



64th Death Anniversary

Rabindranath Tagore  
A Tribute



Self expression through Tagore songs

Professor Anisur Rahman shares his views



Professor Anisur Rahman

KARIM WAHEED

Professor Anisur Rahman is a noted Tagore exponent. He is known for his unique approach to rendering Tagore songs. He believes in "less is more" and hence when he performs, he often has just a violin and a *sitar* for *sangat* (accompaniment). Through his unorthodox presentation and conscious efforts to convey the message of the songs, he has won the hearts of many — both masses and critics. When he feels that there is a lack of "competent" trainers of Tagore songs both in our country and West Bengal, it has some gravity.

What exactly does Rahman imply by "competent" trainers? According to him, "Efficiency of a trainer cannot be measured merely by his/her skills as an artiste. A topnotch artiste usually teaches the students how he/she sings a certain song, which is not necessarily what a student needs to evolve. One needs the freedom of expression while singing to develop uniqueness. Otherwise, every student would turn out to be 'Xerox' copies of the trainer and that's exactly what's happening in most cases.

"A true teacher would explain the message of a certain song and let the students express themselves.

I'm not sure why the trainers repeatedly emphasise on teaching the tunes of songs. One can find all the tunes in *Geeto Bitan*. Most trainers of Tagore songs don't realise that by confining their students to render the songs the same way they do, only impairs the potentials of the aspiring singers. And that is tragic. Besides a carbon copy can never be as good as the original."

Rahman continues, "I remember late Nilufar Yasmeen singing at a programme. She performed songs of different genres including songs of Nazrul, DL Roy, Atul Prasad. Needless to say, she did a fantastic job. However, she didn't perform a single song of Tagore. I was somewhat disheartened and I asked her whether she cared enough for Tagore songs to perform them. Nilufar told me she deeply admired Tagore's creation, so much so that books by *Kobiguru* always accompanied her in bed. Yet she would rather not perform songs of Tagore, as she was afraid that she might not be able to perform the songs unerringly. Can you imagine an artiste of Nilufar's stature questioning her ability?

"Some 'pundits' have created this illusion that Tagore's songs are rigid and there is no place for self-expression. I understand their fear

of distortion. But one can express oneself without moving away from the original tunes. For example *Moharaj eki notun shajey* is usually rendered in a humble tone but sing it in a bold tone and the expression changes dynamically."

"Quite a few of the leading Tagore artistes religiously follow a certain style made famous by ace Tagore exponents such as Kanika Bandyopadhyay at Shantiniketan. Apparently whatever Shantiniketan says is the last word. According to some, Devabrata Biswas couldn't sing, just because his interpretation of Tagore songs happened to be different than that made familiar by Shantiniketan. What these people forget is that even Shantiniketan didn't always follow a certain style of rendering Tagore songs. As the trainers changed, so did the style Shantiniketan embraced."

"*Kobiguru* himself loathed mindless mimicry. He has always encouraged freedom of interpretation. Of course, that doesn't imply that distortion is acceptable but one who truly admires Tagore would never distort his timeless creation." - concludes Rahman.

Mon-e robey ki na robey amarey

Whether I shall be remembered I really don't know.  
Frequently I come to your door-step and sing without cause.  
Days pass by, as long as I live if I move near to you while on the way  
I want to see the fleeting smile on your face-  
That's why I sing unknowingly.  
The flowers of spring are shed as the spring comes to an end-  
The momentary clasp is warm and strong, nothing else is known.  
Days will end, the light get dim, the song will end,  
and the 'veena' get silent,  
As long as I live perhaps I'll fully load this sportive boat.  
That's why I sing unknowingly.

Tomar holo shuru amar holo shara

It is your beginning, this is my end  
You and I together make this current.  
Your lamp burns, you've a companion at home  
For me it is night, for me it is the star.  
Yours is the shore, mine the water-  
You remain sitting, I go on wandering.  
Your hand can hold, mine knows decay-  
Your mind knows fear, mine is above it.

Amar hiyar majhey lukiye chhiley

You were hidden in my heart but I was unable to see you.  
I was unable to see you.  
I cast my eyes outwards  
And didn't look inside my heart  
In all my love, all my wounds and in all my hopes  
You were close to me, but I didn't get to your proximity.  
You were present in the game I played in the shape of joy.  
Being joyous I got forgetful, and unmindfully spent the day.  
Secretly you invaded my heart and lent to my songs of joy and sorrow  
Your own tunes, but your song I never sang.

Translated by Abu Rushd

The maestro's palette

The multi-faceted influences in Tagore's work

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

When Tagore came to Rajshahi and Kushtia (1890) to take charge of his property, it seemed miles away from a life he was used to. The setting was a sharp contrast to Kolkata. But shortly he settled down to the different lifestyle, and spent long stretches of time watching the panoramic scenery from his boat on the river Padma. The seasonal variations enthralled him. On a rainy day he would watch the lightning darting across the dark clouds, listen to the thunders echoing over the plains. In summer, the unruffled peace and tranquility, the truant boy who played the flute on the sultry afternoons, all enchanted him. And most importantly, the young 30-year old zamindar became increasingly fascinated by the folk melodies of the *bauls*, *fakirs* and *vaisnavas* (folk artistes).

"There is a misconception that Tagore came in contact with Lalon himself, but in fact Lalon had already passed away by then and it was in fact, Lalon's disciple that Tagore met," says Dr Mridulanti Chakravarti, Professor, Dept of Theatre and Music, DU. The talented disciple, Gagan Harkara, added a fresh dimension to Tagore's rich exposure to Indian and European music.

Tagore was deeply moved by the lyrical beauty, so vividly expressive of the deep-rooted philosophies in a language so simplistic and rhythmic. The spiritual romanticism in the *Baul* philosophy influenced Tagore so deeply that he went as far as calling himself "Rabindra Baul". Later, he even played the role of a blind *baul* in his play *Falguni*.

"It was Tagore who first collected 20 of Lalon's songs and had published it in the monthly *Probashi*. Folk literature was printed in the section titled *Haramoni*. In the Bangla month of Baishak in 1322, the collected song of Gagan Harkara, *Ami Kothaye Pabo Tarey* was published for the first time in the magazine. Our National Anthem, *Amar Shonar Bangla*, was composed and based on this *baul* tune on August 07, 1905. Tomorrow the 100th anniversary of our

National Anthem will be celebrated," says Mridul.

"Later, Tagore collected Lalon's collection of songs from Cheuria village. The book contained some 283 authentic Lalon songs and are now exhibited at the Tagore Museum at Shantiniketan," continues Mridul.

In fact, different forces influenced Tagore's composition in different stages of his life. His life as a composer spanning 61 years can be categorised in three different phases.

In the first phase (1881-1900) Tagore was mostly devoted to composing *bhanga gaan* or songs modeled on existing Hindi songs. In the second phase (1901 to 1920) he experimented by basing his compositions on the musical structure of the ragas. This was the stage the

marked the beginning of Tagore's unmistakable individualism. Most of Tagore's patriotic songs were composed during this period as he began to increasingly focus on folk music. In the third phase (1921 to 1941) Tagore started to combine poetry with melody and folk with classical melodies.

His compositions of nearly 2,300 songs are seen as falling mainly into four groups — Spiritualism, Patriotism, Romance, and Nature. Even though Tagore composed roughly 60 patriotic songs mostly during the 1870's- it earned him a great amount of recognition during the *Swadeshi* movement. Besides his vast collection of songs that have become an everyday part of Bengali culture, historians also point to his tremendous contribution

in visual arts and in introducing seasonal festivals.

Tagore had spent almost 11 years in East Bengal. He traveled to Shilaidaha, Shajadpur and Potishar. On and often he would go to back to Kolkata and Shantiniketan and would return to the then East Bengal. He traveled in his boat in the Padma, Jamuna, Boral and the Nagar rivers. During the monsoon, Tagore was drawn to the *jari*, *shari* and *bhatiali* songs of the boatmen. Many of Tagore's composition came to reflect this period, depicting the life of the working class.

Some of the memorable songs were directly influenced by the regional songs from several Indian provinces he traveled to: *Baro Asha Kore*, *Aaji Subho Dine* and *Sakatara Oi Kandiche* (Kannada) and *Anandaloke Mangalaloke* (Mysore).

During this period, many of his work also mark the Western influence in his songs. Some remarkable examples include *Katobar bhebechinu*, *Purano Sai Diner Katha* etc. Most of these songs were aptly used in his lyrical plays viz., *Balmiki Pratibha*, *Kalmigaya* and *Mayar Khela*.

"Though influenced by the *baul* songs, Tagore added his own touch. In *baul* songs the four stanzaic patterns (*asthai*, *antara*, *shanchari* and *abhog*) of Dhrupada style are sung in the same tune. However, Tagore would compose a different tune in the *shanchari* giving the song a completely new flavour. Among his repertoire of songs of devotional (Puja) are *Ami Kotaye Pabo Tarey*, *Ami Kaan Petey Roi*, *Amar Mon Jokhon Jagli Narey*, *Tomar Khola Haawaye*, *Kon Alotey Praner Prodeep among others*," says Mridul.

Tagore's legacy of songs undermines his receptivity to the changing settings and culture he came in contact with. Whether it be the influence of the classical songs, the *bauls*, regional or western music, Tagore's touch worked as a timeless prism, blending all into one unique sparkle, transforming the ordinary to a masterpiece.

Bolpurer Rabindranath  
In the master's footsteps

FAYZA HAQ

The documentary film *Bolpurer Rabindranath* is a record of Shakoor Majid's trip to Shantiniketan in 1994. Shakoor had taken with him his camera Canon XL1S. Going there he discovered that the history of Shantiniketan went back to the time of Tagore's father, who built a rest house in the place with the name of Shantiniketan. The area has now developed enormously with a cultural impact. Sixty-three years after Tagore's death, the place is still pulsating with Tagore's spirit and his deep admiration for literature, music, dancing, fine arts and more. Bolpur and Bhubandanga, are basically the places of origin of Biswa Bharati, otherwise known as Shantiniketan.

"I tried to capture the last 40 years of Tagore's life which he spent at that place. I saw many elements of nature which had inspired his writings. Places like the River Moirankhi and Shaontal Patti reverberate with life. Places in Bolpur and Bhubandanga are covered with shops and eating houses with signboards that had names taken from Tagore's writings, like *Robiroshi*, *Shonchoita* and *Ghorebairey*, says Shakoor.

Asked to talk about the trees, flowers and waterways that formed Shantiniketan, he said that nature was an integral part of the institute, where the sky was the ceiling, and bushes and shrubs the walls of the classrooms. Shakoor says that the place began with only five students, but after 100 years it now has more than 5,000 students, coming from various corners of the world, to study sculpture, music and other art forms. He went during *puja* holidays and so he missed the normal activities of the students such as their dancing and feasting during *Poush Mela* and *Pahela Baisakh*.

Scenes from the documentary

(Clockwise) Venue for classes under the open sky, the entrance of Kalabhavan, a gazebo where classes are held, main building of Bishwa Bharti and Tagore's statue in Shantiniketan

Shakoor fully understood Tagore's philosophy of combining nature with man. "Chemistry, physics and dance classes were taught in the open air so that these young people would grow with nature," says Shakoor. He studied how Tagore lived in Bolpur from 1901 to 1941. Since he lived in this place, the environment affected his writings and this is what the filmmaker tried to show in his film. He also traced how he had won the Nobel Prize and travelled to distant places in the West. After his trips overseas he changed the concept of his institute of Biswa Bharati in 1917.

Thus his original concept was globalised.

As for the stills in the film based on the different stages of the life of Tagore, these photographs were taken from different books, which are available in Dhaka. Mridulanti Chakravarty of the Dhaka University (Music and Dramatics section), who was once himself a student of Shantiniketan, helped him trace down these relevant photos.

Shakoor got permission to shoot his film from 2 pm to sunset for a single day. He took more time to bring in the adjacent locality. He did not get the support of the Biswa Bharati as he was not allowed to film in the museum. Neither was he allowed to take his camera inside Uttarayan, where Tagore lived. Shakoor also lamented the fact that he could not get an architectural plan of Shantiniketan.

Shakoor is a playwright and director and his TV plays include *Londoni Kannya*, *Nayari*, *Karimunessa*, *Cherag* and *Bairati*. He has also done a film shot overseas called *Shobuj Matir Maya*. Apart from these he has done a documentary on the learning of Bangla by foreigners, called *Shodamatir Ghran* which was telecast by ntv.