

Communalism and Relevance to Nazrul

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Keywords

ABSTRACT

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Kazi Nazrul Islam, renowned for his poetry and literary works, championed Hindu-Muslim unity and secularism in India. Born into poverty and influenced by revolutionary ideals, Nazrul's writings emphasized humanity over religious divisions. He critiqued both Hindu and Muslim extremism, promoting a universalistic approach to religion. His literature sought to bridge communal divides, advocating for the harmony of souls and the recognition of truth across faiths. Nazrul's legacy of secularism remains profoundly relevant today, offering guidance in a world still grappling with religious intolerance and division. His efforts in fostering unity and challenging religious dogma remain relevant today as communal conflicts persist, highlighting his enduring legacy as a flow of harmony and social justice.

1 Introduction

In his first poetry book "Agni Beena," Nazrul Islam stated, "He is not just for Muslim, nor he is just for Hindu - he belongs to all people, all religions." Nazrul, who was born into extreme poverty, lost his father at a young age and abandoned his education due to financial constraints, joining a group of minstrels known as "Leto". The songs of this group often reflected the struggles of life, as well as themes of Hindu-Muslim unity and patriotism.

His first poem, "Mukti", was published in the Muslim Bhar magazine in 1920. After arriving in Kolkata from Karachi in 1920, Nazrul began living with Mujaffar Ahmed at the office of the Bengal Muslim Literary Society. Mujaffar Ahmed was not just a personal acquaintance of Nazrul, he was a friend of the Indian people and a prominent labor leader in the Indian communist movement. Through his revolutionary ideals, Mujaffar Ahmed was able to influence Nazrul by providing him with an

opportunity to interact with the impoverished working class. The influence of political ideals of Mujaffar Ahmed, expanded Nazrul's mental horizon, making his non-sectarian mentality even more apparent.

Whereas Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had laid the foundation of Hindu nationalism, Nazrul transformed it into Indian nationalism. Attempting to revive the secular environment of pre-colonial India and promote coexistence under Muslim rule, Nazrul sought a renaissance. Nazrul did not understand communalism. While he admired the Hindu nationalist Tilak's celebration of festivals like 'Ganapati' and 'Shivaji,' he also expressed profound respect in his editorial writings for Tilak's death. To Nazrul, the most significant aspect was that Tilak was a warrior for independence. Nazrul stated, "Our motherland's bravest arm, the adorable child – Tilak is no more".

Throughout his life, Nazrul had to fight against the extremism among Muslim community forces on one side and on the other Hindu communalism, as well. Even after being severely hurt by these assaults, he continued to be the unwavering rebel against intolerance in all its manifestations. Essentially, Nazrul's life trajectory was further oriented towards combating against communalism.

Kazi Nazrul Islam performed extraordinary feats in his literary career, among which the most notable was his efforts to foster Hindu-Muslim unity. In a letter to President Ibrahim Khan, Nazrul explicitly stated, "Believe me, I did not come to be a leader; I came to shake hands with Hindu-Muslim unity."

Throughout his contemporary era, Nazrul was different in that he had a non-communal mentality in both his writings and activities. He was not in favor of any religion's exclusivity. Despite being a follower of Islam himself, he strongly opposed the narrowness of Islamic fundamentalism. He sought to harmonize between religion and logic, freeing religion from the shackles of communalism and presenting it in a universalistic perspective. He attempted to bring together people of all faiths under the broad umbrella of syncretism. He knew: "Unless the skepticism between Hindus and Muslims is removed, this country will not heal, and I believe it too. And I also know that this mistrust can be eradicated only through literature." (Letter to President Ibrahim Khan).

During that time, when the Indian subcontinent was overwhelmed in communal discord, Nazrul strongly emphasized a secularistic mindset in Bengali people through his literature. He never accepted any religious or geographical boundaries as his own. He wrote:

"I did not belong to this country just because I was born in this country and this society. I belong to all people of all countries. My worship and my religion are towards the attention of beauty. Whatever caste, whatever society, whatever religion, whatever country I'm born into, that's my destiny. I've just tried

to shake hands with both Hindus and Muslims, not trying to transform one into the other."

As he said, "When someone calls my words, someone says, those are infidel. I say neither of the two. I have just tried to shake hands between Hindus and Muslims together, tried to turn curses into blessings. If the handshake becomes more awkward than hand-to-hand combat, then they will be separated from you. If the bond of my friendship is cut, they will gain nothing. Because one holds a stick in hand, and the other holds a knife in the sleeve."

The writings of Nazrul fell silent in 1942. Therefore, his criticisms of Hindu-Muslim discord and hostility in his writings were all based on events before 1942, when the relationship between the two communities was not as bitter as it later be seen in Kolkata, Punjab, Khulna, and Noakhali. However, despite the intensity of hostility being relatively less, Nazrul saw the two warring communities through the lens of his conscience which made his moral sense bleeding.

He vividly portrayed how the division between Hindus and Muslims had made barriers within the framework of religion. He repeatedly emphasized what the true goal of religion should be. It's essential to remember that Nazrul did not receive any formal education in his school or college; he did not have access to such opportunities. The experiences of his life served as his university, and through his own understanding, he expressed the beliefs within him through his writings.

Nazrul wrote:

"Humanity is the greatest religion of all. My one of the aim was removing the barriers or gaps in the unity of Hindu-Muslim relations. In the interaction between humans, there should be harmony of souls, habits, and the recognition of truth by one's own religion. One who believes in the truth of his own religion, who has recognized the truth in his own religion, can never despise another religion."

In Nazrul's era, women were largely neglected and almost voiceless in the strongly patriarchal society.

They were merely objects of male pleasure. To awaken such oppressed women, he gave birth to a progressive female character named "Shahisika" in his novel "Badhan Hara". Sahasika, the brave protagonist, echoes Nazrul's personal beliefs on religion. He expressed his own feelings about religion through her character.

In a letter, her protagonist actress is writing to her friend: "I have something more to say about religion. I have already said before that the foundation of all religions is the eternal truth, the truth that existed at creation, still exists, and will last forever. When I accept this truth, I can choose any religion I desire. I am Hindu, I am Muslim, I am Christian, I am Buddhist, I am Brahmo. I don't confine myself to any one religion. That is where the fundamentalists are wrong. They hold onto their religion not by holding onto the truth of religion but by holding onto all the meaningless rituals and regulations. They are so blind and attached to their religion that even if someone tries to loosen their grip a little, they become furious and resort to violence. But they don't realize how small, low, and based their religion becomes, compared to the faith or belief in it. Can religion, like a glass, break into such small pieces?! Religion is tolerable like itself, but seeing the hypocritical believers, one cannot but think so... For all these reasons, brother, I am more devoted, more partial to atheists than to such hypocritical believers.

The way Nazrul envisioned the women's awakening through his revolutionary thoughts and ideas, went a step further in his play "Putuler Biye". Here, he used the character of a child named Komali to build a sense of love in childhood and made her utter these words to her friends:

"Father says, Hindus and Muslims are equal. If you hate someone from another religion, God is displeased. Their Allah is ours too."

The communal hatred and conflicts that have arisen in pursuit of our nation's goals are vividly understood by Nazrul who inherited the idea of secularism. If others could

understand it as he did, perhaps we could have broken free from the shackles of subjugation long ago. The reason we didn't find freedom, in the fact that, even though the citizens didn't understand, the clever English rulers did, much like Nazrul. They fueled the fire of Hindu-Muslim discord to keep the flames of division burning. Nazrul expressed in his unique voice:

"India, which is still subjugated, and whose journey towards freedom has not yet begun - it's not just about events happening and falling apart, but the only reason is the violence and distrust between our Hindu and Muslim brothers. We Muslims envy our Hindu brothers by seeing their progress, and Hindus distrust us seeing our decline. English rule has caused the greatest damage in this regard, by dazzling us with the allure of education and civilization in such a way that neither of our two communities keep concern of civilized progress."

Nazrul envisioned the land of India would become the ground for the grand union of the great souls of the subcontinent through natural integration between people. It is not worth repeating that his dream remains elusive even today. As long as Hindus and Muslims in India cannot work together as one mind, one soul, the full potential for development in this country remains unrealized. The deterioration of mutual relations between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, aided by the divisive politics of priests and clerics, has placed the future of both Hindus and Muslims on the brink of destruction.

The outbreak of communal riots has been prevalent since the late 19th to early 20th century. From April 2, 1926, violent clashes erupted between Hindus and Muslims in Kolkata. Rabindranath was deeply tensed by the severity of these riots. The rioters were so out of control that they even attacked the Jorashanko Thakur Bari. In response, Soumyendranath Tagore provided shelter to several Muslim families in the Thakur Bari. Kazi Nazrul was extremely distressed by this situation. In this context, an initiative was taken to hold a political conference in Krishnanagar. The organizers were the Congress

and the Farmers-Labor Party. Students and youth were also involved in the conference. The objective was to organize the student-youth society against the divisive situation of communal hatred. Nazrul was one of the organizers of this conference and the leader of the voluntary service brigade.

Inaugurating the conference, Nazrul sang "Kandari Hushiar" as a song. In this song, he declared against the Hindu-Muslim discord in favor of the national movement:

"The helpless nation is drowning, unaware, oh
Leader!

Today, I'll witness your mother's emancipation, for
sure!

'Are they Hindu or Muslim?' No one asks that
question!

Leader! Tell me, are the sons of my mother
drowning?"

The poet was acutely aware that within the conflicts between these two communities lies the benefit for self-serving rulers. Therefore, maintaining unity between Hindus and Muslims was imperative. The leader of the national liberation struggle must not nurture any animosity. It must be understood that all inhabitants are children of the motherland, and in the struggle for independence, everyone deserves equal dignity.

Even during the turbulent days of the freedom fighting, Nazrul's vast poetic talent broke through the walls of communal history and tradition, challenging both Hindu and Muslim antagonistic simultaneously. In the political, religious, economic, and social context of his emergence, creating secularistic literature was an unprecedented endeavor. In the days of religious renaissance, both communal literary figures only focused on presenting their own religious traditions, describing religious grandeur, and expanding their own dominance. However, within that environment, Nazrul emerged with independent characteristics and remarkable skill in songs of non-communalism and harmony, which became a weapon against colonialism. From the

perspective of the era, his role was undoubtedly remarkable, daring, and unprecedented. In Bengali poetry, Hindus couldn't assimilate with Muslims, and Muslims couldn't embrace Hindu traditions. In Nazrul's immortal fame in Bengali literature lies the conscious effort to harmonize these two opposing cultures and traditions. His literature is devoted to countless instances of secularism and non-bias towards religion consciousness and thoughts. One such view is associated with a death announcement. Alongside the presentation of the news of journalist Motilal Ghosh's death, he said, "Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi raje'un," Abdul Aziz Al-Aman cited that news in his book "Dhumketu Nazrul" - omitting the prayer. The news was published in the 8th issue of the 1st year of "Dhumketu" on September 12, 1922 AD. The headline was "Matyer Motilal Shorge."

He had deep-rooted skepticism towards the corruption of religion, superstitions, heartless rituals, and tyrannical rule. He aimed to present the eternal and benevolent ideals of all religions. In doing so, he did not clash with any other religious beliefs while presenting his own religious views. In the reconstruction of the present, Nazrul recalled the Muslim history and heritage. However, this doesn't imply that he forgot about other communities. He carefully considered the possibility of mutual coexistence. Therefore, while he depicted the eternal ideals of Islam in his poetry, he never attacked other religious ideals with sectarian thoughts. Rather, he trusted in the benevolent ideals of other religions as well.

He called upon Muslims to awaken and also called the Hindus. Thus, his efforts throughout his life have been actively aimed at bringing about a transformation in the entire social life, not just in Hindu or Muslim societies. It is clear that Nazrul never discriminated against the universal human religion. However, this doesn't mean he placed blind faith in the external rituals of religion. Rather, he viewed religion as a staircase of principles and policies leading to the illuminated world of self-

purification: a means to inspire people towards uplifting life for the welfare of humanity and to create something new against injustice. In his view, religion was a means of acquiring knowledge about the inherent beauty and essence of religion, through which individuals could break free from the shackles of religion and attain a fulfilling life. Therefore, his interest lay in the compassion and understanding of religion, which could lead to the acquisition of knowledge, enabling individuals to find fulfillment in life beyond the bonds of communalism. Hence, the poet was opposed to discrimination and conflict in the name of protecting religion. He considered unnecessary bloodshed in the pursuit of increasing worldly power in the context of one's own community as unjust and unacceptable.

It's clear that he really didn't like this kind of behavior in religion and society which vividly showed by:

"Manu, the great sage, revered in the vast universe,
Does not comprehend that law, that boundless law,
With noose in hand, he's ready to decapitate,
He's a hero, he's rigid,
Preferencing scriptures over truth,
You fail to recognize what you should,
The essence lies beyond the scripture."

Or

"Truth lies more in humanity than in race,
Truth resonates more with the pulse of life,
In the abode of life, all are equal.

2 Conclusion:

Establishing a firm stance against communalism is crucial in society, state, and individuals. The discriminations and behaviors based on communal lines hinder the development of a cohesive, progressive, and humane world. The poisonous spread of communalism continues to plague the global population. If the walls of this discrimination

thought cannot be broken down. In order to building a healthy, inclusive world will not be possible, leading to the destruction of the noble achievements of civilization. Communalism is evolving in various forms in many parts of the world. If not restrained, it will destroy the noble qualities of cooperation, humanity, tolerance, resilience, and brotherhood inherent among people. Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam tirelessly worked to propagate and establish non-communal consciousness and thoughts through his literature, discourse, speeches, and daily actions. In the complex world of today, where communalism takes various fearful forms, Nazrul's non-communal ideology and practice can show us the path of light. That's why Nazrul is so relevant in the present time.

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