To the Tune of SM Sultan, Play On!

Sultan's eyes saw wondrous landscapes and diverse places, but none inspired him more than his native Narail. To the town, their Lal Mia was renowned as artist, flautist, wanderer and vagabond. He may have left this earth in 1994 but Sultan's tune in Narail plays strong, still now.

ANDREW EAGLE

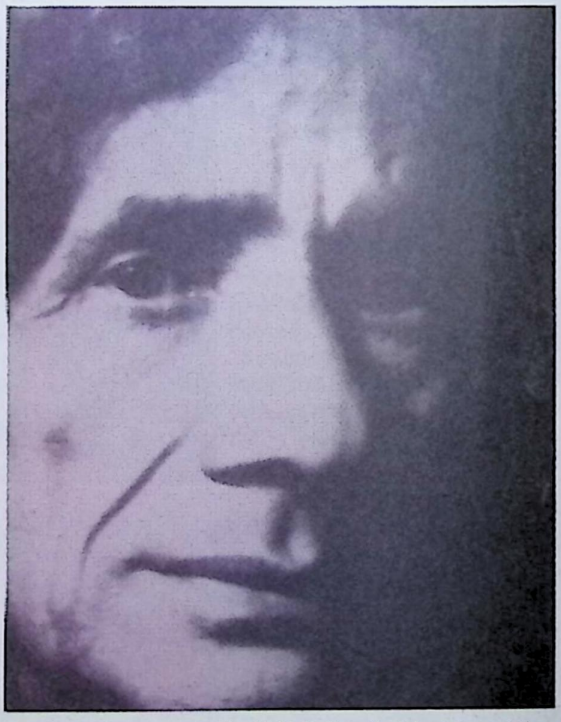
Even today, Narail doesn't suffer much from big city problems. There might be small-town electric-engine jams around Roopganj Bazar time to time but they're not much to contend with. There's little risk of arriving late for an appointment.

In the mid 1970s the town was quieter still. When carpenter's son Narayan Chandra Biswas arrived on an empty stomach with time to spare it was a simple matter to set off for a meal. He'd come from Itna village in Lohagara to support his older brother Krishna on the day of Krishna's BA exam at Victoria College. The exam would start in an hour.

Krishna likewise thought little of Narayan disappearing from the hostel. He gave ten taka for food. What neither brother considered was the risk inherent in a flute song.

Narayan had almost reached the desired shop beside the Chitra when that soulful, melancholy melody first caught his ear. He saw a crowd listening attentively. "The flute pulled me in," recalls Narayan, "I saw a tall, handsome figure in a long, black kurta and scarf. He had curly black hair falling down his neck in waves."

When the song abruptly ended Narayan stayed put. "I was hypnotised by that man's deeply inspiring speech. His words were not of lesser value than his song. Not a single person left."



Detail of a large portrait of SM Sultan that features at the SM Sultan Memorial Gallery in Narail.

The man spoke of walking along a country road. He described paddy swaying back and forth. As he spoke he smiled a little in the corners of his lips, and he eventually stopped and said, "You know, in the eyes of an artist nothing seen is valueless."[1]