

T R I B U T E T O Tagore



The charisma of "Chhinno Patra"

A video laced with Tagore's lyricism

FAYZA HAQ

DR Noazish Ahmed, the well-known photographer the maker of the video on "Chhinno Patra" talking about the importance of his subject matter, "Chhinno Patra". "This is a collection of Rabindranath Tagore's letters written to his niece from 1887 to 1893 when Tagore was fairly young, before his 30s and he was living on a boat in the then East Bengal. The letters depict the beautiful nature of the region where he was residing, particularly the River Padma, so that the writing is a unique documentation. Tagore used to write to his niece Indra Devi almost once a week, and this resulted in 246 letters. As is well-known, Tagore was a son of zamindar and was supervising his father's estates in Shelaideho, Shazadpur and Rajshahi. Tagore would say that "My profession is zamindari" but my interest is in 'asmandari' as he wrote poems, short stories, and so many other things which have enriched our literature. This was the era in which he wrote most of his short stories like 'Post Master', 'Khoka Babur Prottaborton', 'Megh-o-Rodru' and various other such literary works. His keen observations on nature, the people, the day to day changes of environment came superbly in the 'godde moha kabbo', with its simple, freestyle which surpassed even the language of his short stories, as he admitted himself."

Asked how he had transformed Tagore's writings on the different aspects of the Padma and other elements of East Bengal scenario onto the screen, in his video, Dr Noazish Ahmed says, "My 'Chhinno

Potro' is based on Tagore's 'Chhinno Potro' selecting from 246 letters. I did the selection in such a manner that it covers most of our seasons and a lot of the areas, such as storms, moonlit nights, spring, and at the same time the dry seasons in the shoals, dunes etc. I took five years to do it (it had taken five years for Tagore to write this). In the video is captured the essence of Tagore's 246 letters."

Dwellings on the problems that he had faced while making the video, Dr Noazish Ahmed says, "There were a lot of problems. To begin with, there was the physical difficulty. Tagore wrote the letters a hundred years back. The structures have changed since then such as change in the garment of people's clothes, the River Padma changed quite a bit, and country boats with sails cannot be seen that often as there are motorized counterparts at present. Again, to spend days on a boat, shooting the pictures, was not that comfortable. Also, the Bangladeshi weather with its heat, mosquitoes, flies and sometimes damp weather naturally hindered my work somewhat, at times. The heat could spoil my camera. At times, I had to leave the boat and go to the sand dunes when my expensive cameras could have been stolen. Incidentally, I carried about three professional Nikon F-3 and Nikon 100AF, 90X cameras with five or six lenses and lots of films. I needed various cameras as with some I took negatives, and with other I took slides and pictures in the dark."

Talking about whether there were any other photographers with him and whether he had preplanned the venture the outset, Dr Noazish

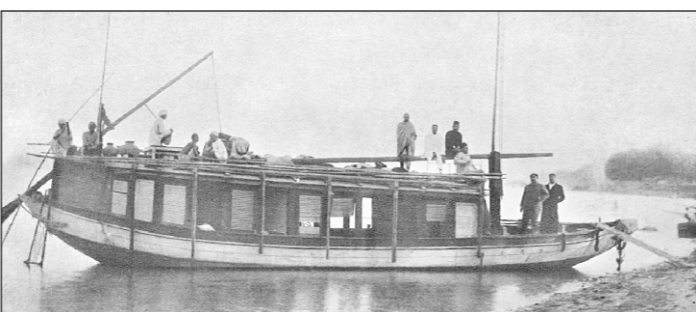
Parting Words

When I go from hence  
let this be my parting word,  
that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this  
lotus  
that expands on the ocean of light,  
and thus am I blessed  
---let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms  
I have had my play  
and here have I caught sight of him that is  
formless.

My whole body and my limbs  
have thrilled with his touch who is beyond  
touch;  
and if the end comes here, let it come  
---let this be my parting word.

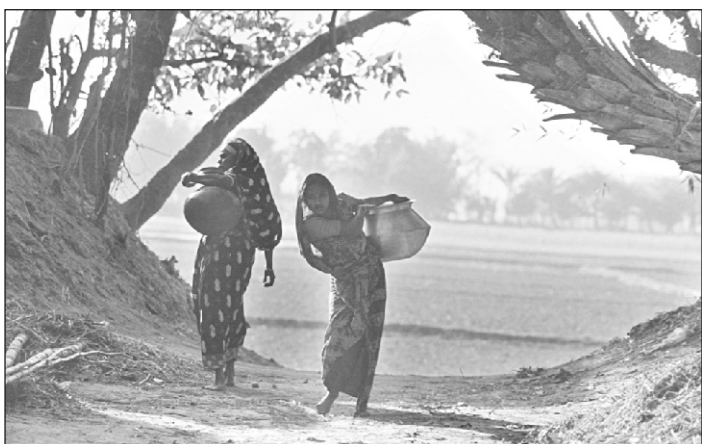


Chaitali and Chinno Patra were composed while sailing on the boat, Padma.(U) The view seen through Noazish Ahmed's lenses after a 100 years.

Ahmed says, "Instead of taking the pictures on the video camera, I first take the stills. Tagore's old musical sensibility and his lyricism stirred me on. I had a few friends like the well-known actor and director Aly Zakir and Nafiz Ahmed, a reputed photographer, also accompanied me. I had other friends besides. Most of the time we were in an ordinary boat, while I stayed some time at Shelaideho, covering a large area from that spot, going on a small boat."

Dwelling on the particularly satisfying moments, Dr Noazish Ahmed says, the shots I took fit well with Tagore's descriptions, particularly the sand dunes which were so beautiful and exciting for me, with their integral patterns and rhythms of sand, which Tagore described so vividly."

Dr Nozesh Ahmed has brought out books on photographs before. He is educated in USA and has worked in the Far East and in Bangladesh during the Pakistan days.



Tagore wrote about his observations on nature to his niece, later on compiled as Chhinno Patra. His writings have been transformed by Noazish Ahmed's lenses after a 100 years.

Kobiguru Remembered

ZILLUR RAHMAN SIDDIQUI

IF the title Kobiguru Remembered should suggest that the poet, sixty odd years since his death 'has sunk into oblivion' nothing could be farther from truth.

If any body lives in the daily memory of millions-- that is Rabindranath Tagore.

And there is a special reason why he should be in our minds today.

Rabindranath is often called the last of our Renaissance men. Nineteenth century Bengal produced a galaxy of men endowed with the quality of a Renaissance man.

Though they were members of a subject race-- they had achieved a freedom of the mind which enabled them to look to the West-- to Europe with a clear vision. West was in the vanguard of civilisation for atleast two centuries. It had absorbed much that was best in the cultures of the orient and the occident. And its contribution to modern science and technology had naturally put it in position of leadership in the present day world.

Rabindranath was a humanist to the core of his being, a profoundly religious man, without being a strict follower of any religious creed. And at the same time his mind was always open to the achievements of modern science.

The poet had always been a

staunch believer in the unity of mankind-- rising above the passions of narrow nationalism. True, his faith in the basic sanity of the West had occasionally been tested but this never prompted him abandoning what he called a faith in man.

In the closing years of his life, however, the poet's faith in the essential goodness of the West was rudely shaken and that included his long cherished belief on British rule in India. We remember his angry reply to Miss Rathbone, a British parliamentarian, when she charged Indians for their ingratitude for what the British had done for India. The sharp tone and the bitterness of the poet's reply shows how complete was his disillusionment with the British rule.

Rabindranath, as he grew up in the environs of his family and in an all pervasive climate of creativity and optimism, had come in contact with the West quite early in his life. He had experienced West in the city of his birth, may be in a limited even corrupt version but he had also been in England and he had had a very good exposure to the Western culture, to its literature, its liberal and liberating thoughts, and particularly its music, during his first, and a few years later a second stay in England. In his family, and through the influence of his saintly father Maharshi Debendranath, his mind was



Rabindranath- at the age of 35 (Rare photographs collected from Rabindra Rachanabali)

already steeped in Upanishad and the classical lores of India. Exposure to the West only meant a further enrichment of the mind and a positive attitude to the best that it represented.

In his forties, especially in the years following the partition of Bengal, Rabindranath was an ardent Bengali. But soon after, in the twenties, in the years of India's political reawakening, under the spell of Mahatma Gandhi, the poet had come to believe in the nationhood of India, confident of India's political destiny. Without being actively involved in politics -- one remembers his concern for and his advice to Nazrul Islam on hunger strike in jail, not to waste his talent in politics -- the poet had enjoyed the confidence and homage of political leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas and Fazlul Haq.

Remembering how deeply disturbed Rabindranath was as the world plunged into the tragic second world war, remembering his utterance, his heart's agony in that unforgettable poem addressed to God, 'Bhagaban tumi jugs jugs doot pathayechha bary bary', we can only guess what he would have felt after the recent rape of Afghanistan and Iraq. We, the hapless peoples in Asia and elsewhere, looked on and if we remembered anybody at this crisis of civilisation more than any one else it was Rabindranath. In our hours of agony and despair, we draw sustenance from all he left us, in verse and prose.

The author is a former Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University.

Rabi-- the sun that never set

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

KOBIGURU Rabindranath Thakur was born in the historic settings of Jorashako house, Kolkata, a house that was frequented by so many of the cultural leaders of the Bengali renaissance in the 1900s. So it was not a surprise that he grew up with a love of the arts.

At a time when much of the country was in the grips of conservatism, Jorashako played host to dramas, poetry sessions and the Brahmo doctrine. From an early age onwards, Rabi, as he was fondly called, found himself writing songs, giving it tune and singing it at family occasions and weddings.

Rabi was eighth among brothers and fourteenth among all of his brothers and sisters. His education began at home under the guidance of several teachers. Later on he went to the Oriental school, Normal school, The Bengal Academy which was specially meant for the English and also St. Xavier's school. But the school setting never settled well on him, and after a while he resumed taking his lessons at home, where he could always fit in time for his beloved poetry.

When he was 17, Rabi traveled to England with his second brother Sattyandranath. The

young Rabi studied English literature at the College of London University under Professor Henry Morley. He returned to India a year and half later. Though he had planned to go back to study Law, as was the standard line of education for the elites at that time, he never went through with his plans, preferring instead to remain in India.

All this while, the Thakur family's vast estates were looked after by Sharada Prasad, Rabi's brother-in law. After Sharada's death and a number of other incidents including the failed shipping business of Rabi's brother, the death of his sibling Hemendranath, Rabi started to be given more responsibility in looking after the zamindari. Between being an even-minded zamindar, a dutiful father, a vocal reformist, he seldom slowed down his prolific penmanship, authoring poems, plays, novels, short stories and editorials.

Tagore's life as a composer of songs stretches over 61 years. Of his 2500 songs, the most number - totaling over 400- are love songs. His patriotic songs were as fiery as his love songs tender. Tagore was an avid nature lover and the countless hours he spent on the deck of his boat, or making out the shapes of the clouds found

its way into 300-odd writing on seasons giving life to whatever in nature took his fancy. Much of Tagore's work also centered on spiritual and philosophical writings.

At one point in his life, Tagore started thinking about ways to bring changes in the society through educating the young generation. Being a reformist at heart, he decided to set up a model learning school that would blend in the best of Western and Eastern education. In 1904, at the age of 40, he went to Bolpur where his father had previously bought a 20-acre plot of land and established one such school. He named it after the house that his father had left behind there 'Shantiniketan'. For some time to come, Tagore would support the school through his own means, often diverting funds from more pressing personal needs. In the years to follow, 'Shantiniketan' did live up to his dreams of being the seat of culture for the young generations.

Between 1902 and 1907 Tagore lost his wife Mrinalini Devi, son Shomindronath and daughter Renuka Devi. But from his pain emerged some of his most moving work, including the 'Gitanjali' which was published in 1910. This collection of verses, translated

into English by the poet himself and named "Song Offerings", won Tagore the Noble Prize for Literature in 1913.

Two years later Tagore was knighted by the British Empire. In 1919 the horror of the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre stunned Tagore and he renounced his title. In a letter to the Viceroy he wrote "The disproportionate severity of the punishment inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the method of carrying it out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized governments and these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask your Excellency to relieve me of my title."

Between 1916 to 1941, Tagore published 21 collections of his work including songs (2232), Collection of poems (56), short stories (119) Collection of songs (4), plays (29), novels (12), and art work (2000).

Tagore died in Calcutta on 22 Srawaan, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1941. Like the Rabi, the sun, Tagore's work radiated across generations. Just as the setting sun leaves behind a crimson glow even when it itself is out of sight, Tagore's has left behind a legacy that is as vivid today as it was decades long gone.



Tagore (in circle) in Shantiniketan after receiving the Noble Prize.



Tagore with his family members. (L-R) Daughter Mira Devi, son Rathindranath, Tagore, Daughter-in-law Pratima Devi and daughter Madhuri Lata.

**Musical programme**  
August 6  
To mark the death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, Bangla Academy has organised a programme

of recitation and Tagore songs at the seminar hall of the academy today at 11 am. Professor Anisur Rahman, eminent Tagore specialist and researcher will perform a solo recital at the programme.

**Cultural function**

**August 6**  
To mark the death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy has arranged a cultural programme at the academy's second floor of the exhibition hall at 5.30

RECOMMENDATIONS

pm. Eminent artistes will perform song, dance and recital at the programme.

**Cultural programme**  
August 7

To mark the death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore the Russian Cultural

Centre, Dhaka jointly with Bishwabehena, has organised a musical evening on 7th August at 7 pm. at the centre's auditorium.

**Musical Programme**  
August 8

To mark the death anniversary of Tagore, Bangladesh Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi

Shangstha has organised a programme at the Shishu Academy auditorium on 8th August at 9.30 am and 5.00 pm.

**Exhibition**  
August 01-15

Gallery Chitrak (House #21, Road #4, Dhanmondi) is holding an exhibition of