart Mill upheld it as a "benevolent despotism" (Mill 1991). Thomas Babington Macaulay's infamous 1835-minutes imprints a quintessential colonial ethnocentrism, insinuating the role of the English language to "form an intermediary and pro-colonial class, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay). Nazrul Islam debunks these discursive camouflages through his poems. He could sense that there is no "virtue," no "civilization," "philanthropy," or "human value" in colonialism (Césaire 32-34). On the one hand, the colonial rule was devastating the colonised world's trust in its own vitality, on the other, an aggressive nationalism was gaining momentum beneath anti-colonial resistance.

Indian nationalism also failed in preparing any intellectual unanimity and anti-colonial leadership to decolonise India. As Partha Chatterjee observes, nationalism at this juncture was "not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist – but it does need some

pre-existing differentiating marks to work on” (4). Nazrul Islam foresaw that ethno-religious nationalism of India, which was constructed by “certain forms of religious identity” (Langley 14), would mire India’s decolonial vision. He could presage the pitfalls of this “ethnocentric nationalism” which sprung from structured religion-race-backed politics. Not necessarily “colour-coded,” it is rather an economic, political, and religious system of discrimination and oppression, which still remains the “most brutal system of social hierarchy” (Roy 2019). Nazrul Islam’s poetry is a voice against this classical foe of India which was tantamount to a self-colonialism for her.

### **Nazrul Islam and the poetics of iconoclasm**

Nazrul Islam’s poem, “The Rebel” (“Bidrohi” [1922]) pulsates with the rebellious spirit against the perpetrators of injustice and anarchy in his contemporary world and issued a proclamation of a resistance and self-identity of subjugated India and the global colonised. This poem spurred the Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22) in India which was linked with the anti-colonial motifs of Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) because of Gandhi’s liaison with it. These two movements were the first acts of civil disobedience against British colonial rule in India. Nazrul Islam joined these movements at the forefront. His debut poetry anthology *The Lyre of Fire* (*Agni-veena* [1922]) harbours an impassioned resonance of human resistance, peace, and justice. His poetry repertoire *Bisher Banshi* (*The Flute of Poison* [1924]) was banned for its avowed call for a counter-colonial insurgency.

Nazrul Islam published a galvanic anti-colonial rhetoric through his poem, “The Coming of Anondomoyee” (“Anondomoyeer Agomoney”) in September 1922 in his bi-weekly magazine, *Dhumketu* (the Comet), inciting a powerful anti-colonial aura into the Swaraj Movement. Consequently, police raided his office, banned *Dhumketu*, and apprehended him. Interrogated at the court, he articulated an exemplary anti-colonial discourse namely “Disposition of a Political Prisoner” (“Rajbandir Jabanbandi” [1923]) where he states:

The charge against me: I’m a traitor. Therefore, I’m now a prisoner, convicted by a royal court.... I know and I have seen that I’m not standing alone in the dock today.... Today India is subjugated. Its people are slaves.... I have full faith in myself. That is why what I have understood to be unjust I have called unjust oppression, oppression, I’ve called a lie, lie.... I reassure you, I have no fear, no regrets. I’m a son of the immortal. (Nazrul Islam 201-206)

He himself staged a forty-day hunger strike inside the jail. Concurrently, he was disillusioned with the Swaraj, Non-cooperation, and Khilafat movements for their failure in alleviating the plights of the mass and in advancing a unanimous decolonial battle in India.

### **Decolonisation and its vision**

Decolonisation does not only contest physical colonisation, but unearths how post-colonialism, as practiced by Europe and the global North, in nomenclature and nature, transports us to the colonial world. It holds that cultural enterprises of the ex-colonialists are still alive and aids knowledge-coded violence in the post-colonial nations. Hence, decolonial theory interrogates this culture as “Eurocentric critiques of Eurocentrism” (Grosfoguel 2). For Fanon, “decolonisation is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: the “thing” colonised becomes a man through the very process of liberation” (2). The existence of the colonised is erased by colonialism and in the post-colonial world west-and-the-rest binaries continue to be generated and sustained through Orientalist apparatuses of knowledge. Decolonisation is not only the subversive questioning of these colonial and neo-colonial forces and forms of ascendancy, but the call for revitalisation and re-individuation of the identity and epistemology of the colonised and ex-colonised.

Seen through this lens, decolonisation is an ongoing battle of “revealing and dismantling” the residues of oppressions (Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin 52). As Nazrul Islam enunciates in “The Rebel”:

I am the great rebel, weary of battle  
But I will rest only when the anguished cries of the oppressed  
Cease to resonate in air and sky. (41)

Nazrul Islam anticipated the far-ranging consequences of colonial domination and hence, he reminds the world of the oppressed that the “exploitation of the colonisers was imperialist in character,” and that the resistance of the oppressed must continue “to overthrow the forces of imperialism” (Choudhury 45). Walter Mignolo confirms this perspective on decolonisation but he delves deep into the mutable intricacies of Western capitalistic, political, economic, and cultural agencies which still overshadow the post-colonial nations. He weaves decolonisation with a direct political “dewesternization” of and “delinking” from the ideologies of “development,” “democracy,” and “education” that are deeply rooted in the post-independence nations (Mignolo 2012). Unlike the Euro-North America-centric critical studies of post-colonialism, decoloniality shakes off the colonial gaze lying in the post-colonial critiques of previous colonial havocs and ongoing imperial entanglements.

### **Nazrul Islam’s decolonial poetics**

Nazrul Islam’s aesthetics of decolonisation is rooted into what Eagleton terms “cultural emancipation of the masses” (97). Nazrul Islam felt an urgency of this aesthetics for confronting the “lingering presence of Orientalist discourse” (Alam 134) formed by the convergence of national classicists and colonial canonical figures much prior to the discursive aesthetics of post-colonial literary criticism. The revolutionary ideology of his poetry coincides with Walter Benjamin’s

propositions for a “revolutionary literary criticism” that vows to “dismantle the ruling concepts of ‘literature’, reinserting ‘literary’ texts into the whole field of cultural practices” (Eagleton 98). Nazrul Islam took on the role of a “colonised intellectual” (Fanon 236-39), adopted his aesthetics of resistance, and continued to learn how colonialists can be confronted with the very physical and cultural forces they have wielded upon the physical and psychic world of the colonised. Nazrul Islam resists both intellectually and politically by writing “combat literature, or revolutionary literature” (Fanon 239) and joined the decolonising fight for an emancipated land. He urges interventions against colonial-imperial power systems. As he asserts in his song “The Chain-wearing Song” (“Shekal Porar Chol” [1924]):

This chain-wearing is our trick; this is our chain- wearing trick....

Wearing these restraints, we will overcome the dread of being enchained.

(Nazrul Islam 199-200)

These lines echo a counter-force against British colonial-cultural oppression, as Nazrul Islam emboldens a supreme voice of decoloniality that competes colonial truths and exploitations, leading to the “fashioning” of a counter-colonial superstructure of indigenous identity (Langley 55). Deep inside this identity reverberates a constant questioning of the coercive practices and cultural logic that underlie western colonialism and hegemonise the post-colonial populace, as signified by Nazrul Islam’s metaphor of “chain,” and that are “presumed to be politically, even historically innocent” (Said 27).

Nazrul Islam’s poems, in particular, “The Rebel,” “The Comet,” “The Ecstasy of Destruction,” and “Beware, My Captain” (“Kandari Hunshiar” [1926]) sermonise for the rupture of the colonial mentality of self-doubt and rediscovery of the language of resistance what wa Thiong’o calls a “regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues... in the world demanding over liberation” (108). wa Thiong’o’s model of African decolonisation identifies Nazrul Islam’s vision of decolonisation of the Indian and global colonised. Their decolonial aesthetics is embedded in a culture of struggle. wa Thiong’o further asserts that decolonisation of the colonised involves the “rediscovery of the real language of humankind: the language of struggle. It is the universal language underlying all speech and words of our history. Struggle. Struggle makes history. Struggle makes us. In struggle is our history, our language and our being” (108). The cultural fractures and deep psychological wounds of colonialism have affected Indians and other colonised nations. As wa Thiong’o puts it, the impacts of colonialism are a sort of “holocaust” or a “cultural bomb” which has been instrumental to annihilate a “people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environments, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (3).

Nazrul Islam unearths these colonial scars in the same light in his poem “Irrepressible Youth” (1929). He laments the loss of cultural force among the

natives who have strongly “internalised the image of the oppressor” and hence are “fearful of their freedom” (Freire 47). “The mask of wisdom,” “the apparel of patience,” and “morality-mongers” emblem the brunt of colonial hegemony to dampen the spirit of resistance of the native youths (Nazrul Islam 568). The mentions of “the cold wind” and “shadow of frost” represent explicit colonial violence on the natives. Nazrul Islam affirms that counter-insurgency of the young rebels can save the dominated natives. The fear, passivity, and silence created a “confusion between freedom and maintenance with the status quo” of domination (Freire 47). This was rendered visible by colonialism in almost every fabric of colonial India’s individual and political life.

In “The Comet” (“Dhumketu” [1922]), Nazrul Islam cherishes the emergence of a nation through cultural and political struggles of the colonised:

I come in age after age;

I have come again to provoke a great revolution. (Nazrul Islam 42)

He dreams of a culturally re-embodied society, what Cesaire (52) calls a “new society,” a society vibrant with all the “productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days.” In a broader scale, Langley sees the resonance and relevance of Nazrul Islam’s poetry in Martin Luther King Jr.’s movement against “racism, fascism, oppression, discrimination and religious fanaticism” (2016). Nazrul Islam’s comet thus foments the decolonising identity that is ready to combat all colonial havocs which have physically and psychologically wronged the colonised.

“The Rebel” continues this vein of a counter-friction against colonial forces of subjugation. The native revolutionaries will subvert, destroy, and resist all colonial mechanisms and then they will create their own identity. In Nazrul Islam’s words:

I am creation, I am destruction;

I am human habitation and cremation ghat. I am death, I’m dawn. (38)

The images of destruction, both verbal and visual, like “destruction,” “graveyard,” and “end of night” reveal his hope and hunger for resistance in decolonising India. His rebel is gladiatorial in dismantling the sediments of “secular, political, societal, religious discrimination and oppression”, yet he is “celebratory” with global mankind’s sufferance, penchants for life and creativity and love of nature (Zaman 15). Thus, he instils in the global colonised a perpetual activism that sings of the democratic revolution of the proletariats.

A myriad of hegemonic pitfalls, the slumber of fear, the hegemonic silence, and the mentality of slavery have incapacitated the cultural and political autonomy of the natives. Nazrul Islam’s understanding of this culture matches Fanonian perspectives: “The feeling of inferiority of the colonised is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior” (Fanon 69). The way Nazrul Islam initiates the call for this decolonising fight is itself an indication for

decolonising the writing norms which were customary in his contemporary world. The Bengali poets and writers, including the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, were the offshoots of modernism, which itself was carrying the colonial signposts. Nazrul Islam assimilates the stylistic newness of the modernist tradition but formed his own language and aesthetics of political resistance (Husain 191) which garnered much literary-critical scathe for him but he did not cease his recalcitrant pen. As he vindicates himself in the poem “My Answer” (“Amar Koifiat” [1926]):

Whatever nonsense I write, do I myself understand any of it?  
I never got to raise my hands,  
So I write bending my neck! (50)

In “I Sing of Equality” (“Samyabadi” [1925]), he expresses solemn respect for humankind by transcending the limits of caste, race, religion, nation, and culture. The humans of the subaltern world have been debased, brutalised, and objectified in an effort to secure the colonial world’s superiority. The colonised or socially marginalised group and victims of gender-based othering receive humanistic treatment in his poems. His impassioned plea is so inclusive and encompassing that it goes beyond any spatio-temporal fixity:

I sing of equality in which dissolve all barriers and estrangements,  
In which are united Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians. (Nazrul Islam 59)

Nazrul Islam throws off the “paradigm of war/power” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 42) that relies on all differentiating and discriminating ideologies and norms lying in dogmatic practices of religion. In doing so, he overtures his “paradigm of peace” through a celebration of cultural heterogeneity or “third humanist revolution” of “co-humanness” (Ndlovu- Gatsheni 42-43), which is an inevitable mark of decolonial philosophy. Nazrul Islam valorises this ecology of humankind thus:

What I have heard, my friend, is not a lie:  
There’s no temple or Ka’aba  
Greater than this heart! (Nazrul Islam 60)

Nazrul Islam’s embrace of the local and global symbols of cultural ecology hints at engendering the literary-political “global south” and its “projects of decolonisation” that align him more broadly and optimistically with “a call and label signifying the emergence of nothing less than a differing world based on responsibility to self and others” (Levander & Mignolo, 7).

“Beware Helmsman” retains Nazrul Islam’s aspirations for a decolonial leadership, which will diminish the inherent tensions between Hindus and Muslims and spearhead a united struggle against colonial rule in India. Irrespective of race and religion, all are suffering at the colonisers’ hand, and, hence, all must endeavour to establish a cultural cohesion for their panacea from colonial suppressions. This is why Nazrul Islam urges a unanimity in the Indian cultural leadership:

Helmsman, stand by your vow to your motherland.

“Are they Hindu or Muslim?” Who asks this question? Helmsman just say, “Human beings are drowning, the children of my motherland!” (Nazrul Islam 138)

Here Nazrul Islam interrogates the fractured bond of the Indian because of Hindu-Muslim communal feud and furore in a multi-layered racial environment. To liberate India, all Indians must work to establish cultural unison by eliminating all existing religious bigotry and sectarianism.

### **Nature and women in Nazrul Islam’s cultural ecology**

The modern world order is a visage of a coloniality, which has centred the world of knowledge within Europe and the global North. This disorientation occurred throughout the Post-Renaissance-Enlightenment and modernist-colonialist world in the name of cultural enlightenment and civilisational modernisation (Mignolo 3-5). Thus, an anthropocentric world emerged, which colonised the non-western world and its nature to yield political and economic power for colonialists. This humanist tradition of culture and epistemology has served to make “human or any subjectivity as self-contained, sovereign, and independent” (Nayar 53). Nature or the nonhuman world of the colonised land has solely been a site of domination and profit for the colonialists. Conversely, a sense of inclusivity, tenacity, and ceaselessness of power that nature holds influenced Nazrul Islam’s decolonial vow for bringing back “the eternal beauty” of the natives and reminding anti-colonial rebels of “how to destroy and build again” (Nazrul Islam 127).

Nazrul Islam’s anti-colonial aesthetics celebrates an intriguing philosophy of heterogeneity that can be seen in his usage of human and nonhuman objects as well as his symbols of creation and destruction. His symbols have been extracted from astronomy, geography, religion, mythology, human physique and attributes, and natural forces like flood, thunder, lightning, rain, and quakes. In “The Ecstasy of Destruction” (1922), Nazrul Islam mingles the natural forces and their ruinous connotations, ruminating his vision of political and cultural revolution waged by the colonised against the coloniser. A supreme synonym for a devastating cyclone or hurricane (Husain 190), he anticipates these natural forces as a resurrectional and explosive upheaval, hinting at the re-embodiment of the natives and their invincibility in surmounting colonial evils. In “The Rebel,” nature continues to influence his aesthetics of politico-cultural resistance. Nazrul Islam also deploys natural images like the latitude and longitude of the earth, the peak of the Himalayas, sky, moon, planet, cyclone, typhoon, summer, tornado, death, life, fire, flute, brook, hill, volcano, earth-quakes, and so on. All these images represent an organic wholeness that decolonisation strives to achieve.

In “The Comet,” Nazrul Islam’s aesthetics reciprocates with the natural world. Like the comet, the rebel, Nazrul Islam envisions, will “come in every age”



and “come for a great revolution” against any anarchy and injustice. He has clarified the intensity and multitude of his resistance by using the imageries related to temporality and spatiality. The recurrent use of “heaven” and “eternal time” also signifies his transcendental vision. In this poem, he has drawn images of the great deserts, Sahara and Gobi, natural forces like fire, rain, disaster, hurricane, and so on. Again, this can imply his holistic challenge against the colonial-imperial rulers of every age and society. Colonised India and other nations should resist against colonialism and re-enact their existence the way nature suffers human tortures but survives through its resurgence.

Nazrul Islam empathises with the plights of women in pre-colonial India and discerned that Indian women, particularly lower-caste women, would be more vulnerable in British colonial India. The sprawling colonial agenda targeted at representing and anticipating Indian women as merely wretched and subdued beings. As Liddle and Joshi argue: “By maintaining women’s subordination they could show that India was not yet fit for Independence. By liberalising women’s position, they demonstrated Western culture’s superiority in relations between men and women” (3). This manifests that there was a planned dualism in British conceptions of Indian women, which simultaneously lowered Indian women and pretended to uplift their conditions. While the history of Indian women’s identity plights predates British colonial rule in India, the imperial gender ideologies complicated women’s rights and empowerment in colonial India. They suffered the brunt of a dual patriarchy: both native and imperial androcentric gender ideology negated Indian women’s socio-politico-economic identity and segregated them from the production system, education, suffrage, and other fundamental life concerns. Spivak contends that “the patriarchal strategy” embedded in the colonial gender constructs defined “the natives as barbaric”, and thus it “intervened to ‘save’ Indian women from their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons” (23-71). Thus, British colonialism served to convert Indian women into the worst strata of the colonised.

In British India, “representations of Indian women were strategically linked to the agenda of empire” (Sen 47), that is, developing women’s status through colonial education and privileges was part of the civilising mission of the colonial era. Additionally, the western male gaze and capitalistic politics of sexualisation and commodification was operating in India. Thus, colonial gender ideology rather denigrated Indian women and aggravated their colonisation, coalescing them into what Sen (47-71) calls “devoted wife or sensuous bibi (wife)” or a merely feminised being. In the face of this national-colonial androcentric constructs, Nazrul Islam uplifts women’s vitality and role in the wider world. In his poem “The Prostitute” (1925), Nazrul Islam safeguards women from the social and religious gender indoctrinations which defile women in the name of upholding ethico-religious code of purity. He shatters religious conceptions of bodily purity. He alludes to Muslim, Hindu, and Christian myths

of sacred figures like Eve, Mary, Sita, and Krishna. He brings in Jesus Christ as the embodiment of humanistic greatness who is beyond man-made constructs of purity and impurity:

The conception of the great lover of humanity, Jesus remains a mystery.  
None is stained with sin here,  
none is an object of hate. (Nazrul Islam 280)

Mentions of Jesus, Adam, Eve, and Mary in the poem “The Prostitute” represent Nazrul Islam’s contentions on the purity-impurity dichotomy underlying every religion. This poem signifies that women have always been put into the trial of ethics and their body has been narrowly viewed as a site of sin and impurity. In “Women” (“Nari” [1925]), he acknowledges the variety of women’s roles and rejects the native and colonial gender binaries. In colonial India, these biases turned more dehumanising for colonised women. Hence, he indicts the androcentric history of biases and forgetfulness:

Men are heroes of gory battles,  
History proudly remembers their names.  
But time forgets many mothers. (Nazrul Islam 68)

Nazrul Islam opens up a wide world of women’s influence, inspiration, courage, sacrifice, involvement, and contribution and critiques the socio-cultural relegations and discursive masculinisation that are rooted into colonial patriarchal ideologies. He enthuses women to subvert androcentric constructs and enact their autonomy:

The day of subjugation is over ... No longer will man be her master. ...  
Arise now and come forth,  
Come free from all bonds. (Nazrul Islam 69)

His novels *Bandhon Hara* (*Unfettered* [1927]) and *Mrityukshudha* (*Love and Death in Krishnanagar* [1930]) showcase women, as Niaz Zaman holds, both as “victims and victors” (223). The poem, “Women” resonates with this mixed portrayal of women. The native and colonial gender ideologies work largely for sustaining men’s superiority. The “bonds” of androcentric society have quarantined women into a perennial slavery and subservience.

Nazrul Islam asks women to shake off patriarchal confines and thus, to assert their own identity. The masculine conventions of Indian society coupled with colonial stereotyping of Indian women engendered into them a helpless absorption of a masculine hegemony. Essentially “exclusive, internally and hierarchically differentiated,” “culturally idealized,” “pseudo-natural and socially sustained,” it became “anxiety-provoking,” “brutal” and violent” (Donaldson 4) for women in colonial India and thus turned their “possibilities for social justice in gender profoundly problematic” (Howson 3). Nazrul Islam prompts Indian women to subvert the national-colonial politics of treating women as merely sexualised “docile bodies” (Foucault 138-9). Thus, he extends the spectrum of women’s power: he emboldens them to claim their identity and reposes his faith

in women's broader ability to partake in the decolonial struggle of their nation. As we see in his song "Rise up, Women" ("Jago Nari Jago"):

Rise up women – rise up like the flaming fire! ...

Rise up, all you mothers, daughters, wives, sisters! (Nazrul Islam 197)

For Nazrul Islam, the decolonisation of India will remain radically incomplete without women's freedom and their engagement with the cultural and political interventions. In "The Rebel," "The Ecstasy of Destruction," (1922) and "On the Coming of the Blood-blissed Mother" (1922), the potentials of wrath, destruction, and birth of women have been emphasised through the metaphoric expression of Goddess Kali's generative-destructive powers.

### **Nazrul Islam's philosophy of difference**

Nazrul Islam juxtaposes a plethora of myths which transcend the differentiating and dominating boundaries of caste, class, race, religion, and place. Although he critiques twentieth-century colonial politics of cultural domination, he extensively borrows images from "Muslim lore, Hindu mythology, Greek legends, the modern industrial West, and local stories connected with Bengal's countryside" (Husain 188). This bespeaks his literary breadth and openness, as evident in Miltonic and Spenserian deployment of Greek and Roman myths, and reinforces the themes of resistance. He also tailors this poetical openness in deriving the emblems of the creation-destruction model of decolonial resistance from Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Moreover, his poems do not offer any invective against Christianity that was always alleged to be complicit in grossly converting the natives into Christians. In the first stanza of "The Rebel," Nazrul Islam calls upon God, refers to His "throne" (Arsh), and celebrates His equal potential for creation and destruction.

Nazrul Islam invokes the Hindu God Shiva/Nataraj, Hindu legend Parshurama, Goddess Kali, gods of the sun, moon, fire, storm, and other natural forces to insert a dual force of destruction and creation. He believes that by destroying all colonial evils the colonised of the whole world will attain a holistic existential revival. Nazrul Islam aspires to see the rage, resilience, and power of Shiva in the anti-colonial rebels. As he asserts:

I am the dance-crazy rhythm,

Dancing to my own beats. (Nazrul Islam 13)

In "The Ecstasy of Destruction," he evinces the dual power of creation and destruction:

The new is coming to destroy the dead and ugly!

The eternal beauty knows how to destroy and build anew. (Nazrul Islam 126)

The anti-colonial rebel has been identified with the Hindu deity Shiva, who has giant hands and potentials of creation and destruction. Nazrul Islam transplants his godly hands in his rebels, who will "crackle" the world of colonial evils. But

his heart will store “the eternal beauty” which will know “how to destroy and build again.” The Indians, through their passivity and tolerance of colonial rule and racial polarisations, have killed their mother India. He yokes together the metaphors of Parshurama and the passive and polarised Indians and shames the Indians into being redemptive like Parshurama to free their country by wrestling with all colonial exploitations and self-inhibitions. As he avows:

I am the pitiless battle-axe of Parshurama;

I will rid the world of the warrior caste, I will bring universal peace. (41)

Nazrul Islam in his poems “The Rebel,” “On the Coming of the Blood-blissed Mother,” and “The Ecstasy of Destruction” frequently displays an “ease of travel between Hindu and Muslim contexts” (McDermott 20). The cultural unity Nazrul Islam’s Bengal upheld decayed due to colonial divide-and-conquer politics and self-constructed fractures of the Indians. The annihilation of colonial and national culture of domination and disenfranchisement was an exigency for India. Nazrul Islam solicits to the destructive power of the Hindu deity, Kali, to rescue the colonised-racialised Indians in his poem, “The Coming of Anandamoyee”:

With your sword, Mother, finish off their false adulation.

Bring your sword and your arms, Mother Kali, let us not be dead. (129)

He intuits that in achieving decolonisation the native tradition of cultural cohesion should be reinstated through a destruction of colonial and native rudiments of oppression.

Nazrul Islam does not place destruction and violence at the centre of his decolonial resistance: he cherishes the recreation and celebration of cultural confluence through a wholehearted acceptance of global emancipatory knowledge. The allegory of Orpheus attests his decolonial profundity. He believes that the culture of non-communal harmony, classless value, and non-racist fraternity can restore the lost heritage of Indian uniformity and bolster them to resist British colonialism. In setting forth this aesthetics of resistance, he resorts to Orpheus:

I’m Orpheus’s flute,

Lulling the turbulent sea to sleep,

I bring sweet slumber to the whole world. (Nazrul Islam 4)

He cherishes to see a devout love – as Orpheus nurtured in bringing back his dead wife – in the decolonial fight of the Indians. He then brings in the Indian myth of Shyam who stands for a perennial value of the symmetry between love and resistance. Nazrul Islam deploys the myths of Arjuna and his four brothers who symbolise the resilience and valour of the righteous force in the war against colonial power. He aspires to see an interplay of cultural and political activism in continuing the decolonising struggle:

In one hand I hold the tender bamboo is the tender flute,

The trumpet of war in the other. (Nazrul Islam 38)

He intermingles the European myth of Orpheus and the Indian Shyam here who are Nazrul Islam's signifiers of "cultural wholeness" (Langley 76). He also alludes to the Christian myths of Jesus Christ, Mary, and Eve.

European myths of Orpheus and gods of sun, war, rebellion, habitation, and so on find recurrent references in his poems. Jesus serves as a symbol of sacrifice, vanguardism, and audacity of martyrdom required for the victory over any oppressive regime. As we discover in "Poverty" ("Daridro" [1928]):

Poverty, you have empowered me,  
Endowed me with Christ's dignity

... inspired me to speak out and eye the world boldly. (Nazrul Islam 415)

Here Nazrul Islam invokes Jesus to acknowledge the gifts of his embattled life. In examining the significance of this usage of myths of varied cultures, McDermott notes: "the 'Rebel Poet' the young man who tore down boundaries, railed against injustice, and cried out for the disadvantaged. He also built bridges — between elite and folk, Muslim and Hindu, West and East, Persian and Bengali" (2). Nazrul Islam's philosophy of diversity — as he delineates through his myths — situates him within the decolonial philosophy of co-humanness which prevails as the foremost "resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history" (Said xxiii). His decolonial philosophy is premised upon a "pluriversalism" or many-worldliness, (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 43), that is; "at root to be is not to be one but to be diverse" (Gutting, cited in Drolet 28). Nazrul Islam elevates this decolonial spirit of fostering a cultural ecology over any monochromatic racial, religious, continental, and colonial worldview and thus "depicts the birth pangs of the new nations" (Sengupta 59) who would cultivate the intertwinement of the local and global ideals of human-nonhuman emancipation.

## Conclusion

Nazrul Islam lived in an intricately oppressive colonial and racial regime, but he did erect his rebellious identity that ushered a wide vista of politico-cultural emancipation for the Indian sub-continent. This article contends that his anti-colonial interventions can be theorised through the Foucauldian conceptualisation of power: "there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised" (142). He mobilises a multifaceted praxis of resistance that entails a lifelong pledge of undoing colonial-racial hangovers and empowering the continuity of a revolution of peace, justice, unity, and identity of the global subalterns. Another significant fabric of his decolonial poetics is its philosophy of inclusivity, endorsing the presence of many alternatives in terms of his egalitarian cosmopolitanism in subject-matter and usage of natural elements and myths. This poetics of resistance centres on global

peace and emancipation, and involves a cultural wholeness which is devoid of racial, cultural, national, gender, and human-nonhuman binaries.

Finally, the article infers that Nazrul Islam's decolonial praxis of resistance, peace, love, and violence can justifiably place him in the constellation of anti-colonial poets of world literature. His decolonial iconoclasm equates him with the Guatemalan poet-activist Otto René Castillo's anti-imperial-capitalist poetics of interventions, emanating a decolonial osmosis of love and violence as a destructive-resurrective subjecthood of the colonised. Additionally, like Pablo Neruda, who celebrates the working class in his poems, of note, in *Canto general* (1953), Nazrul Islam, a rural proletariat, also upholds the peasants in his poetics who constitute the crux of anti-colonial resistance across the world. Again, Mahmood Darwish's discourse of resistance against the settler colonial rule in Palestine parallels Nazrul Islam's poetics of decolonisation: their poems and individual battles against coloniality forge a locatedness of their identity that will be "inherently connected to the lands, lives, histories, and futures" of their birthplaces (Gahman and Legault 57). They also gave a political expression to their national-colonial entanglements and decolonising vision, calling for reinforcing national and cultural equilibrium. An exponential subcontinental decolonial voice, he ignites the vision and voice of a desubalternising Global South that projects, in Azfar Hussain's terms, Che Guevara's "tri-continent – Asia, Africa, and Latin America." Thus, his poems trenchantly circulate a tutelage and tenacity of decolonial poetics of insurgence that does not limit decoloniality to a mere local anti-colonial, and anti-Western movement.

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