KYAU Journal, 8(1):45-54

Khwaja Yunus Ali University Journal

Publisher homepage: www.kyau.edu.bd

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN: 2791-3759 (Online), 2521-3121 (Print)

Journal homepage: www.journal.kyau.edu.bd

Research Article

Love or Rebellion: Incorporation of Foreign Myths in Kazi Nazrul's Poetry

Prodip Kumar Adhikari

Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia-7003, Bangladesh

Corresponding: E-mail: prodipadhikary781@gmail.com

Abstract

This article critically examines Kazi Nazrul Islam's innovative incorporation of foreign myths in his poetry, positioning him as a pivotal Bengali poet following Rabindranath Tagore. Centered on the powerful themes of love and rebellion, the study reveals how Nazrul skillfully weaves mythological elements from diverse cultural traditions to deepen and expand his poetic expression. Employing a qualitative approach, it analyzes five seminal poems— 'Bidrohi' (The Rebel), 'Barangana' (Prostitute), 'Nari' (Woman), 'Manush' (Man), and 'Daridra' (Poverty)—to uncover the thematic and symbolic significance of myth within his oeuvre. The findings demonstrate that for Nazrul, myths transcended mere literary ornamentation; they served as vital vehicles for articulating a universal humanist vision that defied communal and national divides during the colonial era. His mythic imagery enriched Bengali literary praxis and played a transformative role in shaping cultural consciousness and inspiring political resistance. Ultimately, this study underscores the enduring emancipatory power of Nazrul's poetic myth-making, affirming its profound impact on socio-political thoughts.

Keywords: Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bengali poetry, myth, foreign myths, love and rebellion, incorporation, emancipation.

1. Introduction

Kazi Nazrul Islam, widely known as the most significant Bengali poet after Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), seamlessly integrated foreign myths alongside indigenous myths or mythological elements in his poetry. In his poetry, he uses indigenous myths, which are heavily drawn from Hindu Traditions, featuring deities, demons, figures, and narrative motifs. Nevertheless, his incorporation of foreign myths or mythological elements includes Christian, Islamic, and classical Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythologies. Nazrul skillfully employed these mythological references—ideas, allusions, images, metaphors, and characters—to articulate the complex social, cultural, and political realities of twentieth-century British India. The incorporation of diverse mythologies in Nazrul's poetry significantly reshaped the literary landscape of Bengal, enriching it thematically, structurally, and rhetorically. His mythopoetic style reflects a cosmopolitan synthesis, creating a mosaic of global cultural expressions. Through this fusion, his poetry embodies a unique blend of romantic melancholy, fatalistic beauty, unrestrained lyricism, and vibrant energy—expressed especially through the dual themes of love and rebellion. Nazrul's distinctive voice emerged from his deep commitment to human equality, fraternity, and empathy. His poetic vision was motivated by an urgent pursuit of liberation, encompassing personal, emotional, collective, and political dimensions. As such, his use of

foreign myths transcended aesthetic function and became a vehicle for resistance and reform. Ultimately, Nazrul's myth-saturated poetry retains a vital inspiration for emancipation in his time and beyond social, political, cultural, and literary praxis.

2. Statement of the Problem

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), often hailed as the "Rebel Poet" and the national poet of Bangladesh, occupies a pivotal position in the emergence of modernism in Bangla poetry. A successor to Michael Madhusudan Dutt—the first poet to incorporate foreign myths into Bangla poetry—Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976) stands out for his rich and varied use of indigenous and foreign mythological elements. His integration of diverse myths has added layered, suggestive, and multidimensional meanings to Bangla poetry. Recognized as "a pioneer of post-Tagore modernity in Bangla poetry," Islam (2000) observes that Nazrul's versatile and distinctive poetic contributions "made possible the emergence of modernity in Bengali poetry during the 1920s and 1930s" (p. 109). Although Kazi Nazrul Islam came after poets such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Dwijendralal Ray (1863–1913), and Satyendranath Datta (1882–1922), he emerged as one of the most influential early modernist voices in Bangla literature. His arrival on the literary scene—marked by a powerful call for liberation from all forms of bondage—coincided with a critical moment in Indian history: the First Non-Cooperation Movement. This historical backdrop lent urgency and relevance to his work. Nazrul's poetry, characterized by fervent lyricism and a passionate tone of rebellion, earned him several distinct epithets, including "a fervid poet and an exciting verse-pamphleteer," "a rebel poet," "the voice of the moment," and "the Bulbul (Nightingale) of Bengali music" (Bose, 1943).

Kazi Nazrul Islam was born on a stormy night, 25 May 1899, in Churulia village of Burdwan district, West Bengal, under British India, to Kazi Fakir Ahmed and Jaheda Khatun. The family name Kazi, meaning "judge," was an honorary title granted by Mughal Emperor Shah Alam (Mukherjee, 2000), though it carried no economic privilege. Known by names like Dukhu, Tara Khyapa, and Nazar Ali, Nazrul led a life marked by hardship and struggle, which shaped his poetic voice. Forced by poverty to work from the age of ten, he took up various roles—as a teacher, mosque attendant, caretaker of a Sufi shrine, soldier in World War I, journalist, and editor of journals like *Nabjug*, *Langal*, and *Dhumketu*. These real-life experiences broadened his worldview and enriched his cosmopolitan outlook. During this time, he gained knowledge of Islamic rituals and Persian and Bengali literature, the latter under the guidance of his father and cousin-uncle Kazi Bazle Karim, a linguist and lyric poet (Mukherjee, 2000). Nazrul's poetry reflects the polyglot richness of his upbringing and manifests possible influence from nearby medieval poets Jaydeva and Chandidas. His poetic career spanned roughly 25 years, during which he left an indelible mark on Bangla literature. In his later years, he became deeply associated with Bangladesh, where he passed away in 1976, honoured as the National Poet.

Myths or mythological images, allegory, similes, allusions, metaphors, narratives, and references have added novelty and diverse meanings to his poetry. While employing myths, his approach emerges cosmopolitan. His poems, thus, accommodate a spontaneous and frequent use of the Indian, Persian, Arabian, Greek, and Roman myths. Nazrul's cosmopolitan temperament, reflected in his use of foreign myths, brought about a far-reaching influence by challenging the conventional use of Indian myths that had dominated Bangla poetry since the medieval period. Nazrul, of course, in this respect, followed Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who saw the strength and potential of foreign myths, especially those of the Greco-Roman origin. His deliberate use of foreign myths not only accelerated the modernist trend, which Michael Madhusudan Dutt initiated in Bangla poetry, but also strengthened the protest against the poor imitation of Rabindranath Tagore (Hossain, 2010).

The term myth in English derives from the Greek word *muthos* or *mythos*, meaning "word" or "handed-down story" (Brunel, 2016, p. xii). In its simplest form, myth refers to a story or narrative, though its meaning has varied across contexts since antiquity. Roland Barthes (2000) defines myth as "a type of speech" (p. 109)—a system of communication that can take the form of an object, idea, or concept. From a

structuralist perspective, myth functions as a mode of signification shaped by historical and cultural forces. Depending on the recipient and context, myth may refer to an ancient story, a widely held but false belief, or a symbolic narrative (Hornby, 2010). Etymologically and semiologically, myth is best understood as a form of expression that reveals meaning. From a structuralist point of view, Roland Barthes (2000) argues that myth "transforms history into nature" (p. 119), presenting itself not as a lie or confession, but as a transformative discourse. With its transformative quality, myth functions differently. Slochower (1970) acknowledges the capacity and function of myth in the following observation:

> "The myth is a power by which men live. And this power can be used for good or evil. Mythic symbols can represent an ideal or an ideology. The fateful import of the myth for our day stems from the fact that it is pivotal to the idea of One World. It can determine whether this world is to be one of unity and totality or one of uniformity and totalitarianism, whether the powers of man are to be freed or shackled" (p. 16).

This observation underscores the fundamental functions of myth: it achieves not only as a symbolic force shaping ideals and ideologies but also as a guiding structure that helps individuals locate their identity within the world.

Mythological allusions, symbols, metaphors, allegories, images, and narratives shape human experience artistically and critically through literature, which remains one of the richest repositories of myth. As a reflection of human life, literature adopts myth as a narrative structure intimately connected with two key areas of unconscious experience. On one hand, myth expresses innate human drives and emotions—such as repressed desires, fears, and internal conflicts—that often motivate mythic themes. On the other hand, myth reflects its origins in the fragments of individual consciousness rooted in the primordial or phylogenetic development of human communities (Feder, 1971). From this perspective, diverse communities may have their own mythologies and myths that reflect the culture, beliefs, and activism of their land and people. The impression, foreign myths, however, imply the myths of the other people, across the border, that include the myths, mythological figures, narratives, images, symbols, metaphors, ideas, etc., of the non-native communities. Again, by the impression, the incorporation of foreign myths suggests integrating foreign myths in the works of a creative artist, including a poet, a playwright, a novelist, etc. The word incorporation, however, implies including anything, so that it forms a part of something (Hornby, 2010). From this perspective, the use of mythological allusions, symbols, metaphors, allegories, images, or narratives from foreign cultures, and the reshaping of creative works, can be understood as 'the incorporation of foreign myth' in this context. In the poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the contrasting emotions of love and rebellion are central motifs that resonate on both individual and collective levels, transcending physical and geographical boundaries. Love, often imbued with a mystical quality, extends beyond the personal to embrace all of humanity. Rebellion, conversely, emerges as an inherent human response to injustice, inequality, and the absence of love—an act of defiance against authority and convention (Hornby, 2010).

Nazrul's indigenous myths are deeply rooted in Indian or Hindu traditions, yet his employment of foreign myths, deriving from cross-border cultures, remains substantial and bears a far-reaching impact. These mythological references, whether native or foreign, serve as a foundational framework in his poetry, lending it a collective human significance and a cosmopolitan dimension that challenges parochial boundaries and enriches Bangla literary modernism.

3. Literature Review

Kazi Nazrul Islam emerged as a poet for all people—those bound by the ideals of fraternity, equality, and freedom. A profoundly non-communal figure, he drew from indigenous myths, legends, history, and foreign traditions, skillfully reinterpreting and renewing them to serve his creative vision (Chowdhuri, 2000). Myth, legend, and history retained major sources for Nazrul's imagery, symbols, and metaphors. Figures from

Islamic history—such as the Prophet Muhammad, Kamal Pasha, Anwar Pasha, Tariq, Qasim, Ali, Omar, Hasan, and Hussain—were transformed into powerful symbolic representations in his poetry.

This very method of Nazrul much aligns with W. B. Yeats. Chowdhuri (2000) notes that Nazrul's method of incorporating mythology closely resembles that of W.B. Yeats, who likewise drew upon Irish myths, legends, and folklore as a means of cultural and political expression in support of Irish independence. Like Yeats, Nazrul's mythic approach is deeply individualistic, rhetorical, and occasionally temporal, reflecting his contemplative yet eclectic use of myth. However, unlike many modernist poets of the 20th century who approached myth with restraint, Nazrul employed mythological symbols, imagery, and allusions with passionate intensity, embodying a revolutionary zeal that reshaped Bangla poetry (Kamal, 1999).

Nazrul was not only a poet of rebellion and love but also a literary visionary whose body of work—including poems, plays, short stories, novels, songs, political essays, and social pamphlets—served a dual purpose: to inspire joy and awaken the collective unconscious against oppression, inequality, and authoritarianism (Islam, 2000). His inclusive vision fostered a sense of cultural unity that transcended all the constraints of caste, religion, and creed. Drawing inspiration from Persian literature, Sufism, mysticism, and the Hindu Puranas, Nazrul demonstrated remarkable creative fervor and intellectual depth (Haque, 2023, May 27). His innovative use of imagery, allusions, and metaphors from Islamic theology and history marked an unprecedented move for a Muslim poet of his time. As Chowdhury (1991) observes:

> "His works helped the growth of self-confidence and respect in the Bengali Muslim mind, effecting at the same time a link of continuity with the processes of history. However, it must be emphasized that Nazrul was free from all kinds of religious fanaticism. He was, above all things, a liberal humanist, a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and a sworn enemy of fundamentalist thinking" (p. 3).

Nazrul, therefore, emerges as a true advocate of cultural wholeness, embracing relationships between men and women across local and global boundaries, and among followers of various faiths—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism (Rahman, 2022). His poetry reflects a conscious synthesis of diverse religious and mythological elements, promoting interfaith harmony and a spirit of universal humanism (Haque, 2023, May 27). This blending reinforced his idea of collective identity, positioned against Western ideologies of cultural and racial supremacy, anthropocentrism, and androcentrism—forces historically complicit in colonial domination (Rahman, 2022, p. 120). In this sense, his poetry becomes "a weapon for waging a war of emancipation for his country" (Chowdhuri, 2000, p. 126).

This emancipatory mission in Nazrul's work extends beyond political liberation; it also plays a crucial role in freeing modern Bengali poetry from the constraints of imitating Rabindranath Tagore without originality or depth (Islam, 2000). His expansive creative expression emotionally and practically stirred his readers. Unlike modernist poets who often relied on ironic self-detachment or conversational tones, Nazrul's poetry remains open, bold, and emotionally charged—not confined to the enjoyment of a select elite (Chowdhuri, 2000). Nazrul's mythological allusions—from Indian, Arabic, Persian, and Christian traditions—serve to confront issues of economic inequality, caste and religious hierarchies, and colonial oppression. He addresses these through an egalitarian and humanist lens (Biswas, 2023). His use of cosmopolitan myths became a powerful vehicle for collective psychological transformation and revolutionary resistance—mobilizing readers toward a vision of a democratic society founded on justice, empathy, and equality.

Stylistically, Nazrul's poetry is flamboyant, bohemian, and defiantly rebellious. Yet when addressing themes of love, beauty, and compassion for the oppressed, his verse takes on a distinctive character, marked by rich rhetoric, rhythmic turbulence, social idealism, and romantic egotism (Radice, 2000). The themes of love, rebellion, and humanism are deeply embedded in Nazrul's poetry. These qualities reveal his profound empathy for human emotion and dignity, driving him to celebrate human achievements within the physical world. As Siddiqui (1982) states:

> "From the beginning to the end, but simultaneously enough, Nazrul was the poet of rebellion and love, his suffering and self-pity as much unrestrained as were his anger and defiance" (p. 43).

Nazrul's innate spirit of rebellion and humanism sent waves across the landscape of Bangla poetry, influencing a generation of poets—including Jibanananda Das, Golam Mustafa, and Shahadat Hossain—who drew upon his Islamic and revolutionary sensibilities (Siddiqui, 1982).

4. Objective of the Study

Nazrul's poetry exhibits a multidimensional use of mythological elements from diverse sources. In most cases, these have been used simultaneously with the indigenous mythological elements, suggesting distinct purposes. From this perspective, some fundamental questions arise, such as i. what made Nazrul Islam import foreign myths in his poetry? ii. What were the major foreign myths he incorporated into his poetry? iii. What was the impact of using those foreign mythological elements in the social, political, and cultural ambience of this region? Therefore, the main objective of this study was to know why and how the poet has used assorted foreign myths in Bangla poetry. In addition, it attempted to understand the impact of using foreign myths in the social, cultural, and political life in the non-sovereign British India.

5. Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach to attain its objectives. Accordingly, it focused on understanding the social, cultural, and political events and experiences depicted through the poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam. For collecting, examining, and interpreting data, a total of 6 poems by Kazi Nazrul Islam were chosen purposively, including "Bidrohī" (The Rebel), "Bārāṅganā" (Prostitute), "Nārī" (Woman), "Mānuṣ" (Man), and "Dāridra" (Poverty) as a primary source. On the other hand, relevant journal articles, book chapters, published books, and newspaper articles were used to interpret and explain the contents and their meaning. Thus, the researcher explored and attempted to understand the events and experiences that led to "why" and "how" rather than quantifying data. For citation, the author-date method of APA 7th edition was followed, and sources were cited accordingly.

6. Discussion

Kazi Nazrul Islam emerged as a powerful voice in Bangla literature in the 1920s, conveying a message of love, rebellion, and vitality. Tagore—the Nobel laureate and towering figure in Bengali literature—remained the dominant literary force then. Yet, Nazrul carved out a distinct and enduring place for himself through his cosmopolitan literary exploration and the spontaneous expression of a universal and humanist zeal in his works. Nazrul's writings are characterized by a rich interweaving of mythological and historical imagery, metaphors, allusions, narratives, legends, and references, drawn from diverse cultural and religious traditions. In this regard, his work invites comparison with poets like John Keats, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Walt Whitman. Through his use of diverse mythologies and global motifs, Nazrul articulated an ideology of 'One World'—a vision aimed at liberating humanity from all forms of social, cultural, and religious bigotry and constraint.

Nazrul's poem "Bidrōhī" (The Rebel), under the collection *Agnibīṇā* (*The Harp of Fire*) in 1922, appears to be a captivating work, manifesting all types of disparity, injustice, inequality, and oppression in human society, both in the micro and macro levels. The mosaic quality of the poem, especially regarding the poet's integration of cosmopolitan mythological, religious, and historical allusions, metaphors, images, narratives, etc., aligns him with one of the leading modernist poets, T. S. Eliot (1988–1965). The publication of *The Wasteland* by Eliot in 1922 brought about a revolutionary change in Europe, heralding the modernist trends in literature. In this continuity, Nazrul's "Bidrōhī" accelerated the modernist trend in Bangla literature, followed by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. In "Bidrōhī," Nazrul's incorporation of Western and non-Western mythological elements and historical allusions gives it a mirroring impression of the *Wasteland*. The myths of religious connotations in his poetry have been used purposefully for social, cultural, and political emancipation. He demonstrates how these mythological figures, allusions, and narratives can stimulate the

collective unconscious of the non-sovereign British Indian people and help unshackle them from any type of disparity and oppression.

When the poet juxtaposes the Greek mythological figure Orpheus with the Indian mythological character Shyam, i.e., Sree Krishna, he reminds all of the mesmerising power by which they could save their communities from the evil force or power. In the first-person narration, Nazrul's articulation:

I am Orpheus' flute.
I bring sleep to the fevered world,
I make the heaving ocean quiet
I am the flute in the hands of Shyam! (Islam, 1997, p. 15)

—not only signifies his mythical consciousness and attachment to historicity in the context of British India, but also unveils his explorative thoughts and mastery in using multicultural myths; it also shows how the contrasting rhetorics of destruction and survival can be used for reshaping the suppressed thoughts and restoring them to vitality or activism.

In Greek mythology, Orpheus is a famous poet and singer who got the lyre from Apollo, the multifaced God of music, healing, light, prophecy, and the sun. He could play the lyre so beautifully that even the rocks were moved to tears, trees bent to listen, flowers bloomed, animals danced around him, and rivers changed their courses (Daly, 2009). It was through the power of his lyre that, during the Argonauts' expedition, he saved the crew from the Sirens—bird-like creatures with female forms—who lured sailors to their deaths with their enchanting songs. Similar to the lyre of Orpheus, the flute of Shyam also retained such enchanting and soothing power that a deaf and dumb one could speak again, a speaking one turned to a deaf and dumb one, the waves of the water turned still, and the stone got melted. Beneath the literal meaning of these myths, the lyre of Orpheus and the flute of Krishna connote some deeper meaning, where man's awakening from the abysses of inaction and ignorance requires an opposite reaction to activate in action and consciousness.

Nazrul's fierce first-person narration in "Bidrōhī" imports several metaphors, allusions, images, etc., which have come from the Middle East, yet they are an integral part of the culture of this region because of their association with the religion of Islam. The most striking ones in this respect include the 'roar of Israfil's bugle,' the mighty 'Borrak' or 'Buraq,' a celestial steed that carried Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem during his night journey, and then through the heavens to meet the Almighty. The narrator also calls him the 'ambassador Gabriel or Gibril,' who is related both to Christianity and Islamic tradition. He also mentions that he will sit in 'the burning hell' (Havia Hell). All these mythological associations indeed express Nazrul's deep passion for vitality and stimulation, which could bring the colonised people back to struggle and action to make them free. Myths in "Bidrōhī" manifest the social function of myth, one of four functions of myths, propounded by Joseph Campbell (1991) in The *Power of Myth*.

Nazrul's fervour for social concern allows him to accept an inclusive society, which accommodates all kinds of people, irrespective of caste, profession, and economic status, and remains at the epicentre of these poems. A humanist ardour, which flourishes in 19th-century Bengal with the advent of the Bengal Renaissance, constitutes its core. Nazrul's persona and narratives manifest this spirit profoundly. In the poem "Mānuṣ," by alluding to Hindu, Christian, and Islamic religious mythologies, Nazrul suggests the 'One World', where all men are carrying the same stream of blood in their veins:

Adam, David, Messiah, Moses,
Abraham, Muhammad, Krishna,
Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, —
The treasure of the whole world
They are our great ancestors; in our veins
Runs more or less their sacred blood—
We are their children, kith and kin,

And possess a body like theirs. (Islam, 1997, pp. 41–45)

For the poet, all men are equal since all are carrying almost the same ancestral lineage and bloodstream. None should be either excluded or ignored. From this point of view, he sees God even within a beggar. Nazrul thinks that because Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, or Krishna can come to us in the guise of a common man. This ancestral lineage and kinship certainly depict Nazrul's love for mankind profoundly. In contrast to this compassionate representation of one God in the 'One World', the poet manifests his destructive form too:

Perhaps in Me is the future Kalki,
And in Thee the Imam Mehedi!
Who knoweth the Alpha and the Omega,
Who knoweth the Destiny! (Islam, 1997, pp. 41–45)

According to Hindu mythology, Kalki represents the last of the 10th incarnations of God, who will destroy the degraded world and restore righteousness at the end of Kali Yuga, one of four chronological segments of the world. The same rhetoric is presented through the myth of Imam Mehedi. The Sunni Muslims believe him to be a future figure who will restore justice and religion on the earth. The poem "Mānuṣ" teaches about the universal brotherhood of humanity, united by the thread of love and compassion.

For Nazrul, both men and women in society must be acknowledged for their accomplishments, and gender roles, not for their professions. Among the diverse human professions, begging and prostitution are considered ancient and enduring in the history of human civilization. His feelings regarding them appear not at all contemptuous or hostile. For him, a person's identity is valued most as a mother or any person awakened to perception. Therefore, when the poet inquires:

… if Ahalay became freed of
Sin, O mother, if Mary was canonized,
why shouldst thou not be worthy of
worship by the pursuit of serene truth? (Islam, 1997, p. 281)

—he directs how the tainted life of the Indian mythological character Ahalay becomes a nobler one with the blessing of Lord Rama. The myth of Mary again reminds all of the divine mystery regarding the birth of Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind. The protagonists in the "Bārāṅganā" and "Mānuṣ", therefore, manifest man's supremacy in this physical world through their accomplishments.

In this continuity, Nazrul's poem "Nārī" (Woman), published in 1925 under the collection the *Sāmyabādī* (Of Equality), incorporates myths from Hindu, Abrahamic, and Greco-Roman origins, reflecting the very idea of equality overtly. In particular, his allusions to the Abrahamic myth of the 'original sin' provoked by Satan, and to the Greco-Roman myths of Pluto, Demeter (Ceres), and Hades, vividly underscore both the equal roles of man and woman from the very beginning of the world and a tone of rebellion against tyranny. Nazrul acknowledges women as a driving force in the physical world. Whether in mythological or historical times, women have become an inspiration for men in all their pursuits, whether noble or ignoble, good or evil. Although women have contributed to half of all human achievements, their contributions have been largely unacknowledged. This marginalization persisted in the twentieth-century non-sovereign communities of the region, where women were often excluded from the workforce and sidelined from decision-making processes—a practice that Nazrul never tolerated. Hence, his rebellious self has sought women's emancipation from socio-cultural prejudices. Accordingly, he waged war against the biased socio-cultural system and continued his struggle to ensure dignity, social status, and equality for women alongside their male counterparts. In this context, his allusion to Pluto (Hades in Greek mythology) and the inclusion of associated Greco-Roman mythological figures such as Proserpine and Demeter (Ceres) remain significant. Therefore, when the speaker proclaims:

O Proserpine! Dear Child of Earth!
No longer dost thou wander
about singing in hills and dales
and branches. In an evil hour

came Pluto, King of Hades,
under wings of darkness, and carried
thee far down in his realm of Darkness. (Islam, 1997, p. 288)

—he evokes, in a melancholic tone, the image of women's unwilling, passive, and ignoble existence within the indifferent socio-cultural conditions of early twentieth-century male-dominated society in this region. Women's passivity, their exclusion from decision-making, and their absence from the active workforce are portrayed as consequences of ignorance, arbitrary control, and the dominating nature of their male counterparts.

In this context, women metaphorically mirror the mythological figure Proserpine—abducted and silenced—while the male-dominated society is likened to Pluto, who forcibly seizes her agency. This allegory underscores the intolerable injustice inflicted upon women, as their identities and social positions are suppressed by a patriarchal structure. In Roman mythology, Pluto (the Greek equivalent of Hades) is a feared god of the underworld. He is portrayed as a remote and formidable deity, impervious to human appeals, actions, or offerings. Although euphemistically named Pluto, Roman alternatives such as Dis or Orcus slightly temper the fear associated with him (Daly, 2009). Nevertheless, his deep association with the underworld continues to evoke a pervasive sense of dread, carrying connotations of death, darkness, and absolute power. The symbolic use of Pluto in this context intensifies the gravity of women's subjugation and loss of agency within the social landscape.

Myths, in Nazrul's poetry, remain both explicitly and implicitly. For example, in the poem "Nārī" (Woman), the allusion to the Roman mythological figure Pluto suggests a direct employment of Roman myth. Besides symbolizing death, darkness, and absence, Pluto embodies a fearful passivity—reflecting the erasure or silencing of women. Notably, the phrase "dhanīr dulālī mēẏē!" (Dear Child of the Earth), along with the references to Yama and his guard dogs from Indian mythology, suggests the parallel figures from Greco-Roman mythology, including Proserpine, the underworld king Hades, and his multi-headed dog Cerberus, respectively. As the speaker continues:

Since then, thou hast
put on fetters, and been condemned
to the domain of Death. Night descended that day on Earth!
Break, break the Place of Hades
And come, O Mother, out into the
Sunshine penetrating the lower world
Like a terrible serpent,
The Hell-hound of Pluto's hunger
Stuck by the stout kicks shall
Rolling with the vanquished demon
At thy liberated feet—so long thou
Hast served nectar, serve deadly poison
By the same hand. (Islam, 1997, p. 288)

—he hints at an urgent call for the liberation of Proserpine from Hades, or metaphorically from the patriarchal underworld of male-dominated society. The plea to free Proserpine metaphorically represents empowering women in this region and releasing them from a world marked by darkness, fear, passivity, and indifference.

The speaker's mournful invocation of Proserpine echoes the romantic melancholy of Keats, while the fatalistic beauty reminiscent of Swinburne suggests a kind of temporal numbness. Nevertheless, a Shelleyan revolutionary spirit against colonial and patriarchal tyranny is powerfully conveyed through the allusion to Pluto (i.e., Hades). Nazrul's implied use of foreign myths encompasses a larger area, related to the metaphysical or philosophical undercurrent of thoughts regarding physical love versus the metaphysical attachment with the natural pace of life, fears of death versus the struggle for overcoming fears. Nazrul's nuanced use of foreign myths thus extends beyond surface-level references, engaging with deeper

metaphysical and philosophical questions: the tension between physical love and a spiritual connection to the natural rhythm of life, the fear of death versus the struggle to transcend it. His poetic vision, therefore, acknowledges these existential conflicts and seeks reconciliation by mediating between the opposing forces of transience and permanence. In "Pūjāriṇī" ("The Worshiper"), when the speaker declares:

It is a vain belief!
Zephyr only makes the flower blossom.
The honey-making bee comes and deflowers it.
The former is a type of chivalry;
Love, and not the body of the beloved,
is all-in-all to him! (Islam, 1997, pp. 114–128)

—he reflects how Nazrul intertextualised the figure of Zephyr from Greco-Roman mythology. In the original Bengali version of the poem, the personification of "pathik dakinā bāẏu" ("the traveller south-wind") is likened to Zephyr. In Greek mythology, Zephyrus, or Zephyr, the son of Eros, is the god of the west wind and the harbinger of spring. Besides, he is well known as the husband of Iris, the messenger of the gods, especially for Hera, and a goddess of the rainbow (Roman & Roman, 2010, p. 66). Zephyr, often associated with a balmy, gentle breeze, is portrayed as adventurous and benevolent—bringing flowers and fruits to nature. As such, Zephyr symbolizes love, creation, and freedom, serving as a fitting metaphor for Nazrul's vision of a liberated and passionate self. In contrast, Notus—the Greek god of the south wind—is linked to the oppressive heat that follows the rise of Sirius after midsummer. Known as the bringer of late summer and early autumn storms, Notus carries ominous, destructive connotations, often associated with the ruin of crops (Daly, 2009). The allusion to Zephyr, therefore, stands in deliberate opposition to Notus, reinforcing a thematic contrast between creative vitality and destructive force.

Zephyr's adventurous and liberating qualities reflect Nazrul's own yearning for unbounded love and rebellious freedom. This pursuit of unrestrained romantic idealism closely aligns with Nazrul's individual self. However, his poetic purpose transcends the personal. Through the contrasting image of the "honey-making bee" and its deflowering act, Nazrul critiques possessive and exploitative forms of love. The bee symbolizes a collective force driven by control and consumption, while the chivalrous Zephyr evokes love without seeking possession. Ultimately, Nazrul underscores the tension between the individual's idealistic pursuit of love and the collective experience of social and emotional oppression. Yet, the integrity of love and its transformative power remain unwavering, which gets asserted even in the face of defilement, domination, or resistance. Hence, the speaker continues:

Myself, the sound Wind, a traveller,
At the end of spring, I depart
For that deathless, undiscovered country of Eternal Night (Islam, 1997, pp. 114–128)

These images and metaphors—such as "bumblebees" and "honey-making bees," "the south wind," and "the travelling south wind"—suggest a binary opposition between possessive love and free-spirited rebellion. However, this binary gradually dissolves as humanity progresses toward a more reciprocal relationship grounded in love, empathy, and mutual respect.

In this context, a reciprocal relationship, grounded in love, empathy, and respect for all, cultivates a powerful and sustaining vigour, keeping the rebellious spirit against all forms of oppression, and fosters compassion for the oppressed and the struggling in society. In addition, it strengthens resistance to injustice, emphasizing the urgent need to extend love universally. Therefore, when the speaker articulates:

O poverty, thou hast made me great.
Thou hast me honoured like Christ
With his crown of thorns. Thou hast given me
Courage to reveal all. To thee I owe
My insolent, naked eyes and sharp tongue.
Thy curse has turned my violin to a sword. (Islam, 1997, pp. 411–115)

—he exhibits his vitality and strong resolution to fight against disparity. By alluding to the myth of Jesus Christ, the poet has shown how suffering is followed by honour and glory in human life. He sees vitality in poverty because it keeps his inner self awake and allows him to overturn the curse and turn it into a might. From this perspective, the Christian myth in the poem "Dāridra" (Poverty) has been an instrument for the poet in redefining poverty. The rhetoric of poverty culminates in defying its afflicting attributes and energizes mankind to fight against it collectively. Nazrul's "Dāridra", therefore, acknowledges the binary opposition of poverty versus affluence, the poor versus the elites affirmatively, and stimulates the indomitable struggling spirit in mankind to transform this binary opposition into an enthusiasm for collective positive alteration.

7. Conclusion

Assorted foreign myths in Nazrul's poetry have been a tremendous source of empowerment and inspiration for liberating all from restraints, disparity, oppression, and captivity prevailing in the collective social and literary life of mankind. By incorporating foreign myths, parallel to indigenous mythological elements, he has not only upheld the cosmopolitan literary trend of the twentieth century but also strengthened the kinship of human beings, believing in the One World and fraternity irrespective of castes, rites, professions, religious faith, etc. His love for mankind and nature has been manifested through his distinct incorporation of the world's myths or mythological elements with Keats' romantic melancholy, Swinburne's fatalistic beauty on one hand, and Shelleyan vigour against all sorts of tyranny in society on the other hand. While using myths, Eliot's mosaic quality bridges the ancestral past and contemporaneity, inspiring people to be elevated by mythical consciousness. The combination of the indigenous and foreign myths demonstrates why and how to voice against the indifferent situation in an indifferent time when the fears and uncertainties engulf people into inanity, but the collective unconsciousness is yet to awaken. Finally, Nazrul's poetry shows how or in what manner people's belief in the One World, their enthusiasm for equality, and respect for all can ensure love and empathy, and stimulate a voice against injustice and oppression at all times and all geographical communities.

References

1. Barthes, R. (2000). *Mythologies*. Vintage.
2. Bose, B. (1941). *An acre of green grass: A review of modern Bengali literature*. Papyrus.
3. Brunel, P. (2016). *Companion to literary myths, heroes, and archetypes*. Routledge.
4. Campbell, J. (1991). *The power of myth*. Anchor.
5. Chowdhuri, S. I. (2000). The blazing comet. In N. Huda (Ed.), *Nazrul: An evaluation*. Nazrul Institute. (Original work published 1997)
6. Daly, N. K. (2009). *Greek and Roman mythology: A to Z* (3rd ed.). Chelsea House Publishers.
7. Feder, L. (1971). *Ancient myth in modern poetry*. Princeton University Press.
8. Haque, M. M. (2022, April 10). Women's empowerment and Kazi Nazrul's poem Nari. *The Daily Sun*. https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/611895
9. Haque, N. (2023, May 27). Need for the revival of Kazi Nazrul's spirit. *The Daily Sun*. https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/691571
10. Hornby, A. S. (2010). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (8th ed.). Oxford University Press.
11. Hossain, K. A. (2010). *Modernism and beyond: Western influences on Bangladeshi poetry*. University of Dhaka.
12. Islam, K. N. (1991). *The morning shanai: 20 poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam* (K. Chowdhury, Trans.). Nazrul Institute.
13. Islam, R. (2000). Nazrul Islam. In N. Huda (Ed.), *Nazrul: An evaluation*. Nazrul Institute. (Original work published 1997)
14. Kamal, B. A. (1999). *Adhunik Bangla kabita o myth* [*Modern Bangla poetry and myth*]. Mowla Brothers.
15. Mukherjee, A. K. (2000). Making of a great poet. In N. Huda (Ed.), *Nazrul: An evaluation*. Nazrul Institute. (Original work published 1997)

16. Radice, W. (2000). Sampling the poetry of Nazrul Islam. In N. Huda (Ed.), *Nazrul: An evaluation*. Nazrul Institute. (Original work published 1997)
17. Rahaman, H. (2022, June). Kazi Nazrul Islam and decolonisation: Poetry as a praxis of political intervention and cultural ecology. *Asiatic*, *16*(1), 120–136.
18. Roman, L., & Roman, M. (2010). *Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman mythology*. Infobase Publishing.
19. Siddiqui, Z. R. (1982). Nazrul Islam. In the *Literature of Bangladesh and other essays*. Bangladesh Books International.

Citation: Adhikari PK. (2025). Love or Rebellion: Incorporation of Foreign Myths in Kazi Nazrul's Poetry. *Khwaja Yunus Ali Uni. J, 8*(1):45-54. https://doi.org/10.61921/kyauj.v08i01.005