

# In conversation with Ajit Roy

## Veteran artiste on the state of Tagore songs in Bangladesh

ERSHAD KAMOL

FOR singer-composer Ajit Roy, Rabindra Sangeet is a devotion, which he claims has established him as a reputable artiste. His mother introduced him to Tagore songs in his childhood. Eventually, music became his profession and the guiding light of his life.

Though he is a renowned Tagore singer, Ajit Roy has also made major contributions to the 'Gano Sangeet' genre, especially during the movement against the Pakistani junta. He served as a music producer at Bangladesh Betar from 1972 to 1995. During his career in radio, Ajit Roy has composed several songs that attained much popularity including *Shukh tumi ke* rendered by Runa Laila, *Ekti Bangladesh* by Sabina Yasmin and *Banglar mukh ami dekhichhi*. For his contribution to music, Ajit Roy received a state recognition -- Swadhinata Dibash Padak in 2000.

Initially, apart from Tagore songs, Roy used to sing 'Panchakabir Gaan' and Gano Sangeet. The Tagore centennial celebrations had a remarkable impact on him. He became a Tagore devotee. He started performing Rabindra Sangeet alongside Gano Sangeet at cultural and political programmes. Was Tagore songs appreciated at political gatherings? "Why not? When rendered with conviction, Tagore's patriotic songs have immense impact on the listener," responds Roy.

In 1971 Ajit Roy joined Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and after the Liberation War, in



Ajit Roy

1972, he joined Bangladesh Betar as a music producer. Do Tagore songs get proper coverage in radio? Ajit says, "Yes, in terms of duration. Tagore songs get over two hours of air-time throughout the day. However, it is my

observation that Tagore songs aired on radio and TV is losing its appeal and there are reasons behind that."

Ajit continues, "First of all, several novice artistes are performing on radio and TV who lack proper training. Apart from that quite a few music producers responsible for these programmes, do not take enough care during the recording sessions. As a result, often the programmes are substandard."

Commenting on the current scenario of Rabindra Sangeet practices in Bangladesh, Ajit Roy says, "I don't see enough talented upcoming artistes in the genre and several prominent singers these days have become commercial. They have lost the urge to do better."

Despite several renowned schools offering courses in Rabindra Sangeet, why is there a lack of upcoming talents? Roy responds, "After the era of Hemanta Mukharjee, Kanika Banerjee and their generation there was a huge void in India. Similarly, we are going through a tough time. There is another issue. I run a music school named 'Abhuday Sangeet Angan'. It seems that the young singers are after fast fame. They are not interested in extensive training and preparation. To achieve expertise one has to practice scrupulously. And particularly in Tagore songs one needs greater understanding of Tagore's philosophy and has to incorporate apt emotions that the lyrics demand during renditions."

The veteran artiste however, has not lost hope. He is optimistic about the fate of Tagore songs in Bangladesh.



PHOTO: AMRUL RAJIV

On the occasion of International Day for the World's Indigenous People on August 9, hundreds of indigenous people of all ages in their traditional attire thronged the Central Shaheed Minar premises. Amidst much enthusiasm and fanfare a colourful rally was organised at the venue

# Exhibition Bandarban birds through Australian eyes



FAYZA HAQ

An exhibition of drawings and sketches of birds of Bandarban Hills by the Australian naturalist artist Malcolm Arnold is on at Drik Gallery till 15 August. The display is associated with the current festival of indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Malcolm was invited to Bangladesh by Saber Hussain Chowdhury, a businessman and politician, to produce a book on the wild life of this country in 2000. The publication is in



FAYZA HAQ

its final stages. He hopes to write a second book on how people are living in the Sunderbans-- with the constant fear of the tiger. He says, "I fell in love with the people, their culture and heritage." In 2001 he met a Bangladeshi woman, and in 2003 he married her on his next visit, and he has resided here since. A professional artist for 21 years, he is internationally known. He supports himself from the sale of his work.

He went to Rangamati in 2001 and from there he went to the Madnapur Forest and to



Artworks featuring nature and birds of Bandarban by Malcolm Arnold

Bandarban and met the people, whom he grew to admire. Later the Alliance Francaise, seeing his work, asked him to be a part of the present exhibition, which, incidentally, also contains ethnic jewellery. Malcolm says, "The Hill tracts is like nothing else on the planet -- it is peaceful and beautiful. The way the people live in harmony with nature is something dear to my heart, as I'm a conservationist of both wild life and cultures. As it is difficult for a foreigner to walk about the streets without getting mobbed, to sit somewhere and sketch is an impossibility. So I take photographs but when seeing through the camera, I'm thinking of a painting, not a photograph. For one painting I work from six to eight different photographs, which I get from my computer."

One of the highlights for Malcolm in the Bandarban was when he once went for an early morning walk. The mist on the river when he got to the bottom of a hill was breathtaking. He spent three hours in the peace and quiet just seeing the ethnic people come and go about their work and enjoyed every minute of it. Coming from Australia, every single bird for him

is new, and Bangladesh for him is a whole new venture, after studying wildlife in his home. "Coming from Australia, which is mostly desert and full of browns, reds and ochre, he finds it a great change to be in Bangladesh with its greens and blues. He has been to the Sunderbans at least 20 times and says that the silence in the desert is similar to the silence in the jungle. He hopes to go to the remote areas of the Hill Tracts in future. He says, "I'm at a loss as to why tourists don't flock to this country as it has so much to offer."

About his drawing, Laurent Jalicous of the Alliance Francaise says, "Such is Malcolm's art that each feather is lovingly painted, each leaf is carefully drawn, and the overall piece is perfectly matching the real subject. This exhibition of this bird-lover gives a unique perspective on the wildlife, the scenery and the people of Bandarban. With photographic precision, Malcolm offers us some sights of the Hills to be remembered."

# Lending a hand

## Palakar arranges charity programmes for flood affected Hajongs

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

In aid of Hajong families, affected by the recent flood, theatre troupe Palakar has arranged a fortnightly programme starting from yesterday. The programme will continue till August 24. Apart from theatre, street theatre and studio theatre performances, artistes of Palakar will hold cultural programmes at shopping malls and holiday markets to collect funds for the flood victims.

Chief of Palakar, Aminur Rahman Mukul, informs, "On the occasion of International Day of the World's Indigenous People, yesterday we

have staged a play *Mangula*, featuring the struggles of the ethnic minority group Hajong. The play is written by Golam Shafiq and directed by me. Proceeds from ticket sales will go to funds for flood victims."

Besides, staging *Mangula*, Palakar artistes will stage the street theatre production *Tairair Bukey Miju Munshir Pao* on August 11 at the Liberation War Museum. Cartoons by Shishir Bhattacharjee will be on display at the venue. From August 16 to August 22 Palakar will stage two studio theatre productions -- *Dakghar* and *Project 100+* -- at its studio on Natok Sharani (formerly known as

Baily Road). Moreover, Palakar artistes will stage a short play *Adivasi Life Sketch* at different shopping centres from dawn to dusk between August 12 and 15.

Mukul further said that relief would be distributed amongst 100 flood affected Hajong families at Birishiri, Netrokona. Explaining the reason behind selecting only Hajong families, Mukul says, "Since the Hajong families are likely to be left out of the flood relief programmes, we have decided to help them."



A scene from Mangula

# Album review

## "Bonno": Fuad's latest album lives up to its name

KARIM WAHEED

Following smash hits *re/Evolution* and *Variation No. 25*, Fuad is back with his latest album *Bonno*, a G-Series exclusive. The album features 17 numbers and an intro by Arafat Kazi -- sort of a disclaimer suggesting the listener not to play the album in company of *murubbis*. This gimmick may work well with juvenile music-lovers.

According to Fuad, *Bonno* should not be considered his "musical masterpiece because it is not very musical". The musician calls it a "total entertainment package". The album is inspired by the "basic animalistic instincts in humans".

The lowdown: Humour and sarcasm are the high points. Though at times the jabs are uninspired, for the most part the allusions are clever and will induce chuckles, if not side-splitting laughter.

*Jungle*, the opening song, sets the mood. Highlighting percussions and Latin beats, the catchy number may not sound readily coherent, but once you concentrate, the message is quite simple.

*Khub chena chena*, an Asha Bhosle hit, gets a complete makeover. The stereotypical naive, love song becomes a smouldering



hip hop/ RnB number, perfect as club music. Poonam's throaty (of *Basto shohore* fame) vocals and refrain of Egyptian artist Amr Diab's crossover phenomenon *Habibi ya nour-el ain* make this number irresistible.

*Bonno rap* by B1SHOP and Fuad (intro by Rahaat and Laboni) takes a

hilarious pot shot at the issue of obscenity in Bangladeshi films. Clip of a song that goes "*Joubon amar laal tomato*", which was actually used in a Bangla film, is added as reference in the track.

The farce continues with *Hit film* (featuring Shihab, Lamia, Shaheen and Johan). Granted, the prelude

and the song (a remake of RD Burman's *Shono mon boli tomaye*) underscores the ludicrousness of dialogues and lyrics in '80s films and the formulaic love story that is doomed by class difference, but it's so camp (intentionally, of course) that it's funny. Lines like "*Amar Tommy Hilfiger lekha tight genji achhey*" is sure to provide a few laughs.

*Shukno pata*, rendered by Mila, features refrain of the Nazrul Sangeet *Shukno patar nupur paye*. The number is easy to the ear but does not match up to the brilliance of *Jhilmil jhilmil* (from *re/Evolution*).

*Ke bashi bajaye re* (remake of a Happy Akhand song) is refreshing and soothing. Anila, a regular in Fuad albums, provides just the right kind of melody needed for this track.

Other notable tracks in the album include *Da dushtu number*, a reggaeton tune by RULE and B1SHOP; *Jokhoni nibir korey*, a remake of a Niloy Das composition, sung by Elita and *Prayashchitto* (Fuad featuring Arbovirus), a grunge song.

Prediction: another big hit.

# কর্ষধর্ষট্টৎষচ রিহং ওহফরধর্ষ ঘর্ষঃরড়র্ষর্ষ অর্ষিৎফ্র ভড়ৎ নবৎঃ ভরষম

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Internationally acclaimed Bengali filmmaker Buddhadeb Dasgupta's *Kaalpurush*, set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement, has been adjudged the best feature film at the Indian National Film Awards for 2005. The announcements were made recently, after a delay of nearly a year due to court cases.

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan was chosen the best actor for his role in Sanjay Leela Bhansali directed film *Black* that also stars Rani Mukherjee, while Rahul Dholakia was adjudged the best director for his debut film *Parzania* (in English) based on the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002.

The best actress award went to Sarika for her role in *Parzania*, which also stars Naseeruddin Shah. The film's release in Gujarat ruled by BJP had run into trouble following refusal by exhibitors to screen the film.

*Kaalpurush* stars Rahul Bose and Sameera Reddy, known more for her sizzling role in Bollywood films. Veteran actor Mithun Chakrabarty also plays a key role in the film. Chakrabarty had earlier done the lead role in the Dasgupta's *Tahader Katha*.

"Obviously it's nice to receive the National Award," said Dasgupta who began his celluloid journey in 1979 with *Durotto* (The Distance). The Naxalite movement had also formed the background of two of his

earlier films *Grihajuddha* in Bengali, arguably his best film, and *Andhi Galin* in Hindi.

For 64-year-old Amitabh Bachchan, the recognition for his role in *Black* is his third National Award for best actor as he had earlier won it for his roles in *Agnipath* and his debut film *Saat Hindustani*. *Black* has also been adjudged as the best Hindi feature film.

Aamir Khan-starrer Hindi film *Rang De Basanti*, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, bagged the award for the best popular film providing wholesome entertainment.

The Indira Gandhi Award for the best first film by a director went to Pradeep Sarkar for his *Parineeta*

(Hindi), starring Sanjay Dutt, Saif Ali Khan and Vidya Balan.

The best supporting actor award was bagged by Naseeruddin Shah for his performance in Nagesh Kuknoor-directed *Iqbal*, the story of a physically-challenged youth's ambition to become a cricketer, while the same award in women's category went to Malayalam actress Urvashi for her role in *Achhuvinte Amma*.

Veteran actor Anupam Kher was given a special jury award for his performance in *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara*, directed by Jahnur Barua.

Playback singers Nareesh Iyer got the National Award in male category for his rendition of the hugely popular song *Roo ba roo* in

*Rang De Basanti* and Shreya Ghoshal for *Apne asoo peene ke liye in Paheli*.

The declaration of the awards was delayed by about a year because of a Bombay High Court order that had directed consideration of uncensored films for the competition. The high court had stayed announcement of the awards, which was vacated by the Supreme Court.

Leading documentary filmmakers Anand Patwardhan and two others had moved the high court in the year 2006 seeking exemption for their films from obtaining censor board clearance prior to entering the competition.



Rahul Bose and Mithun Chakrabarty in Kaalpurush