

# Whitman and Nazrul: A comparative study of poetry

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**Abstract:** This article sketched out the comparative analysis of Whitman's *Song of Myself* and Nazrul's *Bidrohi (The Rebel)* in theme, mood, tone, language, and poetic diction, respectively. Consequently, the article illustrated the contextual interplay between both poems. The article used data from primary and secondary data sources to draw some preliminary conclusions. The article started with a literary discussion on discourse analysis. The finding confirmed the power of 'I' and the glorification of humankind in both poems, respectively. The main contribution of this study was the discourse analysis of Whitman's *Song of Myself* and Nazrul's *Bidrohi (The Rebel)* in a comparative approach. This article would help to understand the influence of American literature on Bengali poetry.

**Keywords:** *Bidrohi (The Rebel)*, mood, poetic diction, *Song of Myself*, tone, theme.

## Introduction:

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) are often called American and Bangladeshi national poets, respectively. Whitman was a poetic representation of the spirit of the border and an enthusiastic search for a viable identity, generated by the American War of Independence. Thus, Nazrul, a young man of his time, attempted to gain the freedom of India. Similarly, Whitman and Nazrul are a human poet, not a sect or a narrow ideological or economic system. Both wrote for everyone to be ensured the same opportunity, regardless of color, faith, or economic status. They wanted to eliminate all barriers and create a new society by eliminating all obstacles. Both poets entered the literary world with a revolutionary spirit. They raised their voices against the traditional rules. The sounds and rhythms of revolution were found in Whitman's *Song of Myself* and Nazrul's *Bidrohi (The Rebel)* (Hossain & Rima, 2013).

## Methodology of Research:

The objective of this research is to analyze the figurative language in Whitman's *Song of Myself* and Nazrul's *Bidrohi (The Rebel)* and to perform a comparative analysis thematically. The objects of this research are two poems: Whitman's 'Song of Myself' and Nazrul's *Bidrohi (The Rebel)*. Whitman's *Song of Myself* (1892) was excerpted from the *Leaves of Grass* and was published in Norton in 1973. Furthermore, Nazrul's *Bidrohi (The Rebel)* was taken out of '*The Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English translation*' translated by Kabir Chowdhury, edited by Mohammad Nurul Huda at the Nazrul Institute in 2000, pages 12-16, and translated by Sajed Kamal. The researcher used qualitative methods to describe and interpret the poems of Walt Whitman and Kazi Nazrul, respectively, in this research. The primary instrument is the researcher's ability to combine and analyse data (Merriam, 1998; Alwasilah, 2008). According to Sukmadinata (2010), qualitative research has two aims: first, to describe and explore, secondly, to describe and explain. A sample is any part of the population, regardless of whether it is representative (Robert, 1994). According to Sugiyono (2007), a sample is part of the number and characteristics that are possessed by that population itself. In the investigation, two poems were taken as a sample to analyze and explore the thematical comparison between Whitman and Nazrul. The poems were discussed as follows: a) *Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman and b) *Bidrohi (The Rebel)* by Kazi Nazrul. In this investigation, the researcher uses two types of data. They are as follows. Primary data source and secondary data source. The primary data source of this research are the poems entitled. The primary data of the poems of this research were taken from *Leaves of Grass* published in Norton in 1973. and *Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English translation* translated by Kabir Chowdhury, edited by Mohammad Nurul Huda in Nazrul Institute in 2000, pages 12-16. and translation of Sajed Kamal, respectively. The secondary data source for this research is references from different printed and online journals, books, articles, and news published regarding the research problem at the time. Furthermore, *A glossary of Literary terms* by M.H. Abraham (1999), *English Literature* by Anthony Burgess, and *Figures of Speech* by Christina Alm-Arvinus (2003) were notably regarded as the secondary data source. In this research, library research was done according to the Attarsemi model (1993) to collect data by finding books and journals related to the research as references. Furthermore, the technique for collecting data was followed by the Sukmadinata model (2010) to collect and analyze data. They are entitled as planning to begin to collect data, collect basic data, collect closing data, and complete. As it is a qualitative investigation, the data were classified, descriptively analyzed, and presented in the form of words and sentences. The analysis was presented in two aspects, namely, figurative language analysis and poetry analysis. To analyse the data, the model of Ekomadyo (2006) was followed that content analysis is a method to collect data and analyse the payload of a text. The text can be said as words, the meaning of images, symbols, ideas, themes, and various forms of messages that can be communicated. According to Allen (2017), poetic analysis can be defined as a method that creatively constructs data into expressive and artistic representations. Essentially, poetic analysis allowed the researcher to (re)organize and compose the data with poetic sensibilities.

## Discussion and Findings:

Poetic diction is the language, including word choice and syntax, which sets poetry apart from more utilitarian forms of writing (Hirsch, 2014). Both Whitman and Nazrul used informal (conversational) diction in their poems. In the history of American poetry in the late nineteenth century, Whitman brought the language of common people and everyday language into his poetry. The language of the poem *Song of Myself* is one of the finest examples of poetry in the colloquial language in American literature. Similarly, the poet Nazrul in the early twentieth century Bengali poetry drew a new poetic genre by writing poems in conversational language with colloquial diction, and his poems became the soul of common Bengali people of that time. For example, Nazrul's *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) can be regarded as one of the prolific examples of Bengali colloquial language, and thus Nazrul is regarded by critics as a Bengali romantic poet.

One of the dominant themes of both the *Song of Myself* of Whitman and *the Bidrohi* (the rebel) of Nazrul is the celebration of 'I'. For example, the word 'I' is used by Whitman about 145 times and by Nazrul about 136 times in these poems, respectively. Both poems can be regarded as examples of self-expression in the history of American poetry and Bengali poetry. It should be noted that Nazrul was highly influenced by Whitman in the early twentieth century thematically, and thus poetic individualism became a subject matter of Bengali poetry followed by Nazrul historically.

Whitman expressed and celebrated himself.

*'In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less,  
And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.  
I know I am solid and sound,  
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,  
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.  
I know I am deathless,  
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,  
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night.  
I know I am august,  
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,  
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,  
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)'*  
(Whitman, 1982, *Song of Myself*)

Similarly, after 29 years of Whitman, Nazrul in Bengal wrote and sang his glory as

*I am the hurricane, I am the cyclone  
I destroy all that I found in the path!  
I am the dance-intoxicated rhythm,  
I dance at my own pleasure,  
I am the unfettered joy of life!  
I am Hambeer, I am Chhayanata, I am Hindole,  
I am ever restless,  
I caper and dance as I move!  
I do whatever appeals to me, whenever I like,  
I embrace the enemy and wrestle with death,  
I am mad. I am the tornado!  
I am pestilence, the great fear,  
I am the death of all reigns of terror,  
I am full of a warm restlessness for ever!*

(Nazrul, 1921, *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) translated by Kabir Chowdhury)

Both Whitman and Nazrul expressed the source of power as their inspiration for self-celebration in a multi-looked way. For instance, Whitman used nature as his source of poetic inspiration to celebrate individualism. The following discourses are notable examples: *summer grass, nature, breed of life, beams, earth, seasons, sand, egg of the wren, gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots, sky, ground, winter, summer, autumn, bean, twilight, moon, sun, night, day, blood and air*, etc. These are the

powerhouse of Whitman's inventiveness to sing his song, which are all natural elements. Conversely, Nazrul took myth, nature, and humans as his source of power. First, his poetry, *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) is composed of several myths that form the eastern and western worlds simultaneously. The following discourses are remarkable examples in this regard: *Durjati, Hambeer, Chhayanata, Hindole, son of Indrani, Brahma, Israfil's bugle, Pinakpani, Chakra, great Shanka, Bishyamitra, Durbasha, Orpheus's flute, Bishnu, Chandi, Warlord, Parsurama axe, Saturn, Borrak, Bhriugu*, etc. of Eastern and Western mythology combined. For Nazrul, the myths of the whole world are the power and inspiration of individual human beings. Second, similarly to Whitman, Nazrul accumulated elements of nature in his poetry, such as his poetic enthusiasm and self-veneration. He used the discourses of nature in the poem, for example, *Himalaya peak, wide sky, moon, sun, planets, stars, earth, heaven, cyclone, graveyard, night, wild fire, dawn, fury of typhoon, spring, fall, burning volcano, woods, sea of wrath, earth quacks, mighty flood, fire of the comet, innocent flower, air, hurricane, comet*, etc. are the natural forces to enjoy self-glorification and joy. Third, Nazrul, as a poet of ordinary people, accumulated elements of ordinary people such as his strength and enthusiasm. Therefore, he collected elements from ordinary people concurrently, for example, *madness lover, pinning soul of the lovesick, bitter tears in the widow's heart, piteous sights of the unlucky, all homeless sufferers, anguish of the insulted heart, the trembling first touch of the virgin, tenderness of her first stolen kiss, the fleeting glance of the veiled beloved, gripping young girl's love, the jingling music of her bangles, the piteous groans of the oppressed* etc. as his power of joy and celebration of life. One example of this is what Nazrul wrote,

*I am the pining soul of the lovesick,  
I am the bitter tears in the widow's heart,  
I am the piteous sighs of the unlucky!  
I am the pain and sorrow of all homeless sufferers,  
I am the anguish of the insulted heart,  
I am the burning pain and the madness of the jilted lover!  
I am the unutterable grief,  
I am the trembling first touch of the virgin,  
I am the throbbing tenderness of her first stolen kiss.  
I am the fleeting glance of the veiled beloved,  
I am her constant surreptitious gaze.  
I am the gay gripping young girl's love,  
I am the jingling music of her bangles!*  
(Nazrul, 1921, *Bidrohi* (The Rebel), translated by Kabir Chowdhury)

Another perspective holds in both poems, that is, supremacy of human being by Whitman and Nazrul. Humanism and glorification of human supremacy were the major concerns in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century by American nationalism and Bengali renaissance, respectively. For example, Whitman portrayed that a human being is above all entities of the universe. He wrote with pride,

*And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,  
.....  
And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,  
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,*  
(Whitman, 1982, *Song of Myself*)

Similarly, Nazrul also vividly heightened the supremacy of all human beings. He wrote

*... rending through the sky,  
surpassing the moon, the sun,  
the planets, the stars,  
piercing through the earth,  
the heavens, the cosmos  
and the Almighty's throne,  
have I risen, the eternal wonder  
of the Creator of the universe.  
.....  
I crush under my feet the vain glory of the Almighty !  
.....  
I'm the Rebel Bhriugu,  
I'll stamp my footprints*

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*I'll tear apart the chest of the whimsical god!*

(The Rebel (*Bidrohi*); Original: Nazrul, 1921)

At this point, the reader finds that both Whitman and Nazrul upheld the position of mankind in accordance. Furthermore, Whitman insisted on pantheism in his poem notably; he wrote, '*I hear and behold God in every object*' (Song of Myself). In addition, Nazrul found the existence of human beings in all objects. More importantly, Whitman and Nazrul by nature beheld a feature of romanticism, the march above the earth. For instance, Whitman wrote, '*I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world*' (Song of Myself). Similarly, Nazrul penned '*I raise my head beyond this world, High, ever erect and alone*' (Nazrul, 1921, *Bidrohi* (The Rebel), translated by Kabir Chowdhury). In Song of Myself, Whitman sang the victory of democracy with freedom as he wrote, '*I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy*' whereas Nazrul promoted self-government free from oppression and domination to reach in internationalism as he wrote in *Bidrohi* (The Rebel), '*I'm unruly and lawless. I crush under my feet all the bonds, rules and disciplines! I don't obey any laws*' (translated by Sajed Kamal). The geographical landscape of Whitman is American national (*Elkhorn, Louisianian, Georgian, Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye, Kanadian, New foundland, hills of Vermont, woods of Maine, Texas ranch, North-Westerners* etc.) whereas Nazrul did not want to demit him in geographical boundaries rather he wanted to be universal. For example, Nazrul chose the word '*world / earth*' about thirteen times in his poem *Bidrohi* (The Rebel).

According to Amoussou (2015), the word *mood*, written in small-case letters, generally refers to each of the different forms of the verb: declarative, interrogative, imperative, subjunctive, exclamative, etc. Furthermore, he also added that mood is the linguistic expression of attitudes, judgements, points of view, social relationship, etc, and to identify and to analyse of mood types, modality, and adjunct types in a given piece of discourse. According to Halliday (1985) and Eggins (1994), each mood type has a general speech function, as summed up in the table below:

**Table 1:** Mood types and their speech functions: collected from Halliday (1985); Eggins (1994).

Mood types	Speech functions
-declarative mood	-giving information by stating what is or happens.
-interrogative mood	-request of information;
-modulated interrogative mood	-indirect/tempered request of information;
-imperative mood;	- getting someone to do something
-modulated imperative mood;	-getting indirectly/in a tempered way somebody to do something by using, say, polite modals.
-exclamative mood	-expressing wonder, surprise, and bewilderment

In Song of Myself, Whitman accumulated both the declarative and the exclamative mood simultaneously to celebrate the joy of self-expression and describe the power of nature in life. To give information by stating what is or happens in American life and freedom, the poet used a declarative mood in the poetry. In addition, as a part of nature, the poet expressed wonder, surprise, and bewilderment at his existentiality. Besides, in some parts of the poem, the poet used the modulated imperative mood to get indirectly/in a tempered way, the people of New England to receive every class, race, and people equally by using, say, polite modals. He tried to comfort people to believe that everyone is important to the new nation, America. For example, he mentioned professionals of *farmers, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker, prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest, fishermen, teacher, lexicographer, mariner, geologist, mathematician*, etc. to promote occupational equality and social justice to all in building America as part of a linguistically modulated imperative mood. Similarly, Nazrul used modulated imperative mood with symbols of *unbridled hair of a maiden, fire in her eyes, romance if a girl of sixteen, madness of the recluse, grief of widow*, etc. to temper the power of the common man with the power of smallness.

Tone denotes the author's attitude towards the subject, towards himself, and towards the audience to a considerable extent. The tone of Whitman in Song of Myself was joyful, optimistic, and encouraging. To write in detail, he wanted to express his joy of American democracy to people of all levels, along with being overly optimistic about social equality among all professionals in American society. Furthermore, he encouraged people to build on *truth, faith, and friendship* simultaneously. In comparison, the tones of Nazrul in his *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) are playful (dance, sing, uprising, flute), sympathetic to (*beloved, groans of the oppressed*), furious (*colossal damage, ruinous, poisonous, burning, destruction*), wrathful (*wrath*) and whimsical (*mad, insane, drunk with delight*).

Language in poetry implies words that describe the entire body of words in a text, not isolated bits of diction. Both Whitman and Nazrul composed their Song of Myself and *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) respectively, in colloquial, emotional, ordinary, and symbolic language. It is important to note that allusion is a dominant element of the *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) of Nazrul, with myths and legends

that have spread all over the world. He used four types of allusions in the poem: a) biblical allusions, b) literary allusions, c) historical allusions, and d) cultural allusions. However, Whitman used only a cultural allusion in his poem Song of Myself.

**Conclusion:**

In summary, both Whitman and Nazrul are poets of self-esteem, freedom, and universal love. This article has shown how both poets expressed the power of 'I' in their poems. These results provide a significant first step toward investigating the influence of American poetry on Bengali poetry to a considerable extent.

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