

Paying Tribute to *Bishwakabi* A Life Not Smooth as Silk

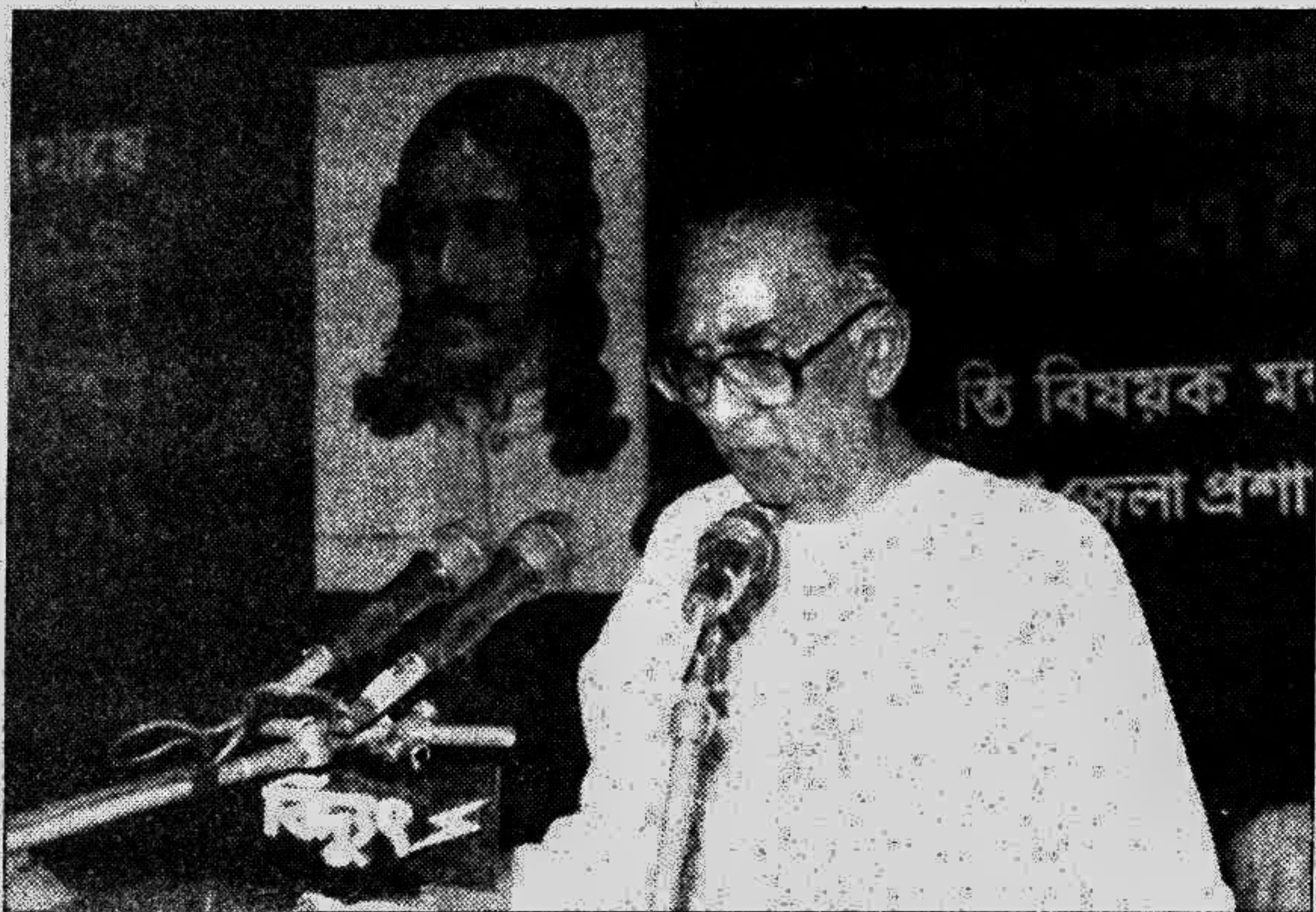
From Anwar Ali
NATORE: Hailed as the *Bishwakabi*, Rabindranath Tagore is a master in his own right in the field of Bengali literature. Bengalis lovingly remember the poet every year on his birth and death anniversaries. This year the 138th birth anniversary of the great poet was celebrated at the national level in Dhaka, Khulna, Shilaidaha, Sahajpur, Patisor and Natore as elsewhere of the country.

In Natore, though it was a more meaningful and nostalgic event. For this was the tiny town that Tagore had come to call his home and from where many anecdotes of his interesting life has trickled down over the decades. This year, for his 138th birth anniversary, it was the venue for the main function of the Rabindra Birth Anniversary celebrations. In 1941 also the 84th birth anniversary of the poet was celebrated in a befitting manner. Biswa Bharati Acharya Kristimohon Sen chaired an animated discussion on Rabindranath. More than half a century later, the tradition lives on.

The Ministry for Cultural Affairs along with the district administration organised a three-day programme from 25-27 Baishakh (8-10 May) at Queen Bhawani's Palace on the outskirts of Natore town. The programme, a memorable one, brought on stage some of the leading artists from Dhaka who kept the audience spellbound with their superb performances. The celebrations generated a great deal of excitement among the people of Natore. Rich tributes were paid, the life and works of the great poet discussed, and recitations from his creations and presentations of his music followed.

On the afternoon of 25th Baishakh, the opening ceremony started with Tagore's immortal song — "Aguner parashmoni chhoo praney, E jibon purno karo." Former Chief Justice and head of the caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman formally inaugurated the three-day event as chief guest. The State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs Professor Zinatun Nesa Talukdar and acting secretary of the Cultural Affairs Ministry were present as special guests while the eminent Rabindra researcher and poet Ahmed Rafique presided over the ceremony. Speaking on the occasion Justice Habibur Rahman also paid rich tribute to the poet and said Tagore would remain an endless source of inspiration for the nation.

However, the function was marred by some blaring mismanagement on the part of the organisers and local administration. Firstly, the programme started late from its scheduled 2:45 p.m. This was because the stage could not be erected on time and went on to be com-



Former Chief Justice and chief of the caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman inaugurated the three-day programme on the occasion of the 138th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at Queen Bhawani's Palace in Natore. **Star photo: Anwar Ali**



A scene from *Shyama*, performed by the Bulbul Lalitakala Academy on the second day of the three-day celebrations. **Star photo: Anwar Ali**

pleted by 4:00 p.m. Chief guest Justice Habibur Rahman who had come to Natore the day before was also held up from opening the celebrations at

Queen Bhawani's Palace. Although the local administration had erected a huge pandal for the function, they forgot to mark seats for the different

guest attending. As a result, a number of VIPs and other important visitors were confused over the seating plans of around 3000 people. Further even after

preparatory planning journalists did not find any designated place for themselves.

Nevertheless, overall, the programme was a success. "Peasants and labourers in the thoughts of Rabindranath" was a lively discussion, participated by eminent Rabindra researchers like Professor Abul Kalam Manjur Morshed, Professor Zulfikar Matin, Professor Subrata Barua, Dr Mahbub Sadik and Dr Rafiqul Khan. Eminent poet Quazi Abu Zafar Siddique also presented an animated recitation from Tagore. Then the cultural organisations of local and neighbouring districts organised an enchanting evening programme with some memorable songs of Rabindranath Tagore and dance numbers. On the second day (May 9), another lively discussion took place. Present were Professor Abdul Khaleq, VC of Rajshahi University, Prof Muhammad Majir Uddin Mia of the Bengali Department of Rajshahi University, Prof Abdul Zall of the Folklore Department and S M Jarjis Kadir of Queen Bhawani Women's Government College in Natore.

Later in the evening, the Bulbul Lalitakala Academy, a reputed cultural organisation, staged one of Tagore's popular dance dramas — *Shyama*. Renowned dancer and model Mou performed the role of Shyama while Ratan and Swapan of the Academy played the roles of two lovers in the *Shyama* dance — a story that deals with the love of Shyama. Mou, Swapan, Ratan and their team of promising young dancers enthralled the audience with their flawless performance of *Shyama* which attracted a large audience. The performers' knowledge of the subject and dedication towards their individual art was commendable. The recital was a big success.

On the concluding day (May 10) of the three-day celebrations, Pabna Shilpakala Academy organised another popular Tagore dance drama — *Chandalika*. Young dancers of Pabna enthralled a good crowd with their perfect steps, hand gestures and facial expressions in the *Chandalika* dance.

After the play, the artists of Natore organised a musical soiree of Tagore songs. *Ganero surero asonokhanti, Anandadhara bohichhey shuboney, Aaji jhosna ratey sobal gachhey honey, Aaji borisono mukhorito* were favourites.

M Ishaq Bhuiyan, the DC Natore concluded the programme. Organising such an extensive programme at a national level was first of its kind in Natore. Though marked by a bit of mismanagement, local people appreciated and enjoyed the programmes which came as a welcome change to their otherwise mundane life.

RAJSHAHI: Life is not always as smooth as silk for workers at Rajshahi Silk Industry. Many of them report breathing difficulties, asthma, bronchitis and relentless headache. Doctors and experts link the disease to the silk the workers produce.

The longer a worker has worked the greater he or she has suffered.

Zohra Khatoon has been with the factory for the past 20 years. Otherwise a healthy woman she recently went to a doctor with complaints of respiratory problem. The doctor found out why. She has been inhaling harmful amino acid and nitrogen released by silk-worm cocoons when these are boiled to produce the fibre.

"When cocoon is boiled at 100 degree centigrade the protein splits and amino acid comes out. Nitrogen is part of amino acid. Both amino acid and nitrogen are harmful to health," said Tanzima Yesmin, assistant professor, Department of Biochemistry at Rajshahi University.

"Cocoon," she said, "is a kind of protein and this protein is the complex nitrogenous substance forming the most essential parts of the body."

Those who work at the boiling point are most vulnerable to the health hazards. Zohra is one of them.

"Zohra is one of the victims of acute air pollution caused by the industry, wherein she has been working for the last 20 years," said her doctor, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Set up in 1962, Rajshahi Silk Industry currently employs 274 workers, including 163 women. Of the female labourers, some 100 work in the reeling section where the threads come out after green cocoons are boiled.

Workers of the section told the News Network that most of them have been suffering from asthma, sinusitis, bronchitis, headache and feel sniffing troubles round the year.

"Having failed to endure the severity of this sufferings, many workers have given up job," said Zohra, the head reeler of the section.

At least 15 workers of the industry died of respiratory troubles during the last 20-year and my husband was one of them," she claimed.

Another reeler Sufia Begum, 25, said the reeling section of the industry is most vulnerable to respiratory diseases as boiling cocoon emits intolerable gas with bad odour.

"Instances are also there that some workers collapsed while boiling cocoons," she said.

Source at the industry said some 150 women workers of different ages have long been suffering from breathing problems.

"I joined the industry three years ago as a reeler and I have been suffering from asthma for the last two years. I have to reg-

ularly take anti-histamine as I feel cold troubles me a lot," said Jamila Begum.

Workers of the industry's reeling section always inhale this harmful gas and thus are being affected with various diseases like asthma, cough and sinusitis, the university teacher said.

"The authorities should install ventilation system in the room where chemicals are boiled," said Abdul Aziz Sarkar, a senior research officer at Rajshahi Silk Board, but unfortunately the reeling room of the Rajshahi Silk Industry does not have any ventilation system. Vapour with amino acid and nitrogen gas whirls in the room during production."



Little do they know about the harm the cocoons pose

Two years ago, a group of foreign health experts visited the industry to conduct a health camp and they attributed the respiratory troubles of its workers to gas poisoning, according to some workers.

The experts reportedly asked the authorities to ensure the workers wear masks and gloves as protection. But the authorities paid no heed, some workers alleged.

Not only the reeling section, workers of its printing department have also been suffering from the same diseases.

Printer Anarkoli, 30, said she had been suffering from asthma for past five years.

Moloy Goshwami, another worker in his 60s, claimed he has been working in dyeing and degaming section for the last 28 years and he has now developed eye infection.

He said threads are boiled in hot water to separate the glutinous state in dyeing and degaming section. Hydrochloric acid, Sodium oxide and Asiatic acid are used in this section as chemical ingredients.

Sandipon Ghosh, Director of Rajshahi University Medical Centre, said hydrochloric acid and sodium oxides are seriously detrimental to eyes.

Describing the working

condition of the Rajshahi Silk Industry as most hazardous, Sandipon said women workers of its reeling, dyeing and printing sections severely suffer from various complications during their pregnancy. During this period, they are most vulnerable to respiratory diseases.

Another reeler Jarina, 25, accused the industry authorities of breaching promises of offering medical facilities.

The Labour Union and the industry authorities differ on the issue.

Ataur Rahman, former president of Rajshahi Silk Labour Union, said: "We had submitted a number of memorandums to the authorities demanding medical facilities, but our ap-

peals went unheeded."

When contacted Labour and Welfare Officers Shaifuddin Waresi said, "I don't think that it's a serious problem. No worker has ever complained to me about such health problems. There are two doctors in the industry."

But workers complained that the doctors are not always available.

According to the Industrial Law of 1965, the internal environment of all industries must be neat and clean. The floor, stairs and the residence of workers are to be free from all dirt and filth. There should be proper drainage system, if the water stores in the floor in time of production.

"The painful thing is that production continues in the reeling section with water remaining stagnant on the floor," said head reeler Zohra.

"The industrial laws are hardly practised in this industry," alleged Ataur Rahman.

But Deputy Manager of the industry Md Shamsul Islam denied the allegations.

"If the authorities continue to ignore the health hazards, it will badly hit the industry," warned Yesmin, the university teacher.

—News Network

Photo Feature



He isn't breathing any more ... wailing of a devastated sister

Fatal carousal



Death toll rises



Spellbound at the death of the dear ones



The lucky one ... for him and his family it was a close call

AKM Mohsin and Anisur Rahman arrest in frames the Narsinghdi liquor tragedy in which more than a hundred people died after they had drunk methylated spirit.