

67th death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore

Shantiniketan days

In conversation with Papia Sarwar



Papia Sarwar

ERSHAD KAMOL

Shantiniketan, a small town near Bolpur in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, India, is famous for Visva Bharati University established by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore with the vision of learning in a natural environment. Most of the leading Tagore singers of Bangladesh are graduates from Visva Bharati University, under Central Government of India.

Papia Sarwar, one of the eminent Tagore singers of the country, enrolled in the BMuse programme under a scholarship and had outstanding academic results at Visva Bharati. She was very popular among the students and teachers.

"I went to Shantiniketan in 1973, the first batch after the Liberation War. Naturally, the people at the institution were curious to know about our newly independent country," says Papia Sarwar. "It was like a dream come true, as I got legendary singers such as Kanika Bandyopadhyay, Neelima Sen, Ashesh Bandyopadhyay, Shantidev Ghosh and Shubino Roy as my mentors."

"The scenic beauty of the place always moved

me. Tastes of the different seasons were distinctive at the campus. In true sense it's an abode of peace, which is formed like an ashram. The soil of the place is locally called 'khoai' (red barren soil). People love to walk bare feet in Shantiniketan just after the rain. Gurudev (Rabindranath Tagore) wrote many of his literary classics here, and his home is a place of historical importance," she added.

Commenting on the learning process at the institution, Papia Sarwar said, "Besides the class room, we used to learn on the *bedis* (under the canopies of big trees). Learning in the midst of nature was always exciting. Moreover, our mentors used to teach us at their residents, in particular before special occasions."

Under the BMuse programme all branches of music are taught in the first two years. From the third year, a student is trained on a special music genre. Papia Sarwar specialised on Rabindra Sangeet.

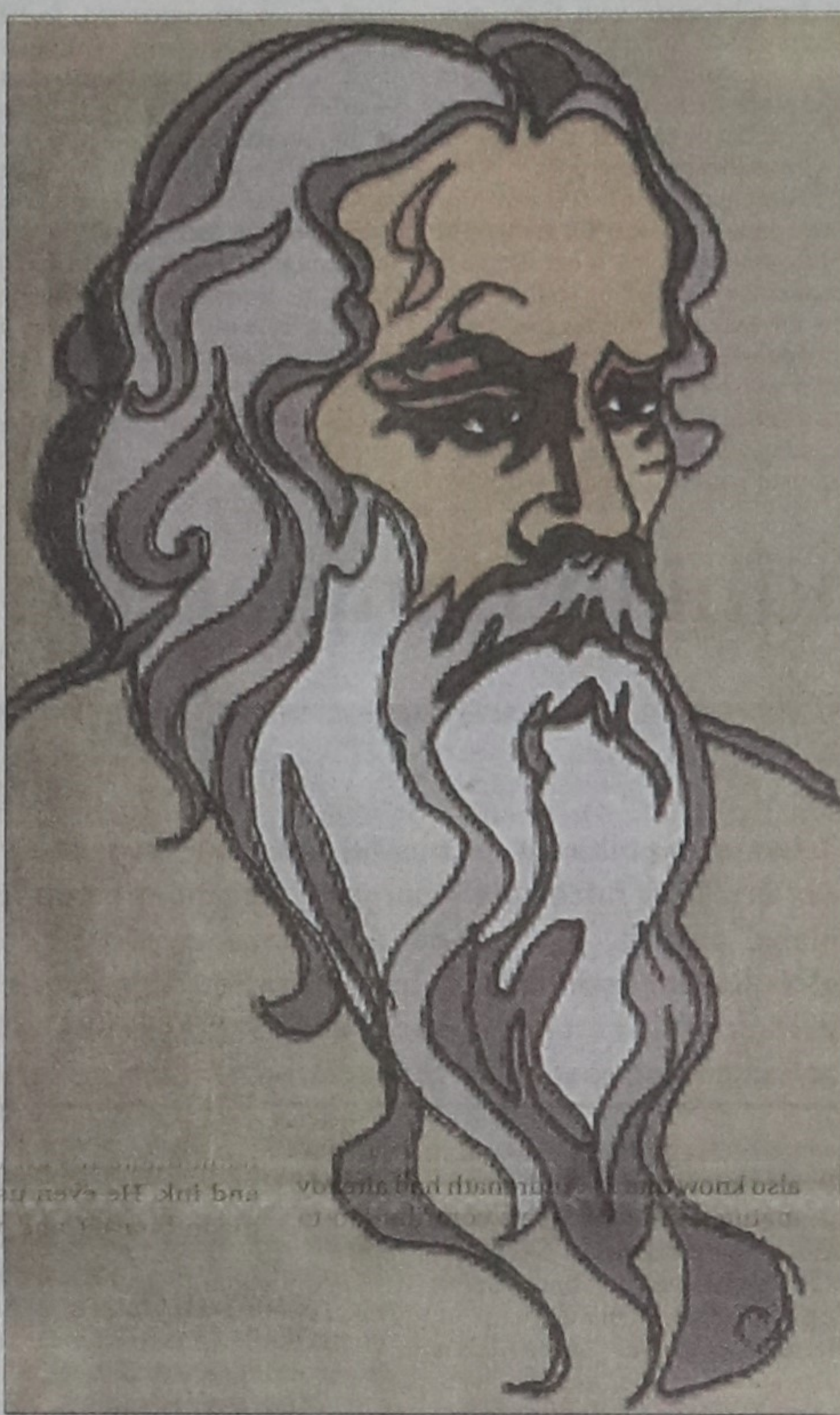
As a student Papia proved her talent from the beginning and at the BMuse exam she obtained first class first. "The academic result is not important to me. How I practice and perform are more important."

"Over four decades I've been practicing and performing Tagore songs. I got popularity as a Tagore singer in Bangladesh before going to Shantiniketan. However, it must be mentioned that I learnt a lot from the institution and still go there to learn," she added.

Despite her popularity, why doesn't she have a significant number of music albums in the market? Papia's response: "Though Tagore songs are very popular, ironically recording companies are usually not that keen on releasing several albums featuring Rabindra Sangeet in a year. Without taking permission from the artists, they are copying songs from older albums for commercial releases. In most cases, recording companies are doing this kind of 'business' with my songs, which I don't like."

On the current trend of fusion and use of modern instruments with Tagore songs, Papia Sarwar commented that she encourages experiments unless it distorts the original tune. She believes that any kind of 'bad' experimentation on Tagore songs will never be accepted by the audience.

Papia Sarwar is optimistic about the future of Tagore songs in Bangladesh as there are many talented young singers. "For a better scenario the young talents should be promoted properly, however, the reality is that people focus on a few prominent singers like me," she added.



Envisioning what's left unsaid

What Rabindra Sangeet means to Fahmida Nabi

KARIM WAHEED

"Like billions of Bengali children, my initiation into singing includes *Amar sonar Bangla*. Needless to say, as a nation our introduction to Tagore, or to be more precise Rabindra Sangeet, happens effortlessly," says Fahmida Nabi.

Fahmida, a popular voice in the *adshunik* genre, recorded an album of Rabindra Sangeet titled *Amar Bela Je Jeye*. Released last year -- on the occasion of Tagore's death anniversary, the album was much admired by music connoisseurs as well as average listeners.

This album follows the trend of "personal interpretation" of Tagore songs -- a style quite often under fire. "Pundits" have laid down the law: Rabindra Sangeet must be rendered in a certain way. Artists trying to experiment or break free from the tradition have been ostracised in the past.

"Is Rabindranath anyone's personal property?" -- asks Fahmida. "I'm a former student of philosophy and Socrates continues to inspire me, likewise Rabindranath's creations will never cease to move me because our parents have instilled his values, his words and tunes in us when we were young," says the artiste.

Fahmida goes over childhood memories: "I remember, early in the morning, my father (renowned *adshunik* singer Mahmudunnabi) would often hum one particular song -- *Ei monihaar amaye nahi shajey*..."

"He'd say, 'Like knowledge, music should never have doors.' Both are meant to broaden our creative horizons, not confine us with limitations."

Hitting the issue that her renditions of Rabindra Sangeet have an unmistakable feel of *adshunik* songs, Fahmida reasons, "What exactly is '*adshunik*'? '*Adshunik*' means contemporary. Can any Tagore exponent say that Rabindranath's creations are not contemporary? I consider his songs and literature enigmatic, phenomenally timeless."

"There was a point when I decided that under the circumstances I can't continue singing and I did take a hiatus. I took up teaching, a profession I've always admired. Then one day, perhaps used in some TV play, I heard the song *Jodi tor daak shuney keu na aashey*... and that did it for me. I decided to resume my singing career and to my surprise I found well wishers and unbound support."

"Prior to *Amar Bela Je Jeye*, I didn't formally sing Rabindra Sangeet because I was apprehensive about how the Tagore exponents might react. But I'm over that apprehension now," says the seemingly confident artiste.

According to Fahmida, "I try to articulate the way I envision Rabindranath's songs."



Fahmida Nabi

Case in point, the opening track (of *Amar Bela Je Jeye*), *Tumi kon kanon-er phool*. Fahmida's wispy vocals effortlessly glide through the notes, breathing life to each word. The way she utters '*Tomaye kothaye dekhechhi*...' exudes desperation, yearning. It's like poetry in motion.

Fahmida's rendition of *Amaro poran-o jaha chaye* envisions a rainy evening, a melancholy admirer and her unconditional love. The vision is quite surreal, yet subtle and relatable.

"I get a sense of solitude in the songs. Even when the song is about love and two individuals are concerned, I feel that Rabindranath invariably goes back to the past, then presents a vision of what could be," Fahmida explains, "*Kobigurur* was and remains the greatest motivator of all. The idea is to keep the past sealed within, embrace the grief of unrequited dreams and let that ignite a creative flame within."

"What's said is obvious but the unique trait of Rabindra Sangeet is what's left unsaid. And it is the 'unsaid' that I try to emphasise on when singing Tagore songs."

Special attractions on the small screen

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

On the 67th death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore different satellite channels will telecast special programmes today.

Channel i

"Tommar Banitey Shimahin Asha"

Special programme *Tommar Banitey Shimahin Asha* will be aired at 10:30 pm. The programme will feature music renditions by Rezwana Chowdhury Bonna and recitation by Asaduzzaman Noor.

TV play "Bodnaam"

Single episode TV play *Bodnaam* will be aired at 7:50 pm. Based on a work of Rabindranath Tagore, the play has been adapted by Mustafa Soud and directed by actress Rozina. Sajjad Hossain Bablu is the chief assistant director of the play.

The plot is set against the backdrop of the British rule in India. As the voice against the colonialism heightens by the day, the British becomes desperate to crush the uprising known as the "Swadishai andolon". As a result police officer inspector Bijoy Babu is handed over the task to arrest Anil, the leader of the Swadeshi movement. Bijoy tries his best to capture him but Anil seems to be one step ahead of him always. No matter how astute his plan may be every time Anil seems read them, much with the help of Bijoy's own wife Sowdamini, who is unknown to Bijoy, a Swadeshi sympathiser. As time goes by Bijoy becomes more and more desperate to arrest Anil. The story takes a new turn as he finds out about Sowdamini. Bijoy turns to Sowdamini to capture Anil. Zahid Hassan and Rozina have played central characters in *Bodnaam*.

Zahid Hasan and Rozina in *Bodnaam* to be aired on Channel i

Discussants at a programme to be aired on ATN Bangla

ATN Bangla

Jhokon Porbey Na Mor Payer Chinho Ei Baatey

Special talk show *Jhokon Porbey Na Mor Payer Chinho Ei Baatey* will be aired at 12:05 pm. The programme will feature discussion on Rabindranath Tagore and his works -- poetry, novels, essays, short stories and more. Aly Zaker, Nirmalendu Goon and Bulbul Moholanobish will participate in the discussion. The programme is directed by Rumana Afroze. Saiful Bari is the host of the programme.

Tumi Nobo Nobo Rupey Esho

Special musical programme *Tumi Nobo Nobo Rupey Esho* will be telecast at 3:10 pm. The programme will feature performances by Rezwana Chowdhury Bonna, Papia Sarwar, Mita Haq, Fahim Chowdhury and Sajed Akbar.

ntv

Aaji E Prabhaty Rabir Kar

Musical programme *Aaji E Prabhaty Rabir Kar* will be aired at 7 am. Noted Tagore artistes Kalim Sharaifi, Mita Haq, Auditi Mohsin and Shima Huda will sing at the programme. Sadia Islam Mou and her

troupe will perform dance. Noted actress Subarna Mustafa will recite poems.

Jorashanko Thekey Bolpur

Documentary programme *Jorashanko Thekey Bolpur* will be aired on 8:55 am. The programme will highlight Tagore's ancestral home at Jorashanko and his humble abode in Shantiniketan. Tagore researcher Partho Basu, former vice-chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University Professor Pabitra Sarkar, educationist Supriyo Mukhopadhyay and Tagore researcher Suvas Chowdhury will discuss on Tagore's life and works. Arpon Moitra will host the programme.

Rtv

Chalochitrey Rabindranath

Film based programme *Chalochitrey Rabindranath* will be aired at 1:30 pm. The programme will highlight clips from film adaptations of Tagore's works. Syed Sabab Ali Arzu is the producer of the programme.

TVplay "Nirjhorini"

Special play *Nirjhorini* will be aired at 9:00 pm. The play is an adaptation of Tagore's *Dorphanan*. Adapted by Bipasha Hayat, the



Apurba and Tarin in a play to be telecast on Rtv

play is directed by Chayanika Chowdhury. Nirjhorini and Harish tie the knot. Harish is studying law and is apt in English literature, whereas his new bride is an admirer of Bengali literature. Nirjhorini's father-in-law is in praise of her writing skills and appoints a mentor to guide her. Meanwhile, the couple start drifting away from each other.

The cast includes Tarin, Apurba, K.S. Firoz and Sumon.

Banglavision

Dhaka-e Rabindra Sangbardhana

Special documentary programme *Dhaka-e Rabindra Sangbardhana* will be aired at 6:50 pm. The programme will highlight Tagore's arrival in Dhaka after receiving the Nobel Prize. Bhaswar Bandyopadhyay will read out an essay. Rabi Sankar Moitra has compiled and produced the programme. Rokeya Prachi will host the programme.

Musical programme "Gaanguli Mor"

Special musical programme *Gaanguli Mor* will be aired at 9:45 pm. The programme will feature renditions of Rabindra Sangeet by Shampa Reza, Shakila Zafar, Fahmida Nabi and Nakib Khan. In between informal conversations, the artistes will perform their favourite Tagore songs. The programme is hosted by Sadi Mohammad.



Artistes in musical programme to be aired on Banglavision