

## Military life and initiation of the official literary career of Nazrul.

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**Abstract:** A new dimension was added to the history of Bengali Literary World when Kazi Nazrul Islam created prose, poems and songs against the colonial rule in India. It is the reason that Kazi Nazrul Islam was known as 'Rebel Poet'. From childhood Nazrul lived a life of misery. He spent the first few years of his life as a vagabond. From the end of 1917 to first half of 1920, Nazrul's military life spanned about two and a half years. During this time he rose from an ordinary soldier of 49 Bengal Regiment to battalion quartermaster Habildar. He learned Persian from the Punjabi Maulvi of the regiment, practiced music with music-loving colleges with local and foreign musical instrument, and at the same time practiced literature in prose and poems. From Karachi cantonment he was also a subscriber of various literary magazines of Calcutta like 'Prabasi', 'Bharatvarsha', 'Saugat' etc. Besides he had some books by Rabindranath, Sarat Chandra and even the Persian poet Hafiz. Nazrul's works, based in Karachi cantonment published in various magazines of Calcutta, include the first prose essay 'Baunduler Atmakahini' (Saugat, May 1919), the first published poem 'Mukti' (Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika, July, 1919) and others stories. This short period enriched him by shaping his thoughts and creativity. The experiences Nazrul gained while serving in army influenced him greatly. His latent talent was awakened in this time. Actually, Nazrul's official literary career began while he was in the cantonment of Karachi. This chapter attempts to focus on the military career of Nazrul Islam and at the same time various events of his army life. While writing this chapter secondary data were collected through different journals, books, website, newspaper and magazines. The readers will get an overall picture of Nazul's military life.

**Key Words:** Military career, 49 - Bengal Regiment, 'Baunduler Atmakahini', Official literary career.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Once the great poet William Wordsworth opined- "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity". These precious words match the life of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the National Poet of Bangladesh. The dignity and importance of the great poet are immense in the 20th century. Actually he was a man of versatile and exceptional talents in Modern Bengali Literature. He had a good hold on literature, poetry, song, journalism and politics. At the same time he had the mind of a heroic soldier which revealed through his writings. His writings brought a storm in Bengali Literature at that time. Being a revolutionary he pioneered poetic works espousing intense spiritual rebellion against fascism and oppression. For this reason he was given the title of 'Rebel Poet'. He is still respected for his great works in Bengali Literature but it is very unfortunate that in India (except in west Bengal) he is almost forgotten.

### 2. EARLY LIFE:

Kazi Nazrul Islam was born on May 24, 1899 in the village of Churulia in Asansol subdivision of Burdwan district of Bengal Presidency; presently known as West Bengal. He was the second of the three sons and daughter. His father, Kazi Fakir Ahammed was the imam of local mosque. The name of his mother was Zaheda Khatun.

At the age of nine Nazrul lost his father and after a year he passed lower primary exams from a village Moktab. To live out poverty Nazrul joined the work in the father's place (as a caretaker of the mosque). In the same year he joined his uncle's 'Leto', travelling theatrical group. There he began to come in contact with Bengali and Sanskrit Literature as well as Hindu scriptures. While staying in the group Nazrul composed many folk plays, songs, poem etc.

After one year Nazrul left the Leto team and was admitted to Searsole Raj High School in Raniganj. At that time he came in contact with the Head Master, great poet Kumud Ranjan Mallick. Here, too, he didn't last more than a year. In the year of 1912 he joined in a Kabigan group then in a bakery shop in Asansol.

It was 1915 when Nazrul was again admitted in Searsole Raj High School at class Eight. At that time he got Sailajananda Mukhopadhyaya as a lifelong friend. While reading in school Nazrul became acquainted with the Freedom Movement. He was influenced by his teacher Nibaran Chandra Ghatak, a revolutionary and Juganter activist.

### 3. BEGINING OF MILITARY LIFE:

In the year 1914, the First World War or Great War began. The war pitted the central powers-mainly Germany, Austria, Hungary and Turkey against the allies mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan and United States.

To recover Kut-Al-Amara of Mesopotamia from the hand of Turkeys, British force formed a regiment with Indian soldiers. For the reinforcement of this troop Bengal Regiment was formed.

After hearing the news Nazrul Islam and his bosom friend Sailajananda rushed to Calcutta to be recruited in the army. Towards the end of 1917, at the age of eighteen Nazrul joined the 49, Bengal Regiment (Middle East frontier, Mesopotamian campaign) and was posted to Karachi. But Sailajananda was refused due to short measures. It was told that behind the rejection there was a plot of his relative (Sailajananda Mukhapadhaya, 1968:17). The paltan went training for three months at Naosherwa and then stationed at Karachi cantonment. They were kept ready for despatch to Mesopotamia if situation demanded. 'In 1917, Nazrul was a student of class ten and he was about to take part in the Matriculation Examination, but he preferred to join the army to fight in the war instead. I don't know what would have happened if Nazrul had stayed at home and took part the examination. However, I am sure that his decision to join the army during the war greatly enriched the poet by shaping his thoughts and creativity,' said eminent Nazrul researcher professor Rafiqul Islam.

### 4. BACKGROUND FOR CHOOSING ARMY LIFE:

It is believed that there were several reasons behind Nazrul's joining the army. According to Priti Kumar Mitra, Nazrul wanted to learn the techniques of war and experiences with the aim of using it later for pursuing Indian Independence Movement. Nazrul was influenced by Nibaran Chandra Ghatak, teacher of Searsole Raj School. It is known from a different source that to wipe out the discredit from the Bengali's fate that "Bengali's are coward", Nazrul joined army. Due to less or no attraction to his family Nazrul did the job (Sailajananda Mukhapadhaya, 1968:141-142). But in the year of 1933, in a literary conference at Rouzan, Nazrul inferred that without considering anything he joined army only for the surge of youth. It is true that Nazrul got a chance to develop himself as a writer, poet staying at military camp for around two half year.

### 5. ARMY LIFE:

During his stay in the army Nazrul learnt Persian from the regiment's Punjabi Moulavi and at the same time he collected various literary journal like 'Probasi', 'Bharatvasi', 'Sougat', 'Bangiya Musulman Sahitya Patrika' etc published from Calcutta. Though these types of journal were banned in army barrack, Nazrul used to collect them very secretly. Nazrul read the books of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chattapadhyaya, Hafiz, Rumi and Omar Khaiyam, the Persian poet extensively. Actually these writings helped to awaken the latent talent of his mind. Under the influence of this Persian poet, Nazrul used Persian vocabulary in his works which made his works widen.

Nazrul practised music with other music lovers' soldiers with the accompaniment of local and foreign instrument at leisure period. Monoranjan Das, son of Raj Kumar Das, a co-fighter of Nazrul said that he saw Habilder Nazrul singing with harmonium and used to take tea and beetle at Karachi. His throat was competing with the sky.

### 6. MILITARY CAREER:

Although Nazrul never saw active fighting, he rose in the rank from Corporal to Havildar and served as Quartermaster for his battalion after showing capability of a courageous soldier. Nazrul's heart was full of youth. He filled everyone with happiness. That's why Nazrul was called 'Hoi Hoi Kazi'. After the end of First World War, 49, Bengal Regiment was abolished by the British in the year of 1920. Then Nazrul returned to Calcutta and began his career of a literature journalist (Muzaffar Ahammed, 1973:42).

Nazrul's military career was about 2 years 6 months. In this period he stayed at Naosherwa and Karachi. He had a wish to go Mesopotamia but he never got a chance. Nazrul had a hobby of writing since childhood. While staying at Karachi Nazrul send his writings to Calcutta's publisher. In the year of 1919 (month of may) his first prose 'Bounduler Atmakahini' was published in 'Sougat' and in the month of July his first poem 'Mukti' was published in 'Bangiya Musulman Sahitya Patrika'. Many more writings written at this time were published later. 'Nazrul's literary talent was ignited when he was in Karachi, where he wrote his first published poem Mukti in the Karachi Cantonment. After two years returning from Karachi, ie in the year of 1922 'Agniveena' the first collection of his poems was published- informed noted poet Habibullah Sirajee, who also added that Agniveena contains 12 poems most of which including 'Bidrohi', 'Kheya Parer Toroni', 'Prolayullash' convey messages of freedom, equality and gallantry.

### 7. CONCLUSION:

At last it can be said that the army life enriched the poet by shaping his thoughts and creativity. The experiences Nazrul gained while serving in the army influenced his literary career greatly. He gained knowledge of

foreign cultures and languages, which improved him. Actually, his thirst for knowledge was irresistible. According to Sirajee, Nazrul even wrote poems on contemporary leaders and their struggles against Western occupiers. He wrote the poem 'Kamal Pasha' on Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and others. Turkish revolution left an indelible mark on Nazrul's mind, evidence of which are the following writings- 'Kamal Pasha', 'Anwar', 'Ronoveri' etc. The recessive revolutionary nature of past now began to dominant and Nazrul turned his attention to the bringing down of the British Raj once he had completed his military service.

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