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## **Influence of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat on Kazi Nazrul Islam's Composition: An Observation**

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### **Abstract**

For as long as anyone can remember, the Bedouins of the Arabian desert have carried poetry in their blood. It wasn't something they learned it was something they lived. Their words rose out of sand, wind, and firelight, shaping a tradition so powerful that it eventually carved out its own place in the story of world literature. And when this Bedouin spirit flowed eastward, it found a deeper, more reflective voice in the works of Persian poets none more captivating than Omar Khayyam. Khayyam's thoughts and questions his way of looking at life, time, and the fleeting nature of existence echoed far beyond Persia. They found new life in the Indian subcontinent, especially in the work of Kazi Nazrul Islam. Nazrul was the first to bring Khayyam's Rubaiyat from its original Persian into the rhythm and warmth of the Bengali language. But he didn't just translate it; he let it seep into his own art. Lines from Khayyam's verses found their way into Nazrul's Islamic songs, into his Bengali ghazals, into the emotional landscape of his music. This short exploration looks at how the influence of Khayyam's Rubaiyat helped shape Nazrul's songs how it gave them a deeper pulse, a sharper edge, and a kind of timelessness that still speaks to us today.

**Keywords:** Omar Khayyam, Sufism, Rubaiyat, Ghazal, Islamic song, Persian literature.

### **Introduction:**

Kazi Nazrul Islam lived a brief but fiercely creative life one shaped as much by struggle as by genius. Poverty shadowed him from childhood to his final years, yet it never dimmed his hunger to create. He moved through art, culture, and literature with a rare kind of freedom, crossing lines of caste, creed, and religion as if they were nothing more than sand. In his work, the Quran sits beside the Puranas, and the old Bengali Punthis breathe the same air as Indo-Iranian thought. He wasn't trying to please anyone he was trying to build a space where every voice could meet. The sheer breadth of his work is astonishing, especially considering how short his healthy years were. Nazrul composed an enormous number of songs, weaving together hundreds of ragas and raginis with the instinct of someone who felt music rather than studied it. His brilliance shows up everywhere in his

Islamic Bengali songs, his Bengali ghazals, and the many forms he experimented with. As Mohammad Abul Khair once wrote, "Nazrul achieved such success in composing ghazals that even if he had composed no music other than ghazals, he would have been regarded as a star of Bengali music."<sup>1</sup> The pull of Persian literature runs deep in his work, and nowhere is this more visible than in the echoes of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. Nazrul's Islamic songs and his Bengali ghazals carry the unmistakable rhythm, longing, and philosophical edge of Khayyam's quatrains.

### **Main Discussion:**

Persian literature is built on four major poetic forms: Qasida, Ghazal, Masnavi, and Rubaiyat. Qasida carries praise or satire; Ghazal sings of both divine and earthly love; Masnavi unfolds like a long, soulful tale; and Rubaiyat distills a single emotion into four sharp, unforgettable lines. Among these, the Rubaiyat stands tallest. Though the form traces its roots back to Arabia, it found its fullest voice in Persia, where poets shaped it into something the world could not ignore. The word "Rubaiyat" itself refers to quatrains four-line poems where the first, second, and fourth lines share a rhyme, and the third breaks away to close with a thought of its own. Each quatrain is a universe: a moment of betrayal, a breath of love, a wound, a celebration. Nothing spills over. Nothing repeats. Every emotion stands alone. The Persian tradition of the Rubaiyat is wide and wild it reaches into optimism and despair, Sufism and mysticism, metaphysics, fatalism, and philosophy. Through it, Persian literature not only deepened its own identity but opened a doorway through which the world stepped in. The renowned philosopher and poet Omar Khayyam significantly contributed to the promotion of Rubaiyat in Persia. Born in Nishapur, Khorasan, Persia, Omar Khayyam's birth year is disputed among historians, although most concur that he was born in 1048. During his lifetime, Omar Khayyam served as the royal astrologer to Seleucid Emperor Malik Shah. A polymath of his time, Omar Khayyam was esteemed for his expertise in astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and science, but his poetic endeavours remained unrecognised during his lifetime.

Omar Khayyam's life as a poet was first documented by his disciple Nizam Arzi in the book "Chahar Makala." It was not until 1859 that Edward Fitzgerald rediscovered and popularised Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat, which had lain dormant for approximately 800 years. However, it is worth noting that the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam had been introduced to European Buddhist circles nearly 200 years prior to Fitzgerald's discovery, courtesy of British orientalist Thomas Hyde in the sixteenth century.

In the Indian subcontinent, Swami Govinda Tirtha was the first to translate Omar Khayyam's 1069 Rubaiyat from the original Persian into Marathi in his book "Guru Karunamrita". Subsequently, he translated "The Nectar of Grace" into English from this book. Although several prominent poets and writers in Bengali literature did not directly translate from the Rubaiyat, they incorporated extracts from it into their poems. Notable among them are Buddhadev Bose, Mohit Lal Majumder, and Rabindranath Tagore. However, the Rubaiyat was first translated into the Bengali language by Kanti Chandra Ghosh, who translated 75 Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam in 1919. Apart from Kanti Chandra Ghosh, other notable translators include Narendra Dev, Mallinath, Kshirod Kumar Roy, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Syed Mujtaba Ali, Sikandar Abu Jafar, and Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, who collectively translated approximately 72 Rubaiyats into Bengali. Nonetheless, most of these translations, like Kanti Chandra Ghosh's, were rendered from

Fitzgerald's English version. Prof. A. J. Arberry aptly observed: "Only educated people worldwide know Omar Khayyam, as at least one Rubaiyat has reached them.

### **Original Persian of Omar Khayyam**

تنگی می لعل خواهم و دیوانی  
سد رمقی باید و نصف نانی  
وانگه من و تو نشسته در و ایرانی  
"خوشر بود از مملکت سلطانی" <sup>2</sup>

#### **Pronunciation of root Persian in Bengali**

"Tungi moi la'l khoaham oe diwani  
soddoi ramaki bayed oe nisof-e nane  
oan-gah maan oat u nishasta daar oarani  
khostor buaad aaj maanlekat sultani"

#### **Translated by Edward Fitzgerald from the original Persian:**

(XII)

"A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread-and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness –  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"<sup>3</sup>

#### **Translated by Kanti Chandra Ghosh from Edward Fitzgerald's English:**

(XI)

"Sei nirala patae ghera boner dhare shitol chae,  
khaddo kichu peyala haate chondo gethe dinta jae.  
mouno bhanggi mor pashete gonje tobo monju sur,  
Sei toh sokhi sopno amar sei bonani sorgopur"<sup>4</sup>

#### **Translated from the original Persian by Kazi Nazrul Islam:**

(61)

"Aek sorahi sura dio ektu chilke aar,  
Priyo saki, Tahar sathe aekkhana boi kobitar,  
Jirno amar jibon jure roibe Priya amar sathe,  
aek jodi pae chaebo na tokhot ami sahasar"<sup>5</sup>

Kazi Nazrul Islam was the first to directly translate the 197 Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam from the original Persian into the Bengali language. In this regard, Syed Mujtaba Ali wrote: "Omar is the greatest of Omars. Mallinath and Kazi's translation is the Kazi of all translations."<sup>6</sup>

In his translation of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat, Kazi Nazrul Islam gave more importance to the mood, language and rhythm. Kazi Nazrul Islam also translated the Rubaiyat, keeping the same rhyming pattern [A, A B A] of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat in harmony with the rhythm. Kazi Nazrul Islam's Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bengali songs reflect the philosophical wisdom of Omar Khayyam's Wine and Intoxication. For example, the intoxicant wine, which is used to forget the sorrows of daily life has been used to denote mysticism. The wine of wisdom refers to special wisdom. Kazi Nazrul Islam has

widely applied intoxicant wine and the wine of wisdom in his Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bengali songs written by Omar Khayyam. Not only that, Kazi Nazrul Islam also maintained the 'Khamariat' of Omar Khayyam in his Islamic Bengali songs and Bengali ghazals. 'Khamariat' is a poem about alcohol. Which comes from the 'Golden Odds' qasida of ancient Arabia. This is why Kazi Nazrul is everywhere in Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bengali songs: Sura, Saki, Sharab, Payala, Behush, Sharabkhana, Saraikhana, Gul, Dafan, Kabar, Niamat, Dilruba, Khoda, Pir, Astana, Ghazal, Shireen, Shiraji, Gore, Khushbu, Bulbuli, Gulistan, Lala, Meki, Seref, Takdir, Dost, Gulbagicha, Khizir, Barat, Karsazi and many other Persian and Arabic words are widely used. Kazi Nazrul Islam used these words in his Islamic Bengali songs and Bengali ghazals in a symbolic sense and meaning similar to the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. For example, the literal meaning of wine is to be drunk, but Kazi Nazrul Islam has interpreted it in a symbolic sense to mean leaving the worldly world behind in deep love for the Creator. In this context, the world-famous Persian Sufi Maulana Jalal Uddin Rumi made the matter clear. A brief summary of what he said goes like this: Remember God so much that you forget yourself. Kazi Nazrul Islam mastered what he had learnt in an extraordinary manner. Nazrul's personality similarity with Omar Khayyam is only a part of Nazrul's remarkable talent. Fitzgerald's ideology differs slightly from the ideas that unfold in Nazrul's life in Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. Fitzgerald considered Omar Khayyam to be an atheist. At least that's what a section of European readers thinks. But Kazi Nazrul Islam tried to establish Omar Khayyam as a Muslim Sufi poet.

That is, Omar Khayyam as he really was. Narendra Dev, the translator of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat, divided the Rubaiyat of Omar into five categories. Namely love, beauty, irony, complaint and religion. That is, he also believed in Fitzgerald's ideology. But Kazi Nazrul Islam went deeper and divided Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat into six categories:

- Munajat, or prayerful Rubaiyat, written in dedication to God's wonderful creation.
- Shikayat-e-Rozgar means writing to complain about the invisible.
- Firaqiya and Osaliya, which are written on the subject of the meeting and separation of the beloved.
- Baharia, or the spring season, is written in praise of nature.
- Hajj, or hypocrite and blasphemy, to expose the arrogance and foolishness of the righteous.
- Kufuriya, or writing against Dharmashastra.

In this Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, the reflection of the rest except kufuria is reflected in Kazi Nazrul Islam's Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bengali songs. He adapted several Rubaiyat directly from Persian and inspired by Omar Khayyam into Bengali Ghazal. Kazi Nazrul Islam was the first to give meaning to Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat in the framework of ghazals, rhythm, rhythm and raga. Also, in many Islamic Bengali songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam and Bengali ghazals, there is a feeling of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Kazi Nazrul Islam did not blindly imitate these styles; rather, he reflected them effectively in Islamic Bengali songs and Bengali ghazals. Likewise, some of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat and Nazrul's Islamic Bengali songs and Bengali ghazals, extracts of Rubaiyats of Kazi Nazrul Islam, have been mentioned in different dimensions of this examination.

### **Ghazals of Kazi Nazrul Islam:**

“Pio sharab pio!

Tore dirgho she kaal gore hobe ghumate  
Seh timir-pure  
tor bondhu sojon Priya robe na sathe"<sup>7</sup>  
"aaj baade kal aasbe kina  
ke jaane bhai ke jaane.  
bhol re baetha bedon-atur,  
laal sharab bhorpur prane."<sup>8</sup>  
"jedin l'bo bidae dhora chari!  
dhou laash amar lal pani diye.  
sheor:- sharabi jomdeshi ghazal jaanajae  
gaheo amar  
dibe gor khuriya oi shorab-khanar!"<sup>9</sup>  
"Ore obodh! Shunne sudhu shunne mati dhora  
shunne oi ashim akash rong- beronger khilam kora  
hawate shunno nimesh nimeshe jar hoye sesh"<sup>10</sup>

"Torun premik! Pronoy bedon  
janao janao be-dil priyae  
Ogo bijoyi! Nikhil hridoye  
Kor Kor joy mohon mayae.  
Nohe oi aek hiyar soman  
hajar ka'ba hajar mosjid  
Ki hobe tor ka'bar khoje,  
ashae tor khoj hridoy chaya"<sup>11</sup>

**Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat:**

(53)

"Shorge pabo sharab Sudha, e je korar khod khodar,  
Dhorae taha pan korle paap hoe e kon bichar  
Hamza sathe beyadobi korlo matal aek arob,-  
Tuchho karon- sharab haram tae hukume mostofar"<sup>12</sup>

(72)

"Aaar kotodin sagor-balae khamoka boshe tulbo it!  
Gor kori paye, dhik legeche gore gore murti pith.  
bhebo nako-khaim oi Jahannamer bashinda,  
bhitore seh sorgochari, bahire seh norok-kit"<sup>13</sup>

(41)

"Oggaeneroi timir toler manush ore be-khobor!  
shunno tora, binyad tor gatha shunno hawar shunnotae,  
Poschate tor otol shunno, ogre shunno oshim chor"<sup>14</sup>

Analyzing Kazi Nazrul Islam's Bengali Ghazals and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyats reveals that Nazrul's ghazals incorporate elements of Omar Khayyam's prayer, Shikayat-e-Rozgar, and his contemplation on mortality. The striking similarities in mood and vocabulary between the two poets are noteworthy. Shikayat-e-Rozgar is a poignant appeal to the divine, highlighting the fleeting nature of human existence. Human life is but a temporary journey, subject to the whims of destiny. In contrast, Omar Khayyam's prayer advocates for spiritual focus, emphasizing the importance of devotion without fear of sin. The

stylistic connection between Nazrul's ghazals and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyats is evident, despite being translations. Moreover, Omar Khayyam's influence is apparent in Nazrul's Islamic Bengali songs and ghazals, particularly in the Hajj style, which critiques hypocrisy and foolishness.

For instance, a Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam:

(135)

“Bhondo joto bhorong kore dekhiye baerae jaenamaz  
Chae na khodae-loker tara proshongsa chae dhappabaa!  
Dibbi ache mukhosh pore sadhu fokir dharmikera,  
Bhitore sob kafer ora, baire musholmaner saj!”<sup>15</sup>

Or,

(56)

“mosjide ojoggo aami, girjar ami shotru-prae:  
Ogo probhu, kon matite korle srijon ei amae?”<sup>16</sup>

Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote an Islamic Bengali song based on this form of Bhavabad.

“Ya Muhammad behesat hote  
Khoda ke pawar poth daekhao  
Ei diniyar dukkho theke  
Ebar amae najat dao”<sup>17</sup>

Despite being separated by nearly a thousand years, Omar Khayyam and Kazi Nazrul Islam shared a common goal of combating religious dogma and social injustice. Through his music, Nazrul sought divine guidance from Prophet Mohammad, lamenting the corruption and crimes perpetrated by those who claimed to defend faith after his passing. Interestingly, Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat and Nazrul's Bengali ghazals and Islamic songs share common themes and elements, including Bahariya, Firaqiya, and Osalia bhavabad, highlighting the timeless and universal nature of their message. An example of, Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat written in the Bahariyat style:

(17)

“Bulbuli aek halka pakahe uthe jete gulisthan,  
dekhlo hasikhusi bhora golap lilir ful bathan”<sup>18</sup>

A Bengali ghazal by Nazrul with this:

“Gulbagichae bulbuli tui rongin premer gae ghazal”<sup>19</sup>

Or the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam:

(76)

“Pollobito torulotae koti aache kanonmoe,  
Daodar aar tholokomole jano mukto koe?”<sup>20</sup>

With this an Islamic Bengali song written by Nazrul:

“Ei sundor ful sundor fol

Mitha nodir pani khoda tomar mehebaani”<sup>21</sup>

A notable connection exists between the ideas of Omar Khayyam and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Omar Khayyam's Baharia Bhav, characterized by vivid natural scenery adorned with flowers, fruits, and leaves, finds echoes in numerous Bengali ghazals and Islamic songs composed by Nazrul.

Furthermore, the Firaqiyyah and Osalayyah styles prominent in Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat have significantly influenced Nazrul's Bengali ghazals and Islamic songs, demonstrating a profound cross-cultural exchange. For example, Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat:

(90)

“Pete je chae sundorir fullo-kopol golap ful”<sup>22</sup>

Similar to Nazrul's:

“Cheyo na sunoyona aar cheyo na ei aakhir paane”<sup>23</sup>

Ghazal's emotional connection is intense. It is as if Nazrul has expressed Omar's feelings in his Bengali ghazal. Firakiya and Osalia are the meeting and separation of lovers. A unique accompaniment too many songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam is Omar's Firaqiya and Osalia Bhav.

The Rubaiyat of Omar not only enriched Persian literature, but the Rubaiyat of the desert crossed the sea and ocean and arrived at the port of Bengal in the literary world. Many eminent poets of Bengal have applied the extracts of the literary Rubaiyat in their works, but Kazi Nazrul Islam has made it successful in all aspects. Ghazal's emotional connection is intense. It is as if Nazrul has expressed Omar's feelings in his Bengali ghazal. Firakiya and Osalia are the meeting and separation of lovers. A unique accompaniment too many songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam is Omar's Firaqiya and Osalia Bhav.

Just as Sufism, mysticism, fatalism, optimism, pessimism and philosophy emerged in Persian art, literature almost every one of the 6 lines of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat has been reflected in the Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bangla songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam. That is why famous American poet James Russell Lowell called Omar's Rubaiyat the thought-provoking Pearl of the Persian Gulf. And Kazi Nazrul Islam himself said about this: “I have crossed over from the Gulistan of the world of poetry to the Ragini Island of the world of music”<sup>24</sup> The Rubaiyat of Omar not only enriched Persian literature, but the Rubaiyat of the desert crossed the sea and ocean and arrived at the port of Bengal in the literary world. Many eminent poets of Bengal have applied the extracts of the literary Rubaiyat in their works, but Kazi Nazrul Islam has made it successful in all aspects.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the Rubaiyat-e-Omar Khayyam, translated by Kazi Nazrul Islam and published in book form in 1959, demonstrates an excellent language style that is equally evident in its acceptance within Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bengali songs. Omar Khayyam's ideology is not only reflected in the translated poetry and word choice but is also deeply embedded in every aspect of Bengali ghazals and Islamic songs. Notably, Kazi Nazrul Islam is the only figure in Bengali literature to have successfully adapted the Rubaiyat into a meaningful form that complements Bengali ghazals and Islamic Bengali songs, thereby rendering his songs ornate, aesthetic, and endowed with excellence.

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