

## THE IDENTICAL POETIC MISSION AND VISION OF WHITMAN AND NAZRUL

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### ABSTRACT

The paper aims at finding out some striking similarities regarding poetic mission and vision between Walt Whitman, the poet of the USA and Kazi Nazrul Islam, the great national poet of Bangladesh. Though Whitman and Nazrul were born to two different great nations and in quite different centuries, they have become the poets of the world, of all nations, and of all times because of their extraordinary love for common humanity and true sense of well-being for mankind. Though they were truly the representative poets of their own era and represented hopes and aspirations of the commons and the oppressed section of their own society, they were able to transcend their era and have become poets of common humanity of all times by virtue of their transcendental and universal humanistic poetic spirit. As, even today, the reality all over the world is the same and that always the commons are exploited; are the primary victims of any kind of political upheaval or social and economic corruption done by so called rulers, elite or vested section of the society; and their sufferings are overlooked or not really understood and addressed by the so called privileged or ruling class of a country, the poetry of Whitman and Nazrul deserves a serious consideration because they just not only speak for the oppressed common people but also unmask those exploiters, who are responsible for many social evils of the society. Though many writers throughout the ages wrote for the common, Nazrul and Whitman are yet different from them because of their universal voice, which transcends any local cultural milieu. The authors of this paper has taken some representative poems of both the poets into considerations to understand the true poetic mission and vision of these two great poets how they, in their respective historical context, understood the sufferings of the commons addressed them properly and thereby how the truth and ideas of their poetry enlighten us still today.

**Keywords:** Whitman, Nazrul, Similarities, Mission, Vision, Common Humanity, Mankind

## INTRODUCTION:

Both Walt Whitman and Kazi Nazrul Islam had almost similar poetic mission as poets and vision to spread to the people of their respective country and people of the world. Lyrically both were adept in composing poems or songs in their respective mother tongue with acute precision having exact words of popular appeal. Their life and works show extraordinary affinity with each other in many ways. They observed that the commons were the worst victims of all social, economic and political indiscriminations, and injustice. Though they were products of their own time, they have been always appreciated for their prose and poetical themes of social, economic and political thoughts for the emancipation of the common oppressed people of the world. Their works have always been highly appreciated against all sorts of unjust oppressors or common human foes. And their identical family background and poverty-stricken life must have turned them to be the poets of the commons. They struggled throughout their life for their own survival through changing one profession after another. Their own poverty-stricken lives made their life and literature symbiotic. Based on their strong convictions of human dignity and equality as votaries of democracy, they spoke for the commons and against all social and political evils pervading their time transcending equally the national border of their countries at the same time and turned them as poets of mankind.

That a society of a particular place or particular nation in any part of the world in anytime of history faces some complex historical forces affecting virtually the life of the millions is nothing but the conflict between the vested group and the oppressed section or human greed and or the conflict between the just and the unjust forces. The time and society of Whitman and Nazrul is not an exception. During socio-economic and political upheaval of their respective society Whitman and Nazrul spoke for the commons and addressed the whole nation with a view to healing the nation equally thereby hoping and dreaming a world free from oppression and injustice or sufferings of all mankind.

## DISCUSSION:

Son of a carpenter and born into a working class family in 1819, Walt Whitman, who is also thought of by many as the Dante or Homer to the USA, had to leave his public school in Brooklyn at his early age due to extreme poverty and he took the job of the office boy at the newspaper printing press to earn his livelihood. He was then only of thirteen or eleven years of age. After struggle for some time he became the proof reader, news reporter, book reviewer and at last the editor of the newspaper. A self-educated man, like Nazrul, Whitman taught school on Long Island villages. He drudged and wrote a large number of editorials and undistinguished pieces, whether of prose or of verse between the years of his early manhood and the great year of 1855 when, at thirty six, he burst upon the world in an entirely new identity as the author of *Leaves of Grass*, the magnum opus of the poet. "Song of Myself" is the most significant and representative poem of the poet in this book. Whitman wrote in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." He believed there was a vital, symbiotic relationship between the poet and society. The connection was emphasized especially in "Song of Myself" by using an all-powerful first-person narration. As an American epic, it deviated from the traditional or historic use of King or Queen or the use of an elevated lofty hero and instead assumed the identity of the "common people" (Whitman, Biography, 2014)

The national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, who is affectionately called *Dhukku Meah* (prince of sorrow), was born also in a poor family in 1899, India; seven years after Whitman's death. Kazi Nazrul Islam later became the national poet of Bangladesh after East and West Pakistan war in 1971. Like Whitman, Nazrul also led a life of wandering. He worked in a bread and bakery shop as a baking boy at a meager wage. Nazrul never felt interested to study at school for a long time, and so did Whitman. In *Kazi Nazrul: Poet and More*, Sirazul Islam writes about Nazrul, 'Like Whitman, who was an influence on him, Nazrul Islam was essentially a traveler along the open road' (Islam, 1994). Their poverty stricken lives must have turned them to be the poets of the commons.

Some critics of Nazrul have made their random comments on Nazrul and Whitman focusing on very narrow affinity between the two poets. This paper aims at exposing the poetic affinity of the both poets to a larger perspective, the attempt of which so far has not been made.

Nazrul Islam left Raniganj Searesole Raj High School and joined the First World War. After the First World War, he went to Calcutta, India, leaving Karachi behind to seek his livelihood there. Then he was only twenty-one. Meanwhile his both poetical and prose works have been published in famous monthly the *Moslem Bharat* and *Saughat* of Mohammed Nasir uddin. He had settled in Calcutta. Bit by bit his literary fame began to

flourish. At twenty-two he published his famous poem Vidrohi (the Rebel) which brought him the name as the poet rebel.

However, Most of the poets or their writings had been under the shadow of Rabindranath Tagore’s strong influence until Nazrul came with the new voice and spirit of rebellion. When Nazrul came the people of the Bengal not only heard new voice but also found a bard of inexhaustible spirit and courage. Similarly, when *Leaves of Grass* came out in 1855 the Americans heard a new voice, the voice of power, consciousness, new future and democracy. Whitman’s transformation into the ‘Walt Whitman’ who springs forth from the pages of ‘*Leaves of Grass*’ is one of the great aesthetic miracles in American literary history and the most ‘generative nourishment’ (Boris, 1991,p.652) in American literature. *Leaves of Grass* is ‘the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that American has yet contributed’ (Clarke, 1991). In terms of poetic themes and form both Whitman and Nazrul were unique hallmarks in the literary history of their countries. As noted by D.H. Lawrence, ‘Whitman is the greatest of the Americans. One of the greatest poets of the world...’(Moon, 2002. P.823). H.D. Thoreau also praised Whitman highly saying, ‘we ought to rejoice in him greatly.’ and also wrote him a letter of appreciation for his *Leaves of Grass* (2002, p.823).

However, to understand Whitman and Nazrul well as to their voice for the commons we must place them in their time. Nazrul Islam, like Walt Whitman, wrote what his age demanded. Md. Habibulla says, ‘Though Nazrul was a himself, yet he is a product of the situation’ Islam (Islam, 1994,p 143). In the writings of the both poets we find an “indistinguishable mingling of realism and romantic fervor”. Both Whitman and Nazrul used their romantic and realistic poetic zeal to speak against all sorts of oppression and injustice. Unlike Alexander Pope or Dryden, who only portrayed 18<sup>th</sup> century social foibles or defects of English society realistically as they saw or unlike Wordsworth or S.T Coleridge who take the readers to the imaginary world of nature and distant sea with the appearance of death ship with a ghostly woman with red lip, Whitman and Nazrul ,on the contrary, focused deeply on the deep roots of socio-economic problems and real issues of their time to bring about a change. Both poets were “all-inclusive” and all-accepting; as a result, contradiction and conflict characterize the lives of them and their poetry. They are both realist and romanticist at the same time. In “Song of Myself” Whitman himself says about his contradiction and dualistic poetic entity:

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well, then I contradict  
I contain multitudes. “Song of Myself” (Section: 51 )

Both of them as visionary poets observed and understood the root cause of the sufferings of the commons of their time, and expressed in their writings love for the commons of their own society and for the oppressed people of the world at the same time with a conviction that all human beings-near and far- are same and have a common human bond. They understood that some mighty sections of society, because of their inhumane greed, always cause sufferings to the poor. Through their knowledge of their own time they understood that the causes of sufferings of the commons are same all over the world. So, when they speak for their own people, their voice transcends the boundary of their country and is universalized. Unlike the narrow poetic world of Pope or Dryden or narrow romantic domain of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats or Shelly the poetic world of Whitman and Nazrul is rather vast, spreading and varied every way. They become poets of all mankind by their local as well as universal humanistic poetic approach, and a broadness of sympathy and sincerity of expression characterize the works of the poets. Both are equally ‘loud-mouthed’, (Islam, 1994, p.17) both have a strong social commitment; both are more concerned about what they say rather than how they say it. Again, like Whitman, Nazrul Islam is primarily the poet of man, not of any sect, nor of any narrow ideological system. They are poets of mankind. As Whitman says, “If the poet cannot speak to mankind, he can (if he is good enough) speak for mankind (Cunlif, 1954,p.127).

Both are “votaries of democracy” (Islam, p.17) - a system that allows equality of opportunity to every man Islam. Though the distance of time between Whitman and Nazrul is large, the situations of their time were almost alike. When the poor and the commons were subject to the ugly desires of the oppressors, both of them spoke against the oppressors and indiscrimination and injustice of all sorts pervading their own society.

When Nazrul Islam arrived on the literary scene, Bengal, like the rest of India, for sure, was under the colonial rule of the British, a rule that had produced many evils—economic, social and cultural.

Economically the province was in misery. The rulers had helped the setting up of a local bourgeoisie comprising mostly their agents and employees. So the root cause was actually economic exploitation. Members of the ruler class enjoyed certain economic and social privileges; and considered themselves to be cultivated

elite. But the vast majority of the population, who were tillers of the soil, lived in semi-primitive darkness. The population was indeed divided by Lord Cornwallis, who had introduced new system of land tenure. The situation became worse for the peasants and the common that were the majority of the total population and were dependent mostly on agriculture for their livelihood. The peasants and the common grew to be poorer than ever due to the new system of land. The new system created some heartless absentee landlords who lived in large mansions in Calcutta and led a life of luxury. And the money of course came from the nameless peasants sweating in the sun and rain. Thus the discrimination between the rich and the poor was widening very fast. However, the commons, no matter they were the Hindus or Muslims, were being exploited and oppressed. And their common enemies were the heartless landlords. In such a time what Bengal needed is a radical change, also a unity against the British rulers and the cruel landlords.

But, unfortunately literature was not unbiased. Though Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Tagore wrote about the poor and lowly, they still kept a distance from the common man and poor class. The cause is clear—"the writers belonged to the same class as the land lords" (Islam, 1994, p.17-18). Nazrul Islam first showed the warmth, the openness, and the complete identification of himself with the common and the poor. Nazrul's extraordinary mode of defiance and anger against the oppressors was completely new in the Bengali literature. He was completely free from narrow communalism, though he was a religious man. Nazrul saw that the commons were the victims of murder in all communal riots that took place in then India, but the ill-motivated selfish leaders who really fueled to the riots for their political purpose were far away from the harm. He was different even from other contemporary Muslim writers such as, Kaikobad and Mir Mossarraf, who were only busy with glorifying the old Islamic heritage.

Similarly, Walt Whitman composed his poems in one of the most dangerous and difficult periods of American history. The root cause of problems during Whitman's time, Like Nazrul's India, is economic. Tensions were everywhere in the United States when Walt Whitman emerged as a poet. The union was divided into two, the North and the South, on slavery, tariff and tax issue, which finally led the United States to the civil war (1861-1865).The south demanded the continuation of slavery for economic reasons. Materialism developed everywhere due to the progress in industry, and total economic structure changed. Another social phenomenon was the growing inequality between the rich and the poor. Being afraid of the division of the union due to the slavery issues, Whitman desperately declared in "Song of Myself: 'I am the poet of the slaves and of the masters of slaves, / I will stand between the masters and the slaves, / I am southerner as well as northerner.' But against slavery he wrote a letter to the south saying, 'you abolish slavery or slavery will abolish you'.

Nazrul himself was afraid of Hindu-Muslim division in the political background under the British rule because the British Raj wanted to implement his well known tactic divide and rule policy to solidify the imperialist rule of oppression and exploitation over the Indian commons. So Nazrul writes: "We Hindu and Muslim are two flowers on the same stem..." to encourage unity to fight their common enemy: the British Raj (Kamal, 1999).

As regards Whitman's concerns on many social, political and economic issues of his time and his innovation in poetry it may be said that Whitman's book was an extraordinary accomplishment which addresses many social issues of the USA such as "education, slavery, prostitution"( WaltWhitman:Biography,2014) etc. that challenged the new nation (America after her independence from Britain in 1776). The voice of his poetry aimed at identifying a new American democratic attitude, which will encourage unity and harmony in diversity. Just as Nazrul produced his outpouring numbers of writings and composed inspirational songs(more than six thousands in number) to raise the Indians against the British, Whitman, in the midst of alarm, equally gave the Americans the confidence, "the decisive ideas and the joy" that they needed in order to transcend and conquer such a difficult situation. As an age-conscious poet like Nazrul, Whitman tried to guide the nations celebrating the common universal human essentials and entity at the same time. Whitman, like Nazrul, could influence "politics" and "policy" of the state (Allen-2002, p.872).

Based on the demands of their time they chose their vocation (mission) as poets and declared their function accordingly. Whitman is not concerned with "kings and queen", but with the aspirations of the commons oppressed" section of his society. "Song of Myself", did focus "the poetic eye for the first time on the common people" (Walt Whitman Biography, 2014), and so did poet Nazrul Islam.

In his Preface to the Leaves of Grass Whitman talks about the vocation of a great poet. Whitman said, 'The poet must not content himself with making beautifully contrived verses. He must be a prophet, a seer, a bard, a teacher and a moralist.' Whitman likes to say—the future and for democracy. His aim is to "cheer up the slaves and horrify the despots." Also he believes that the poet is a kind of spokesman for his people. "He (a poet) is not only an individual voice but also the voice of his nation. The intention of the poet is to make those happy who suffer under slavery and warn those who are tyrannical. The poet should also be a spiritual leader. He holds

the balanced between the conflicting forces. He is himself the focal point of events. He is the voice of his society. His voice is that of the entire society, not merely of the individual' ((Moon, 2002 p.616-636). We can feel the inner poetic relationship between the two poets-Whitman and Nazrul, when we study Nazrul's famous poetic speech, Deposition of a Political Prisoner (Rajbandir Jabanbandhi) that he delivered on the day of his trial in the court of the British government. Nazrul was protesting against the British rule, which he thought to be the root cause of all evils in Bengal. When he was charged of treason and arrested and produced in the court, Nazrul says, 'I am a poet; sent by God to speak the unspoken Truth, to give form to the formless creation. God speaks through the voice of the poet. The message is the revelation of the Truth, the message of God' (Kamal,1999,p 213).The idea of being a prophet or having prophetic qualities means actually speaking the truth from God almighty who is just and kind. So when a person calls himself as prophet he not only speaks truth from God but also fights against all social evils. In the human history, no prophet from Adam (A) to Mohammad (pbuh) was away from social issues and problems; and no prophet was indifferent to social injustice. All prophets besides speaking for the oneness of God, they also speak and protest against all social injustices. So when a poet calls himself as a prophet he actually performs a prophetic duty. And it also indicates that speaking against all sorts of social, political and economic oppression is the true revelations from almighty God. If a poet upholds such values, he will have a prophet's honor. Similarly, Nazrul in his speech Deposition of a Political Prisoner, spoke the truth against the British misrule which is responsible for the suffering of the poor. The speech, what is today's term would be considered a "prose-poem", reminds us of his social commitment to his countrymen. Just as Whitman's preface focuses mainly on the 'divineness of the ordinary, common man' (Cunliff 1955, p.123) as propounded by Emerson in his essay, The Poet. Nazrul's speech highlights the sorrows of the common. Whitman for his sermonizing tone got the name "Second Christ" (Shahane, 1992, p.6).

Both Whitman and Nazrul wanted radical changes in their respective society and time. Both poets stirred and agitated the minds of the masses. Whitman thought of himself as the "chosen one to agitate the country..." 'Agitation' is the great and mighty instrument for carrying forward radical changes... (Reynolds: 7). Nazrul, through his radical mode and writing, also touched the mass mind. There is a great surge of life within both poets, and by focusing on the sufferings of the commons their poetry speaks of equality for all classes of people. Their dreams were of a society without discriminations--economic, racial, and political. So, Nazrul declared a rebellion against economic discrimination, religious and racial divisions and wanted a society in which the identity of a man would be nothing but a man (Sultana, 1969).

Though they were poets in vein and blood, Whitman and Nazrul squeezed out melody and sound from politics, which is necessarily 'a task of poets'. Whitman was once a democrat; Nazrul was not known to have been directly engaged in politics of a particular political party. But Whitman grew disenchanted with 'party politics' around 1850, appalled by the unwillingness of political party to confront slavery. He wrote that the parties had become "empty flesh, putrid mouths..." 'The politicians, he says, in shadow, "are telling lies"(Moon 849). Nazrul's political philosophy is clear. He had no faith in contemporary leaders. So no political party could have included him. He belonged to none but his free will (Mukul,2001). Like Whitman Though Nazrul was fond of the Great leaders as Kamal Pasha or Kamal Atatürk and of Omar, the great Caliph of Islam for their virtues, he criticizes corrupt political leaders calling them 'beggars of votes' and 'manipulators of the youth' (Chaklader, 2003,p. 182 -83).However, both of them, though lost their belief in politics, they tried to bring change in the society through creative literature. But, the situation of their countries as to basic political structure was different, so their attitude to change was also different. It should be noted, While Whitman's America was just free from the British rule, Nazrul's own country was still under the shackles of the British imperialism. So, while Whitman did not want extremism in politics, and had a 'definite conservative streak' an impulse to steer 'a political middle course,' (Greenspan, 2000,p. 98-104) and announced himself in Song of Myself 'pleased with the native and with the foreign'. Nazrul, on the contrary, was sympathetic towards the extremists or the terrorist groups who used to fight against the British imperialists, and was also supporter of violent and quick change at any cost, and he was hostile to the British in his blood and vein. Nazrul believed that the root cause of the suffering of the common and other social evils is the British imperialism. Regarding Nazrul's time it should be noted that he fought against the internal as well as the outer forces of evils. Whitman felt that the problem of his country is more from within than from outside. So, while we find Whitman as a spiritual bard singing with a tone of serenity and calmness,(As Randal Jarrel says about Whitman: " he has at his command a language of the calmest and prosaic reality,...") we find Nazrul singing with a violent tone of rebellion and anger. While Whitman was pouring water (soft verse) on fire, Nazrul was setting fire to the bushes with his fiery tongue. The truths that they experienced in their time are the same in the sense that the commons were being exploited and

oppressed whatever the causes might be. So both the poets, though politically conscious, yet were mainly concerned with the fate and the sufferings of the commons, and spoke for them in their poetry.

Generally, the truth, which can be applied to both the poets, is that both of them wrote for the commons because of their deep convictions on the equality and human dignity. Especially, two poems that bring both the poets close to each other are “Song of Myself” and Vidrohi, meaning, ‘the rebel’ (Gupta, 1997). Song of Myself is one of the best poems in Whitman’s Leaves of Grass (1855). Similarly, Nazrul’s Vidrohi is one of the most celebrated poems in AgniBina(meaning ‘flute of fire’ ) published in 1922. The interesting features of both poems are the celebration of Self and ego-perception of the poets. These two poems also present an extraordinary sense of spirituality mixed with romantic fervor as well as mundane themes. For the celebration of self both poets use ‘I’ (ami), which is not only an epitome of the two ‘ego-perceptive genius’ (Rahman, 2005) but also a symbol of collective ego of humanity. Here ‘I’ becomes the mighty word of the world. Addressing all human beings as ‘you’ Whitman writes:

I celebrate myself;  
And what I assume you shall assume;  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. L.1-3      Song of Myself

Thus at the very beginning of the poem, Whitman breaks all false conceptual impediments to global human brotherhood by emphasizing similar human constituents, ‘every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you’. Whitman not only breaks, Like Nazrul, the poetic conventions but also sets poetry on the “vernacular of America’s common people” (Whitman Biography, 2014).

Extraordinarily Nazrul stressed a great importance in this mighty word ‘I’ and used it 141 times in his poem Vidrohi with a lot of both Hindu and Muslim mythological symbols to reinforce his rebellion. ‘I’ becomes a different love-self in both poems endowed with spiritual power and rebellion. Nazrul writes:

Proclaim, Hero,  
Proclaim: I raise my head high!  
Before me bows down the Himalayan peaks!  
Proclaim, Hero,  
Proclaim: rendering through the sky,  
Surpassing the moon, the sun, the planets, the stars,  
Piercing through the earth,  
The heaven the earth, the cosmos and the Almighty’s throne,  
Have I risen I eternal wonder of the creator of the universe.      Vidrohi , (The Rebel)

While celebrating his own self in The Rebel (Vidrohi), he never forgets to mention his common- humanity-concern. He goes on saying: ‘I have realized my self.’ So he would not calm until and unless that day comes:

Weary of battles, I the great Rebel,  
Shall rest in peace only when  
The anguished cry of the oppressed  
Shall no longer reverberate in the sky and the air  
And the tyrant’s bloody sword  
Will no longer rattle in battlefields.      The Rebel,

Almost all similes justify the powerfulness of egoist perception of Nazrul, which seem to be absolute and tremendously turbulent. It surpasses the egoist perception of Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’. Whitman is rather calm in celebrating himself unlike Nazrul.

Besides the similarities between Vidrohi and Song of Myself, most of the poems of Nazrul in SAMYABADI, published in 1925, echo most of Whitman’s ideas expressed in “Song of Myself”. Whitman’s “Song of Myself” is a single large poem having no less than fifty-two sections, and this poem propounds a lot of ideas or themes at the same time, such as, self, love, body and soul, human dignity, democracy, equality, universal brotherhood and oneness of God etc. And Nazrul on the other hand deals with all these ideas separately in different poems with different names. That both Nazrul and Whitman were attracted to the call of contemporary communist or socialist ideas is clear, though they were not supporters of communisms in the real sense. But they were very much inspired by the call of the Communist ideas of equality. Nazrul wrote many poems on Marxism such as

Sammabadi, Ghahi Sammer Gan (I sing of Equality) etc. He also edited a weekly called Lungal (the Plough) used to be published by the leftist section within the cotemporary Indian congress. Whitman was influenced by such contemporary writings as, Progress and Poverty, by Henry George who criticized ‘private property’ as ‘culprit’ (Reynolds, 2000 p 98 &104). As Whitman was sympathetic to the poor, his journalism is known for ‘its empathy with the working poor.’ In Song of Myself ‘Whitman repeated the oft-made charge that the ‘idle’ rich cruelly appropriated the products of the hard working poor (Greenspan, 1999&95, p.81):

Many sweating and ploughing and thrashing, and then the chaff  
For payment receiving,  
A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.

The life of the poverty-stricken working class people shocked both of the poets. Whitman absorbed the language of the working class protest.

Nazrul is different from Whitman in his expression. He unlike Whitman rather curses the oppressors and the exploiters violently:

Pray—that those who rob thirty three crore  
mouths their morsels of food  
Meet their doom in my writings in blood.

Nazrul:( Amar Khaifiyut) My Answer.

Whitman’s love for the poor compelled him to write his short free-verse poem, “To the Poor”. With his natural serenity of mind Whitman reveals that he loves a place for himself among the poor not among the rich:

I have my place among you  
Is it nothing that I have preferred to be poor rather than to be rich?  
The road to riches is easily open to me,  
But I don’t choose it  
I choose to stay with you---

Leaves of Grass: canto: 1847-55

The sufferings of the poor make Nazrul almost mad. His personal grief caused by poverty is transformed into universal grief of greater humanity as Tennyson’s personal grief(Long,2004,p.464) caused by his friend’s death in “In Memoriam” becomes less personal and inspires him to understand the greater sufferings of humanity. Here, Nazrul loses the serenity of his mind when he observes others’ suffering because of poverty. The natural sprit of violence and restlessness of his character becomes clear. The mental anguish he feels inside due to the suffering of the poor bursts out in the following lines. Even he questions the value of the leftist movement Swarj, going on in Bengal at that time, because after every movement the commons find nothing:

My heart is burning with pain  
I have gone mad seeing all this---.  
I can’t shed blood alone.  
So I write all this down in bloody letters  
Deep sadness prevents big thoughts----.  
But the hungry children don’t want Swarj-  
They want some rice a bit of salt.  
Day passes hour by hour----  
Their tender bellies are in fire from hunger.  
I cry out madly!  
I cry out in tears: “ O God, are you still there?

.....  
Mother is begging out  
While her child lies dead at home.  
.....

Nazrul: ( Amar Khaifiyut) My Answer





all embracing. He is ‘sovereign’, a ‘man of beauty’, ‘representative’, ‘the sayer’, ‘the namer’ and ‘stands on the center’. But he is ‘above all an inspired public speaker (Joel & Morris, 2001, p.184-85)”. Interestingly, Nazrul and Whitman have these qualities. Within the internal chaos of their country Whitman and Nazrul tried their best to ‘heal’ the nation by writing creative literature. They never lost their belief in literature and their people. They asked their people to respect their values whether new or old, to emphasize humanity and to uphold the worth of man and women.

As a lover of common humanity like Nazrul, Whitman believes that man is naturally good and deserving of an equal share of not only eternal salvation but also temporal prosperity. Their writing echoes the rhythm of the common humanity in every sense. For this they had to address the present, be in the present. Present (or now) was important for them. To address the present is skillful rendering of the present into writing which made their writing so intimately relevant to their time just as the writing--- affirming their “ever presence”---continues to be relevant today:

I am a poet of the present  
 Not a prophet of the future,  
 Nazrul: (Amar Khaifiyut), My Answer

But I don't talk of the beginning or the end,  
 There was never any more inception the there is now  
 Nor any more youth then there is now.  
 Whitman: Song of Myself

Through this presence, they listened and responded to, emphasized with, and spoken up for the common humanity. Through this presence grew in them their intense, inspiring, and uncompromising faith in universal human dignity and equality---personal, social, racial, spiritual. Nazrul's bold and Whitman's distinct voice was a creative expression of their dialogues with the world. Through such dialogues, they allied themselves with kindred spirits near and far. Compare Nazrul's few lines with those of Whitman's Song of Myself:

I sing of equality  
 There is nothing greater than human being,  
 Nothing nobler  
 Caste creed, religion---there is no difference,  
 Throughout all ages, all places,  
 We are all a manifestations  
 Of our common humanity.

Nazrul: (Manush) Human Being

Of every hue caste am I, of every rank and religion,  
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker.  
 Prisoner, fancy -man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.  
 “Song of Myself”(Line: 346-48)

.....  
 I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,  
 And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man. “Song of Myself” (Line: 425-26)

-----,  
 And that all the men and women ever born are my brothers, sisters and lovers.  
 “Song of Myself”

Organic integrity and universality are essentially complementary. Through the sharing of and devotion to the common earth or through the natural and far reaching ability Nazrul and Whitman make their achievement unique, diverse as well as universal- distinct yet transcendent of any particular historical, geographical, linguistic and cultural milieu. There is a profound sense of a diverse yet common humanity concerns, values,

vision—a sense of unity among diversity in the writings of both Walt Whitman and Nazrul. This is how Nazrul and Whitman came close to each other (Kamal, 1999).

Their spiritually-illuminated soul and self take, sometimes, a mystic trance and are able to understand God and the purpose of His creation. Whitman writes: ‘Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge/.../ And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own/And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own.’ The self of the poets through a sense of mysticism transcends the earthly limits and boundary and shares a spiritual bond with all human beings. Through mingling with the divine a realization dawns on him: ‘And that all the men ever born are my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers’ (‘Song of Myself’). They understand that man is the ultimate truth, and so they (‘the poets are requested to climb down from heaven to earth’ - Mayakovskhy, Russian poet) should climb down from heaven to the earth. Like mystics or Sufis they egoistically declare that their selves referring to I (ami) in their poems are more powerful and symbol of all truth and poet’s body is heavenly and a miracle. This I is the ‘collective ego’ of all humanity and also the proof of the existence and greatness of God:

I believe in the flesh and appetites,  
Seeing, hearing, feeling are miracles, and each part  
And tag of me is miracle.  
Divine am I inside and out I make holy whatever I touch or am I touched from,  
The scent of these armpits aroma finer than prayer,  
This hand more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds. Song of Myself

Nazrul also dedicates his spirituality to uphold the value of man as if God and man were inseparable:

Open your heart—within you lie  
All the scriptures,  
All the wisdom of all ages.  
Within you lie all the religions,  
All the prophets-your heart is the universal temple  
Have all the god and goddesses.  
This heart is Neelachal, Kasi, ---,  
This heart is the mosque, the temple, and the church.  
(Ghazi Sammer Gaan): I Sing of Equality

Whitman expresses same view in “Song of Myself” saying, “Creeds and school are abeyance” (canto-2) meaning our knowledge of scripture and institutional knowledge are now obsolete because these have not changed our personality towards loving the common humanity.

However, Nazrul and Whitman’s views on God are very identical. Man and God are not separated from one another in their poetry. God is omnipresent; He is present within us as in other things. For Whitman all things are actually manifestations of God. But man is the ultimate proof and the best manifestation of God:

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?  
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,  
In the faces of men and women I see god, and in my own face in the glass.  
Song of Myself

Nazrul writes:

.....  
You search for the creator  
Instead of searching for yourself.  
O self-inflicted blind-open your eyes,  
Look at yourself in the mirror,  
You will see his shadow fall on your body. (Issavr) God

Sayed Ali Ahsan (Islam, 1990) said that Nazrul wrote his poem Agrapathic (meaning; Pioneers) in the shadows of Whitman’s poem, Pioneers, though there are some striking dissimilarities between these two poems regarding theme and diction. Whitman’s deep influence on Nazrul is obvious. Whitman says:

Come my tan-faced children,  
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready.  
Have your pistols? Have your sharp-edged axes?

Nazrul Islam says:

O Pioneers! O Soldiers!  
Proceed at a rapid pace,  
O my sun- burnt mud- stained brothers  
Listen to me

.....  
Where is your hammer? Where is your shovel?  
O pioneers! O Soldiers! "Agraphatic"

Both the poets want the pioneers (the young and juvenile) to attack and destroy the evil foundation of society to create a new one.

Whitman is an individual who speaks for all individuals or mankind. In the 'ego', Whitman brought the global human nature in his poetic fold. Their transcendental self relates to all human beings through an understanding of the common human nature and through their inward mental bend to mankind:

Walt Whitman am I, a kosmos, a mighty  
Manhattan the son.  
Turbulent fleshy and sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding;  
No sentimentalist-no- stander-above men and women,  
Or apart from them; no more modest than immodest.  
Song of Myself (section-24)

Similarly, Nazrul doesn't forget to bring up the common issues of human sufferings caused by different social evils while celebrating his own self in The Rebel (Vidrohi). He goes on saying: 'I have realized my self.' He would not calm until and unless that day comes when miseries of common humanity would be finished in the world. When Nazrul expresses the power of his self-saying, 'I am the god of gods, the supreme humanity traversing the heaven and earth', he echoes Whitman very nicely:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is. Song of Myself

Both Nazrul and Whitman sound like the Sufis who try to understand almighty God with love and devotion not with practical reason or debate. Nazrul Islam must have been influenced by oriental mysticism as he translated Rubayat-e- Hafiz, a famous work of Iranian mystic poet Samsuddin Mohammed. He also translated Rubayat- e- Omar khayam. Nazrul, like Walt Whitman, is jubilant in understanding own self. The intensity and the vibrant feeling of the poet's self-realization is also present in Sufism and its message: Anal Hoque meaning "I am the truth" (Mukul,2001). In respect of spiritual aspect of Whitman's poetry it may also be said that, 'Leaves of Grass in general, and Song of Myself in particular reveals similarities between Whitman's experience and the mystical literature in general'. Besides, 'it is the inner illumination and extraordinary individuality and inevitability that link all the mystical writings, eastern and western... (Gupta, 1997.p. 112)".

Though Love, mankind and spirituality are separate words or themes in Whitman's and Nazrul's poems, yet these are not virtually separated from one another rather fused or mingled with one another as complementary elements to complete their poetic whole. Their boundless love for the commons in particular and the mankind in general is attributed to their spiritual experience and self- realization and their understanding of love as being a vital force behind all creation. Love is the message of God and the ultimate good of mankind. About Nazrul it may be said that "his rebellion is the outcome of his love". Whitman in Song of Myself says, 'love is the keelson (foundation) of creation'. Through their 'all accepting' voice and 'all loving' attitude they want to disseminate the message of love, which is the message of God (Sastry, 1982, 19& 80).

Also, Nazrul Islam wrote such poems as Coolie Mojoor(Day Labourers), Choor Dhakat(Thief and Robber) and Krishaner Ghan(Song of Farmer) and Krishoker Eid(Eid of the Farmer) etc. in which the poet basically

highlights the sorrows and fights of their life at the sametime the exploitation over them by unmasking the face of exploiter with his natural language of rebellion.

If we read some lines from Whitman's "Song of Myself" as given below, we will find Whitman celebrating equally these working class people including thief or the wicked or the righteous: 'Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade of all who shake/

hands and welcome to the drink and meat,'(section 16 "Song of Myself")

or

'This is the meal equally set,...

It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments with all,

I will not have single person slighted or left away',(section 19 "Song of Myself")

or

'Through me many long dumb voices,

Voices of interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,

Voices of the diseased.. of thieves and...' (section-24 "Song of Myself")

Both Whitman and Nazrul besides speaking for the dignity of common humanity and the working class people, the also speak for the right of the thief and the robber, because everybody has his right for self defense.

## CONCLUSION:

The discussion held above indicates that Whitman and Nazrul are identical with each other in many points; especially in their unalloyed love for mankind and the common humanity. Because of the unlimited love as they have shown for mankind and the commons, it may be said about both poets- associating their poetic mission and vision with Victor Hugo's saying, in his Preface to his masterpiece Les Miserables: 'so long as there shall exist, by reason or law and custom, a social condemnation, injustice, misery of the common, tyranny and oppression, inhumanity, inequality that artificially create hells on earth and complicate the destiny of the humanity, so long as the problem of the age—the degradation of man by poverty, the ruin of man and women by starvation and the oppression of common humanity are not solved, so long as in certain regions, social, political and economic injustice shall be possible, so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth(Hugo,1994,p.17)' - the voice of these two great lovers of humanity - Whitman and Nazrul- shall always reverberate in the world.

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