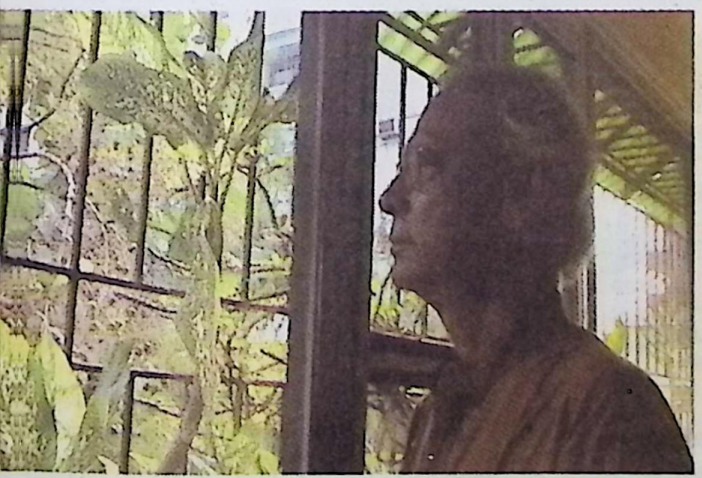
How did Anisur Rahman interpret Tagore songs where the lyrics and the melody often competed to excel over one another? To this he says, "Words and melody should bond, as if they are made for each other. As if they are dancing together in a Ball dance. From the perspective of the audience, each may come in view sometimes one is more prominent than the other. But both, by turns, come into view. Similarly, the melody sometimes grows prominent; sometimes it's the lyrics. But it is an integral part of the pair's dancing. Sometimes one comes more in focus, sometimes the other. But both of them, together, are one. Neither is greater than the other. Both are engaged in expressing one another.

Will not a marriage like this be ideal? Rabindranath, thus, terms the union of lyrics and melody as an 'Ideal Marriage'."

Anisur Rahman himself said in one of his memoirs that he was not a professional Rabindrashangeet singer. He sang purely for his own rapture, for his own ecstasy, and then for those who might like to hear him sing. Some of his friends often organised *ghoroa ashors* where he would sing in his immaculate voice that was not bound by the rigours of any particular *gharana*. And he would sing with great passion that surged from deep within. The interesting part of the story is he would sing only with the accompaniment of a traditional harmonium, never showing much interest in having tabla to provide the *taal*.

In one such *ashor* in a friend's house back in 1997, one

n still cast Spells



of the distinguished guests present was the then High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh Dev Mukherjee. When he had finished, Mukherjee came up to him and praised his style of singing Tagore song. Dev Mukherjee later invited him to sing at Rabindra Sadan in Kolkata on the occasion of 25 Baishakh, which fell on May 11, that year. The programme was organised by the ministry of cultural affairs of the government of West Bengal. Anisur Rahman was taken by surprise at the offer. Firstly, he was not a professional singer and secondly it was a big stage where only renowned exponents of Tagore songs of both Bangladesh and India were invited. Then, another surprise. He was also requested by the ministry to sing at Girish Moncho (stage) the next day. Anisur Rahman candidly wrote in his memoirs that it was good enough to make him nervous because he sang with the help of a harmonium only and not with many instruments as is done by professional singers on such stages. He went to famous Tagore song exponent Kalim Sharafi to seek his advice. Kalim Sharafi told him to sing in his natural way, the way he always did, and not to change his style. That day, on May 11, 1997, at Rabindra Sadan, Anisur Rahman sang in his own blithe way the popular Tagore number "Badhu Michchey Raag Korona..." In the pin drop silence, the melody emanating flawlessly from his sweet yet mature voice reverberated in the large hall room, taking everyone to a *kalpolok* that Tagore spoke of so often in his poetry and songs. The magical spell was cast.

The following day, Anisur Rahman sang at Girish Moncho but this time he allowed music hands to play only *esraz* and *mondira*. He did not allow *tabla* to accompany his songs.

On both the stages he had to sing "Ekoda Tumi Priye..." more than once along with other popular numbers like Tumi Kemon Korey Gaan Koro Hey Guni..."

It appears that the critics in Kolkata have been impressed too by his performance at Rabindra Sadan as can be understood from the following review that came out in The Statesman newspaper on 18 July:

"Anisur Rahman's discipline is economics but his passion is Rabindrasangeet. It has dominated his thoughts in a way that is rare even among practitioners of Rabindrasangeet...His unpretentious style moved the audience who encored him vociferously. His "Saghono gahono ratri" and "Eshechile tobu asho nai" were warm and intimate."

Anisur Rahman was born in 1933 and educated in Dhaka and Harvard University. He taught in Dhaka and Islamabad University. After the birth of Bangladesh, he worked in the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh, and later joined ILO in Geneva.

When someone sings from the heart perhaps the song finds its truest expression and connotation. This is where understanding the philosophy of the poet composer comes to play a part. Through years of extensive study of Rabindrashangeet and Tagore's philosophy of the purpose of life, of birth and death, of love and lovelessness, of ecstasy and distress and of the bonding with nature, Anisur Rahman has also developed his own philosophy about nature and about human life overwhelmed with so much of mystery and ambiguity. At one point the two philosophies blend, and the union only increases his thirst to know the poet, the composer, the singer, and the mystic better. He pushes on like Odysseus for the elusive shore - towards his home in the mystical realm. ■