

**FIRST ANNUAL KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM LECTURE  
“THE VOICE OF POETRY AND THE DIRECTION OF CIVILIZATIONS”**

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You should know that I struggled mightily, in trying to find a subject area on which to speak with you. One who knows Nazrul’s work will understand this sort of challenge, since there are so many areas of his work one may select as a topic for discussion. After over three months of reflection, during which I changed focus many, many times, I returned to one of the areas I had previously considered and rejected: the voice of poetry and the direction of civilizations, a modified version of the first chapter in the book and part of an earlier article published.<sup>1</sup>

This topic, on first encountering it, may seem ambitious, even presumptuous, perhaps foolhardy. But I chose it for a number of reasons, among them: the war in Iraq, the consequences of which will occupy the world for a very, very long time; the dominant political/cultural emphasis within which this war was begun and, to a large extent, is being fought; the voice of poetry, as represented by Nazrul, in relationship to that dominant emphasis; and the individual and collective duty Nazrul prescribes for us. As important is the university setting within which the discussion is taking place—a setting that should lead societies.

**I: The War in Iraq**

This war, as just named, is a misnomer. It is not a war in Iraq; it is a war which has its most pronounced physical, coercive expression in Iraq. The war is seen as part of a wider battle against “terrorism,” which is seen as world-wide in scope (we will not spend much

time in questioning the wisdom of a war against an idea, except when such an idea is being used as a metaphor). In analyzing the actions of those who have sought to prosecute the war, however, one finds that the claimed motives, purposes, or objectives that may have sponsored its initiation have changed over time. Regardless of those motives, purposes, or objectives, we are faced with its consequences, which are broad, profound, and (as earlier mentioned) likely to be long-lasting.

First, it has caused the virtual destruction of a country, including its material and non-material culture. Second, civilians who have been living in an environment of death—death of one's friends, one's daughter, one's son, one's mother, one's neighbors, one's dream—have been its principal victims. Third, it has occasioned millions of refugees in neighboring countries, primarily Jordan and Syria, each of which now faces increasing difficulties in not only absorbing the refugees but, also, in preserving its own social stability. Fourth, it has provoked widening antipathies among Muslims and others throughout the Middle East and the rest of the world, including peoples and countries in the West. Fifth, it has been associated with deep and widening compromises in the norms of war and human rights. Sixth, it has embittered many, who will—for the foreseeable future (do not forget the injury that bin Laden referred to after 9/11)—be seeking revenge, thus inviting increased fear and suspicion. Seventh, it has contributed to the stigmatizing of an entire “civilization”. Eighth, it has invited material, moral, social, and psychological investments that make compromises among and between countries and sub-national groups (the Kurds, for example) more difficult. Ninth, it has undermined much of the remaining international, moral authority of the United States, thus making Washington more inclined to resort to the use of force to resolve differences. And ten, it

has deeply wounded the fragile moral (and intellectual) solidarity that had been hoped for after 1998, when—to complement the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the “rule of law for all” push after World War II-- the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities and the peoples of the world succeeded in adopting the Statute of Rome, which brought into being the International Criminal Court. The latter body enjoys the authority to try persons—including leaders of countries—who commit international crimes.

## **II: Context of Political/Cultural Emphasis**

The context of the political and cultural emphasis within which the war was begun and has by and large continued also prompted me to select the topic, because I fear you will be called on (even in the loneliness of talks with one’s pillow) to debate it, as we move individually and collectively into the future. And what was that context? It was the context of discussions concerning the so-called “Clash of Civilizations,” the spirit of which, in 2004, found further expression in what has come to be called “The Hispanic Challenge.”<sup>2</sup>

The contention of the “Clash of Civilization” thesis, presented in the Summer of 1993, is that the “fundamental source of conflict for the future will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic,” but cultural, with the cultural expressed through a unit of analysis called “civilization”—the “highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.” In short, conflicts between civilizations will become the latest phase in the “evolution of conflict” in the modern world.

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Previous conflicts, centering around kings, princes, and emperors developed between 1648 (the Peace of Westphalia) and 1789 (the French Revolution), when the war of “peoples” began. The latter type of conflict continued until World War I, when the Russian Revolution brought into being the conflict of ideologies—first communism and fascism-Nazism, and then communism and liberal democracy (the latter embodied by the conflict between the two superpowers). The ideological conflict came to an end in 1989, with the fall of communism in eastern Europe, and has been replaced by the conflict of civilizations. What are the identities of these civilizations?

The are (seven or eight in number): Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavo-Orthodox, Latin American, and African. They are “differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition, and, most important, religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and autonomy, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear.”<sup>3</sup>

While these values have always been present between civilizations, a number of factors have contributed to their becoming keys in the emerging conflict (at the micro level, “over the control of territory and each other,” and, at the macro-level, “for relative military and economic power, struggle over the control of international institutions and third parties, and competitively promote their particular political and religious values.”) These factors, among others, are increased interaction between civilization; social change throughout the world, which often find religions shaping the identities of states; the return to “roots” by a non-Western world faced with a West at the peak of its power; and economic regionalism as well as the emergence of fewer

non-Western elites, from Cambridge, Oxford and other like institutions who have “absorbed Western attitudes and values.”

Coupled with the “clash of civilizations” thesis is the idea that we are facing the end of history and the “last man”. This is the idea that the liberal democratic form of social order and the human type that order has produced constitute the summit of human cultural achievement. In sum, although time and events will pass and human beings will continue to populate this earth, the human cultural type produced by liberal democracy (Western civilization) represents the cultural evolutionary end to which history is tending.<sup>4</sup>

Like the strategy of “containment” during the Cold War between Marxist socialism and democratic capitalism, the “clash of civilizations” created oppositional identities. One of these oppositional identities is that of the of Arab-Muslim militancy against the West or Islamic civilization against Western civilization, with the former seen as back-ward and life-negating and the latter modern, life-affirming, and representing “the end of history.” It is within the context of this oppositional identity that one must view the the “war in Iraq,” with the United States seen (at least initially) as taking steps to protect not only itself (a victim of 9/11) but Western civilization. (China is often depicted as likely to form an alliance with Islam—in a Confucian-Islamic thrust against the West.)

### **III: Nazrul’s Voice of Poetry and the Direction of Civilizations**

Ordinarily, I would—at this stage in our discussion—offer a survey of views concerning the voice of poetry. Time, however, does not permit it; so I will go directly to Nazrul’s outlook of the central feature of poetry by way of the position of the late British philosopher Michael Oakeshott. In his view (one that captures well the position of Nazrul), the voice of poetry seeks

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4

to express the uniqueness of self, to “evoke another and join to compose another and [a] more complex image of the same kind.”<sup>5</sup> So, poetry seeks to give utterance to the uniqueness of self; to evoke another; and to join, in order to compose a more complex image (of the same kind).

Far from seeking to construct oppositional identities, the voice of poetry—apart from identifying and giving expression to the uniqueness in each person or group (including nations and civilizations)—seeks, as well, to evoke another, that is, to call forth or bring into being another and to join with that other to compose something more complex. To the extent that anyone or anything is unique, it means that differences exist between that thing (or someone) and others. This is the “natural condition” out of which poetry develops and which it seeks to keep in tact; and those differences, according to Nazrul’s understanding of the voice of poetry, are not to be seen as alien, something to be avoided, or with which (whom) to do battle. Indeed, poetry brings differences into being—often making those differences sharper and clearer. These differences, which are found everywhere (part of uniqueness) are the foundational sources out of which true unity is born.

### Unity and Effectiveness

The direction of civilization is therefore not, in Nazrul’s view, one of a “clash” as is being suggested, but more likely one of unity. Let us, however, not approach this issue of unity simply from the standpoint of definitions of poetry’s voice; let us review briefly what he said, in his own words, in his poem “Coolies and Labourers”:

Let the high heavens  
Break down into this room of yours.  
Let the sun, the moon and the stars  
Pour on our heads in showers.  
Let men [and women] of all ages and climes

From every race and country  
Unite and combine

And hear the song of unity.

Today let us be equal and free.  
And if anybody abuses one of us,  
Let us all feel the pain in equal degree  
Let the disgrace of one  
Be considered a shame  
To the whole of mankind.

Whom do “all ages and climes from every race and country” include? At least the eight civilizations earlier identified; and they are to combine and unite.

This call for unity in the midst of acknowledged differences is not a “pipe dream,” as the expression goes; it is born out of the very constitution of human beings—out of our existential needs—needs which the voice of poetry encompasses and expresses. (We will return to the theme of unity.)

The uniqueness each person embodies and the freedom one needs (we recognize here that there are varying degrees of freedom that people experience) causes one to feel separate and, sometimes, even isolated, especially in societies that have become more socially complex.. This need for freedom, as well as the awareness of one’s separateness and uniqueness (this need and awareness are applicable to societies, also) would occasion individual and collective aloneness and alienation, were people not able to experience a countervailing sense of unity. So, on the one hand, we seek and fight for freedom and independence, in part to affirm and protect our uniqueness. Many, including those who espouse the “clash of civilization” thesis, play on this affirmation and sought protection, overlooking the exist-entail split in all human beings for independence and unity. That is why one cannot relate exclusively with oneself (narcissism); one, as an individual or a

social or cultural collectivity, has the need to relate to others, to form affective ties, to establish bonds, to have unity with other human beings and with nature. (Sometimes this need is expressed through drugs, sexual encounters, individual and collective passions manifested in associations with sports teams, ideologies—nationalism, for instance, control over others, (a form of sadism), and even making oneself a non-person, a thing.)<sup>6</sup>

### Empowerment, Diversity, and Morality

The voice of poetry, in Nazrul's view, has other attributes, apart from those of promoting unity among the diverse. Included among those other attributes with which it is associated are: the empowerment of individuals and groups; the actual promotion of diversity itself; and the affirmation of the moral in human life and societies. We will touch on each briefly, because each bears directly on the "Clash of Civilization."

When in our definition of the voice of poetry we said it evokes or seeks to evoke another, we also included within that evocation not only the act (through images) of bringing another into being, but empowering that other by making him, her, or it visible in interaction with others. The human search for empowerment, which poetry expresses, is not to be understood as confined to our conventional use of the term power, however. Its importance and meaning, as used here, refer to a capacity to minister to a fundamental need of all human beings, the affirmative satisfaction of which is critical to one's (individual and collective) identity and effective social interaction. That need is said to be the need to be effective, to have an impact, to make a dent, in one's interaction with others. A central objective of all imperial power has been to ensure the opposite—to make sure that, in the interaction of "natives" with agents of controlling state, the natives

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6



would never gain the sense they could make a dent—they must be made powerless.

To make that dent, one needs power, whether that power be in the form of education or enlightenment, as some would say, relative status, organization, data, natural resource, social access, or some other capacity to deny to another a value deemed to be very important by her, him, or it.<sup>7</sup>

As a human being progressively gains awareness of self, “she or he also becomes conscious of a huge, complex, and overpowering world—a world within which the individual might experience her- or himself only passively, as a mere object. To experience oneself in this manner, only,” or even primarily, is to encounter oneself without a sense of will, but also without a sense of identity. It is to experience oneself as impotent. Human being, however—even when they must live in abject impotence, in order to survive, have never accepted that condition; they have always striven to find means to counteract that conditions, sometimes at risk to their lives. Nazrul, in his poetry, consistently sought to empower people, in giving them the capacity to make a dent, to pursue ends that are self-chosen. We find him, for example, seeking to have peasants use their own language to convey their experiences rather than having to do so in the language of the listener or reader, because thereby the peasants have greater control of the narratives of their experiences. Returning to “religious experiences” is, often, also an attempt at personal control—something that frightens the author of the “Clash of Civilizations”. Perhaps the writing in which one finds the most concentrated focus on empowerment, however, is “The Rebel”—the poem in which the (the self) is never passive, always engaging the universe in independent self-assertion.

I am irresistible, cruel, arrogant

I am king of the great upheaval...  
 I grind all to pieces...I trample under  
 my feet all bonds, rules and disciplines...  
 I am destruction, I am grave-yard, I am the  
 end, the end of night...

Here one finds the “Rebel” as a powerful actor; but that about which Nazrul is most concerned is constant agitation against passivity, against being an object. This battle and agitation will come to an end “only when I find/the sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed...” He is also the liberator—one who brings the end—the end of night (invoking the many “others” that “night” suggests). In pursuit of this liberation, one finds the merciless “Rebel” trampling on “all rules and disciplines” – the “rules” and forms of “disciplines” that imperial countries have to get human beings (called “subjects” by Britain) to internalize in order to rule them. These are the “rules,” the deep, psychological limitations people find emanating from within their being that the “Rebel,” through high and “mighty primordial” shouts seek to uproot in Bengal and throughout the world. And in respect of those who found him somewhat strange, objectionable, unresonating, he was the “consciousness in [their] unconscious soul,” giving voice to what they would, if they were fully awake.

Linked to the gaining of a sense of effectiveness, a sense of having the capacity to pursue--separately or jointly--self-chosen courses of conduct, are leaps in one’s or a people’s consciousness. And here we should not forget, as Gurdjieff reminds us, that the “evolution of [humans] is the evolution of [their] consciousness”; that consciousness cannot evolve unconsciously; that the evolution of humans is the evolution of [their] will, and “will cannot evolve involuntarily”; and that the evolution of humans is the “evolution of [their] power of doing, and that ‘doing’ cannot be the result of things which ‘happen’.”<sup>8</sup>

So Nazrul sought to get, in the words of Langston Hughes who may not even have been aware of him, to get the “folks with no title in front of their names all over the world” (especially those with the “piteous groans”) to begin “doing,” including “rearing up and talking back.”<sup>9</sup>

It is this sense of capacity for self-assertion as well as the will and the willingness to “talk back” that is the central problem for the author of the “Clash of Civilizations”. He and those who have subscribed to his thesis find this self-assertion threatening to Western civilization. In other words, if what he calls “indigenous cultures” and peoples (other civilizations) were to have remained subordinate to the West or to have had increasing numbers of westernized elites who could tame such self-assertion, all would be well, since the pointed-to cultural differences have, in general, always existed.

For Nazrul, the absence of effective self-assertion, including the will to crush that which oppresses, is nothing less than decrepitude. And he was not unwilling, during his day, to identify that condition whenever he saw it. So, in his poem “Pioneers” we find him castigating the then “decrepit races of the ancient East,” who had lost their “pride to inspire.” Far more important, however, is the fact that, for him, the author of the “Clash of Civilization” betray such a profound lack of faith in human beings and their individual and collective possibilities. He, the author, can only think of civilizations “co-existing” where one or more dominates, not where differences are openly evoked, embraced, and celebrated, and where the civilizations are co-equals.

Above and beyond the abstract, constitutive attributes of the voice of poetry, that which evokes another, Nazrul explicitly sought to use his poetry to join a diverse world into

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9

becoming tomorrow's joint pioneers in inter-civilizational encounters, not pursuing cultural "clashes." The "end of night" he sought to effect, including the "night" social disparities and oppression, also bore with it the daybreak of transnational creativity and moral solidarity. In his poem "Pioneers" we find him penning the following:

We'll leave behind the rotten past  
 we'll come out of caves to sing in open fields!  
 We'll create a world--more diverse, vigorous, spirited...  
     bustling with life.  
     O creators of the new era,  
     with forceful steps—march on!

Felling withered ancient trees, we'll build dams  
 against strong currents preventing us from crossing over  
 We'll dig for diamond mines,  
 grow flowers on the virgin Earth,  
     measuring lands by footsteps.  
     O restless pioneers,  
     with forceful steps—march on!

We've come with the new tide of the modern East,  
 from impassable mountain peaks...

Ireland, Arabia, Egypt, Korea, China, Norway, Spain,  
 Russia—we're indebted to all.  
 We sense blood-kinship with them,  
 We're comrades of a shared pain.  
     we're everyone in every land!  
     O timeless travelers,  
     with forceful steps—march on!

(Need I point out that Nazrul included, among his pioneers, countries representing five of the seven (or eight) identified civilizations?)

### We are Many: The Diversity of Self

Let us turn more formally to the theme of diversity which—as said before—is inherent in the voice of poetry. Today, much of the West (in France, in the United Kingdom, in Australia, in the U.S.—where the "Hispanic Challenge" is a particularly weighty

concern,<sup>10</sup>

in Canada, in Switzerland, in The Netherlands, and in Ireland, to mention some noteworthy examples), diversity has become a “problem”. It is seen as threatening to some socially, politically, economically or legally coherent self, be that self expressed as a municipality, township, nation, culture, civilization, or other. Nazrul reveled in diversity; he saw it everywhere, including what he saw as the self. Indeed, it may not be an exaggeration to say, he would view any “self” that was not “many” as somewhat defective. In the case of the “Rebel,” which we have been featuring today, the self is almost forbiddingly many—an attempt on his part, I have hypothesized, to help oppressed move from the confined and confining structures within which oppressors place and restrict them. Be that as it may, one finds the “Rebel” as an inter-planetary traveler, as a dancer, a destroyer, as priest, ascetic, bedouin, as military leader, wandering bard, as judge (dispenser of justice), as the insane, as God of gods, as war-monger, peace-maker, flood, as the recluse, the “grief of the widow,” the drinker of poison, the anguish of the dejected, as the suffering of the homeless, the pain of the humiliated, the eternal child, the eternal adolescent, as aesthetic joy, the defiant, the merciless, the southern breeze, among others. This form of diversity is rarely touched.

He is also the protector and embodiment of fertility, tenderness, innocence, and longing. In one of the most moving portions of the “Rebel”—in the midst of images of hell, fire, cyclones, destruction, callousness, we find the following:

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 the shy village maiden frightened by her own budding youth.  
 I am the soothing breeze of the south,

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10

I am the pensive gale of the east,  
I am the deep solemn song sung by the wandering bard.

The diversity of the individual “self” is replicated in the collective selves with which we deal and must deal, if we are to become our true wider selves, as humans.

Nazrul was one of the earliest espousers of human rights, especially at the time when Europe—fearing the diversity associated with those rights—was manifesting some of the most shameful and repulsive expressions of inhumanity during World War II. I will not go into the details of the human rights regime, which formally began in 1948 with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What I wish to focus on with you is the socio-political and moral order it has sought to bring into being—cosmopolis, and the consistent efforts, contained in the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, to undermine that order, with its cleverly embraced, obverse outlook, the Westphalian system. I end this portion of our discussion by comparing the focus on human rights with Nazrul’s voice of poetry.

The state-centric or Westphalian system is the name given to the international public order which, without much institutional or philosophical contest, defined the structure and practice of international relations between 1648 and 1945. That order, which initially legitimized them, expanded and protected nation-states, extended to each of them the exclusive (and not-to-be-questioned) right to act, if it so desired, toward persons, events, or things within its borders. It recognized the state as the basic unit of international society and the *standard* by which the legal and moral appropriateness of any and all international conduct should be measured. Additionally (supportive of the stance to follow and justifying of the preceding recognition) the order is defined by moral skepticism—a view which holds that no state can afford to follow moral rules which

restrict the pursuit of immediate national interests, and argues that evidence supportive of claims that moral principles promote the long-term interest of states is at best questionable. The primary, if not exclusive responsibility of government is, therefore, the pursuit of national interest.

Part of that interest has consisted in the social and psychological construction of citizens who measure their identities in terms of actual or supposed differences from other human beings (many of the differences pointed to in the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis). As well, this system supports states as subjects of international law, while individuals are to be seen as objects, with few, if any rights that can be self-asserted.

The cosmopolitan view, in contrast, argues that the world is morally a universal community or *cosmopolis*. In that community, the individual (not the state) is the basic unit, with rights as subjects; and the community of human beings is morally prior to the society of states. If the individual, not the state, is the basic unit of the international community, and that community of individuals (the human family) morally comes before the society of states, then states are no longer to be regarded as the exclusive or even primary repositories of rights and responsibilities. Neither can the moral propriety of any international course of conduct be properly characterized by the self-defined interest of any state. Rather, such conduct must be measured against the degree to which it agrees with and compatibly accommodates the common concerns of the human family.

The human rights regime forms the core of the cosmopolitan view, and states are pledged to support and promote it. Under its terms, human beings from **everywhere**—not citizens, nationals, co-religionists, or co-culturalists—are entitled to the protection of states. (Of course, in protecting humans, citizens, nationals, and co-culturalists are also

protected.) So, how a person in Indonesia is treated by that state's government is to be the concern of all countries; and the response of a government to any injured person should not be whether s/he is a citizen, national, co-religionists, but whether the person is human. That's what we mean, when we say the community of humans is morally prior to the society of states.

The "Clash of Civilization" thesis subtly masks its support of the Westphalian system, which is supposedly "on its way out". Far from representing an evolution beyond that system, the thesis simply substitutes the unit "civilization" for the nation-state, cleverly suggesting that the interest of that unit (and the states constituting it) has the right to advance its self-defined interest, including fighting "other civilizations." In so doing, the concept of cosmopolis, of human rights, and of the human family are either denied or made invisibly subordinate. Nazrul, on the other hand, captures the world of the many that we are—as individuals and as social/ cultural collectivities--in two ways: first, in expressing and advancing the underlying complexity of the self as well as its moral equality (central to human rights) and collective responsibilities for the well-being of all under cosmopolis. One has but to recollect the last five of the previously quoted lines from his poem "Coolies and Labourers": "And if anybody abuses one of us/Let all feel the pain in equal degree/Let the disgrace of one/Be considered a shame/To the whole of mankind." Second, he always made the well-being of the human family something prior to the society of states, and appealed, as he did, to all races and countries (and for all time), on behalf of human beings.

### The 'Last Man'

Among the contributions of Nazrul's voice of poetry is that of giving a final, striking



refutation to the oppositional identities created in the “Clash of Civilization” thesis and laudatory rejection of the “end of history” claim. In dealing with this part of our discussion, I sought to help of Goethe, Rousseau, and Kant.

Kant, who is known to have sought to shape universal principles respecting human individual and collective conduct, especially ethical conduct, found an important source of inspiration in Rousseau. The latter took the position that what is truly permanent about human nature (and by extension, what is truly defining of human beings) is not any “condition *in which* it once existed or *from which* it had fallen; rather, it is the goal *for*” and *toward* which it moves. That goal, for Kant and Rousseau, though masked by the often confusing distractions of race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality, is “distinctive and unchanging” and flows from human ethical nature.<sup>11</sup> So, what is the end?

#### **IV: Direction of Civilizations**

Earlier we dealt with poetry’s focus on unity, effectiveness (empowerment), diversity, sisterhood, but no single one of these or their combination, although very important, captures that end. It is to give full expression to the real law of our being—the affirmation of our role as the moral consciousness of the universe, in moral unity and intellectual solidarity with all humans. To reach this end, of course, Nazrul posited certain preconditions: the further development of our aesthetic sensibilities (for him the ethical and aesthetic sensibilities are almost identical twins), and the social acceptance that, contrary to Kant and Goethe who looked at the human future in terms of reason, human possibilities are infinite, when the imaginative faculties are freely indulged. In short, the direction of civilizations is not defined by what our present conditions are or the cultural

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roots out of which we come, but by the law of our being, part of which is what we strive to become. This brings us to the “the end of history” claim and its relationship to the “Clash of Civilization.”

As you will recall, in the opening portion of this discussion, I noted that the claim that we have reached the summit of human cultural and social evolution, the last and final (the highest) realizable type in human development, the “last man,” refers to be the kind of person who has been brought into being by liberal democracy, the reigning socio-political ideology of Western Civilization. (If this claim were true, it would be, in part, understandable why the author of the “Clash of Civilization” would be so insistent on preparing the West to defend itself; after all, it represents the highest achievement humans can aspire to, and other civilizations, for their own good, should wisely accept it. In 1897, Britons, too, thought their culture had reach a final consummation of human cultural possibilities).<sup>12</sup>

Proving the just-mentioned direction of civilizations is not without some difficulties, but those difficulties will be made all the more formidable by those who, as now, will try to link future wars with the clash of civilization—clashes in which the “last man” must be protected. But that direction will not be denied, for a number of reasons.

First, as Nazrul observed, human possibilities are determined more by the imaginative than the rational faculties, the latter emphasized by the authors of the “last man” and the “clash of civilizations,” although the former touches on matters of the search for recognition and the role of the thymus). Second, the developed aesthetic (and ethical) sensibilities about which Nazrul was always writing, those which are associated with

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12

motives that are pure, meaning, free from the calculations of the narrow self-interest so evident in both the “clash of civilizations” and the “end of history” theses, will allow for a focus on the general good, as human moral consciousness expands and deepens to fit the reality that the earth is a single, though (like civilizations themselves) highly differentiated community.<sup>13</sup> It will also help teach us about our diverse identities, including as cosmic one. Third, far from indulging (as the “end of history” thesis suggests) the notion that the human capacity to build some ideal socio-economic and political community is at this time reposed in a single cultural area or configuration (the West), all the present evidence suggests that each cultural configuration is speedily contributing to the continuing evolution of our collective future, embodying all civilizations, despite what may appear to the contrary. Fourth, the idea of the inherent dignity of all human beings, the offspring of all cultural traditions, has just *begun* its operational life among human communities; why this sudden abortion of its development by the “last man”? Fifth, the voice of poetry seeks to construct and express a self (individual and collective) that is, in the words of Oakeshott—one with which Nazrul’s positions concurs—is not specifically communicable in advance. Part of what the “end of history” thesis suggests is that (in a form of forbidding preordination), human beings of future decades, centuries, and millennia, would be of a cultural type communicated and chosen in advance of their very being. Conversely, if one takes the position that all phenomena are available for future composition, future co-joining of complex images (and from those images made contingently available for human creative imagination), then—indeed—the liberal democratic human type would be but a partial bridge in a larger future cultural development. Finally, Nazrul’s poem entitled “Man” or “Human” (depending on the translation)

has a special message for us, above and beyond the unlimited possibilities we, the aggregate of civilizations, hold:

...Or perhaps he is a non-entity, nothing  
 great and high, but filled with dirt  
 filth, and cuts and injuries, abed  
 rolling in sorrow,  
 Yet the whole world of scriptures and  
 Houses of worship are not as sacred  
 as that one small body!  
 Perhaps in his cottage home is born  
 to him someone who will have no  
 equal in the history of the world.

Someone who has no equal—and what change would she or he bring to humankind?  
 It would at least be that which counsels against the “Wall” about which a man who had  
 to hide his true identity, throughout most of his life, wrote: <sup>14</sup>

Without consideration, without pity,  
 without shame  
 They have built big and high walls  
 around me  
 And now I sit here despairing;  
 I think of nothing else; this fate  
 gnaws at my mind  
 For I have things to do outside.

Ah! why didn't I observe them  
 when they were building the walls?  
 But I never heard the noise or sound of  
 the builders  
 Imperceptably they shut me out of the world.

The “walls” are ethnicity, race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, nationality, language, religion, and—yes, civilizations. They seek to confine us and limit the law of our being. Nazrul's message to us is to be the “Rebel” and crush these walls in our

lives and elsewhere, and to shape ourselves as metaphors, composing another of a more complex kind; for we have much to do outside.

### Endnotes

1. Winston Langley, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Voice of Poetry and the Struggle for Human Wholeness* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2007), pp. 19-29.
2. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" in *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 73 #3 (1973); see, also, his "The Hispanic Challenge" in *Foreign Policy* (March/April, 2004).
3. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilization," *op. cit.*, p. 9.
4. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free, 1992).
5. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (IN: Liberty Press, 1991), p. 540
6. Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1973), pp. 233-234
7. Fromm, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236
8. P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search Miracles: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harvest Books, 1949)
9. Langston Hughes, "An Explanation of Our Times" in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 282-283
10. Huntington, *The Hispanic Challenge*, *op. cit.*
11. Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau Kant Goethe: Two Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 20-23.
12. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 16-19
13. Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts*. Edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 2006), p. 20
14. See "Walls" in *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*. Trans. by Ray Dalven (New York: Harvest Books, 1976), p. 7.