



## HUMANISM IN THE POETRY OF KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM: A STUDY

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### Abstract:

This paper explores the presence of humanism in the poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), the national poet of Bangladesh, whose creative voice was inseparably linked to the struggles of the poor, and the oppressed one. His writings are marked by a fierce protest against exploitation and injustice, yet they also reveal a profound compassion for humanity and a belief in equality. Deeply influenced by Islamic tradition and enriched by the mystical spirit of Sufism, his poetry blends cultural heritage with a universal call for justice and dignity. As a versatile figure of the twentieth century, he contributed not only as a poet but also as a novelist, musician, philosopher, journalist, editor, and political activist, leaving a long lasting imprint on Bengali literature. His defiant spirit earned him the title of *Bidrohi Kobi* (Rebel Poet), as he consistently challenged discrimination and disparity while affirming the worth of every human being. His most celebrated work, *Bidrohi* (The Rebel), along with other significant poetic collections, embodies his resistance to oppression and his unwavering commitment to equality. Through these writings, he articulated a vision of humanism that transcended barriers of class, creed, and culture, making his poetry a timeless testament to justice, compassion, and the affirmation of human dignity.

**Keywords:** Humanism, Bengali Culture, Indian Society, Social justice, Colonialism, etc.

### Introduction:

Humanism, as a literary and philosophical perspective, emphasizes the inherent dignity, equality, and moral worth of every individual. In the South Asian literary tradition, few voices resonate with this vision as powerfully as Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), the national poet of Bangladesh. Writing during the turbulent years of colonial domination and widespread social inequality, he became a poet of protest and compassion, a voice for those who were silenced by oppression. His poetry consistently championed the cause of the marginalized, while affirming universal values such as justice, fraternity, and human dignity. His humanism was not confined to abstract ideals; it was deeply rooted in the lived experiences of ordinary people. His verses spoke against exploitation, tyranny, and discrimination, carrying the urgency of resistance while simultaneously expressing empathy and solidarity. Drawing inspiration from Islamic tradition and enriched by the mystical ethos of Sufism, his works transcended sectarian boundaries. He envisioned a society where Hindu, Muslim, and people of all faiths could coexist in harmony, reflecting his conviction that humanity itself was the highest identity. This inclusive outlook made his poetry a unifying force in a time of division and struggle.

As a multi-faced figure of the twentieth century, Kazi Nazrul Islam was not only a poet but also a novelist, musician, philosopher, journalist, editor, and political activist. His creative contributions extended beyond literature into the realm of social reform and political resistance. He used his art as a weapon against colonial authority and social injustice, inspiring collective action and awakening a spirit of defiance. His rebellious nature earned him the title of *Bidrohi Kobi* (Rebel Poet), as he consistently confronted discrimination and disparity while affirming the worth of every human being.

*Bidrohi* (The Rebel), the most celebrated poem of Kazi Nazrul Islam was published in 1922. It stands as a manifestation of resistance and equality. In this work, he embodies the spirit of defiance against oppression, portraying himself as a universal rebel who rises against tyranny in all its forms. The poem's imagery, drawn from mythology, history, and religion, reflects his vision of humanism that transcends barriers of class, creed, and culture. Along with *Bidrohi*, other significant works of



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Kazi Nazrul Islam are *Agni-Bina* and *Bisher Banshi* further illustrates his commitment to justice and compassion for the downtrodden.

Through his poetical works, Kazi Nazrul Islam articulated a vision of humanism that was both revolutionary and timeless. His poetry sought to dismantle structures of inequality and affirm the dignity of human beings, making his literary legacy a vital testament to justice, compassion, and the affirmation of humanity. In studying his humanism, one encounters not only the voice of a rebel poet but also an enduring message of a thinker who believed in the transformative power of literature to inspire social change and uphold the values of equality and human dignity.

### Brief life sketch of Kazi Nazrul Islam:

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the *Bidrohi Kobi* (Rebel Poet), is honored as the national poet of Bangladesh and remains one of the most dynamic figures in Bengali literature and culture. His life was a remarkable blend of creativity, activism, and resilience. His works continue to inspire movements for justice and equality.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was born on 24 May, 1899 in Churulia, a small village near Asansol in present-day West Bengal, India. His father, Kazi Fakir Ahmed, was an imam and caretaker of a local mosque and shrine. After his father's death in 1908, he had to shoulder family responsibilities at a young age. He worked as a *muazzin* (one who calls for prayer) and joined folk theatre groups known as *Leto dal*, where he developed his skills in poetry, music, and performance. These early experiences shaped his artistic sensibilities and gave him a deep connection to the rhythms of rural life. In 1917, he joined the British Indian Army and served in the 49<sup>th</sup> Bengal Regiment in Karachi. Though he did not see combat, his time in the army exposed him to discipline, diverse cultures, and the realities of colonial rule. After leaving the army in 1920, he moved to Calcutta, where his literary career began to flourish. *Agni-Bina* (The Fiery Lute), his first poetry collection, published in 1922, established him a major literary voice in Bengali dominated region of India. In the same year, his iconic poem *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) published in the magazine *Bijli*. With its bold imagery drawn from mythology, history, and religion, the poem captured the spirit of defiance against oppression and earned him the enduring title of *Bidrohi Kobi*. His writings consistently championed the cause of the poor and marginalized, blending fiery protest with compassion and humanism.

Beyond poetry, Kazi Nazrul Islam was a versatile genius. He wrote novels, short stories, and essays, and composed over 3,000 songs, known as *Nazrul Geeti*. His music combined classical ragas, folk traditions, and revolutionary themes, making him a pioneer in Bengali musical culture. He also worked as a journalist and editor, using his pen to critique colonial authority and social injustice. Some of his works including *Bisher Banshi* (The Poison Flute) were banned by the British government. In 1923, he was imprisoned for sedition. During his imprisonment, he undertook a 40-day hunger strike, which drew national attention and admiration, including support from Rabindranath Tagore.

Later years of Kazi Nazrul Islam were panicked by illness. During 1940s, he was suffering from neurological disorder and later on it identified as Pick's disease, which left him unable to speak or write. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, he was invited to Dhaka in 1972 and honored as the national poet of Bangladesh. He received several awards, including India's *Padma Bhushan* (1960) and Bangladesh's *Ekushey Padak* (1976). He passed away on 29 August, 1976 in Dhaka at the age of 77. He was buried beside the Dhaka University Mosque, a fitting tribute to a poet who dedicated his life to justice, equality, and human dignity.

### Themes of Humanism and Rebellion:

Literary work of Kazi Nazrul Islam was dominated by themes of love, humanism, secularism, cosmopolitanism, liberation, and rebellion. He wrote against religious orthodoxy, superstition, and class discrimination. His poetry embodied spiritualism and Islamic equality, while also embracing Hindu devotional traditions. He pioneered new genres in Bengali literature, such



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as Islamic ghazals, and composed thousands of songs—known as *Nazrul Geeti*—which blended classical ragas, folk traditions, and revolutionary themes.

His humanism was inclusive and non-communal. He believed that humanity transcended religion, caste, and creed, and his poems proclaimed the rights of the poor and oppressed in a bold, uncompromising voice. His writings embodied spiritual equality and secular ideals, inspiring generations in their struggles for freedom. He envisioned literature not as a privilege of the elite but as a force for social revolution.

Writings of Kazi Nazrul Islam consistently championed the cause of the poor and marginalized. His poetry became a weapon of protest, a voice for the voiceless, and a beacon of truth. He also founded and edited the fiery newspaper *Dhumketu* in 1922, which became a platform for revolutionary ideas.

### Political Activism and Nationalism:

Activism of Kazi Nazrul Islam extended beyond literature. He joined the Non-Cooperation Movement and supported the Khilafat Movement, using his pen to inspire nationalist struggles across India. Influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and leaders like Mustafa Kamal Pasha, he blended revolutionary ideals with Bengali culture. His poetry denounced conservatism, bigotry, and colonialism, while advocating liberty, fraternity, and equality. He believed that independence could not be achieved without armed struggle, and his writings often reflected this conviction. His journalism and poetry during the nationalist movement demanded independence long before mainstream political parties did. Prof. Rafiqul Islam notes that Nazrul's *Dhumketu* newspaper demanded full independence of India even before the Congress formally adopted this goal.

### Musical Contributions:

Creativity of Kazi Nazrul Islam transformed Bengali music. He composed nearly 3,000 songs, many of which he set to music himself. His compositions spanned Islamic devotional songs, *Hindu Shyama Sangeet*, patriotic anthems, and romantic ballads. He skillfully blended Bengali with Arabic and Persian vocabulary, and fused classical ragas with folk traditions. His non-communal outlook made him unique in Bengali literature and music, as he celebrated both Hindu and Muslim traditions without bias. The role of Kazi Nazrul Islam in integrating Bengali Muslims into modern literature and culture was a historic development. His works strengthened the relationship between Bengali literature and Bengali Muslims, helping them enter the literary mainstream. This played a crucial role in the development of Bengali nationalism and the Muslim renaissance.

### Humanism and Relevance Today:

Humanism of Kazi Nazrul Islam remains relevant in contemporary times. He believed that all humans are born equal and that it is their birthright to enjoy equality of socio-political rights, equity, and justice without discrimination. His poetry denounced despotic rulers and class exploitation, championing the cause of workers, farmers, and the marginalized. In poems like *The Song of the Laborer*, he directly addressed the plight of the working class, calling for unity and resistance against tyranny. His rebellion was not aimless; it targeted the evils of society orthodoxy, conservatism, bigotry, and superstition. He believed in liberty, fraternity, and equity, all of which were missing from the society he lived in. His poetry became a weapon of reform, mightier than the sword, and his *Bidrohi* remains a thunderbolt against oppression even today.

### Legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam:

The poem *Bidrohi*, written in December 1921 when Kazi Nazrul Islam was only 22, remains his most powerful expression of rebellion. Drawing on mythological and religious imagery, it thundered against colonialism and injustice. Even a century



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later, *Bidrohi* continues to inspire the oppressed, symbolizing resistance and hope. He endured imprisonment and persecution throughout his life, yet he never abandoned his pen or his ideals. His poetry, stronger than any weapon, remains a timeless call for justice, equality, and human dignity. His works denounced communalism, imperialism, and exploitation, while celebrating liberty, fraternity, and equity.

### Conclusion:

Life and works of Kazi Nazrul Islam embodied the spirit of rebellion, humanism, and inclusivity. He was a poet of the people, a voice for the voiceless, and a champion of justice. His poetry, songs, novels, and essays enriched Bengali literature and culture, while his activism inspired nationalist movements. His legacy continues to inspire generations, reminding us of the transformative power of literature to challenge oppression and uphold the values of humanity. His vision of equality, fraternity, and human dignity remains timeless. His works are not only a testament to his genius but also a call to action a reminder that literature can be a weapon against injustice and a beacon of hope for the oppressed.

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