

Esho Hey Baishakh...

The Daily Star

Bengali New Year Special
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Shubha Nababarsha

by Dr Ashraf Siddiqui

Let our *Nababarsha* messages fly East, Middle East and Far East, from Asia to Europe, from Europe to America ... to our near and dear ones ... to our brothers and sisters... to our unknown friends all over the world ... to the people who live in the deserts... on the hills and mountains ... in the far islands and seas...

In our adolescence, we used to receive beautiful cards, plenty of them, on the occasion of *Pahela Baishakh*, the first day of the Bengali year. Some of them were red; some yellowish, some pink, some greenish. Most of them were home made. The production process of these cards was very simple. Take a few petals of *rajangandha*, *kanakchampa*, *rangan* or rose and some green leaves, pressed and dried inside a book for seven or eight days; glue them onto a card and there you had the greeting card.

The messages on these cards used to be fascinating. One would write a poem or a quotation from his favourite poet or writer.

My father and uncles would also receive printed *Shubha Nababarsha* cards on the occasion of *halkhata* from their business friends. They probably had those cards printed in good numbers, keeping the date and year open so that they could be inserted each year.

These are now traditions of distant past.

Our young ones — boys and girls — no longer get cards from their friends on *Pahela Baishakh*. They do, however, exchange greeting cards on the New Year's Day of the Gregorian calendar.

When we were young, I still remember, I would receive from my friends and relatives not only *Nababarsha* cards but also real flowers. I have one right before me where one of my admirers, Rabea Apa (an unknown poet) quoted from Tagore:

*Phool valoboso, hridai tabe phooler bagan karo,
Antar taba sal sourabe hoke sundarataro* (1351 BS).

(If you love flower let your heart be a garden.

Let yourself be more beautiful with that pleasant flavour)

My younger sister Sayera used to send me many-coloured enchanting cards to *Santiniketan* where I was a student — far away from my home:

Puraton batsarer jurna clanta ratri or *kete gelo ore jatri* — 1353 BS

(Worn-out and tottering night of the old year.

Oh passenger, just passed away)

Letters in later years used to pour in from *Santiniketan* from Mufazal Haider Chowdhury (Shaheed) and many others. Letters would come from famous people, my teachers, friends and well-wishers like Shilpacharya Nandal Basu, Buddha Dev Bose, Anil Kumar Chanda, Sagarmoy Ghose, Quamrul Hasan (then young artist), Poet Farrukh Ahmed, Anis Chowdhury, Poet Habibur Rahman, Minnat Ali, Poet A K S Noor Mohd (Dinajpur), Rokonuzzaman Khan (Dabul), Md Modabber (Baghban), poet Abdur Rashid Khan.



Nababarsha procession in the city, of late.

Chowdhury Osman (Pabna), Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua, Mustafa Nurul Islam, Begum Sufia Kamal, Poet Ahsan Habib and many others. And, even one from Rabindranath Tagore in 1347 while I was a schoolboy, which I published in my book *Rabindranather Shantiniketan*.

Here and there a quotation from Tagore or Nazrul even today bring me the pleasant message from the romantic world of 1340, 48, 49, 50, 53 or even 54!

Even today I have before me spread the petals of flowers which bloomed in those golden days. I have still remains of the broken petals from the girl whom I loved in my eighteen. Does everything pass away?

If today I read a letter from Mufazal Haider Chowdhury which he wrote in 1354 and which runs thus: *My friend, today, this new and wonderful dawn has flooded my heart with unexplainable and inexplicable joy, as if I have been lost in the ocean of eternity, as if I am great, I am endless... I shall joyously sing the victory of the humanity — a new age... a golden age is coming...*

This golden message from a Shaheed that came out on a *Pahela Baishakh*, long time back, can always be recited or engraved in any of our cards. Should it be read only on the *Nababarsha* day? Nay, it can be recited throughout the year, even throughout ages.

I receive Happy New Year cards from my friends and publishers in the United States, Canada and London. Jan Fair Service, a well-known American artist who illustrated one of my books published from the USA, sent me a very interesting card recently. The hand-made card had a pet cat, a mouse, a frog, a serpent and a tortoise with a caption as follows: "Fair Service Family and Happy Co-Existence". Many of the readers, I believe, receive such varied cards on Christmas, English New Year, or birthdays. But what about our *Nababarsha*!

Let me tell you another interesting story of 1359 BS. One of my friends (whom we named *biye-pagla* or marriage-mad) fell in love with a damsel (that's what he called). There arose certain complications. A 'high-power committee' was set up and we sat down to solve this 'life and death' problem of our friend. *Nababarsha* was just round the corner and our unanimous decision was that beautiful cards should immediately be brought and sent to the sweet brothers and sisters of the would-be bride. The shot was sure, the marriage ceremony ended in peace and happiness, and we had heartiest of dinners to compensate our anxieties.

My friend is now a top-notch government official. He still remembers the episode and always speaks highly of the utility of the *Nababarsha* cards. He says that there should be a national effort to introduce the system and lovers in trouble should take lesson from his success.

In western countries, New Year's Day card will surely unite the members of each and every family wherever they might be. The famous Hallmark Company will engage researchers to incorporate new

Lost fears reappear

Many fear that, with time, we are heading towards a complete cultural shift. There is a growing concern over increasing *Westernisation* and *Indianisation* of our culture. Perhaps, there are reasons, Navine Murshid writes



A Baul song performance during Nababarsha celebrations.

THESE are the days of band music. Even *gaaye halud* or *paa-n-chin-ti*, traditionally exclusive family affairs, has been overtaken and overwhelmed by its onslaught. Gone are the days when the relatives of the bride and the groom took care of the music part. Songs like *Haldi baato*, *mendi baato*, *baato phuler mou* or *Aaj putuler gaaye halud*, *kaal putuler biye* no longer feature in different ceremonial leading up to a wedding. The songs now played, in most cases, are either Hindi or English and often have no relevance whatsoever to the occasion at hand.

Blaring music from the house next door is bound to be a Hindi song as well. Eight out of ten cars on Dhaka streets would never have Bengali cassettes or CDs playing in their stereos. A party with Bengali songs is not a party at all for some. Of course, the elderly of the society would differ in their views. But, as far as the 'ever jubilant leaders of tomorrow' are concerned, they would rather live for the moment and 'have fun like there is no tomorrow', and hence would not be able to take time and appreciate Bengali songs.

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foreign music and that would alienate people from their roots.

People who are involved in band music feel that they do not misrepresent Bengali culture. On the contrary, they bring in contemporary issues and ways of life into their songs; they portray Bangladesh and the world as it is today.

Lyricist of many songs of *Souls*, *Renaissance* and *LRB*, Shahid Mahmud Jangal says that his songs are songs of life. "Take, for example, *Aaj je shishu, mayer koley heshechhey, amra chirodin shei hashi dekhtey chal...* (A baby smiled lying on his mother's lap. We want to see that smile forever...).

The first line tells you that this is a song of hope for a better tomorrow; it also tells you that there may be reasons for which the baby may not be smiling for long. This is just an example. There are many songs that incorporate the lifestyles we lead; the lessons we learn; the prob-

lems we face in society. Why should it be anti-Bengali?"

Robin Ghosh, an ace composer who rose to prominence in the 1960s, feels that Bengali songs have reached an all-time low. It is interesting to note that he did not think that present-day songs and band music not fall under the category of 'modern songs'. When he talked about Bengali songs, he actually meant Bengali film songs.

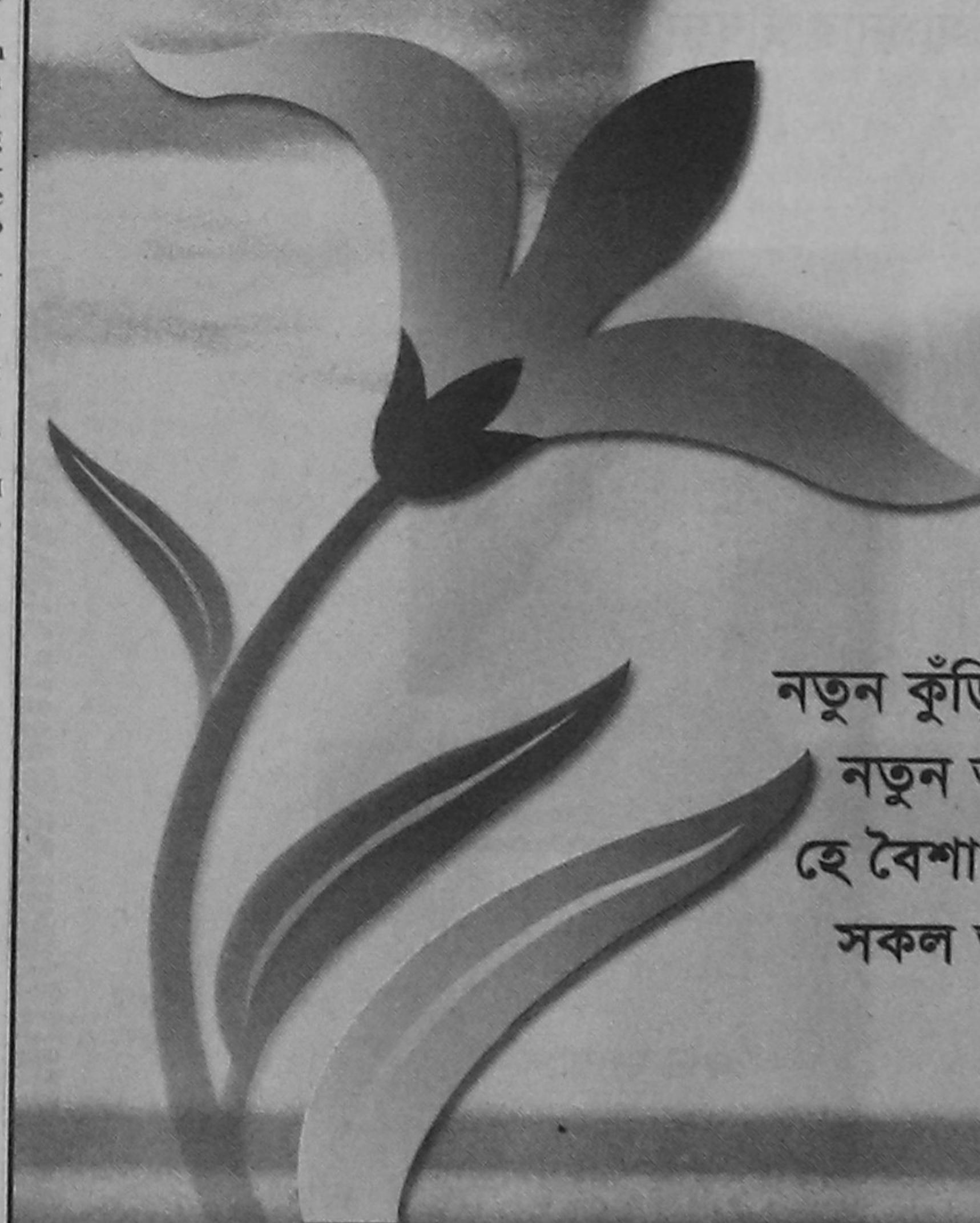
"There is no creation anymore. Everything has stopped. It would be difficult to recover from today's state. A broken mirror can never be fixed. The crack will always be there. There are no proper sound systems; no technological innovations; no opportunities for upcoming singers although there are a lot of talents around." He feels that only these songs will live on while others disappear into oblivion. Some changes will be brought about in the present status quo.

The worst fears among the masses are perhaps of losing touch with Tagore, Nazrul, Lalon and other songs. One such 'fearful' person recalled his experience at an audiocassette shop. "I asked the man behind the counter to show me cassettes of Pankaj. I thought he would understand that I was talking about Pankaj Mallick. But, to my utter surprise, and dismay, he brought out some cassettes of Pankaj Udhas, a popular gazal singer."

Prominent Rabindra Sangeet singer, Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya feels that with time there will be a lot of changes. Some changes will be for the better, while others for the worse.

"Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti have strong roots. The changes that time entails will not disrupt, or even disturb their existence. I believe that only these songs will live on while others disappear into oblivion. There is nothing to be worried about. Rabindra-Nazrul will stay in their places. Nothing will hurt them."

স্বাগত ১৪০৭ সাল



নতুন কুঁড়ির স্পর্শ এনেছে
নতুন আশার আলো
হে বৈশাখ দূর কর আজ
সকল আঁধার কালো

সোনালী ব্যাংক

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