

Footprints of Tagore

147th birth anniversary of the bard

Rabindranath in Srihatta

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

It was the middle of *Kartik* in the Bangla year 1326. Kobiguru was on a trip to Shillong. On behalf of the Brahma Samaj, its secretary Govinda Narayan Sinha sent a telegram to Tagore, inviting him to visit Sylhet. Considering a long and cumbersome journey, Tagore initially replied in negative and wrote "journey long and tedious". Even on receipt of the wire, Sinha did not refrain and sent more telegrams from different forums including Anjuman Islam, Mahila Parishad etc. Upon receiving all these invitations, Tagore had to oblige.

The Sylhet-Shillong road was yet to be used at that time. The Assam-Bengal railway linked Shillong back in those days. Tagore headed out and as the news spread around in days, reception committees were formed to provide a grand welcome to the literary genius.

A team was sent to Badarpur Junction (at present in Karimganj, Assam), while another team went up to Kulaura, 30 miles off Sylhet. Some former students of Shantiniketan, who were originally from Sylhet, were staying at Badarpur. They joined Kobiguru on the way. The poet was accompanied by his son Rathindranath and Pratima Devi (Rathindra's wife). The entourage spent the night at Kulaura Station. Ethel Roberts from

the Presbyterian Church in Sylhet met the poet at Kulaura Station to greet him.

Tagore was given warm receptions at Majgaon, Boromchal, Bhatara, Fenchuganj among other stopovers. As the train made its way to the Sylhet Station on early morning, 19th Kartik, an eager crowd welcomed the guest amidst fireworks and applause. Thousands of people thronged the Sylhet Station that day.

Local elites like the then Chairman of Sylhet Municipality Rai Bahadur Sukhamay Chowdhury; former minister Abdul Karim; Rai Bahadur Pramod Chandra Dutta were on the first row while Nalini Bala Chowdhury led the group of women. A beautifully decorated *bajra* (a covered boat) and a mar boat were ready on the riverbank. Kobi took the boat while his son and daughter-in-law got into the other and crossed the Surma river.

People irrespective of creed and class gathered on the other side of Surma as the boats approached. The historic *Chandni Ghat* was decorated with flowers, flags, festoons, *mangal ghot* etc. The reception committee was led by Maulvi Abdullah, among others. Representatives of the different aristocrat families like the Majumders, Dastiders and others were also there on horses to welcome the Kobi in 'Srihatta'.

The people conveyed their sincere

মহাত্মার সন্মানিত
সংসার সৃষ্টিকারী সত্য
বিস্মিত হুঁসি
সুন্দরী স্রীমতি।
ভারতীয় সনাতন ধর্ম
গভীরে গভীরে সত্য
সত্যের স্রোত
সুন্দরী স্রীমতি।
সে সত্যের স্রোতের স্রোত
সংসার স্রোতের স্রোত
স্রীমতি স্রীমতি।

(Top) The poem Tagore wrote during his Sylhet trip, A photograph of Tagore (C) in Sylhet at the residence of Govinda Narayan Sinha (Right)

and hearty adulation and the poet responded with his modest smile. A few lucky ones were introduced to the legend while thousands were there just to catch a glimpse of the poet. The guest along with Maulvi

Abdul Karim got into a Fiton car, nicely decorated with flowers.

Tagore stayed over at a nice bungalow -- that belonged to a priest -- on a picturesque hillock to the northeast part of the town. The

poet was given a grand reception by the local Brahma Samaj. As expected, people thronged at the Brahma temple and its premises. As the chief guest, wearing yellow, reached the venue just minutes

ahead of the schedule, the crowd turned silent, eager to hear him.

Kobi had to sing a song upon request from the Brahma Samaj secretary. Tagore sang *Beena bajao hey momo antorey*. He then recited

verses from the *Upanishad*.

Next day, on 20th Kartik, the poet was given a reception by 'Srihattabashi' (residents of Srihatta). About 5,000 people attended the programme. Jatindra

Mohan Dev Chowdhury presented a song written by Ambila Babu and Jaminikanto Roy Dastider played violin to entertain the poet. Syed Abdul Majid gave a speech expressing the appreciation of the Sylheti people to have the legendary figure amongst them.

As the chief guest took the stage the venue reverberated with claps. The poet delivered a one-and-half hour speech on "Bangali Shadhona".

The poet showed interest in Manipuri handicrafts and the lifestyle. Kobiguru visited the Masimpur area, (now the area is a part of the city corporation), where the Manipuri community lived.

Charmed with the beautiful Manipuri handloom, the poet bought some clothes. Enjoying a *Rakhal dance*, presented by Manipuri dancers, the poet decided to come back at night to attend further performances.

Next day another gathering took place at the MC College Hostel in the afternoon; about 4,000 people were present. After the students greeted him, the poet delivered a speech.

Three photos of the poet were taken during the Sylhet trip. One was with his son and daughter-in-law.

Kobiguru wrote a small poem on Sylhet. The poem refers to the unique natural beauty of the north-eastern part of the country.

Memories of Tagore in Comilla



The renowned Abhay Ashram that Kobiguru visited is now in a state of disrepair. The Ashram has become a haven for the drug addicts. The room, where Tagore stayed for a couple of days has been turned into a stable. The ashram is currently under the supervision of Comilla Palli Unnayan Academy

ZAKIR AZAD, Comilla

Rabindranath Tagore visited Comilla on two occasions: first en route to Kolkata from Agartala on July 16, 1905. On this stopover, Tagore was given a reception at the Comilla Town Hall.

The second time around, Tagore came to Comilla on February 19, 1926 -- 13 years after receiving the Nobel Prize. On this trip, he was accompanied by his daughter-in-law Pratima Devi; Nepal Chandra, a teacher at Shantiniketan; Pratima Devi's daughter Nandini and others.

The poet's second visit to Comilla was part of a world tour. Dr Suresh Chandra Bandyopadhyay, president of Comilla Abhay Ashram, invited Tagore to preside over the triennial programme of the Ashram -- to which Tagore agreed. The visit spanned from February 19 to February 22.

Tagore was showered with greetings and accolades on his second trip to Comilla. Among them were awards by the employees of the

Abhay Ashram and by the Comilla Mahila Samiti. The speech, which Tagore gave at the triennial programme of Abhay Ashram, was published later in the *Baishakhi* issue of *Bharati*.

Comilla Abhay Ashram is also famous for the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi. This Ashram was an important locale during the Swadeshi Movement and the Charka Movement. Apart from the Ashram, Comilla College (now Victoria College), Maheshangan, Ramnala Library and Birchandranagar Public



Library were some reputed local institutions.

Unfortunately, the places visited by Kobiguru are in a state of disrepair.

Jatiya Rabindra Sangeet Sammilan Parishad too has restricted its activities in the area and organises only one programme annually to commemorate the great bard.

Kobiguru in the Northwest

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Rabindranath Tagore etched his mark in the country's northwestern region several times between 1890 and 1937. Historians identified reasons of his visits to be chiefly associated with his family's *zamindari* -- travelling and attending literary meetings in between. He stayed at Patisar, Shahjapur and Shilaidaha.

The *zamindari* of Tagore family was stretched to three *parganas* in the northwest -- Ibrahimpur *pargana* with headquarters at Shiladaha, Kushtia, Kaligram *pargana* at Patisar, in the then Rajshahi (currently Naogaon) and Shahjapur *pargana* in Pabna. Patisar was stated by many to be the main *zamindari* that existed till abolishment of the system.

The historic *Kacharibari* at Patisar, Shahjapur and Shilaidaha still evoke the memories of the poet.

In the late 1890, the poet visited Patisar for the first time. He described nature and people of the region in many of his letters and literary works. On the bank of the Nagor river, Patisar -- 36 kms from Naogaon and 90 kms from the Rajshahi city -- was the headquarter of his *zamindari* in Kaligram *pargana*.

In 1920, the poet established the first agriculture bank at Patisar with funds donated from his Nobel Prize money to provide his tenants with loans on very easy terms.

Two years later in November 1892, the poet came to Rajshahi (Rampur-Boalia) town upon invitation from Loken Palit, the then Judge of Rajshahi district. Akshay Kumar Maitraya and Natore's Dighapatiya Rajkumar Sarat Kumar Roy were in Rajshahi then and they held several literary gatherings at Palit's residence.

The poet read out his keynote paper on "Sikkhar Herpher" (discrepancies in education) upholding the use of mother tongue as the preferable medium of education at a discussion in Rajshahi. Rajshahi Association organised the event on November 12, 1892.

Rabindranath and Palit visited Natore in a horse-drawn carriage from Rajshahi. Unfortunately, he caught a chill and Kabiraj Jadu Lahidi was employed for his treatment by the Maharaja of Natore. The poet completed *Protiksha* during this visit (December 4, 1892). Then he went back to Patisar by boat and stayed at Palit's house in Rajshahi where he wrote *Ebar Phirao Morey*.

Historians say, the poet's friendship with the Maharaja of Natore,



The Tagore Kacharibari at Patisar

PHOTO: STAR



Tagore's boat "Padma"; most of *Chaitali* and *Chhinnapatra* were written here

FILE PHOTO

Jagadindranath Roy, prompted quite a few visits to this northern town.

Sarat Kumar Roy, the Rajkumar of Dayarampur, in his book *Rabindra Smriti*, wrote, "I have heard from Akshay Babu (Akshay Kumar Maitraya) that he (the poet) and the Natore Maharaja (Jagadindranath) were the two *bhuts* (ghosts) of Rabindranath's *Panchabhuter Diary*." *Panchabhut* was published in the Bengali year 1304 and was dedicated to Maharaja Jagadindranath Roy

Bahadur.

In 1897, the poet again came to Natore; this time to attend the three-day session of the Provincial Congress of Bengal. His elder brother, Sattendranath Tagore was the Chairman of the Congress and the Maharaja of Natore was the Chairman of the reception committee. According to sources, Tagore inaugurated the session singing *Amar shonar Bangla*, which later became the national anthem of our country. Also, to the opposition of the English-

speaking politicians, the poet declared that the session would be conducted in Bengali. The Maharaja read the translated Bengali version of his English speech and Tagore himself translated his brother's speech.

The poet went to Patisar in 1895 while his *Chaitali* was in the making and then in 1908. He visited Pabna in 1912. Kobiguru visited North Bengal for the last time in 1937 on the occasion of the *Punnah* ceremony at Patisar.