

CELEBRATIONS

The multi-faceted influences in Tagore's work

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

When Tagore came to Rajshahi and Kushtia (1890) to take charge of his property, it seemed miles away from a life he was used to. The setting was a sharp contrast to Kolkata. But shortly he settled down to the different lifestyle, and spent long stretches of time watching the panoramic scenery from his boat on the river Padma. The seasonal variations enthralled him. On a rainy day he would watch the lightning darting across the dark clouds, listen to the thunder echoing over the plains. In summer, the unruffled peace and tranquility, the truant boy who played the flute on the sultry afternoons, all enchanted him. And most importantly, the young 30-year old zamindar became increasingly fascinated by the folk melodies of the bauls, fakirs and bhainsnabas (folk artistes).

There is however, a misconception that Tagore came in contact with Lalon himself. In fact, Lalon had already passed away by then and it was actually Lalon's disciple that Tagore met.

The talented disciple, Gagan Harkara, added a fresh dimension to Tagore's rich exposure to Indian and European music.

Tagore was deeply moved by the lyrical beauty, so vividly expressive of the deep-rooted philosophies in a language so simplistic and rhythmic. The spiritual romanticism of Baul philosophy influenced Tagore so deeply that he went as far as calling himself "Rabindra Baul". Later, he even played the role of a blind baul in his play *Falguni*.

According to the late Dr. Mridulkanti Chakravarti, "It was Tagore who first collected 20 of Lalon's songs and had them published in the monthly *Probashi*. Folk literature was printed in the section titled Haramoni. In the

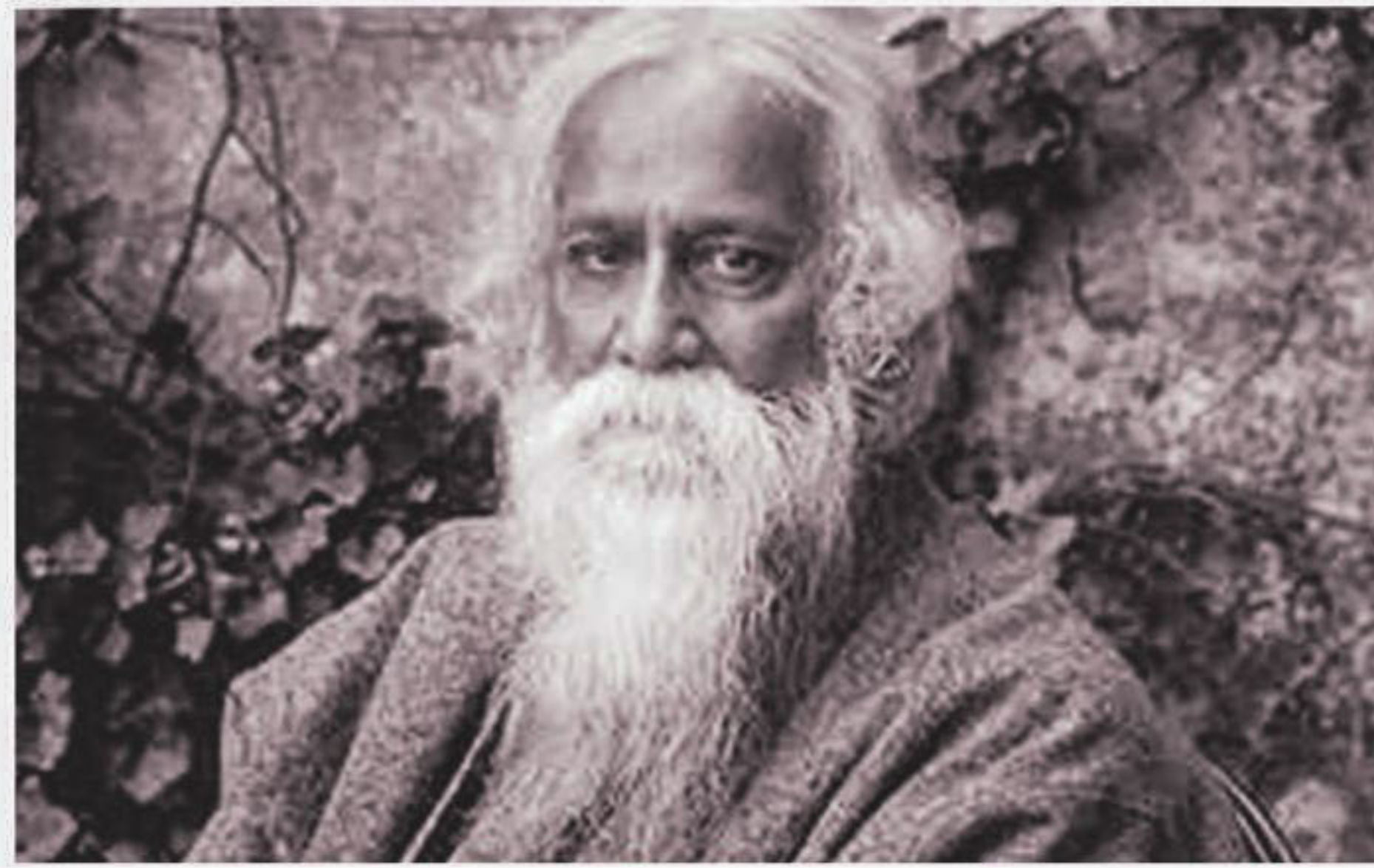
Bangla month of Baishakh in 1322, the collected songs of Gagan Harkara, *Ami Kothaye Pabo Tarey*, were published for the first time in the magazine. Our national anthem, *Amar Shonar Bangla*, was composed and based on this baul tune on August 07, 1905."

Later, Tagore collected Lalon's collection of songs from Cheuria village. The book contained some 283 authentic Lalon songs and is now exhibited at the Tagore Museum at Shantiniketan.

In fact, various forces influenced Tagore's compositions at different

composed during this period as he began to increasingly focus on folk music. In the third phase (1921 to 1941), Tagore began to combine poetry with melody and folk with classical melodies.

His compositions of nearly 2,300 songs are seen as falling mainly into four groups -- Spiritualism, Patriotism, Romance, and Nature. Even though Tagore composed roughly 60 patriotic songs, mostly during the 1870's, they earned him a great degree of recognition during the Swadeshi



stages of his life. His life as a composer spanning 61 years can be categorised in three different phases.

In the first phase (1881-1900), Tagore was mostly devoted to composing *bhanga gaan* or songs modeled on existing Hindi songs. In the second phase (1901 to 1920), he experimented his compositions on the musical structure of the ragas. This was the stage the marked the beginning of Tagore's unmistakable individualism. Most of Tagore's patriotic songs were

movement. Besides his vast collection of songs that have become an everyday part of Bengali culture, historians also point to his tremendous contribution in visual arts and in introducing seasonal festivals.

Tagore spent almost eleven years in East Bengal. He travelled to Shilaidaha, Shahjadpur and Potishar. Often he would go to back to Kolkata and Shantiniketan and would return to the then East Bengal. He travelled in his boat on the Padma, Jamuna, Boral and

Nagar rivers. During the monsoon, Tagore was drawn to the jari, shari and bhatiali songs of the boatmen. Many of Tagore's compositions came to reflect this period, depicting the life of the working class.

Some of Tagore's memorable songs were directly influenced by the regional songs from several Indian provinces he traveled to: Baro Asha Korey, Aaji Subho Din-e and Sakatare Oi Kandiche (Kannada) and Anandaloke Mangalaloke (Mysore).

During this period, many of his works are also reflective of Western influence in his songs. Some remarkable examples include Katobar Bhebechhinu, Purano Shei Diner Katha and others. Most of these songs were aptly used in his lyrical plays, namely, Balmiki Pratibha, Kalmrigaya and Mayar Khela.

Though influenced by the baul songs, Tagore added his own touch. In baul songs the four stanzaic patterns (asthai, antara, shanchari and abhog) of Dhrupada style are sung in the same tune. However, Tagore would compose a different tune in the shancharii, thus giving the song a completely new flavour. Among his repertoire of songs in the devotional form (Puja) are Ami Kothaye Pabo Tarey, Ami Kaan Petey Roi, Amar Mon Jokhon Jagli Narey, Tomar Khola Haowaye, Kon Alotey Praner Prodeep, among others.

Tagore's legacy of songs underlines his receptivity to the changing settings and culture he came in contact with. Whether it be the influence of the classical songs, the bauls, regional or western music, Tagore's touch worked as a timeless prism, blending all into one unique sparkle, transforming the ordinary into a masterpiece.

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Under the grey umbrella

NAHREEN RAHMAN

Under the grey umbrella
I watch the blazing fire
Dancing with the tune of destruction
Burning alive
The evidence of destruction
I smell nothing
But the odour of brutality
That held me standstill
With fight and disgust
That avenged my inner soul
Till I went running
Like a warrior
Stamping on the pool of blood
And corpses of the dead
To save a child
Mourning, yet shocked
To see the barbarism
Of mankind
Who heard the screams
Of pain and desperation
Of his family
Just before their
Last breath
Last sight
In this antagonistic world.
I question,
The masterminds
Was the ride worthwhile?
Was it worth avenging
The lives of millions
And signing a treaty
On the bloodshed and violence
That tore the heart
Leaving a scar in the minds of millions
Shaking the inner souls of the survivors
And the pain of losing their beloved.

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INDIA REVISITED

Memories through winter mist

SYEDA ZAKIA AHSAN

I looked at the magpie outside my flat window in London, looking for food in the wet grass. It was December in London and I was getting ready for my trip to India. I kept thinking of the days I had spent in Kolkata and the friends I was about to spend time with.

I went to Loreto Day School, an Irish convent run by Irish nuns. I have never had so much of joy as I had in those fifteen years of school life under the strict guidance of the nuns. They gave us respect, joy and also the right values. They taught us to always respect our own culture and heritage and also have the same respect for other cultures. I was brought up in strict discipline at home, which was complimented with the strictness in school life.

I remembered with delight the leadership training course that I went to in Bihar. It was a course I will cherish all my life. Among the joys, the lessons and the fun on this trip were also the beginning of a friendship between a boy and a girl of different ethnic backgrounds, to come together for life and give birth to three wonderful boys who have now grown up. Those were the days I thought of and got back to my packing.

Times have changed and so have people's wishes and desires. My oldest brother used to send me chocolates in the 1960s and I would save the shining paper after having the chocolates. Forty years have passed and now I was putting chocolate boxes I had bought for my friends' children into my suitcase.

Suddenly I realised I had to buy gifts for the nieces and nephews I have in Bangladesh. I quickly put the gifts I had bought for them into my suitcase. After all, I was going to visit them as well. I had emigrated to Bangladesh on a cold wintry day in 1981 after the demise of my mother. It was a very traumatic experience for me. I had to leave all my memories, my belongings, my emotions and my friends forty days after my mother's death because I was a girl, was unmarried and so could not live alone. This change had a very negative impact on me. I was depressed, sad, all my energies depleted when I reached Dhaka to live with a sister, who was the only person who agreed to house me at that time. She is someone who soothed my wounds. My sister cared for me like a mother, friend and guide and so did her children. Though I missed Kolkata all the while, I found joy in the

little family that welcomed me to their home in Dhaka and gave me a permanent place in their generous hearts. The bonds of love and trust have grown even deeper.

I now had to live on memories of Kolkata and the life I had led there. I had built my life with them, shared the good times and the bad, laughed and cried over the music and films and the food we shared together. I found employment in a school and within a year I was promoted to the post of vice principal. While working there I met my husband, who was young and vibrant. And I thought he resembled Woody Allen. Little did I know that



The Poet Amir Khusro with Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.

I was to be his bride over a year later.

I am now in Delhi, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, where my husband is a Fellow doing comparative research on Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It is a beautiful place. I get up in the ambience of the fauna and flora and look at peacocks outside my window, the rabbits that scurry about here and there and the multi-plumed birds that paint the surroundings with the hues of the rainbow.

Earlier, I visited Delhi in the late 1950s with my mother and walked, holding my brother's

hand, by the Taj Mahal. I witnessed the splendour of the shrine in Ajmer and laid a "chaadar" of flowers for Khwaja Gharib Nawaz. I visited the city again in the 1980s with my oldest sister. And I remember visiting Jaipur watching the Palace of Mirrors in Jaipur in utter astonishment.

I marvel at this land of diversity, the astonishing weave of multiculturalism that is so vibrant here. I noticed this trend at Delhi-Haat a few days ago with my friend. There were stalls from all the states, from Rajasthan to Haryana and from Orissa to Kashmir. Each stall was a display of all the rich traditional crafts that need special appreciation and support from those who have access to it. The poverty that some of the artisans go through touches the thoughtful buyer who does bargain, and it is reflected in the products that have been produced with the positive pain and pleasure of craftsmanship. It was a very cold morning and as we sipped coffee in one of the cafeterias, I wondered about the chill on cold nights and the sweaty days of summer when these artisans wove the products.

Most artisans, I was told, were women and I salute them for their love, patience and the resilience that they go through in this land of different cultures. I recall women of this land who are part and parcel of the rich Indian heritage and culture. I recall the valiant Jodhabai who left behind a rich legacy. She was a symbol of communal harmony, particularly known for reforming Mughal cuisine and introducing vegetables in meat curries. There is too the exuberance of Mirabai, the respect this country gives to the mother, the only nation that calls its country 'Ma', mother.

The richness of this landscape is embossed with the teachings of Nizamuddin Aulia and the fragrant poetry of Amir Khusro and Mirza Ghalib. As I sit listening to melodies on Kolkata's Tara Music channel, I recall Rabindranath Tagore's song, 'Tomar pujar chhale tomaye bhulei thaki', and Swami Vivekananda's insights into life and living that millions in this troubled world reflect on.

Nizamuddin Aulia speaks to us thus: 'There is no other purpose greater in life than to bring happiness to human hearts.' That is the essence of life, the reality we aspire to.

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Warm words, cold days

IFFAT NAWAZ

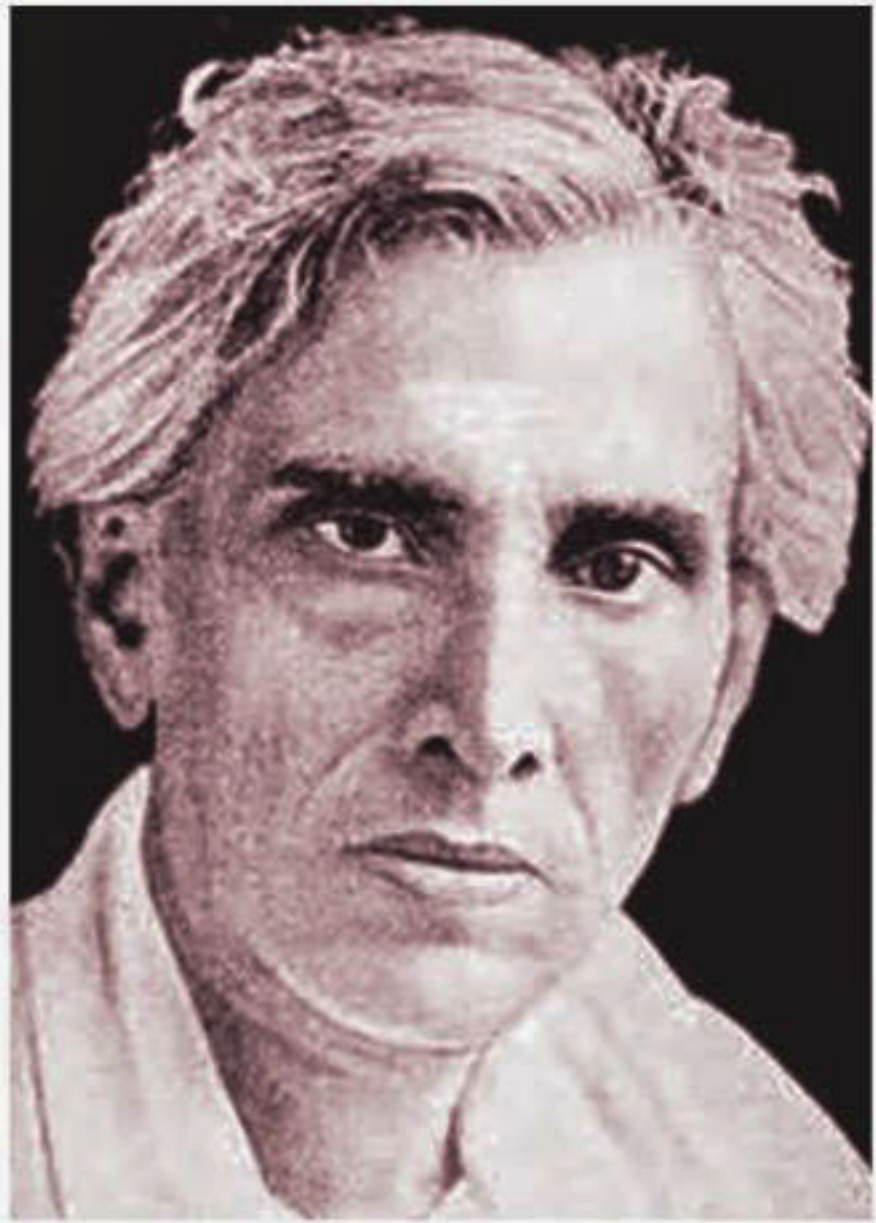
It's cold, not the kind that makes you frozen but the one that touches your bones, makes you shiver from the bottom of your spine. It's cold and your soul stops and tries to breathe warmly but can't, because it is in between and confused, because your soul loves all things comfortable, food, weather, bed. She is born in the land of *obhiman* and *allad*, she is not used to such metallic shocks.

When the fog travels to your veranda and creates the illusion of a fantasy, and through it all you see the outline of children far away in the streets sharing a blanket and body warmth, you step out and give them a sweater or two. But you know and they know you do not have enough for all of them. Yet they still smile, some follow you home, others run to find the last parked bus to sleep under.

At home, you look through your books, the pile that needs to be organized and reorganized. You seek words that will hug your inside. You pick up 'Master and Margarita', Mikhail Bulgakov's devil's visit. You quickly put it down because it reminds you of Russia in its darkest hours and perhaps the most creative. But creativity alone does not bring warmth and so you move on to something that you read more than once, like 'Catcher in the Rye' by J.D. Salinger. You think of your teenage years and how this book had summed up all things inside so well. But that too seems distant and phony, so you skip Holden Caulfield.

You touch Sarat Chandra and 'Borodidi' makes you want to cry, so you move on to Rabindranath's short stories, and luckily they keep you distracted for a while, until you touch 'Noshto Neer'. And Tagore reminds you, "Shohoj sukh, shohoj noi" - easy comfort isn't easily achieved. So you put that down as well, no books about home wrecks and lost love is a match for the winter.

Almost lost between Jhumpa Lahiri and Vikram Seth you find Arvind Adiga's 'White Tiger'. The first chapter might warm you up, even if there is a smell of cold blooded



murder. You laugh because Adiga knows how to make you do so. You move on to Daniyal Mueenuddin's "In other room other wonders," and that is when you realize winter is for short stories. Winter cannot be a novel, because all things you touch in the winter must have the sense of a quick ending; you must know it is temporary. And you must remember that all throughout.

While the children look for buses and pipes to sleep under and inside, and the thought of them makes you feel colder inside, you do not have enough sweaters to keep them warm. But you hope some others do. You distract yourself. You pick up a new collection of short stories, though perhaps not the ones of Edgar Allan Poe or Bankim but those of Shirsendu and Zafar Iqbal, of Tom Rachman and Jennifer Egan. You stay away from all things that last long and make your soul heavier than it already is. You take it all in ---small bites, warm bites, and you know it will be over soon.

And you wait for the universe to lift up its heaviness from all shivering souls and warm words enter and exit your eyesight, like a winter fling. And that is how you realize winter does not last forever. All things, absolutely all things, have an end.

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