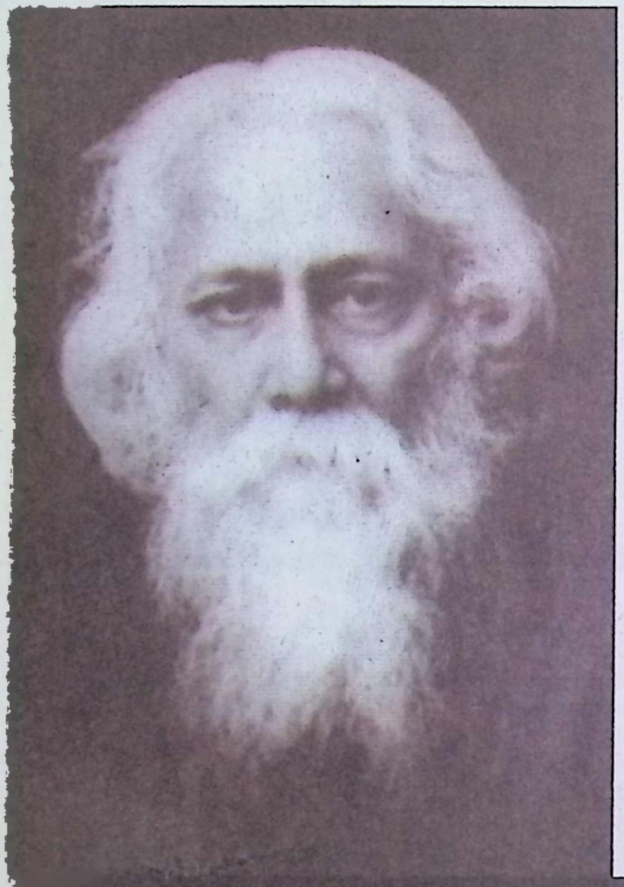


Tagore and Nazru

Asrar Chowdhury

I cannot recall which particular song started my interest in Tagore and Nazrul songs. What I can mention though is that there are the three HMV Long Plays from my Father's record collection that introduced me to the music of these two maestros. They were the two musical operas of Tagore's *Shyama* and *Tasher Desh*; and a collection of Nazrul songs by Feeroza Begum. The musical operas were in commemoration of Tagore's Centenary Birth Anniversary in 1961. The Feeroza Begum album was a collection of twelve Nazrul songs. Those three LPs opened a world of delight that continues to delight even today....

Heavens only know how many times I listened to *Shyama* and *Tasher Desh*. With LPs, you do not have the luxury of rewinding and fast forwarding. You have to train your ears to listen to the music and verse without errors. This made me appreciate the musicals evermore. Every time I would listen, I would be left bamboozled as to how was it possible to narrate a story so wonderfully with verse and music? Although the Feeroza Begum LP introduced me to the music of Nazrul, it was *Kanon Giri Shindhu Paar* that ignited fascination towards Nazrul's music. The composition is so simple. Yet when repeatedly listened to its complexity shows the genius of a composer. Many years later when I first tried to play the tune on my *bansuri* I found the composition is based on Raga Bhimpalashi, but most unexpectedly the song is Nazrul's transliteration of a *Rubai* by the great Persian poet-mathematician, Umr-E-Khyyam.

I passed my adolescent years in Dhaka between the middle of the 1980s to the middle of the 1990s. The only sources of Bangla music were *Geetali* and *Soor Kallal* at New Elephant Road. I would read and re-read whatever was written on the covers and the inside flaps of the LPs of