

Enchantment of word and music

Akhtar Husain Khan enthuses about a new publication

Professor Nurul Anwar's book on Tagore songs is a welcome and exceptional addition to the abundance of publications that have been coming out during the Ekushey Boi Mela of 2012. Published by Anindya Prokash, *Rabindranather Gaan* (Songs of Tagore) deserves more plaudits for its coming out during the final months of the year-long 150th birthday celebration of arguably the greatest son the Bengali-speaking world has ever produced.

This nearly six-format volume in Bengali is not a large-sized book as such, and others outside this country have written more gigantic volumes. But as one goes through it, one finds that all the major issues that would involve a discussion on Tagore songs have been covered in its 93 pages. Born in Mymensingh and a teacher at the Bangladesh Agriculture University for 36 years (1973-2009), Dr Anwar has been an avid follower of Tagore songs and cricket all his life. He was an executive member of the Bangladesh Cricket Board for a decade (1981-1990) and a founding member of the Jatiyo Rabindrasangeet Sammelan Parishad. It is no wonder he finds both cricket and Rabindranath inseparable from his life and very few would disagree with his assertion that Tagore songs are the pinnacle of Bengali culture, an epithet he has used as a subtitle of his book.

The nine chapters of the book are, in English rendering,: *Pre-Tagore Hundred Years: Promotion of the Culture of Music in Bengal, Songs of Rabindranath: Nectar of the Arts, Tagore Songs: Contemplation, Creation, Class and Style, Songs of*



Rabindranath-er Gaan
Bangali Shanskritir Shirsho Porinoti
Nurul Anwar
Anindya Prokash

Rabindranath: Realm of Enchantment of Word and Music, The World Inside Music, Poetic Music and Tagore Songs, 'I Did But Sing..', Shailajaranjan: Reminiscence and Homage and Wahidul Haq: Tagore Songs at the Grassroots.

There are four appendices at the end of the book that will be priceless for serious people in the business, like teachers and students of Tagore songs. They find out the link of 234 of the Tagore songs to their original foreign tune and their Ragas, a list of twenty of the songs whose music was

composed by his elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore, names of the exponents who had graduated from the Sangeet Bhaban of Shantinikatan during the period. Shailajaranjan was the principal there and another list of the books of notation made and edited by Shailajaranjan. These are testimony enough that this book in its brief space has become a very functional and handy edition for everybody --- ordinary listeners like us and the more serious followers of Tagore songs.

The first two chapters provide a historical guide to the hundred years of music in Bengal prior to Tagore and how it was done in the Jorasanko house of the Tagores, the nerve-centre of Calcutta's cultural life in the nineteenth century. The third chapter mentions among other things, and importantly, Tagore's 24-year long association with Shilaidaha in Kushtia and its influence on not only his poetry and music through his bond with the *baul* tradition and Lalon Shah, but also on his thoughts on education, development and humanity. Anwar makes clear his aversion to cash incentive and wealth driving the culture of Tagore songs and he is ready to wait for a civilised society where song and music will find their true fulfilment.

The next three chapters touch on the excellence of word and music in Tagore songs, a discussion on the Ragas of the songs and on how much of poetry these songs are. A small chapter thereafter deals with the teaching and style of Tagore songs wherein he does not hide his

resentment at the distortion of style. The intellectual level of the teachers engaged in the trade has also come up for the axe.

He reminds us that Tagore's first identity is that he is a poet. Therefore when he says Tagore created literature when he wrote songs is the prime truth. And few will disagree with him when he says *Gitanjali*, that comprehensive collection of Tagore songs, is the supreme single piece in the great poet's literary arsenal. And he quotes Tagore to underline the point: 'I have loved this earthly life and its people. I leave behind this love knotting it in the music of my songs. If man remembers me, they will do it through these songs' or elsewhere. 'Maybe people could forget everything of mine, but they would never be able to throw away my songs.'

One of the snags of the book --- and it is not the author's own making, but embedded in our history --- is that a dilettante might be confused by the word 'Bangladesh'. Except in one or two places, this word in the book has meant the whole of pre-1947 Bengal, whether in quotes or in use by the author. Could we use GanoPrajatantri Bangladesh (Peoples Republic of Bangladesh) or Purbo Bangla/ Bangla in such cases. Besides, the long quotations from Waheedul Haq's writings might disturb the tranquil reading of a book so much concerned with the blissful art of Tagore songs, and not politics. We hope this lovely book will run into many more editions in the coming days.

AKHTAR HUSAIN KHAN IS A FORMER SECRETARY, GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH.

Intellectuals are lonely warriors

Parvez Alam explores the journey of the mind

The people of Bangladesh have a rare heritage behind them of the golden history of the language movement and struggling in the face of colonial cultural oppression. The very idea of linguistic identity has shaped the politics of the post-British era of East Bengal, resulting in the birth of the country called Bangladesh. However, Fayaz Alam, in his latest book *Buddhijibi, Tar Dai O Bangalir* *Buddhibrittik Dashotto* successfully grabs our attention with some factual information about the fact that the colonialist cultural aggression and religious sectarianism had not just started in the Pakistan era. It was rather a continuation of a trend which started at least a hundred and fifty years earlier, at the beginning of British colonial rule in Bengal and through a so-called modernization of the Bengali language and Bengali people.

Alam, a well known writer and pioneering Bangladeshi post-colonialist theorist, has been working for a decade on the issue of colonial oppression and its long term effects on the mind and life of the Bangladeshi people. His previous two books, *Uttar Upanibesh* *Mon* (Post-Colonial Mind; 2006) and *Bhasha, Khomota O Amader Lorai Proshonghe* (On Language, Power and Our Struggle; 2008) focused on the deep rooted colonial impact on our language, culture and politics, and the process of de-colonization. He draws our attention to the fact that modernization on the European model in colonized societies inevitably became a long and painful process of self denunciation, a forgetting of one's own past, language, culture and thus one's own identity in the process and yet struggling to cope with the ever-changing scenario of values, ethics and lifestyle in which a man or his nation is automatically alienated and dehumanized. The poor and unstable



Buddhijibi, Tar Dae O Bangalir
Buddhibrittik
Dashotto
Fayaz Alam
Sangbed

political and economic structures of most post-colonial societies and its status as a third world nation go hand in hand with its self denouncing inferiority complex, which makes it an easy victim of neo-colonization. This book is a continuation of such an effort.

In Bangla Bhasha Bishoye (On Bengali Language), one of the most important articles in the book, Fayaz Alam draws a brief picture of such oppression in the colonial period from 1801 to 1870. A Sanskrit pundit named Mrittunjoy Biddalangkar, who even despised the word 'Bangla', became one of the most instrumental of figures in the process of a modernization of the Bengali language --- in his sectarian point of view, 'the process of cleansing the language of the pollution of infidel vocabulary and barbarism of

common folk and developing it with more and more Sanskrit vocabulary and purifying it by using Sanskrit grammar'. At Fort William College, Mrittunjoy Biddalangkar and his fellow pundits successfully completed the task of refining modern Bengali prose, a task entrusted upon them by the British colonial rulers. Mrittunjoy had no experience of writing Bengali prose before that.

In a period of half a century or so the whole face of the Bengali language was changed by a class which previously would take glory in writing faulty Bengali and historically denounce the language as anti-religious and barbaric. No wonder, Mrittunjoy and the later pioneer writers of modern Bengali literature were hugely Sanskrit dependent and their vocabulary and linguistic style clearly alien and obscure to common folks of their time and even today. As a matter of fact, the continuation of such elitist and colonial language might be the main reason why modern Bengali literature is still the literature of a portion of the educated middle class of town dwellers, not a sovereign literature of the Bengali people. Such degradation of a language has harmful consequences, so claims Fayaz Alam, and asks for a different perspective and query on the issue. With such a discovery in hand, should we fight against it, as we did in our glorious language movement? That is for us to decide.

The title article, *Buddhijibi, Tar Dai o Bangalir* *Buddhibrittik* *Dashotto*, focuses on the importance of an intellectual as an architect of de-colonization, a warrior against power with language as his weapon, and a representative of the common people against oppression. With quotations from intellectuals like Edward Said, Antonio Gramsci and Noam Chomsky on the subject matter and his own rationalization, Fayaz Alam tells us

that an intellectual must not take side of a group or party over people. Although an intellectual might be a valiant defender of the interest of the common people, people might not come easily on to his side. At the end of the day, an intellectual is a lonely warrior, so says Fayaz Alam.

Another important article, Antonio Gramsci: On civil society, Alam, elaborating on the subject matter of the book in the light of the perspectives of the Italian Marxist intellectual Gramsci, labels the idea of recently developed Bangladeshi civil society and its position in the neo-colonial power structure. The article, Itihashe Dorshon uponibsher bashona, draws our attention to the fact that the colonial legacy behind the study of history has made history a tool to show sectarian and partisan supremacy in Bangladesh, which needs serious reevaluation.

Most people find petty cultural emotion, radical and aggressive nationalist fervor in post colonial literature, in the politics of praxis. However, the politics of praxis, or the point of view of people against colonialism does not itself represent oppression or petty nationalism. On the contrary, it speaks for the rights of the common people, of humanity. Fayaz Alam proves the point in the first article in the work, searching for the relationship of language and culture in the life and minds of the aboriginal people of Bengal, whose right to their own language is not recognized in a country which owes its freedom and sovereignty to a linguistic cultural revolution.

Writing less, telling more, is Fayaz Alam's style. The same thing goes with this book. As always, Fayaz Alam has given us some tools of de-colonization and it is we who must use them carefully.

PARVEZ ALAM IS A WRITER.

Old cultures in primeval beauty

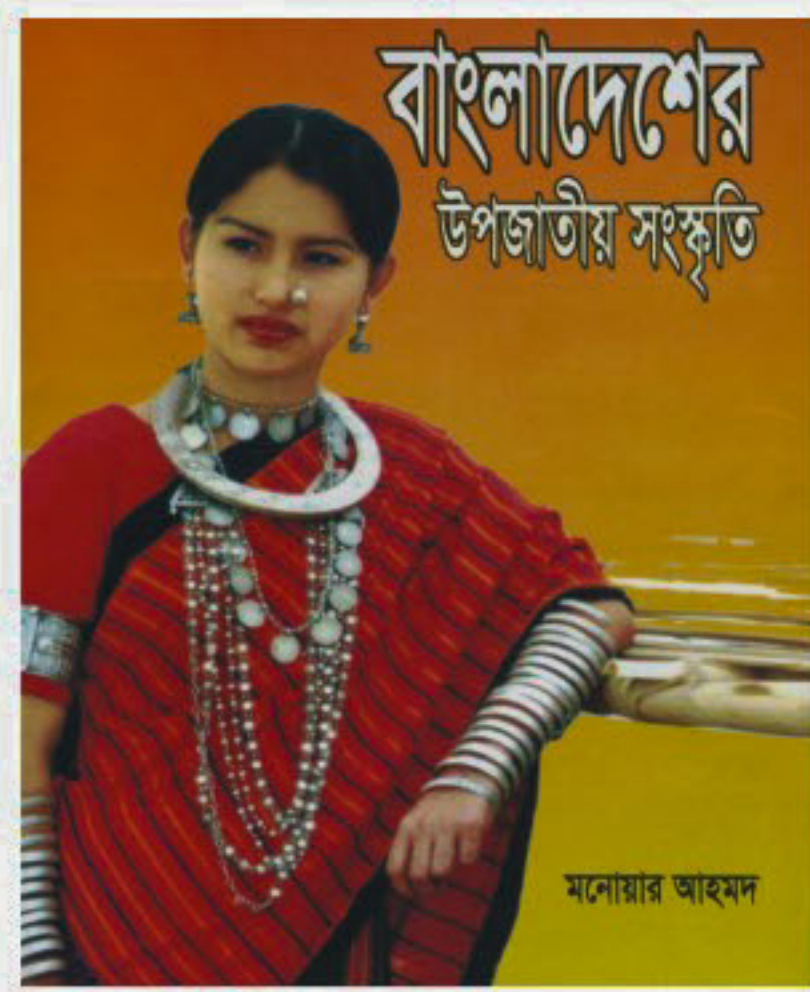
Syed Badrul Ahsan goes on a photo journey

Bangladesh's indigenous people deserve a good deal more importance, a lot more respect than they have got thus far. The unfortunate truth remains that for over fifty years now, and that takes you back to the times of Ayub Khan in pre-1971 Pakistan, they have been subjected to indignities of a kind that puts you to shame. And even as we observe, on an annual basis, the anniversary of the 1952 movement for Bengali to be established as the language of the state, we do not quite recall, or deliberately ignore, the fact that the cultures, traditions and languages of the tribes inhabiting Bangladesh also need to be emphasized in the interest of promoting an inclusive state.

And yet in all this gloom there happen to be individuals, Bengalis to boot, who have cared to hold Bangladesh's indigenous people in respect. Monowar Ahmad is proof, if proof were needed, that there are

people who care about history, about a preservation of heritage. In *Bangladesher Upojatio Shongskriti*, it is a whole panorama of indigenous culture he brings forth, and not just through written literature. The work is fundamentally an album of images, plenty of them, each of which is testimony to the varied nature of culture as it works in this country. If any statement were needed to re-emphasise the significance of cultural diversity in Bangladesh, this album does the job, and very well too. That Bangladesh, for all its limitations of geographical dimensions, is a land of cultural diversity comes through loud and clear in this work.

There are images of ornaments, a whole range of them, which dot the pages here. And observing them is in many ways a going back to history in the earliest stages of time and civilization. Compare the images of



Bangladesher Upojatio Shongskriti
Photo Album
Monowar Ahmad
Ed Mohammad Ashraf Ali
Distributors: Katha Prokash, Mowla Brothers, Uttoron

ornaments or other articles of use unearthed over the decades with what you yet come across in Bangladesh's tribal regions. A feeling of continuity will take hold of the imagination. Some things, traditions for instance, never change. The ornaments tell you that story.

The reality of Bangladesh's being home to ancient cultures is borne out by the presence of the many indigenous peoples within its territory. There are the Chakmas, Marmas, Mros, Tripuras, Monipuri, Bom, Oraon, Rakhaine, Koch, Garo, Khasia, Santal and a host of others. Ahmad, a freedom fighter, a photographer who has always guided himself along the principles of perfection, captures them all on his camera. And thus you spot a couple of young Marma women gathering water from a waterfall. Move on, to spot a young Chakma mother and her child going back

home from a rural market by boat. The pristine is what underlines the pictures. And that essentially means a timelessness. Indigenous culture is always about the timelessness, which is why you rediscover the past through a Monipuri bridegroom placing a garland on his new bride. And alongside that comes the old Monipuri dance form, performed to exquisite delight by four young women.

Monowar Ahmad does a good job of imprisoning beauty in his lens. Old cultures are in a great many ways studies in primeval beauty, be it the beauty of women, of the river, of the deep woods, of the happy banana seller. It is the whole landscape that matters, from the point of view of geography as also from the perceptions which light up the imagination. When Bom women bathe in the stream, you have a hard

time figuring out which is more captivating to the eye and the mind, the women or the stream. The beauty extends itself, to an image of Bom homes lost in time. You go back in time as you take a tentative step toward those huts touched by the mist. That is the feeling which rises in you as you find yourself face to face with a couple of Santal hunters, properly armed with bows and arrows. You get much the same feeling when you see an elderly Oraon woman puffing away on her traditional hookah.

And food? Suffice it for now to know of the delicacy that golden frogs are. For the Rakhaine, these frogs, trapped in the paddy fields, are food that gladdens the soul, besides of course whetting the appetite.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN IS EXECUTIVE EDITOR, THE DAILY STAR.

BOOK choice

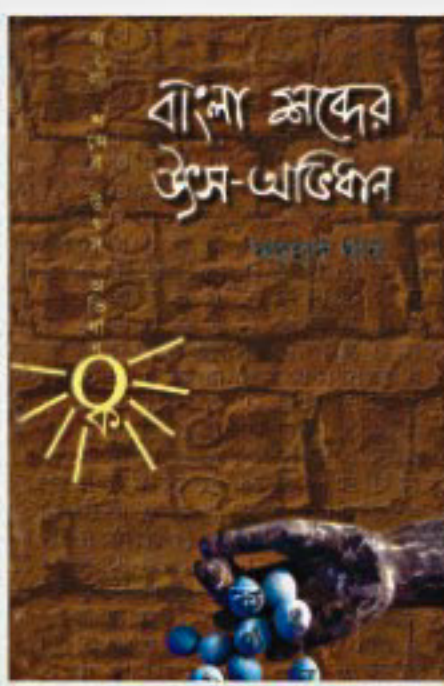
Dr. A.R. Mallick Smarok Grantha
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Super Woman
Shahadat Shohag
Tamrolipi



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Utsho-Obhidhan
Farhad Khan
Protik



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Feroj Adams, Zajida
Meherunnissa
Nawroze Kitabistan



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Ekti Bishesh Odhyaye
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