

Mysticism:

A Means of Unity and Peaceful Co-existence within Islam

S. M. Mehboob ul Hasan*

Abstract

Muslims are quite often accused of being divided into many factions, such as the *Shia*, *Sunni*, and *Salfisects*, as well as the *Imamah/ Zaidiayah* and *Bravelvi/ Deobandiones*. They differ in practice and belief, and they have particularly disparate views concerning the legitimacy of mysticism, which is usually articulated as Sufism or *Irfan*. These apparent disagreements are often considered as real and block the possibility of any unity in the Islamic religious tradition. This perspective not only exists in the Western world but also in the Islamic world.

The very word 'Islam' comes from the Arabic root 'سلم', a word that means 'peace.' This expression provides a room to interpret Islam as a religious tradition that cultivates peace. One method of showing this is by discussing the form and substance that is found in Islam. The prescribed practices like *prayer*, *wudu*, etc., are the forms of Islam. These forms presume the substance which is mysticism/sufism/*irfan*. The substance is expressed through different forms. The forms are exoteric (the *zahir*) expressions that are conditioned by the substance, which is esoteric (the *batin*). The substance of Islam may be expressed in different forms but not vice versa.

This paper seeks to argue that mysticism/sufism/*irfan*, the substance of Islam, is a means to unify all exoteric forms of Islam. This is possible because the substance is shared and a prerequisite to any form of Islam. Mysticism provides an opportunity for Muslims to find among themselves a point of unity which will reduce the apparent differences that exist, or at the very least view these differences in such a way that they are interpreted as being esoterically coherent and unified, though exoterically plural.

* Lecturer in Department of Philosophy, University of Karachi.

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9. Dr. Muhammad Maruf, *Contribution to Iqbal's Thoughts*, (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1977).

The similarity between Iqbal's and Nazrul's concept of 'self' is more obvious as pointed out by eminent poet and scholar Syed Ali Ashraf. He continues "Iqbal's was trained philosopher and thinker. He had also made a comparative of the metaphysical aspects of different religions and was convinced of the finality and completion of the religious consciousness of man in Islam. He could, therefore, easily synthesis his concept of self with Islamic concept of man as 'Khalifatullah',⁽²³⁾ vicegerent of God on earth". This led him to write *Asrar-e-Khudi*, *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi* and *Jawed Nama* as climax.

Nazrul on the other hand had no basic philosophical training. His poem

'*Bidrohi*' though talks of 'rebellion' on the surface but the underneath theme is to raise self-confidence in mankind. Indeed, Nazrul was not the first exponent of the self- 'assertion philosophy' as Bergson put it as 'elan vital' long ago. It seems that Nazrul as a mass poet might have adopted 'elan vital' unconsciously as we notice that another Islamic poet Dr. Muhammad Allama Iqbal had borrowed the self-assertion concept through his meticulous study of philosophy. Both aimed at raising Muslims dignity in particular, as they had fallen in abysmal after the disintegration of the glorious Muslim empire.

23. Syed Ali Ashraf, (ed.), *Homage to Qazi Nazrul Islam*, (Karachi: Bengali Literary Society, University of Karachi, 1973), p. 85.

the prophet Muhammad(S.A.W.) and his companions in distress to overcome. In 'Shat-il-Arab' he says:

For ever glorious, for ever holy,
Your sacred beaches, Shat-el-Arab,
Are bathed in gore, the blood of fighters
Of many races, and diverse colours. ⁽²¹⁾
And in 'Kheya parer Tarani' he says:
Ahammad (Peace be upon him) is the Boatman.
And the Boat is replete with all requirements.
Abu Bakr, Usman, Umar, Ali Haider,
Are the crew of this Boat,
So, the passengers need not fear!
The Boatman and his companions
Are all expert hands,
And "Allah has no partner"
Is the burden of their songs! ⁽²²⁾

The above noted lines exhibit his religious understanding and its intrinsic values for the Muslims in the Sub-Continent.

Nazrul Islam discovered his identity in 1920, when he wrote his widely quoted poem 'Bidrohi' which explains his understanding of metaphysics,

permeating his works. His search for human glory and greatness of Islam emanate from his love and metaphysical thought.

21. *Nazrul Academy, Nazrul Birthday, (Karachi: Nazrul Academy, 1980), p. 7.*

22. *Ibid., p. 9.*

However, even from the Muslim point of view some of these poems may be regarded as being dated, periodical and permanent in their appeal. "His glorification of 'Kamal Pasha', his appeal to Muslims to rise and proceed towards new glory, new life and new freedom are expressed in words, phrases, and images that were highly significant to the Muslims of the early twenties and thirties".⁽¹⁶⁾

Muslims suffered bitter ignominy and tasted political and economic distress after the failure of the freedom movement of 1857⁽¹⁷⁾ and the fizzling out of the so called Wahabi Movement. The movement was directed to the subjugation of Muslims all over the world. Later the 'Khilafat Movement'⁽¹⁸⁾ aroused the Muslim nation in India. The Muslims were seeking some ideal to hold on to give them some direction and make them feel self-confident.

The Muslims' past provided the poet with the ideal of human glory and the revolutionary appeal of the prophet's message. His 'Fateha-i-Doazdaham'⁽¹⁹⁾ indicates a mixture of devotion and revolution. His poems on 'Khalid (Bin Walid)' and 'Tariq (Bin Zayed)' were poems permeated with revolutionary spirit. It was moral depravity among the subjugated Muslims he lamented. The exuberance of his own energy made him write such poems. His 'Korbani' "deals with the principle of self-sacrifice".⁽²⁰⁾ In his historical poem 'Shat-el-Arab' he recalls Muslims past and bemoan their deprivation while his another poem titled 'Kheya parer Tarani'(Ferry Boat) urges Muslims to seek 'blessing' (teachings) of

16. Syed Ali Ashraf, (ed.), *Homage to Qazi Nazrul Islam*, (Karachi: Bengali Literary Society, University of Karachi, 1973), p. 3.

17. Mohammad Nurul Huda, (ed.), *Poetry of Qazi Nazrul Islam*, (Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000), p. 168.

18. Syed Ali Ashraf, (ed.), *Homage to Qazi Nazrul Islam*, (Karachi: Bengali Literary Society, University of Karachi, 1973), p. 8.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

dominate in his poems. During 1920s, the 'Moslem Bharat', the then well known journal of the Muslims, published serially his 'Badhanhara' as well as his famous poems like "Korbani", "Muharram", "Shat-i- Arab" and translation of ghazals of Hafiz. His most famous poem on Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) "Fateha-i-Doaz-Daham speaks eloquently of his devotion to the prophet. As he says:

O Muslims, adorn yourselves with date leaves!
Listen! Good news rings out
With every salute,
'Hera' is proclaimed today in this universe!
Listen, recalling whose name does everyone
In Urz, Yemen, Najd, Hejaj,
Tahama, Iraq and sham,
Egypt, Oman and Tehran
recite in unison; "*Sallah Allahu-Alaihe-Salam!*"⁽¹⁴⁾

His most read religious poems deal with the last day of judgment for Instance 'Kheyaparar Tarani'etc".⁽¹⁵⁾ All these poems deal with disenchantment, and imbibed with hope for a "reawakening" among the Muslims of the then Bengal in particular and Muslims of India in general. They have universal appeal because he has been able to convey this hankering for new life through imagery. But these poems appeal to Muslims because of their referential contexts and traditional imagery.

14. Sajed Kamal, *Qazi Nazrul Islam Selected works*, (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2000), p. 34.

15. Mohammad Nurul Huda, (ed.), *Poetry of Qazi Nazrul Islam*, (Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000), p. 11.

Indeed a large number of books have so far been written on Nazrul Islam. But no scholarly and analytical study has to-date been made specifically about his contribution to Muslim Nationalism and the creation of Pakistan.

This research work is an objective study and analysis of Nazrul Islam's contribution in this regard. It will throw light on a very important aspect of Nazrul Islam's writings and help guide scholars in future to study the rebel poet in this perspective.

A critical analysis of his poetic sensibility amply points to three outstanding features: religious-mystical devotion, social awareness and love for mankind. Essentially he was a poet of human love and passion. He extended his sympathy to include his consciousness of the down trodden Muslim society in the subcontinent. With maturity attained through the passage of time, he became more and more 'mystical' and stretched his personal love into an arena which vividly appears to be 'metaphysical and abstracts'.

This process of synthesis gave birth to different types of poems in different periods of his literary career. These types vary in sensibility, theme and performance according to the poet's integration with his period's consciousness

and his ability to penetrate into the essential nature of human involvement in that consciousness and present it so objectively that its universal significance is brought out.

Though the first phase of his literary career started with love poems and 'Badhanhara' ⁽¹³⁾ a book of 'love stories full of English Poet Shallean enchantment and romantic adolescence'. It immediately turned into a phase in which Muslim began to

13. Azharuddin Khan, *Bangla Shahitey Nazrul*, (Calcutta: Supreme Publisher, 1997), p. 249.

Nazrul, a romantic poet, a par-excellence, closely identified himself with the national spirit and Muslim renaissance.

The nationalism expounded by Nazrul was egalitarian but British Raj put him in prison for more than a year in "November 23, 1922 to December 15, 1923" ⁽¹¹⁾ The British outraged by Nazrul's thoughts proscribed several of his books as well.

Nazrul at the outset moved from place to place to inspire youths and rouse the teeming millions with his poems. He is often described as proletariat poet for his love for the people and relentless and ardent struggle against the forces of exploitation and foreign domination, and for "destruction of the old and the rotten for the sake of creation anew. This is what he said and what he said Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal: "Why dread destruction? Destruction is the travail of creation anew". This is what he said, and what he strongly advocated.

So said Dr. Muhammad Allama Iqbal:

"This sky is old and the world is worn-out.

I want a world just newly-sprung." ⁽¹²⁾

When Nazrul Islam's writings were creating Muslim Nationalism in Bengal,

the writings of the great poet Dr. Muhammad Allama Iqbal was doing the same in the rest of the then India. This generation of Muslim Nationalism contributed to the creation of Pakistan. Thus, the role of Nazrul Islam in Bengal and that of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal in rest of India should be seen in the perspective of the roles of Rousseau and Voltaire in France.

11. Azharuddin Khan, *Bangla Sahitya Nazrul*, (Calcutta: Supreme Publisher, 1997), p. 104.

12. Mizanur Rehman, *Qazi Nazrul Islam*, (Dhaka: Tarun Pakistan, 1966), p. 9.

In his zeal for the upliftment of the Muslim in Bengal, Nazrul Islam wrote a large number of poems on Muslim glory and nationalism. He wrote Mustafa Kamal Pasha-the savior and builder of modern Turkey. In his opinion Pasha was an ideal for regaining Muslim prestige and political status. He wrote in the same vein a number of poems on theme, likes 'Moharram', 'Saat-il-arab', 'Korbani', 'Fateha Yaz Dahaham', etc.

For the first time Nazrul extensively introduced Arabic and Persian words in his writings apparently to associate Bengali Muslims with Islamic culture and

literary genres as well as stir up Muslim Nationalism. Muslims of Bengal began to

dream of independence and freedom. The impact was visible when Bengal was split into two East & West Bengal in 1905. The partitioned of Bengal was the first model of partition of India. Indeed the partition of Bengal did not last long as it was annulled in 1911 under huge agitations of Hindu land lords and business elites. However the partition of Bengal continued in the minds of Muslims of India and formed the base for two states-Bharat and Pakistan. Muslims, especially of Bengal and other downtrodden areas of India flocked to the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who successfully guided them to a separate homeland of Muslims. Muslims of Bengal under illustrations Leadership of Mr. A. K. Fazlul Haq, Mr. H. M. Suhrawardy, and others spearheaded the Pakistan movement in forties under the sterling and undeniable leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah leading in Independent Pakistan, comprising East and West Pakistan in August 1947.

10. *Muhammad Mahfuzullah (ed). Nazrul Institute Journal, (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Vol - 3, 1996), p. 51.*

forms of exploitations and superstitions. He expressed these sentiments in his poems, songs and other writings.

For instance Nazrul says:

Allah is my Lord: no fear for me. My Prophet is Muhammad (Peace be upon him), of whom the world is full in praise.

With the Quran as my trumpet of life, what can terrify me?

Islam is my Code of life, and Muslim my name to identify!

The Kalima is my Talisman of life, and the Tauheed my real Guide.

The Imam is my protecting shield, and the Helal my pole star of life!

“Allahu Akbar” is my War-cry in the Jihad of life; my goal is Firdaus with Allah’s Arsh—the Seat of Mercy Divine!

Arabia and Egypt, China and Ind, the Muslim world at large,

are peopled by my brethren in Faith: none too high, none too low: all on equal footing to grow: the same is body, heart and soul, be they princes, or the humblest poor, On the same Takbeer, all to rise.

Win we must the Battle of Kife. ⁽⁹⁾

Qazi Nazrul Islam was equally a great lyricist, composer and musician. His several thousand songs on varied themes manifest the poet’s creative power and sensibility and are held as treasures of Bangla Literature. His poems and ghazals inspired Muslims to attain renaissance and the likes free the distressed humanity.

Nazrul rose like a comet in the eastern sky and defied the red-eyed and iron-handed alien British ruler and raised his indomitable voice:

Say, O Hero. ‘My head is held ever high.....

My head is held so high that knows not to bow...⁽¹⁰⁾

9. *Muhammad Mahfuzullah (ed). Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam, (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2000), p. 529.*