

The Champion who Preceded The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a momentous document in the history of human rights. The Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10th, 1948. This year is its 71st anniversary.

Years of colonial domination of many countries, savage torturing of the slaves by many nations, gross violation of the basic human rights during the first & second world war and the incidence of the barbaric holocaust pushed the world to a culminating point of self-annihilation & a resolution to preserve human rights & humanity was an absolute necessity. However, all of the clauses described in this resolution have been addressed by Nazrul during 1920-1930 through his poems, speeches, articles & his testimony known as রাজবন্দীর জবানবন্দী (Testimony of a prisoner of the King) long before 1948. There are 30 articles in this resolution. Here I will discuss 7 most significant ones.

Introduction

Article 1 :

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

This article talks about the overall concept of equality of all humans. How did Nazrul address these issues? Nazrul rejoiced humanity. He believed that he was sent by God to serve humanity & his mission was to restore & preserve the sanctity of humanity. In Kuli Majur Nazrul said

“Come all, from all time, all nations, come together at the alcove of brotherhood, Listen to the flute calling for unity; if one person is hurt, the pain transcends to everyone, if one person is dishonored, it shrouds the entire human race with shame and humiliation.”

What a powerful way to proclaim & mandate equality & solidarity of all humans, delegate every individual to preserve the sanctity of humanity & put the burden on everyone’s shoulder to be the guardian of humanity & ensure worldly brotherhood!

Nazrul said

“I know that the thunderous uproar in my voice echoed with the agonizing howling of the souls of eternity. This cry can’t be silenced by punishing or threatening me for it will resonate in someone else’s voice”.

Being a scientist, I see Nazrul placing himself in the space-time continuum & proclaiming his presence in the Universe for all time & his message being eternal.

Article 2 :

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 3:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

All of these issues were addressed by Nazrul in three of his most classic masterpieces, (সাম্যবাদী, মানুষ, ঈশ্বর) The Egalitarian, Man & God. He said :

“Of equality I sing, nothing is nobler or more precious than human/Regardless of countries, time and placethey are all equal and related”

“I sing of equality, where all the barriers and estrangements disappear, where Hindu, Budhists, Muslim, Christian, unite”

“I sing of equality, I see men & women as equal/ They are to be credited equally for all great achievements in the world”

Article 4 :

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave tradeshall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5:

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Nazrulwas committed heart and soul to fight against discriminationof any form & vehemently opposed to class system. About labor right, Nazrul averred : তোমার সেবিতে হইলো যাহারা মজুর, মুটে ও কুলি, তোমার বহিতে যাহারা পবিত্র অঙ্গে লাগলো ধূলি

“Those who became hard laborers just to serve you
And had their sacred body covered with dust
I sing their song/They are the real people, they are the gods
Their wounded souls are ushering in the new era”

About socio-economic discremination he said

“The other day, in a train I saw a socialite push a Kooli on the street calling him name, I broke into tears, will the poor people continue to be humilitiated like this?”

Nazrulfirmlly believed that in order to establish true democracy, social and economic corruption& class discrimination must first be eradicated. He wrote in উপেক্ষিত শক্তির উদ্বোধন (The celebration of the power of the neglected people)

“The bourgeoishave named the proletariat “The People of the lower class”. They are brainwashed from childhood in believing that they are of lesser quality, they are inferior, they forget that they too are God’s creation & have equal rights to any other person. Today, we are heading towards turmoil because we forgot how to respect one another”.

Nazrul belonged to proletariat class, but his realization of self-empowerment was truly outstanding& inspiring,in the poem বিদ্রোহী he wrote

“Proclaim hero proclaim, I raise my head high before me bows down the Himalayan peaks;Piercing through the earth, sky, the sun the moon the cosmos and the Almighty’s throne I rise, I am the eternal wonder of the Creator of the universe”

Here again, he claims his eternal presence in the Universe.

Nazrul, not only created extraordinary literature to ascertain his belief & commitment, he even set examples through his life to prove it.He faced severe financial crisis throughout his life andin the poem রাজবন্দীর জবানবন্দী (Poverty) he wrote

“O poverty the pain you inflicted upon me turned me into a saint, bestowed upon me the honor of Christ as he was adorned with the crown of thorns”, then he writes “As I burn in hell fire, I smile like a freshly blossoming flower”,

Proclaiming that he was totally undefeatable&under extreme adverse situation he would be reborn with renewed spirit.

About slavery he writes in জাগরণী (The awakening)

“Let true heroism, true humanism return
Wipe off the ugly graffiti of slavery, break through the shackles & be free”

Article 7:

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.

Article 10:

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Nazrul was a freedom fighter & victim of the most corrupt judicial system of the British Government. As the editor of Dhumketu he wrote powerful editorials against British colonialism & openly declared that India will settle for nothing short of complete independence. And as he continued to do that he was arrested & charged with treason against the British Government. He was sentenced to serve one year rigorous imprisonment. As a defendant he gave a statement called রাজবন্দীর জবানবন্দী (Testimony of a political prisoner) where he analyzed the subject of fair trial for everyone. Like the poem Bidrohi, which is one of the most outstanding pieces in the history of world literature, in my opinion the statement রাজবন্দীর জবানবন্দী is also one of the most powerful ones ever made by a defendant. I will cite few excerpts. Nazrul said

“I have been charged with treason, convicted for treachery against the king, and sentenced to serve as a prisoner of the king. I find that there are two sides to this case: on one side is the king’s crown; on the other is the blazing comet of God. In the eyes of the Supreme Judge (meaning God), all are treated equally: the king and his subjects, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the unprivileged. On his throne, the king’s crown and the beggar’s “একতারা” are placed side by side. Whereas the king may find me guilty, in God’s judgment I am innocent and my message would be saluted as ever-shining, everlasting, unblemished eternal truth”.

Once again, Nazrul claims that his message is eternal!

Then he said

“I am a poet sent by God to reveal His untold truth and revitalize His creation. My message may be proscribed by the king. But, in the eyes of truth my message does not violate the ruling of truth and justice”.

So, he kept on marching forward with powerful drumbeat making clear distinction between truth, justice & injustice & establish that true justice is an absolute reality, not a relative one & it can’t be different for the so called masters & slaves!

Nazrul was a God sent versatile genius & his message is eternal. The issues he dealt with and the causes he fought for during 1920-1930 were recognized by the world some 20 years later as the gold standard guideline for humanity. So it is my realization that Nazrul has left behind a ocean of treasure. Hence, for the good of the humanity, the treasure must be shared with the world. The burden is on our shoulder to make sure Nazrul’s message crosses the boundaries of language, space & time. I would appeal to everyone to take active part in understanding Nazrul thoroughly & sharing his philosophy, ideology and the magic of his songs & music with the world. We owe it to Nazrul & we owe it to the world.