

NAZRUL'S REALIZATION OF PRACTICALITY OF ZAKAAH AND OTHER ISLAM ENJOINED CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES FOR A BALANCED SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Islam encompasses every aspect of life – spiritual, individual, social, political, cultural, and economic. It provides guidelines by which the flow of money is made sure making Zakaah and other charitable activities operational so that goods are purified by being channeled from those who have much of it to those who have little. Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), the national poet of Bangladesh, has rightly understood the practicality of these economic activities for an equitable society. His inclusion of Zakaah and other charitable activities into literature perfectly indicates his deep-rooted Islamic knowledge. Such true reflection of Islamic standpoints accompanied by his expression of unalloyed love for the poor, strong voice against the causes of poverty, starvation, and the evil forces intending to eternalize the gaps between the rich and the poor in societies, etc. has placed him in a unique position in Bangla as well as in the world literature. This paper aims to explore how Nazrul's dealing in his literature with Zakaah and other charitable activities, and his voice against inhumanity, societal injustice done to the poor, etc. goes simultaneously with the paradigm of Islam.

Keywords: Nazrul, Practicality, Islam, Zakaah, Charitable Activities

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam has provided guidelines for every sphere of life and society. As such it has set some standards, based on justice and practicality, for proper handling of wealth in a society. In this regard, the following verse is worth mentioning: "Whatever Allah restored to Messenger from the people of the towns, it is for Allah and Messenger and the kindred

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and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer so that it may not become a perpetual circulation between the rich among you.”(Al-Quran, 59: 7). Following are some Islamic economic guidelines for establishing an equitable society:

- a) As creator of the universe, Allah is the ultimate owner of everything and human beings are only responsible to steward His possessions. In this regard, the Qur'an states, “To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth.” (2:284)

Thus, human beings need to manage their property according to Allah's way. This main concept constitutes the unique characteristics of the Islamic economic system as opposed to the conventional economy. The Holy Quran declares:“...and spend (in charity) out of what We have provided for them.” (2:3)

- b) Justifying economic equality in society, Islam believes in the concept of charity taxes (*Zakaah, Khums, Fitrah, Khiraj, Ushar, Ssadaqah, Infaq*, etc.). Regarding the compulsion of Zakaah the Qur'an declares: “He has enjoined upon me the prayer and zakaah.”(19: 31)
- c) Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) has banned certain economic and social acts which are against Islamic values, such as *usury* and *hoarding*.The Quran rightly declare in this regard:“Allah destroys usury and gives increase for charities. And Allah does not love any ungrateful sinner.” (2: 276)

There is warning against *usury*in a Hadith:“Narrated Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: The Apostle of Allah (peace_be_upon_him) cursed the one who accepted usury, the one who paid it, the witness to it, and the one who recorded it.”(Dawud :: Book 22 : Hadith 3327)

- d) Prohibition of wasting and squandering (*israf/tabriz*)

Against *Israf* Al-Quran says:

And He is the One who produces gardens,trellised and untrellised,and the date-palm andthe crops of diversetaste, and olives andpomegranates, similarand dissimilar. Eat of itsfruit when it bears fruitand give its due on theday of its harvest. Anddo not be extravagant.Indeed, Hedoes notlove those who areextravagant. (6: 141)

- e) Ensuring the Payment of Wages to the Labourers

However, here our concentration goes withthe discussion of Nazrul's highlight on various charity taxes, especially *Zakaah* and Islamic principles about *hoarding, payment of wages to the labourers*, etc.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to explore the Nazrul's perception on zakah and other Islam enjoined charitable activities for promoting a balanced society.

1.2. Literature Review

So far our observation goes, any parallel discussion on Nazrul's dealing with Zakaah, and other charitable activities and Islam's enjoyment for these activities to maintain a

balanced society is still an unexplored area. But the study of Ruhee(2013), while studying some selected songs of Nazrul, has explored Nazrul's idea of universal brotherhood, Zakaah, etc. Likewise, Tajuddin (2015) has discussed Nazrul's struggle for economic equality, his voice against societal injustice to the poor and the needy, etc. He observes, "Nazrul lived under the oppressive British rule which is", he thought, "responsible for all kinds of social evils or economic oppression, and he dedicated his whole life and poetic career to destroy this regime" (37). Nazrul's poetry and song articulated aspirations of the downtrodden classes, a sphere of his work known as "mass music". Nazrul assailed the socio-economic norms and political system that had brought upon misery. (Classic poetry series, 2012:4)

2. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

2.1. Nazrul's Emphasis on Zakaah

In support of all aspects of Islamic instruction for Zakaah, Nazrul has raised his voice. This study has tried to discuss them below with keen observation.

2.1.1. *Zakaah as an Obligatory Action*

Islam, being a religion of balance, instructs the rich to share a particular portion of their wealth with the poor. This sharing is made obligatory for the affluent Muslims: "And establish prayer and give zakaah."(Al-Quran, 2:110). With the same obligatory sentiment of Islam Nazrul says:

"Your wealth is not merely for your own pleasures
Give Zakah to the deserving Muslim brothers."
(Remember it's Eid at the end of Ramadhan's Fasting)

The rich or the affluent will have to be conscious and sincere in carrying out this essential duty to create a bridge of humanity and brotherhood between the people of two different financial abilities. This may be called human economy suggested by Islam in the form of Zakaah, one of its five pillars or the five most important duties of a Muslim. Poet Nazrul understood the need of this system of human economy which, according to him, will not only stop the rich section's tendency to torture the poor but also create an equilibrium among people in terms of socio-economic condition enabling all to share joy and sorrow equally.

Ruhee's (2013) observation, in this regard, is noteworthy. In studying Nazrul's song "Remember it's Eid at the end of Ramadhan's Fasting", she mentions Allah's commandment to take care of the poor and needy people around us by feeding them, by helping them with the money and wealth that Allah has bestowed us. Therefore, the spirit of Ramadhan is of sacrifice. The Muslims should celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr in order to live the rest of the year with the light of the same spirit. The song nationally celebrated on the occasion of Eid every year in Bangladesh contains the teachings of Ramadhan as well as Eid-ul-Fitr:

“Remember it’s Eid at the end of Ramadhan’s fasting
Come with the spirit of sacrifice today repelling your self-desires —
Observe the command of Allah, the Lord of the worlds.”

We know Islam encourages performing good deeds including charitable activities like zakaah in the holy Ramadan.

2.1.2. Zakaah as a Means of Reward

Though Zakaah is made obligatory in Islam, it is also encouraged with reward: “Indeed, those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayers and regular (Zakaah) charity, will have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (Al-Quran, 2: 277). Nazrul also mentions the sacrifice as a means for earning reward of God’s blessing:

Sacrifice for God your life and soul
and all your riches,
earn truly and honestly the blessing of heaven!
Heaven has no room for selfishness.

[The Martyr's Eid (Original: Shohidi Eid; Translation: Kabir Chowdhury)]

2.1.3. Zakaah as a Means of Purification

In Islam, giving Zakaah to the poor is also described as a means to purify the wealth of the rich. In this regard, the Quranic instruction is as follows: “Take from their wealth a charity by which you may purify them and cause them increase, and invoke (Allah’s blessings) upon them.” (9:103)

“Unlike conventional tax, zakat is viewed by Muslims as a means of ‘purifications’ and not just an obligation” (Gambling & Karim 1986).

Al-Quran also says: “O ye who believe! When ye consult the Messenger in private, spend something in **charity** before your private consultation. That will be best for you, and most conducive to purity (of conduct).” (58: 12).

2.1.4. Zakaah as a Portion of the Poor in the Wealth of the Rich

Describing Zakaah as a portion of the poor in the wealth of the rich, the Quranic verse goes: “And in their wealth was the right of those who asked and are the deprived.” (51:19) In the same way, Nazrul writes:

In surplus of these wealthy and rich, there is definitely a right
of all those hungry and deprived: this is Allah's message, so clear and trite.

Take away their surplus and their undeserving wealth; yes, take away!
You will be fulfilling a divine command, who stands in the way?

[O Destitutes! Original: Sharbohara (eid); Trans. Mohammad Omar Farooq]

In the poem Chasha-Mojur, same message is found.
 At the doors of the owners of staircase have arrived today
Chasha Mojur and Bidiwala;
 In order to obtain our portion at Eid
 Order is given by Allah Ta’ala.

Here Nazrul represents the poor as *Chasha Mojur* (farmers-labourers) and *Bidiwala* (smokers of a kind of slender cigarette with tree-leaf as enclosing materials).

2.1.5. Zakaah as a Means of Poverty Alleviation

From Islamic history it is known that Zakaah plays a vital role in eradicating poverty. A study of Ahmed (2004:31) reveals that there are two reports giving an account of role Zakaah on poverty alleviation during the periods of Umar binAl-Khattab (13-22H) and Umar bin Abdul Aziz (99-101H).during the ruling of Umar bin Al-Khattab reported by Abu Ubaid (1353 H) from Amr bin Shuayb, the Yemen governor, Mu’adh bin Jabal sent one-third of the *zakat* collection in a particular year to Umar bin Al-Khattab. Umar rejected the fund by saying, “I sent you to take from the rich and render it to the poor among them”. Mu’adh later claimed that he could not find anyone who deserved the *zakat* money. In the following year, Mu’adh sent half of the *zakat* collection and similar conversation took place between them. Later, in the third year, he sent all the *zakat* collection to Umar and said, “This year I did not find a single person who needs from me anything of the *zakat*”. Similar scenario was found during the reign of Umar bin Abdul Aziz where an Egypt governor sent him a letter asking him on what to do with the proceeds of *zakat* funds as no deserving poor and needy was found in Egypt. According to Umar bin Abdul Aziz, the funds then shall be used to, “Buy slaves and let them free, build rest areas on the highways and help young men and women to get married”.

Thus, it seems that practically, *Zakaah* is efficient in combating poverty if being managed properly.

Likewise, Nazrul realizes that a meager portion of the wealth ofthe rich could save the impoverished and poor street boys who are deprived of their basic rights: food and shelter--

Faces dried up from starving all day, scornful,
 Their bodies feverish, skin chapped all over
 Ignoring them—O Rich, O Ruler,

 Shame on you...
 All that rice you store in your bins...
 Just a portion of it could save them.
 [Pain of the Poor (Original:Goriber Baytha, Translation: Sajed Kamal)]

2.1.6. Reluctance to Perform Zakaah as a Matter of Decoding

Regarding the responsibility of performing Zakaah, Nazrul's language is scolding to those who are reluctant:

Those who, depositing lacs of money, like scrooge
Do not give Zakaat to the Allah-decided have-nots, will die.

This is not our wreath; this is the curse of Allah,
In the name of money accumulated in your bank a vast amount of vice!

In his poem "Eid-er Chaad", he shows that the joyful event of Holy Eid is associated with Zakaah and Allah's instruction to the rich or the affluent is to give Zakaah to the poor on that happy and holy occasion. So "Eid-er Chaad" vindicates his deeply rooted reliance on Islamic economics with its system of Zakaah.

During the ruling of Abu Bakar, stressing on the importance of zakaah he was recorded as saying: "If they withhold giving zakaah even a little rein of a camel or a small baby sheep (that is due on them) I will fight them for it. Zakaah is the obligation on properties. By God, I will fight whoever discriminates between prayers and zakaah." (Sahih Al-Bukhari)

2.1.7. Emphasis of Islam to be Humble in Charity

Islam not only emphasized on paying Zakaah, but also reminded the rich to remain humble in charity. Al-Quran says: "O you who have believed do not invalidate your charities with reminders or injury as does one who spends his wealth (only) to be seen by the people and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day." (2:264)

2.2. Nazrul's Voice against Hoarding

Islamic Economics is always against hoarding and unnecessary storing of wealth. Correspondingly, regarding the punishment for those who hoard, the following verse goes: "The Day when it (the gold and silver) will be heated in the Fire of Hell and their foreheads, flanks and their backs will be branded with it (it will be said), 'This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you used to hoard.'" (9: 35). Nazrul's position against hoarding is the same. In the poem *Shahidi Eid*:

And you have no sacrifice even meager!
But pile up your wealth larger and larger,
When asked to sacrifice, you shrink,

The following verse of the Quran warns those who hoard:

O you who believe! Indeed, many of the rabbits and the monks devour the wealth of people in falsehood and hinder (them) from the way of Allah. And those who hoard the gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of Allah, give them tidings of a painful punishment. (9:34).

2.3. Nazrul's Presentation of Islamic Historical Event about the Conduct with the Poor

Nazrul realizes and upholds the philosophy inherent in Islam. With a view to making this economic philosophy of Islam practicable, it is backed by a social philosophy of the religion. It is that all human beings are equal. It will be reflected in human feeling and interaction. Wealth, power, fame or prestige does not make one superior to other. This is how ego resulting in insult to others' human identity is prohibited. This philosophy of Islam ultimately ensures heart-felt feeling and a sense of brotherhood among the affluent for the poor. It preserves among the poor a sense of belonging to the society canceling out that of alienation. This society of peaceful, harmonious and brotherly co-existence of the rich and the poor is a place of equity that Islam emphasizes. This feature of Islam is drawn by Nazrul when he in his poem "Omar Faruque" poetically narrates the event when the Khalifa of Islamic State Hazrat Omar (R.) shares the riding of the camel in turn with his servant while in a journey through the Sahara desert. Being astonished, the servant asks Hazrat Omar (R.) how the servant will be on the back of the animal while the master who is also the ruler of the country will be on foot pulling the rope. Hazrat Omar replies that he is the ruler but he is also a human being. So he has no right to have service from another human being. Nazrul writes, "I have no right Of comfort and pleasure,-of taking the service of men being a man!"

2.4. Nazrul's Stand against Societal Injustice to the Poor

When Nazrul includes this essential scenario exemplified by a historical event of Islam, he does not fail to shed light on the contrary situation in order to stress the need of equity between the rich and the poor. In the poem, *Amar Khaifiut* (My Question) he writes about the condition of the destitute and poor with his heart-breaking tone:

I cry out in tears: —O God, are you still there?
 Why is not there a touch of embarrassment
 In the faces of those
 Who suck the blood of these hungry children?

 Mother is begging out
 While her child lies dead at home.
 My heart is burning with pain.
 I have gone mad from seeing all these
 And I say whatever comes to my tongue.
 I cannot shed blood alone,
 So I write all this down in bloody letters.

Against misbehavior and oppressive sentiment of the rich to the poor, the Quran warns:
 (Have you seen the one)...Who repulses the orphan,
 And does not feel the urge to feed the poor.
 So woe to those who pray,

Those who are neglectful of their prayers,
Those who make show of (their deeds).
And they deny small kindnesses! (106:2-7)

The following lines of Nazrul are the true reflection of the above mentioned Quranic verses about the poor and starving men:

“Give away all what will come of use
To the starving men who ought to fast for life.
Feed the poor, the orphan and don't refuse
The grieving beggar that struggles to survive.”
(Remember it's Eid at the end of Ramadhan's Fasting)

Nazrul criticizes the fakeness of religiosity or piety of an individual when he has no love for the poor and the destitute or the common humanity regardless of caste, creed and religion:

Who are they—hating human beings
Yet kissing the Quran, the Vedas, the Bible?
Snatch away those books from them.
The hypocrites pretend worshipping those books
By killing the human beings....

Nazrul's concern like this for the poor and the destitute seems to present the saying of the prophet Mohammad (SAW): — “He is not a believer who sleeps full-bellied, but his neighbor suffers from hunger” (Sahih Bukhari).

In the poem “Jaghoroni” (Raising of Consciousness) same voice is raised:

“Give me alms! Give me alms!
Look back O full-fed,
At your door present is the child unfed,
Give humanity as alms! (126)”

The above Quranic and Sunnatic message lets us know that those who perform religious activities but keep themselves aloof from charity deeds like helping the poor are not true believers. Whereas Allah does not withdraw from showering His blessings to men in the shape of food as well, His creature human beings, even in garb of priest/molla, turn away from the beggars not giving alms or food showing the lame excuse of the latter's not offering prayer to Allah. In “Manush” (Human Being) such an example is presented sarcastically:

I have lived for eighty years
without saying a prayer, yet you've never
deprived me of my food. But the mosques
and temples, O Lord-human beings have
no claim on them. Mollahs and priests

have locked all their doors! [Human Being (Original: Manush, Trans. Sajed Kamal)]

In *ShahidiEid(The Eid of Martyrdom)*, the language of Nazrul's scolding is more touching:

You are very gorgeous in your fasting and prayer,
And upon uttering some mystic hocus-pocus
Have turned you a *JOKER*,

.....
What is the worth of your *PRAYER*?

2.5. Nazrul's Emphasis on the Payment of Wages to the Laborers

From a Hadith of IbnMajah it is known that the Prophet (SM) instructed: "Give the workers his wages before his sweat dries (2443)." He also asks not to pay to the laborers less than they deserve or let not keep them unpaid. The following Hadith in this regard is worth mentioning:

Narrated Abu Huraira:

The Prophet said, "Allah says, 'I will be against three persons on the Day of Resurrection:

1. One who makes a covenant in My Name, but he proves treacherous.
2. One who sells a free person (as a slave) and eats the price,
3. And one who employs a laborer and gets the full work done by him but does not pay him his wages."

Similarly, in the poem "Kuli-Mojur" (Porter and Laborer), the poet shows a sahib who exploits porters through his negligence in giving wages to them in time or avoidance of giving wages to them. If in any way he gives, it is much less than it actually is. Poet asks the sahib: "Have you given the wages? By paying what amount of penny how much crore have you gathered, tell me!"(2014: 195)

3. CONCLUSION

Kazi Nazrul Islam has truly understood that it is religious instructions which can encourage the rich to take the responsibility of the poor. So in a great number of poetry and other literary works of him he talks about the poor and their rights which are readily Islamic message. Though this is very little as compared with the vastness of the volumes of his works, by the study we see that Nazrul was very much familiar with the vastness of Islamic knowledge regarding the socio-economic condition of the people and where problems lie behind the wide spread poverty, starvation and miseries of people in societies. So besides encouraging charitable activities enjoined by Islam, he held his pen against all evil forces, which, he thought, are responsible for the miseries and sufferings of the people, eternalizing the gaps between the rich and the poor.

At the end of this study of parallel discussion on Islamic principles and Nazrul's literature, our research shows that a lot of issues need to be considered in order to meet the requirement of a balanced society.

1. Convincing the rich that Allah is the real owner of their wealth.
2. Arousing strong desire among the rich for giving Islam enjoined charity taxes (*Zakaah, Khums, Fitrah, Khiraj, Ushar, sadaqah and infaq* etc.) as obligatory, purifying, portion sharing, and rewarding activities

More importantly, giving Zakaah can be emphasized with the message of Islam that to be a complete Mumin (believer) Allah has made Zakaah as one of the important characteristics: "Who are active in deeds of charity" (Al-Quran, 23:4)

3. Arousing the Sense of equality among the Muslims

Islam's equality is not like the sense of communism which controls the freedom of individual income. The appropriate term used in Islam for this is 'Ihsan' (equilibrium).

Nazrul truly gives the message of this equality:

The prophet who gave up to man
The rights of man.

.....
And the whole world sings today
Of man's freedom and equality.

(Tora dekheja Amina mayerkole; Trans. by Kabir Chowdhury)

4. Making people aware of *hoarding* which is punishable in the eye of Islam
Says Islam, we are all for one another,
we are all brothers and shall
share joy and sorrow equally,
none of us has the right to hold. [Eid Mobarak; Trans.: Basudha Chakravarty]
5. Arousing sense of giving due wages to the laborers

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