

Tagore and Nazrul

Rafiqul Islam*

That Nazrul's familiarity with Tagore and his oeuvre took place when he (Nazrul) was in the Karachi garrison, or perhaps when he was at school, is evident from some of his short stories and novels written in Karachi and published in different literary magazines in Kolkata. This happened before Nazrul began his journalistic/literary career. Nazrul has used quotes from nearly twenty-five Tagore songs and poems, which are: 'Byathar Daan' (The Gift of Pain), 'Hena', 'Badol-Borishone' (In the Rains), 'Ghumer Ghore' (In the Moment of Slumber), 'Atripto Kamona' (The Unquenched Desire), 'Rajbondir Chithi' (The Letters of a Political Prisoner), 'Rikter Bedon' (The Agonies of the Deprived), 'Meher Negar', 'Shanjher Tara' (The Evening Star), letters in the form of a novel: 'Bandhonhara' (Without Fetters) and other stories.

The phrases and extracts and occasionally whole lines from Tagore's songs that Nazrul used from Tagore are too many, only a few of which are: 'Tumi Shondharo Meghomala' (You are the Clouds of the Evening), 'Amar Shokol Dukher Prodip' (The Candle of My Sorrows), 'Ekhon Phirabe Tare Kisher Chhole' (On What Pretext would you now Bring him Back), 'Emono Dine Tare Bola Jai' (It can be said to her on this Day), 'Amar Noyono Bhulano Ele' (You Came by Charming my Eyes), 'Ohe Shundoro Mori Mori' (Oh Beauty, I Die in you), 'Onek Paoaar Majhe' (In the midst of getting so much), 'Ogo Dekhi Ankhi Tule Dao' (Dear, Open your eyes at me), 'Ami Bohu Bashonai Pranpone Chai' (I want it for the life of me), 'Jhoro Jhoro Jhoriche Baridhara' (It's raining in thick drizzle), 'Tumi Jano Ogo Ontorjami' (You know it all my inner God), 'Premer Phand Pata Bhubone' (The World is spread over by the Love Trap), 'Dujone Dekha Holo' (We have seen each other), 'Ogo Kangal' (Oh, unfortunate), 'Kanna Hashir Dol Dolano' (Laughter and tears swing along), 'Osrú Nodir Shudur Pare' (Beyond the Shores of the Tearful River), 'Bela Gelo Tomar Poth Cheye' (The Day has passed waiting for your arrival), 'Heriya Shamolo Ghono Neel Gogone' (By Looking at the Dark Clouds in the Blue Sky), 'Mone Roye Gelo Monero Kotha' (The Word of the Mind has remained in the mind), 'Aro Aghat Shoibe Amar' (I'll endure more hurt), 'Shokhi Protidin Hai' (Everything is for everyday), etc.

During the second and third decades of the twentieth century the practice of Tagore songs was rather limited. Outside of the Jora Shankho Tagore family, Brahmosamaj and Shantiniketan, Tagore songs were quite restricted. However, Nazrul, though born in a poor Muslim family in a remote village of Bengal used

* Dr. Rafiqul Islam, Professor Emeritus, ULAB and a former Nazrul Professor of Dhaka University.

Tagore songs in his literary works in a sophisticated and restrained manner proving his modern sense of aesthetics.

When the 49th Bengal regiment was disbanded in March 1920, Nazrul returned to Kolkata and found a place to live in the Bengal Muslim Literary Association's (Bongio Muslim Shaitya Shamitya) office in 32 College Street. In Muzaffar Ahmed's words, "At that time Nazrul's belongings, among other things, included note pads for writing poems, note pads for stories, different kinds of book, monthly newspapers and notations of Tagore songs." In his remembrance of Nazrul, Muzaffar Ahmed has also written, "In spite of these, he used to mainly sing Tagore songs. We used to be surprised thinking how he could memorize so many songs of Rabindranath. We would call Nazrul Islam the 'Hafiz' (One who memorizes the Koran) of Tagore Songs. During the autumn of 1921 Muhammad Shahidullah had taken Nazrul to Shantiniketan. Nishikanta Roy Chowdhury, brother of the then Private Secretary to Rabindranath, reminisces the meeting between Nazrul and Tagore in Shanti Niketan in his essay "Nazrul in the Memory of My Youth":

I was a school student then at Shantiniketan. The Puja holidays were over, students and teachers had come back to the 'Ashram' in Shantiniketan. 'Kabiguru' (Guru of poets) Tagore had also returned from his outing. The ashram had come back to life... Only recently I was back at the house of brother Shudhakanta in the 'Guru-Village' from kindergarten. One day I heard my brother telling his friends that Havildar (a ranker in the army) Kazi Nazrul Islam would come to meet 'Gurudev' (Rabindranath) in the evening. Shudhakanata was given the responsibility to meet him at the railway station and bring him home and to arrange for his stay at the guest house and introduce him to Kabiguru. . . . The meeting would take place in the evening in the first floor of the Arts Building. Eagerly I went there with my brother and saw Kabiguru sitting in the middle. Students and teachers had all assembled there. Next to Kabiguru two strangers attracted attention; my brother Sudhakanta pointed out one of them and said, "Look, Kazi Nazrul Islam is sitting there." My brother went and sat close to Nazrul. A person wearing a fez cap, sporting a black and gray beard, was also sitting near Nazrul and exchanging words once in a while with Kabiguru. Nazrul was also taking part in the discussion, although I can't remember his name at present. Nazrul was the centre of my attention on that occasion; however, as far as I can remember the other person was Dr. Shahidullah. He was telling Kabiguru that during the train journey Nazrul had sung all the songs from *Geetanjali*. Kabiguru was surprised to hear this and appreciated his extraordinary memory and said "even I don't remember all those songs." Kabiguru praised the outstanding memory claiming that even he didn't remember all songs from the *Geetanjali*. Nazrul requested Tagore to sing a song and recite a poem but Gurudev

insisted on hearing a song and a recital from Nazrul, and asked him to start without any further delay as he had a plan to concentrate on writing later at night. Nazrul began the recitation without any argument. The occasion was after Puja, for which I remember that he recited a 'Puja' poem which I later came to know was "Agamani" (the Arrival) from *Agneebeena* (The Fiery Flute). Nazrul poured out his heart as he went on reciting the poem. His facial expression, glowing and touching the heart, greatly impressed me at that impressionable age. It was quite normal for one to be bashful when requested to recite a poem, but Nazrul's spontaneity was remarkable as I pictured it in the frame of my mind with great longing... Even today I can say that Nazrul's recital had a touch of masculinity, with a bass voice; by remembering which even today I can hear his tone echoing in my ear. It goes without saying that the form of recitation I used to hear Kabiguru perform was distinctly different from Nazrul's rendition. Next, Kabiguru requested Nazrul to sing a song, and his voice got filled with sorrow and a melancholic tune poured out:

Hey unknown, which call of a known flute have you heard?

Oh! My wanderer!

... After a while Kabiguru said, "Are you going to leave tomorrow morning? Can't you stay for a few more days?" Hearing this, the gentleman replied that it would have been great to stay for a couple of more days. However, Nazrul had a number of appointments for which he had to go back. Nazrul now requested Kabiguru to render a poem and sing a song for which he had been eagerly waiting. In his reply Kabiguru mentioned that he had started to forget the tune of his songs and had difficulty in singing. He of course agreed to recite one of his recently composed songs. "As you want to go after suddenly coming here, the 'Madhobi' of my songs also want to come and go without waiting." In Kabiguru's melodious voice came out:

From where has Madhobi come out of the blue?

In the tide of the days of spring

As she appears smiling, she says I must go, go, go...

When Kabiguru was engrossed in the recital, Poet Nazrul's long hair was waving at the beat of the recitation, and there was a deep sense of satisfaction spread over his eyes and face. After finishing the poem, Kabiguru stood up and probably the others present also followed him. A melancholic tone, unuttered though, began to play.

Nazrul's Journalistic-Literary career in Kolkata started after March 1920. At that time Litterateurs of the city had two hangouts. One was the 'Bharatir Adda' at

the office of the 'Bharati'¹. Literary personalities like Atulprasad Sen, Dinendranath Thakur, Charuchandra Banarjee, Shishir Bhaduri, Hemendrakumar Rai, among others, were regular visitors to the place. The other meeting venue was 'Gajendar Adda' (A Gossiping Centre) where Sharatchandra Chattapaddhay, Nirmalendu Lahiri, Abanindranath Thakur, Ustad Keramatullah Kha, Shatteyndranath Datta, Charuchandra Bandopadhyay, Premankur Atharathi, Narendra Deb, Dhurjatiprasad and others would come regularly. Nazrul was a regular visitor to both these places. Hemendrakumar Roy writes about Nazrul's presence in these hangouts:

...Nazrul started coming in regularly, and within a couple of days it became clear that the boy was not shy...entering the house like a storm he would roar, 'Come and wash the cow's body'; without looking anywhere else he would straightaway grab the harmonium and would sing one song after the other with his thick hair waiving to the lilt. The house was on Cornwallis Street and people would start gathering. Many renowned singers had come to this place to render their songs but so many people had never milled around the place as they did when listening to Nazrul's songs. Nazrul's songs surely had a special attractive strength... (*Who I have Seen*, Kolkata: New Age Publishers, Second Ed.,1359).

In this literary get-together at the house of Gajendrachandra Ghosh on 38 Cornwallis Street, Poet Sattyendranath Bose got introduced to Nazrul. Pabitra Gangopadhyya describes the first meeting of the two poets in his book *Chalaman Jibon (The On-going Life*, second volume):

Brother Gajen and Sattyandranath were seated and having a word. Sattyandranath immediately asked, "Where is the poet of your Shat-el-Arab? I regularly read the *Moslem-Bharat* not because that I think they send it out of their love, but because Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry attracts me. What immaculate rhyme and rhythm, although these are woven with the help of so many Arabic and Persian words..." In the evening I went and informed Nazrul about poet Sattyan Datta's eagerness to meet him...Nazrul obliged like a sober boy. I said, "This is poet Sattyan Datta." Nazrul's eyes and face were glowing, and brother Sattyan hugged Nazrul saying "Brother you have brought a new wave. We are merely negligible, you've even surprised Gurudeb." "Has Gurudeb read any of my writings?" asked Nazrul in an overwhelming voice. "As a matter of fact," said brother Sattyan, "It was Gurudeb who himself asked me one day if I had read any poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam. According to him, in terms of integrating the culture of feelings, your contribution is new." Nazrul could not complete his words because of a gush of happiness.

Bharati was a renowned literary monthly of the time.

As narrated by Pabitra Gangapadhya, Sattyandranath Datta's reference to Tagore's comment proves that he could genuinely understand Gurudeb's expression, "In the integration of the culture of feelings this is a new contribution." Where was Nazrul first introduced to Rabindranath? At Shantiniketan, or the Thakur Villa in Jorashankho? Between May 1920 and July 1921, Tagore was living in Europe for nearly fourteen months. After returning from Europe, in July–August 1921, Tagore passed a few days in Kolkata. It is probable for Tagore to have met Nazrul at this time. According to Shabitriprasanna Chattapadhya it is likely that Nazrul met Tagore at his Jorashankho villa.

I have seen many eminent people being very polite while meeting Tagore at his home in Jorashankho. I've heard other garrulous people speaking in a controlled voice, but the first entrance of Nazrul to the Thakur Villa was like a storm. Many used to say, "Your skipping and jumping won't work here at the villa of Jorashankho, you won't even have the courage to speak as you do." Nazrul did prove that he could behave in his characteristic manner. Therefore one day, he entered the poet's house chanting, 'Wash the cow's body', but the poet was not the least annoyed because he knew him well. (Shabitriprasanna Chattapadhya. "Amader Nazrul")

The memorial meeting held on 11 July 1922 at Rammohan Library following the death of poet Sattyandranath Datta was chaired by Rabindranath, and Nazrul was also a participant in the meeting. Tagore asked Nazrul to take a seat next to him and recited 'Satyakobi', a newly composed poem of Nazrul. Later, Nazrul's relationship with Tagore was marked by vicissitudes but the two poets' mutual respect and love for each other never diminished.

Nazrul's bi-weekly newspaper *Dhoomketu* (The Comet) was published on 11 August 1922, Friday 24 Shrabon 1329 Bangla year. It was in crown folio, 15X10" art paper; price 1 Anna, and annual subscription Taka 5. After 4 issues, the number of pages increased to twelve. The manager of *Dhoomketu* was Shantipada Singha. Starting with the first issue of the newspaper the following welcome note by Tagore was published in the first page of the first six issues, and in the third page above the editorial mast, from the seventh issue:

Kazi Nazrul Islam with good wishes
 Come over, hey shooting star
 Build a fire-bridge in the darkness
 In the lofty head of these bad days
 Fly high your victory flag.
 Let not the sign of the "Tilak"²

² The paste of sandalwood dabbed on the forehead

Be written in the darkness of the night,
 Waken up with surprise
 Those who lie in their subconscious.

Sri Tagore Tagore

24 Shrabaon, 1329. (Translated by the translator. Henceforth all translations are by him.)

From the date of this welcome note, it can be understood that it was sought from Tagore before the newspaper was published. As to how this note was received from Tagore has been revealed by Nripendrkrishna Chattapadhay and has been narrated by Achintyakumar Sengupta in his book 'Kallol Joog' (Kolkata: D. M. Library, 1366 Bangla Year).

...Even then Nazrul sent him a telegram at the last moment. When and who did Tagore reject? Also, what Nazrul has received in his poetry is a new freshness in a thirsty heart. He could understand from only the name and telegram the real meaning of *Dhoomketu*.

What he has written for *Dhoomketu* is clearly politics and a direct call for people's awakening.

In the publication ceremony of *Dhoomketu* a message was also received from Sharatchandra. Probably both Sharatchandra and Tagore had sent their good wishes at the same time. They had also sent their messages on the same date. Sharatchandra's message:

24 Shrabon, Shibpur

Good wishes,

Wishing a long life to your newspaper, I have only one prayer, that irrespective of friend and foe you always speak the truth. After that God will carry the weight of your newspaper himself.

Yours Sri Sharatchandra Chattapadhay

(Sharatchandra's message was published in the 27 January 1923 issue of *Dhoomketu*)

In the 12th issue of *Dhoomketu* (26 September, 1923) Nazrul's 'Anonodomoyeer Agomone' (The Arrival of the Goddess of Joy), a symbolic political poem was published for which he was arrested and was accused of sedition. Nazrul was summoned to the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate Swinhore on 25 November 1922, and a date for hearing the case was fixed on 29 November. Quite a few lawyers came forward, without asking for any honorarium, in support of Nazrul. Among them, Malin Mukhopadhay defended Nazrul in the court. Accused in the same case and released on bail, Nazrul's friend and

publisher and printer of *Dhoomketu*, Afzalul Haq gave witness against Nazrul as a government approver. The statement given by Nazrul during the trial is known in Bangla literature as "Rajbondir Jobanbondi" (Confessions of a Political Prisoner).

On 16 January 1923, magistrate Swinhore read out his adjudication. According to Indian Criminal Law, sections 124-Ka and 153-Ka, Nazrul was sentenced to one-year rigorous imprisonment in the *Dhoomketu* sedition case. As prisoner under trial Nazrul was until now staying at the Presidency jail. After receiving the prison term he was removed to Alipore Central Jail. By going to prison Nazrul earned great respect from the people in recognition of which Tagore dedicated his *Boshonto* (The Spring) musical-drama to Nazrul on 22 February 1923, who was then interned at the Alipore jail.

Dedicated to

Shriman Poet Nazrul Islam beloved

10 Falgun 1329

In order to hand over *Boshonto* to Nazrul at the Alipore Central Jail, Tagore summoned Pabitra Gangopadhay to Jorashankho. Tagore was seated there surrounded by fans as he told Pabitrababu, "Nazrul has brought spring to the life of our nation for which I have dedicated my recently published *Boshonto* Musical-Drama to him. I would have been happy if I could personally present it to him, but because I cannot go myself, it is better to have it sent by you; please hand over the book to him on my behalf."

All the followers of Tagore present at that time were not happy at this dedication; perhaps this was the first offering of a book by Tagore outside the Tagore family or the 'Brahmmosamaj'. Tagore could understand this feeling and had a conversation with those who disagreed with his decision. From Pabitra Gangopadhay's recounting we can learn:

I have dedicated the *Boshonto* Musical-Drama to Nazrul and in the letter of dedication addressed him as 'Poet'. I understand that many of you could not approve this. I believe that you are harbouring this feeling without having read the poetry of Nazrul. Even if you have read him, you did not look for the beauty and 'rasa'³ in his poetry. You have just browsed his poetry with a sense of aloofness.

Beauty and 'Rasa' have vanished in the sound of sword hitting sword and the aggressive mood of his poems, was the comment from a person present there.

In poetry there cannot be the jingle of swords; this, of course, is too much

³ The delight of poetry

of a wanting. When the entire nation's soul is tied to this tune, the rattling sound of swords will turn into a symphony and will create an orchestration which will obviously find its expression in poetry. Had I been in my youth now, the same tune would have sounded in my pen although it would have been of a different kind. This was how another person expressed his view.

The language of two people will be different but how can I say that mine would be better than Nazrul's.

The comment came from someone seated on a rug on the floor.

Popularity is not a permanent indicator to measure poetry, but what reflects the feeling of an age is not only poetry but an epic.

(‘Kobi Shikriti’. *Nazrul Academy Potrika*. Dhaka, 1376 Bangla Year.)

Tagore put his signature on a copy of his poem *Boshonto* and instructed Pabitro Gongopadhyay, “Tell him not to be sad as I could not give him the book myself. I am praying for him wholeheartedly. Also, tell him not to stop writing poetry for any reason. Many soldiers can be found but a poet who can provide inspiration in the war is needed too.” The European warden was shocked to know that Tagore had dedicated his book to a prisoner, and Nazrul touched *Boshonto* on his forehead and clasped it on his chest.

This dedication of Tagore went a long way in mitigating the sufferings of Nazrul's prison life. Nazrul writes on this, “At this time Tagore dedicated his *Boshonto* drama to me. His blessings helped me to forget the pain and sufferings in Jail.” Nazrul also wrote:

Oh beautiful, fire-burnt
 In my heart
 Came from you
 Spring
 In full blossom.

Someone also wrote a satire on Nazrul:

‘Robi’ gave Spring
 And you became a poet.

For unknown reasons, perhaps because of the eagerness of sycophants, the letter of dedication was missing in the second edition of the play, *Boshonto*. However the note has been a part of the later editions and the complete works of Tagore. Nazrul was shifted to the Hooghli jail on 14 April, 1923.

The superintendent of the Hooghli jail, Mr. Astern would always misbehave with political prisoners and find ways of creating various kinds of trouble for them. This also made the detainees violate the prison code and protest against their

imprisonment and torture. During his stay in this prison Nazrul wrote a parody of Tagore's song, "You've raised me with love at your home" as "You're raising me in jail, I thank you, I thank you." In the footnote of the song was written, "While we were in the Hooghli jail all kinds of torture were tried upon us. We used to sing this song and welcome the 'Torture chief'. Nazrul wrote the poem "Shebok" during his stay in this jail. The first stanza of this poem is:

Killing truth the oppressor stands up
Is no one there who would bare his chest and come forward?
Destroy the shackles and grind them under his feet
With lightning in hand unsettle the base of the tormentor.
(“Bisher Banshi” – The Poisonous Flute)

Nazrul's famous 'Shikol Porar Gaan' ('Song of wearing the shackles') was also written in the Hooghli jail. The poem begins:

This is how we wear the shackles; this is how we wear the shackles
In shackles we will break the shackles
We come to your closed prison not as prisoners
We come here to erode the fear of all.
(“Bisher Banshi”)

The prevailing situation at the Hooghli jail can be known from the description of Muhammad Moinuddin. The political prisoners refused to show the 'state-respect' to the Superintendent and his associates which was the normal practice of ordinary detainees. Because of this refusal, they were not served with rice, and were instead given the thick white starch of the steamed rice, and were put in shackles. Instead of the 'state-salute', political prisoners would sing under the leadership of Nazrul, 'In your jail you raise us in torment, thank you, oh, thank you'. A furious Superintendent would go mad at them and shout, 'You damn fool swine', and the poet would also curse him back using the same phrase. This resulted in confining political prisoners in secluded cells. To protest these oppressions, Nazrul started a hunger strike on 14 April 1923 in the Hooghli jail. When news broke out that Nazrul was on strike, tension and excitement spread throughout the country. Without heeding to the requests of his fellow prisoners, Nazrul continued with the fasting for days together.

Hearing about Nazrul's fast, many of his literary friends tried to meet him at the Hooghli jail; but they were not permitted to do so. However, they could learn about the happenings in the jail from a letter from Nazrul signed over the name of Abdul Halim. The repression on Nazrul went on increasing as he was handcuffed, shackled and force-fed for which he gradually started to physically weaken. People outside the prison continued to worry, and Nazrul's friend

Pabitra Gangopadhyay and Nalinikanta Sarkar went to see the poet but were not allowed. Nalinikanata Sarker desperately climbed the wall of the prison house after getting up on the neck of Pabitra Gangopadhyay. Claspings both palms in the form of pleading, Nalini requested Nazrul to have some food; the poet gestured that he would not.

The condition of Nazrul and the other prisoners in Hooghli jail can be known from the *Anandabazar Patrika* published during that time. The *Desh* magazine printed an essay on 29 May 1928 entitled 'Political-Prisoner Poet' with regard to Nazrul's sufferings in the jail. Sheikh Darbar Alam has given several quotations from *Ananadabazaar Patrika*. On 28 April 1923, the newspaper carried a story:

The condition of 21 prisoners has become miserable. Among them three are in a critical state. Kazi Nazrul, Maulvi Sirajuddin, and Gopal Babu have not eaten any food for 14, 12 and 13 days respectively. Kazi Nazrul has high fever every night and is in great pain because of blood-related complications in his head. He faints when his fever shoots up.

On 15 May 1923, *Anandabazar Patrika* expressed concern about Nazrul's health because of his fasting and wrote in its editorial:

For nearly one month Kazi Nazrul Islam, Maulvi Sirajuddin and Babu Gopalchandra Sen have been almost in a full fasting condition. Gopal Babu was fed through his nose but Kazi Nazrul Islam has not had any food at all. He was not force-fed until 5 May. He started getting a fever from 24 April. In this condition he has lost weight by nearly 13 seers because of starvation. His health is so bad at the moment that any time any shocking news may be heard.

The same newspaper was apprehensive of Nazrul's health in an editorial on 23 May:

For forty days he has committed himself to fasting. On the fifth day, food was forced through his nose; as a result he started to bleed from his nose. Since then Kazi Nazrul has been in total fasting. In the meantime he was being forcibly fed with a little amount of milk. We could get the worst possible news at any time.

In this situation a letter was sent to Tagore who was in Shillong requesting him to write Nazrul to give up his fasting. In his reply Tagore wrote, "To ask an idealist to abandon his idealism would be akin to killing him. If Kazi dies in his fasting the ideal of truth will still remain glorious in his being." In spite of writing this, Tagore anxiously dispatched a telegram to Nazrul. In this regard, Tagore wrote in a letter to his son Rathindranath:

I sent a letter to Nazrul Islam in the Presidency jail address, and wrote.

"Give up hunger strike, our literature claims you," and the jail authority returned a 'memo' stating 'the addressee not found' meaning they did not

want to deliver my message to him, because if Nazrul were not in Presidency jail they would have surely known his whereabouts. Therefore, they don't want to stop Nazrul from committing suicide.

(Republished in Nazrul Birthday Celebration Committee, *Nazrul Parikrama*.)

Sharatchandra also became very worried about Nazrul's hunger strike, he went from Shibpur to the Hooghli jail on 17 May 1923 to meet Nazrul and request him to give up his fasting. However, Sharatchandra was not able to meet the poet. Nazrul's mother came from Churulia to see her son but was also not successful. Finally after long forty days Nazrul ended his hunger strike by drinking lemon juice from the hand of Birajshundari Debi.

The debate on modernism in Bangla Literature and a murder case

In 1933, a new chapter of Nazrul Criticism was opened in *Shonibarar Chithi*.⁴ At this time, along with Nazrul, modern litterateurs of *Kallol* and *Kalikolom* became targets of *Shonibarar Chithi*. A large number of Nazrul's writings were satirized and published as parodies between the monsoon of 1333 Bangla year and Autumn of 1334 Bangla year. *Shonibarar Chithi* started publication in its new phase as a monthly from the monsoon of 1334, and once again Nazrul was its object of ridicule. In its Bhadra (Bangla month in the monsoon) issue Nazrul was dubbed as "The modern blessed of Bengal, cunning friend of the new age of Bangla literature," and a parody of his poem "Anamika" was published as "Thumb" written in the name of Gazi Abbas Bitkel (Terrible) actually meaning Nazrul.

Late Sajanikanta Das labelled Nazrul's poems, "Anamika," (The Unknown) "Madhabi Prolap," "Gopon Priya" (The Secret Lover), as being vulgar, and even went to Tagore with this complaint. The parody is his contribution. In the first issue of monthly *Shonibarar Chithi*, Modhukor Kanjilal wrote a poem 'Tomader Proti' (To You), which was a satire of Nazrul's famous poem 'Bidrohi' ('The Rebel'). The intention of *Shonibarar Chithi* was to character-assassinate Nazrul following his marriage with Promila. This attack on Nazrul was not limited to only poetry. Between monsoon and winter of 1334 Bangla year, five issues of the weekly *Gonobani* were satirized, and a five-act play, *Kochi o Kacha* was published. The male characters of the play were Editor, Karl Marx, Shelley, Lenin, Trotsky, Whitman, Proletariat Byron. The female characters were 'Boudi' (Sister-in-Law), 'Potli', 'Khedi', 'Torn piece of cloth', 'Broken bangle', 'Uprooted hair', etc. The real identity of the characters were Karl

⁴ *Shanibarar Chithi* (The Saturday Letter) was a famous literary weekly, parodying many of the popular poems of the time. *Kallol* and *Kalikolom* were avant-garde literary journals.

Marx=Muzaffar Ahmed, Trotsky=Shoumen Thakur, Proletariat Byron=Nazrul Islam. The setting of the play was Kolkata in the 20th Century AD.

Shojonikanta Das, editor of *Shonibarar Chithi*, continued his attack on modern literature by raising his brows against the mouth pieces of new literature: *Progoti*, *Kallol*, *Kali Kolom*, *Uttora*, *Dhoopchaya*, and *Atmashokti*. Shojonikanta was not satisfied even after ridiculing these publications. He sent out a letter to Tagore on 23 Falgun 1333 with the intention of getting an opinion of Tagore on the new literature and its writers. Shojonikanta wrote:

You must have noticed that of late a certain kind of writing is in circulation in Bangladesh. Mainly, these are carried by *Kollol* and *Kali-Kolom*. These writings are on sexual theory, social theory and related subjects... For example Buddhadeb Basu's poem published in *Kallol*, Nazrul's two poems "Madhabi-Porlap" and "Anamika" and a few other writings can be mentioned. We wrote a few satirical poems and plays to protest against these kinds of writing. However this voice of protest is so silent against the strong current that it requires a disapproval from a powerful circle. One who has been nourishing Bangla literature for the past fifty years has to come forward; therefore, I am bothering you.

(*Shonibarar Chithi*, *Modern Bangla Literature*, Monsoon 1334)

Tagore immediately sent a reply to the letter on 25 Falgun but he skillfully avoided the issue raised by Shojonikanta. He attributed the severe pain in one his fingers which made writing difficult, for which he had to naturally control his language. However, what he wrote was published in the Bhadra 1934 issue of *Shonibarar Chithi*:

I can't see any modern literature. What appears rarely remains covered by the pen's modesty. Don't think that I call it beautiful. Why I don't is because of reasons related to literature. Moral grounds may not be a factor in this. Now I feel tired and dispersed. The crooked look from the house of sin is so piercing that I don't feel like spreading my words all over. If ever good time comes, I'm going to speak out my mind.

Although Tagore wanted to avoid the matter, the team belonging to *Shonibarar Chithi* did not leave him alone. They went on requesting Tagore, and what resulted from the interaction between him and those representing *Shonibarar Chithi* is referred to in the third edition of *The Life of Tagore* by Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay:

At this, a delegation from *Shonibarar Chithi* came to meet the poet. Outsiders thought the poet had joined them and they asked for an explanation by writing letters.

Tagore finally expressed his opinion about new or modern literature in his essay *Shahityadharm* ("The nature of Literature" published in the Monsoon (Shraban) issue of *Bichitra*. At one place he mentions:

At present the foreign influence in our literature has brought in a kind of immodesty that is being construed by some as an essential ingredient; they forget that what persists for ever can never raise a protest against the past. I have seen this modernism dressed in loin clothes and covered with dust in the 'Holi' festival on Chitpur Road. In the amnesia of intemperance there is a kind of joy. There is also some force in the tireless excitement of the voice; but if one has to describe this boorish behavior as a sign of strength, I agree in that case that this show of might has to be hailed. But this masculinity belongs to the street of Chitpur instead of timeless literature.

Nareshchandra Sen Gupta addressed the issues raised by Tagore in his essay, "Shaitya Dharma" in the 1334 Bhadra issue of *Bichitra*. Rejecting the claim of Tagore he writes:

The esteemed poet has mocked the new literature as 'Import from abroad'; I did not expect Tagore to ridicule this trend. If light enters my heart, it does not matter as to which window it has come in from if that light enlightens the jewels in my heart. Tagore's battle against this literature has been labeled by him as English. We can find in this literature plenty of writings that reflect the truth of our life and society, which if termed as an English import is actually a heartless mockery.

The young litterateurs who were influenced by European literature in the 1920s and wanted to reflect social realities wrote in *Kallol* and *Kali-Kolom* and their work became popular. *Shonibarar Chithi* might have not liked this new wave but Tagore, who was deeply influenced by English Romantic poetry unexpectedly resisted this foreign influence, especially because he passed most of his time in Europe between September 1924 and May 1926.

Shojonikanta and Mohitlal not only infuriated Tagore against modern literature; they went on to make Sharat Chandra take their side. In the Bhadra 1334 Bangla issue of *Shonibarar Chithi*, Shajani Kanta's letter to Sharat Chandra was published along with a foot note on his meeting with and comments of Sharat Chandra.

I went to meet Sharat Babu accompanied by the respected poet Sri Mohitlal Mojumder in his house on the bank of the Rupnarayan river. We discussed *Kallol*, *Kali-Kolom*, 'Sri Naresh Chandra' and 'Kazi Nazrul Islam. He said if uneducated and untalented boys vitiare literature, it could be tolerated; Nazrul's illiterate mind-set cannot keep him disciplined, but when scholars like Nareshchandra Sen create this vulgarity it becomes dangerous.

It can be understood from this excerpt that although the general target of their attack was the modern writers their particular man was Kazi Nazrul Islam. Shojoni Kanta and Mohitlal's jealousy could have been behind this acrimony.

However, by publishing Sharat Chandra's opinion what Shojoni Kanto writes in the conclusion evokes a sense of the comic:

...If the age of Tagore comes to a close without the poet being unread by 99% people of Bangladesh; if the era of Sharat Chandra finishes while his writings are still on the pages of the monthly magazines; if Naresh Chandra, Dinesh Ranjan and Nazrul Islam appear as avatars during the life time of Tagore then let this literature end here. We can stay assured that in the land of the banyan trees literature can never flourish.

Whatever Sharat Chandra might have written to Shojoni Kanta and Mohitlal about Nazrul and the modern writers, when it appeared in *Shonbarer Chithi*, Sharat was very embarrassed. Referring to this in the 1334 'Ashwin' Bangla year issue of *Bangabani*, he wrote an essay, titled 'Rules and Needs in Literature' in which he states: "In the meantime my condition has become sad without any wrong doing. Sri Shojoni Kanta has made my opinion so very clear that I cannot run away in ignominy. I have been forced to stand on the path of the tiger." It is not known exactly as to what Sharat Chandra had told Shojoni Kanta and Mohitlal, but in his aforementioned writing he was surprised and hurt by the comments of Tagore and sided with the modernists:

The close ones have appealed to the poet asking him to take up arms because they had failed. Not an arrow, but turn a stick toward the ultra-modern literary village. There is no need to aim anyone in particular. There, many of them live together.

The poet's shaft has fallen from the dark sky; the purpose may not have been served although there enough sound and lots of dust have been raised. The poet stays in England thirteen of twelve months. What does he know about who is there in the machete wielding *Kalikolom* team comprising Shailaja, Premendra, and Nazrul.

It is clear from the extract that Sharat Chandra's support was for the modern writers. His comment on Tagore's living in England for 13 months is appropriate. Between 1333 and 1334 Bangla year, Tagore had been visiting England continuously. After writing 'The nature of Literature' that sparked off a debate he left for Malaya leaving behind the controversy that occupied the pages in the country's newspapers and magazines.

Although Tagore's personal relationship with Nazrul went on improving, the controversy between the new and the old in literature continued unabated until the end of 1334 Bangla year. A meeting of litterateurs, chaired by Tagore, was organized on 4 and 7 Chaitra, 1334 Bangla Year, at the 'Bichitro' villa in Jora Shankho with a view to bringing an end to the conflict. Among the leading personalities who attended included Apurbakumar Chanda, Prashantachandra Mohalnabish, Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, Nirodchandra Chowdhury,

Probhatchandra Ganagapadhay, Amol Home, Shojonikanata Das, Promoth Chowdhury, Abaninranath Tagore. The deliberations of the first day's meeting were reported in a distorted manner in *Banglar Kotha* (6 Chaitra 1334 Bangla Year) after which Tagore published the content of his speeches made on both days along with the questions and answers. The main speaker of this meeting was Tagore; he did not support the blatant scorn of modernism; however he wished that a proper literary approach be followed in literary criticism.

Tagore and Nazrul in Darjeeling

Poet Abdul Kader wrote on 'Rabindra-Nazrul Relations' in his book *Writings of Nazrul*:

One day in a discussion, Tagore compared Nazrul to the Italian poet Dinanjo. When Nazrul went to meet Tagore in 'Ashar' 1337, in Darjeeling along with Sri Manoranjan Chakraborty and Sri Promod Guha Tagore told him with a sense of affection, "Dinanjo lives on an island in Italy, he is crazier than you are."

According to this information of poet Abdul Kader, Nazrul went to see Tagore in Darjeeling in the month of 'Ashar' Bangla Year. However, Probhat Kumar Mukhapadhay mentions in his third volume of *The Life of Tagore* that the poet was touring European countries including Soviet Russia and America between March 1930 and January 1931. From Probhat Kumar's writing we learn that Tagore was in Darjeeling for about a month in the summer of 1931. The poet left Darjeeling in 'Ashar' 1338 Bangla Year (not, as some claim, in 1337). In the prelude to "Unseen in the Sketch of Writing," Abdul Mannan Syed informs, quoting the owner of D. M. Library, Gopaldas Majumder that Nazrul initially planned to visit Shillong with him but later went to Darjeeling with Manoranjan Babu, the proprietor of Kalika Type Foundry. Jahanara Begum Chowdhury who was well known for her beauty and fame also visited Darjeeling at the same time. Jahanaara, whose family was close to Nazrul, was the editor of *Ruprekha* and later she also edited *Borshobani*, both annual magazines. Abdul Mannan Syed quotes Jahanara Begum Chowdhury on this visit to Darjeeling:

Once the poet stayed with us in Darjeeling for two months. It was during 'Baishakh'-'Jaishta' of 1931. Tagore and his family were also in Darjeeling at the time along with Dinendranath, Protima Debi and Moitroi Debi. Professor Shurenranath Maitra also used to live close by. The poet (Nazrul) would often take us along to Gurudeb. Nazrul would discuss music, poetry, especially the rhymes of Arabic-Persian poetry and Ghazal, with Dinendranath. Professor Shuren Maitra's daughter, Noton Maitra, was well versed in western music. She could also play the piano very well. We would visit them regularly, and the poet (Nazrul) would let go of Noton only after she finished playing the piano.

Nazrul stayed in Darjeeling for only one month in 1931 and not for two months. But the hill station became a place of joy for Nazrul because of Jahanara Chowdhury and Noton, whom he knew from his days in Dhaka. His stay in Darjeeling became important for meeting Tagore. Abdul Mannan Syed says more about this in his foreword:

Prabhatkumar Mukhapadhyaya (1880-1992) has written: 'After staying in Darjeeling for nearly one month Tagore returned to Shantiniketan at the beginning of July.' In other words the poet was in Darjeeling throughout June. In the second half of June, Nazrul, in the company of others, came to Darjeeling to see Tagore.' Prabhat Kumar continues, 'This time Nazrul Islam, playwright Monmotho Roy and artist Akhil Niogi came on a tour of Darjeeling. Everyone was happy to find Nazrul; there were discussions on many subjects over a long time'. Prabhat Kumar informs 'Nazrul published an essay about this meeting in the 'Ashwin' issue of *Swadesh*. The editor of *Swadesh*, litterateur Probodhkumar Shannyal in a letter dated 27 October 1967 wrote to poet Abdul Kader, 'I clearly remember printing Nazrul's essay, "In the Company of Tagore." This essay published in *Swadesh* is not yet retrieved. In his letter, Probodh Shannyal refers to Akhil Niogi's essay 'In the Sky of Tagore' published in *Swadesh* (Bhadra, 1338 Bangla Year). Another piece of writing by Akhil Niogi, 'Remembering Tagore' was also published. In the *Shikhabroti* magazine (Baishakh-Jaishtha 1360 Bangla Year), we have found yet another essay. The pertinent extracts are:

A few of us, all writers, went to visit Darjeeling that year. Kazi Nazrul and dramatist Monmotho Roy were also with us. A publisher of Kolkata had asked Nazrul to write a poem on the life of Prophet Mohammad. The understanding was Nazrul would write the poem in the peace and quiet of Darjeeling.

The publisher was also with us in Darjeeling. He was unhappy with us because instead of writing the poem Nazrul was passing time with us in fun and frolic. If music, stories, and gossip took away all the time, then when would Nazrul write his poem? He was very angry because the wastage of time had its toll on his money as well.

Suddenly we came to know that Tagore was on a vacation in Darjeeling. All of us requested Nazrul to be our guide in helping us meet Tagore like a pathfinder who is so important in a pilgrimage.

Nazrul burst out in laughter saying we did not need to care about a particular day or time in order to meet Tagore. He suggested that we start early in the morning next day to go and see the poet. We didn't expect Nazrul would agree so easily, and this made us feel elated.

Next day early in the morning we set forth to see Tagore and treated Nazrul as the leader of our team. Tagore was staying in a place which was a little higher from where we lived. Therefore, we had to climb upwards. After arriving, we sent a message to Tagore who hurriedly came out to see who we were. He was perhaps writing something, but when he heard of Nazrul, he appeared before us straightaway.

We followed Nazrul in touching the feet of Tagore who was 70 that year. We were awe-struck as we looked at the great poet. He had strong wrists and was light-skinned; we thought that a sage from ancient India was standing before us. The two poets had already struck a conversation by then. We were all silent listeners.

We never expected to find the two poets of Bengal together in Darjeeling. For this rare luck, we silently thanked God. Luckily we were born in the Tagore era and during Nazrul's lifetime for which we were immensely pleased. Tagore was in a jolly mood and he was extremely happy to find Nazrul close to him. Many topics were discussed: Tagore wanted to know what kinds of songs Nazrul was writing, which songs were popular and what new literature was being written in the country? In this humorous discussion, foreign literature was also a subject. In this context Nazrul mentioned the name of the Italian poet Danuzio. Tagore commented, 'I have read his writings, he is very rebellious!' Tagore requested Nazrul to visit Shantiniketan, and Nazrul politely assented.

Exchange of Letters between Tagore and Nazrul:

Nazrul had written a letter to Tagore in 1935, requesting him to send a piece for the first annual issue of the second year of the weekly *Nagorik* published in Kolkata. Tagore sent a reply to this letter on 15 Bhadra, 1342 Bangla Year (August 1935):

With good wishes,

I am happy to hear from you after a long time. You have asked for something which I cannot refuse. My difficulty is that, it's a long way for you to reach the age of 75; therefore you don't have any compassion for my frail health. A lesson might have been taught to you if you could have changed your age through a miracle. But the age of the Mahabharata is long over, and now human society has to move within the territory of science.

You are a young poet, and this ancient poet can only expect sympathy from you. Don't put to shame one who can give no more. Those who would travel in the pilgrimage of literature during this new age have to collect materials from themselves. You can see my condition with your own eyes.

I have heard that you were born somewhere around Burdwan. We live in the adjacent district. I will be happy if you can ever cross the frontier and come towards me.

The end.

15 Bhadra, 1342.

Love

Tagore

Nazrul was very touched after receiving the letter and wrote a poem, "Tirthopthik" (A Pilgrim) as a 'Reply to Tagore's Letter'. The poem was published in the first issue, second year (1342) in *Nagorik*. A few lines from the poem:

Oh poet, Oh omniscient sage, pardon me
 Mistakes of the size of a mountain I place on your feet
 Even though there is no excuse, my heart pleads to set on your foot
 You have pardoned me before I begged...
 You are the wonder of the world, the best creation of God
 Let all lyric and music cease in your praise
 You have made me proud by remembering me
 And I know not where to hide this joy
 The happiness stifles my speech...
 If I am ever born on this earth, I pray
 That may I come to be immersed in your poems and songs.

Nazrul's feelings for Tagore are genuinely evident in this poem. Their relationship has always been cordial. Nazrul's love for Tagore is exemplified by the release of a film based on Tagore's novel *Gora*, even after the Bishwabharati Music Board raised objection to the music direction of Tagore's songs in the film. Nazrul took the filmmaker, Nareshchandra Sengupta straight to Tagore in Shanti Niketan and got his consent which was instrumental for exhibiting the film in public.

Tagore's demise shocked Nazrul to such an extent that he spontaneously wrote poems and songs expressing his profound grief. In the poem "Robihara" (Without Robi), Nazrul wrote:

The afternoon sun sets at the lap of the path
 Clouds of 'Sraban' rush in groups
 In the forlorn sky
 The sun of the world, India's poet
 Russet Bengal's picture of the heart

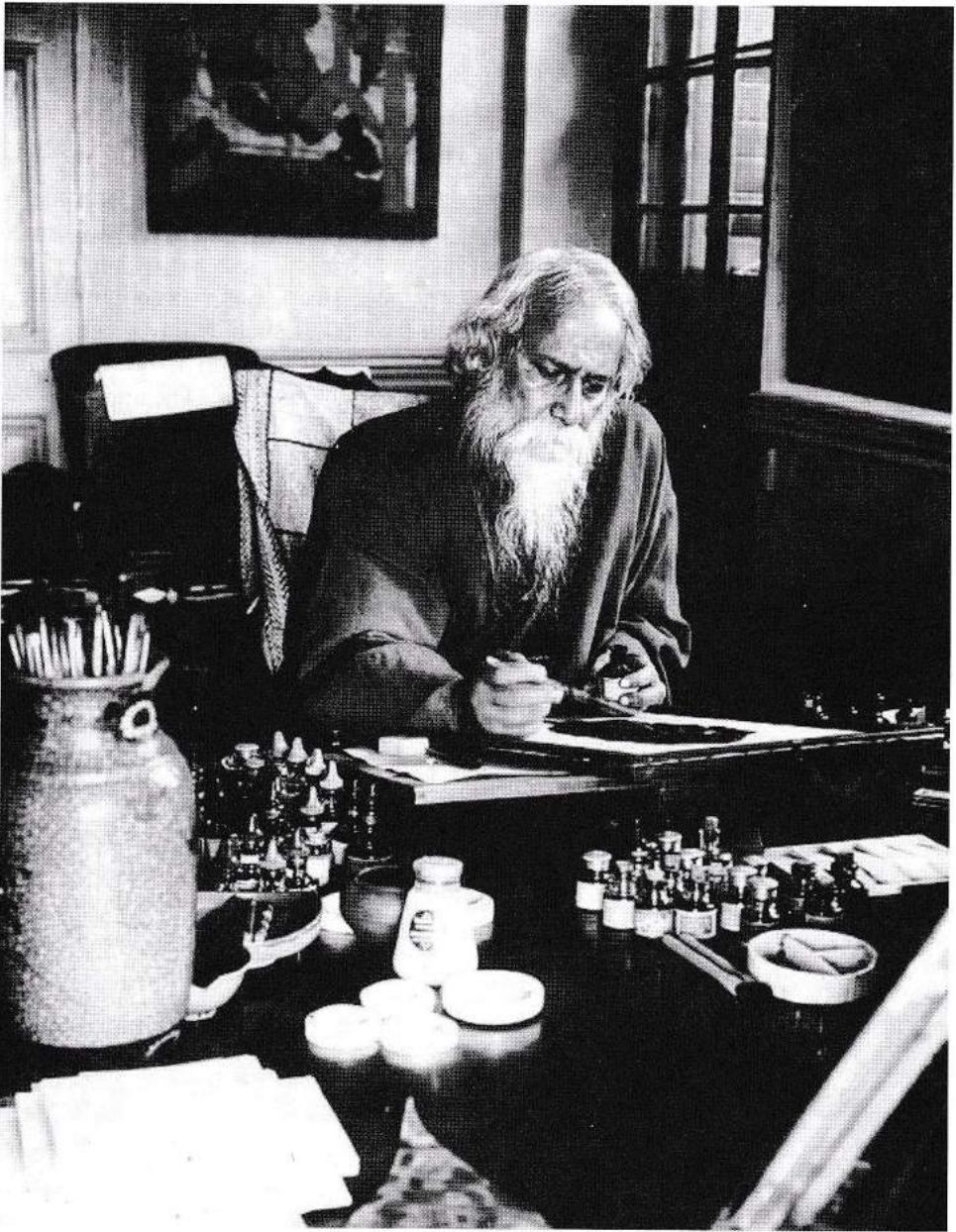
Because of your exit...

None other than Bengalis can feel what has been lost
Other than in Bengal there will be no shock and cry
We have known you as the blessing of God.

Nazrul recited the poem in Kolkata radio; it was also simultaneously recorded in the gramophone. Nazrul's rendition of the poem bears testimony as to how much he was mournful at the passing away of Tagore. Nazrul's instant writing of the song, after Tagore's demise, 'Let the weary poet sleep, don't raise him, don't raise him' is a sombre song. It was rendered by artistes such as Ila Ghosh, Sunil Ghosh, etc. The song was also broadcast on the radio. Nazrul wrote two more poems: "Salute Setting Sun" and "Rabindra without Death." He attended the memorial meeting and chaired it.

It may be mentioned that within a year of Tagore's death, Nazrul fell ill in July 1942 and gradually became silent. The two great poets of Bengal became voiceless nearly at the same time.

Translated from Bangla by Golam Sarwar Chowdhury, and the translation of the poems and songs is also his.



Rabindranath Tagore at his painting desk. 1932.