

Tagore today

"Death is not extinguishing the light; it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come."

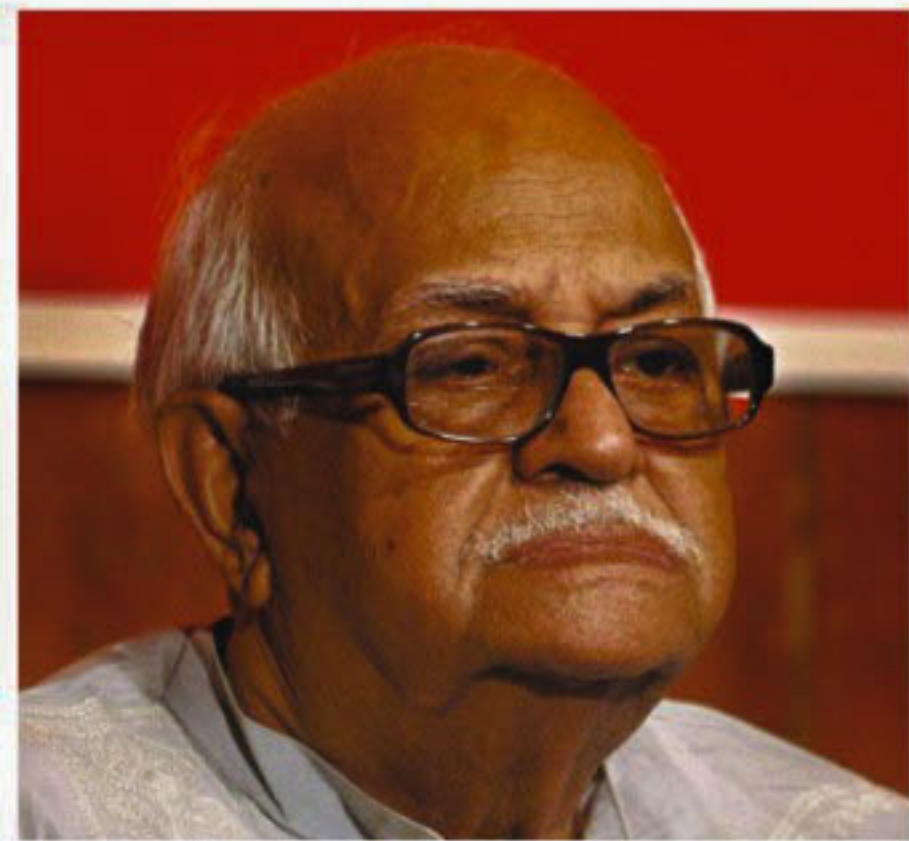
ZILLUR RAHMAN SIDDIQUI

Rabindranath Tagore lived a long and extremely fruitful life. His literary output is simply colossal. What is more, it is of amazing variety and consistently of a high order. True, Tagore himself had his doubts about much of his writings, and he admitted perhaps it would have been better had he been a little less prolific. But at the same time he knew it was in his nature to be prolific, and he could not deny his nature.

Tagore appeared in the literary scene at an opportune moment a moment in the history

poet's own schooling was mainly done in his family place, only intermittently in schools. But he was a beneficiary of an elaborate private teaching system, made possible by the affluence of his family. He was also fortunate to receive early recognition of his talent by his family, especially by his father, Maharshi Debendranath.

Tagore's 150th birth anniversary has generated much enthusiasm among Bangladeshis. Here history has once again proved its sense of humour. Tagore was virtually banished from our land by the then (1960s) Pakistani regime. We had to fight to keep him with us, as a valued heritage of our identity as a Bangla-speaking people. Today,



Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, All the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before Him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door.

of our literature when foundation of modernism, due primarily to Bengal's contact with the West, had been truly laid. This was true, both of poetry and prose.

The founding fathers included such stalwarts as Michael Madhusudan and Bankim Chandra. There were others, too. They all shared one thing among themselves: they had learnt their English well. This was undoubtedly the strong point about the Bengal Renaissance. Tagore was born at a time when Bengal Renaissance was in full bloom. Bengali creativity had found its hour of fruition.

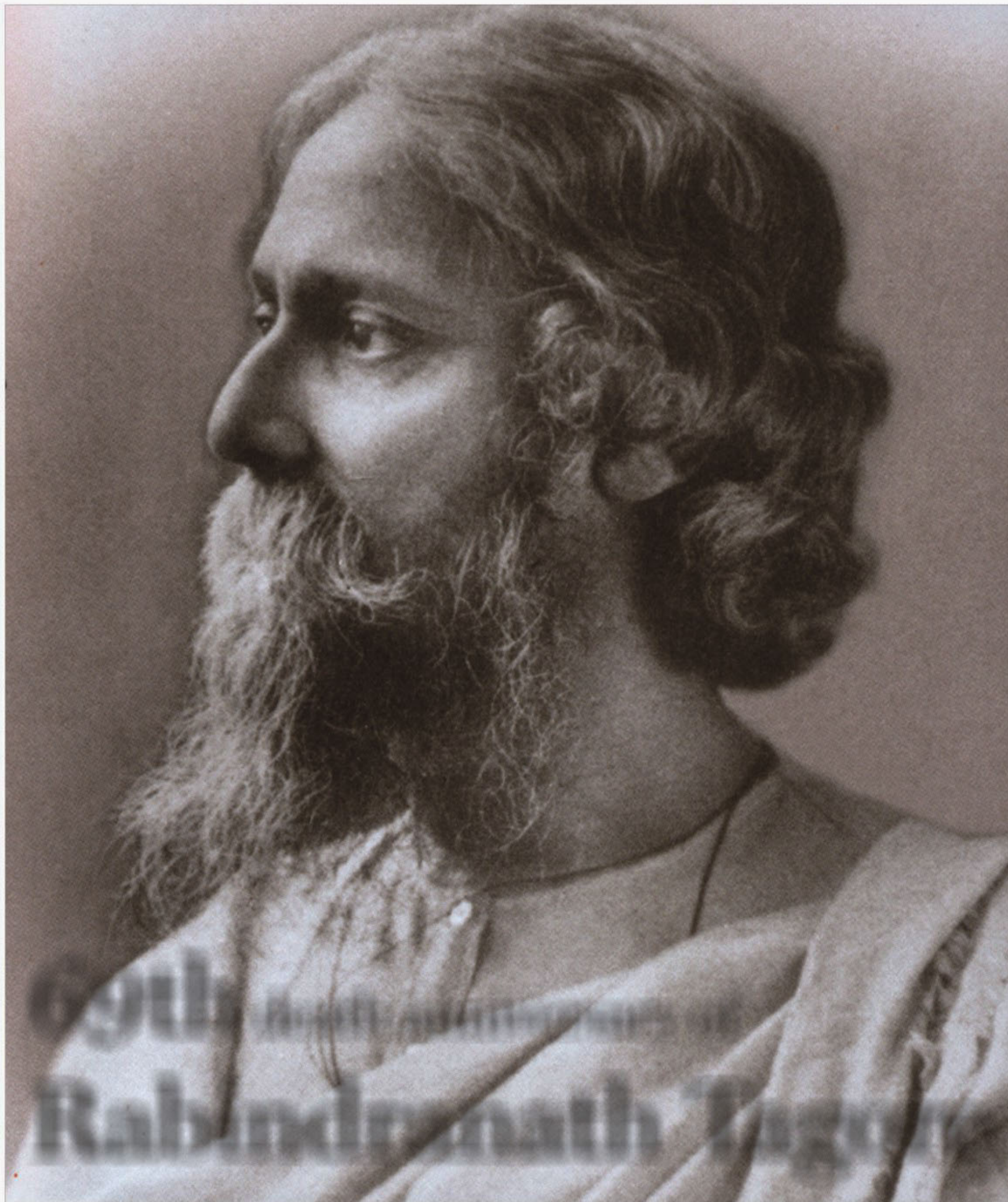
The Tagore house at Jorasanko, Kolkata, was the nursery of many talents represented by the members of the Tagore family. The

Tagore is regarded as an inalienable cultural possession, and a proud possession at that.

The immensity of Tagore's literary aspect is simply daunting for anyone who wishes to measure his greatness, to come to terms with his many-faceted genius. A considerable part of his output may have outlived its appeal, or its relevance due to passage of time. But what remains of permanent value is still great, in volume and variety.

Tagore left our literature at a level of excellence that is still a matter of wonder. Literature is always on march, and Tagore remains as our tallest, and brightest milestone on our journey.

The writer is a noted scholar and educationist.



Rabindranath on stage

ALY ZAKER

We all know that Rabindranath won the Nobel Prize for his immortal works from "Geetanjali." I'm also almost certain that not many of us have read all his works from the "Geetanjali." Indeed, his literary works are so vast and diverse that it is almost impossible for any one person to read and internalise all these in a lifetime. In "Geetanjali" itself he has presented us with an array of literary output, each of which could be classified as an archetype and whole lot of new creations can follow from that. Rabindranath is primarily known for his songs and poetry. His songs are almost an integral part of the Bengali life. We sing them in our sorrow, we sing them in bliss, in our celebration of life or morose of death. After his songs and poetry, come his short stories. They have been popular with all ages of

years after the death of Rabindranath to emerge on the public stage as a credible production when Bohurupee of Kolkata chose to perform it. Rabindranath wrote plays of a variety of genre. These include lighthearted comedies, romantic dramas and philosophical plays that have been classified by some as 'abstract plays'. It is almost impossible, given this confine, to deliberate in detail the reasons for his original plays not being performed on public stages. Once Shishir Kumar Bhaduri contemplated on producing "Raktokarobi" and gave up saying, "this play is un-actable on stage."

After the independence of Bangladesh the situation remained the same. Subsequently, from the '80s some of his major plays started emerging on the stage. Thus we saw "Achalayatan," "Bishorjon," "Rather Roshi" and

with proscenium. And they could not imagine how a play with such a vast landscape could be accommodated within that stage. While writing his plays Rabindranath did not want to restrict his vision, artistry or opinion. He was a believer in giving creativity a free rein. He always had the vast expanse of the banks of the mighty Padma or the ruddy backdrop of Shantiniketan in his vision. In terms of content he also challenged the power that be -- of the ruler or conservatism.

Permit me to quote here just one line from his famed play "Muktohdara." Dhananjoy Bairagi, the Baul singer, was asked by the King whether he had asked the people to refrain from paying land revenue. He said yes, he did. When the King asked "why?" Bairagi said, "My surplus food is yours my lord, not my food for hunger." Almost all his prominent plays artistically depict issues with



Bengali readers. Some of these are so popular that they have been adapted as plays and performed on stage. His "Noshto Neer," "Khudhito Pashan," "Kabuliwala," "Shasti" and many other short stories have been made into brilliant movies by great Bengali filmmakers. Many of his novels have been very popular and were, indeed, made into successful films; the latest case in point being "Chokher Bali."

Strange as it may seem, not many of his original plays were performed on the stage either here in Bangladesh or in West Bengal. Of his plays, "Raktokarobi" (red oleander) is perhaps most talked about. Even that took roughly fourteen

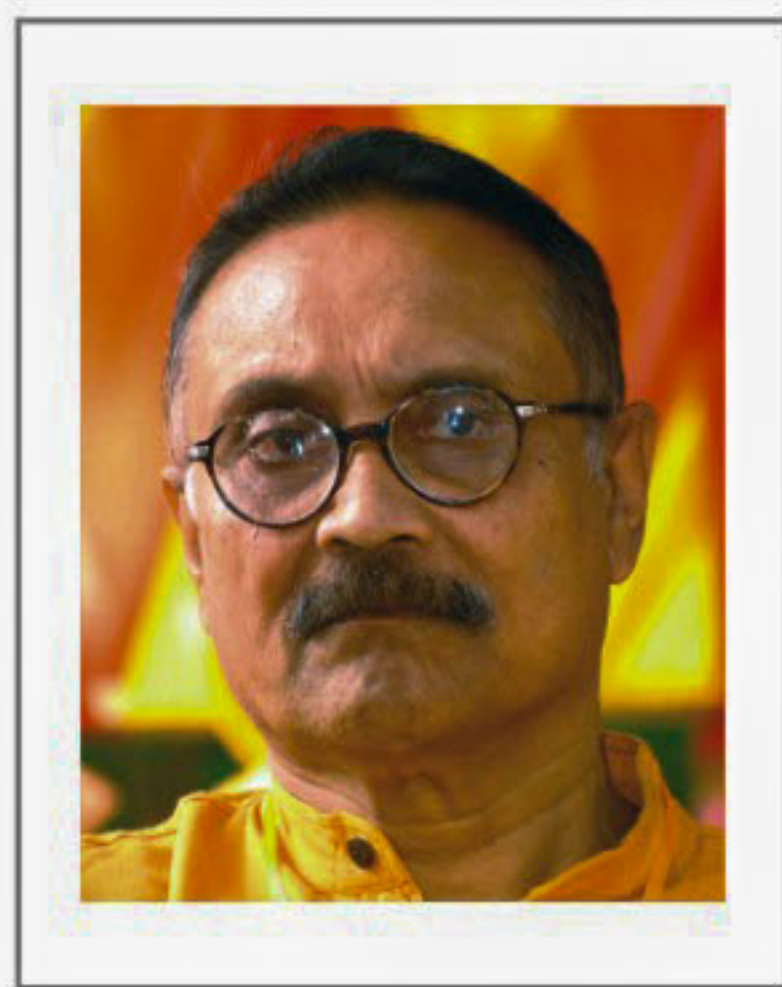
"Raktokarobi." A whole host of plays of Rabindranath appeared on the stages of Dhaka and elsewhere in the country. Many wonder as to why it took so long for the plays of Rabindranath to get a tail wind. Is it as difficult as some would want us to believe? I think, it took us some time to really figure out the novelty of the plays of Rabindranath, the magic in his form and the content and simplicity and the contemporariness of them, given any space or time.

I have a suspicion that the professional theatre -- starting in Kolkata in 1872 -- limited the vision of the theatre activists within the confines of a stage

socio-economic relevance. Such a playwright was sourly missed by the Bengali audience until such time that Shambhu Mitra decided to bring on stage "Raktokarobi." Rabindranath described this play as a protest of the inarticulate agrarian east against the industrialised 'megalomaniac' west.

These days the people involved in theatre often talk about our own theatre form which should be different from the proscenium presentation borrowed from the west. May be we could find a suitable alternative in the style of theatrical presentation of Rabindranath.

The writer is a renowned theatre director and actor.



Nature as it appears in Tagore's Work

How often sitting on a boat I have emptied forth my soul over the land, the water and the skies radiant with the sun's light. I have not then considered earth, quite apart from me, the water with its flow had passed within my heart raising its outburst of joy.

TULIP CHOWDHURY

I am in awe of how Rabindranath Tagore has touched nature in every aspect of his literature. In prose and poetry, on subjects of love, nature, worship and even human relationships, the bard expressed himself in many respects through nature. In the words of the poet, "I have been overwhelmed by another feeling. The one inseparable link between me and the universe, nature -- this everlasting unity of soul has drawn me intensely. How often sitting on a boat I have emptied forth my soul over the land, the water and the skies radiant with the sun's light. I have not then considered earth, quite apart from me, the water with its flow had passed within my heart raising its outburst of joy." (A Tagore Testament)

Nature, with its colours, perfume and beauty enchanted Tagore. However, this feeling of enchantment did not chain him, rather it freed him. It gave him the chance to expand, to step outside himself. He believed that there was someone who sat behind his eyes, a great force that enabled him to find himself in the universe. It was this force that pulled him towards the absolute. To him the essence of his freedom was his love for the universe and nature. Just as a lamp reveals not only the things we are



looking for but also illuminates the whole room, his love of nature helped him to realise his freedom.

As a poet, Tagore wrote of his intrigue with nature and the great force that made him write: "Here is the poet, the King of poets, who taking all the ingredients that are good and bad in me, all the probabilities that exist in me is ever busy composing my life. That is why I can feel an old bond of unity with creepers and trees, birds and beasts of this world. That is why this vastly mysterious, immense universe does not appear terrifying or unfriendly." (A Tagore Testament)

I love Tagore's works and whenever I feel the need to gasp for air in this hectic city life, I open the "Geetanjali" or "Geetbitan" and pour my heart over the vast array of songs and poems, playing ode to nature. A whole section of "Geetbitan" has been dedicated to nature. What could be more beautiful to rouse the heart than the following lines, *Akash bhora shurjo-tara, bishsua bhora pran Tahari majhkhane ami peyechi mor sthan Bishshoye tai jage amar pran...* ("The sun and the stars fill the sky, my heart is with the universe and among it all awakes my heart...")

Then I go on to the next favourite song, *Aaj dhaner khete roudro chhayae lukochuri khela...* ("Today's game of

hide and seek in the paddy field as the sun and the shadow play...") I hear the songs and the poems vibrating with the essence of life in nature. In many of his works, nature speaks for itself. I hear and see nature with a different light when I see them through the great bard's eyes. In his work Tagore is the singer of the shade that shelters both sides of his road, the flowers and foliage, the bird's songs. The poet did not only sing or write his poems of the greater things in nature, but the smallest things also found their way through the poet's eyes. *Jol porey, pata norey...* ("Water drops and the leaves move") is a reflection of the joy he found in nature's simple details. Of the universe he said, "All around us the incessant manifestations of this language is attracting our minds directly or indirectly without fail. Its conversation is eloquent day and night."

And even now as I sit reflecting how Tagore spread the beauty of nature in my heart, I know I need to delve into more and more of his work to fill my heart to the brink. I sit under the *Srabon* sky, reflect on the blue up there and the *kash* flowers to which so many of his songs are dedicated, and hum his song, *Ogo amar Srabon megher kheyatorir majhi, osru bhora purob hawaye paal tuley dao aji...*

The writer is a literary critic.