

Tagore's Timelessness ...

Tagore and his plays

SAURAV DEY

Rabindranath Tagore and his works are the heart and soul of Bangla literature. He is a writer of impeccably high stature, a renaissance man, a songwriter, a playwright, a philosopher, an educator and what not? His songs express deep emotion, spirituality, mysticism and philosophy, while his short stories reflect society and circle around the lives of ordinary people. But it is his plays through which Tagore emerged as a social critic. Those who have read or watched his plays are familiar with his philosophical and allegorical themes. He is an inspiration across generations.

In a recent conversation with The Daily Star, three theatre directors shed light on diverse aspects of Tagore and his plays: Veteran thespian Ataur Rahman zooms in on Tagore saying, "We take pride that Tagore was tremendously influenced by this land. I see the assimilation of world culture in him. He brought foreign traditions into Bangla and gave the world our native style. He is a master of the short story and no less than O' Henry or Maupassant. He is universal."

"I think art can never be a carbon copy of life; rather it should evoke thoughts and be objective. Tagore's works incorporate allegories, abstractions and metaphors which make us think. He was open to changes and always talked of breaking the barriers so that the new can find its place. He was post-modern. The way he defined love in 'Shesher Kobita' is unmatched in Bangla literature," Ataur Rahman added.

"Tagore also taught us to love and celebrate



that nobody can. Tagore is simple and that is his speciality," Sudip Chakroborty added. Another young theatre activist, Aniruddha Kumar Shantou, zooms in on Tagore plays, saying, "Tagore's philosophy of life and his perceptions are still relevant in these times. Rabindranath depicted society and gave bold messages through his short stories and plays. He was eloquent about the freedom of women in his 'Strir Potre', which we can still relate to. Moreover, there is space in his plays. It allows reinterpretation and rearrangement in the light of the new."

"Tagore through his works will continue to inspire generations. He was a master of literary arts who gave us a literary world to indulge in. Tagore took Bangla drama to a different stage through his immortal works.



(Clockwise from top) Scenes from Tagore plays "Muktodhara", "Roktokorobi" and "Chitrangada".



ABODE OF PEACE

Tagore's cultural epicentre at Shantiniketan

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Two years back, while I was in ITC-SRA, Kolkata, to cover the nine-daylong "Bangla Gaan-er Utshab", I decided to make a trip to Shantiniketan. I along with Ashish-Ur-Rahman of the Daily Prothom Alo, arrived at Bolpur by train. As we got down from the train, the Ceetanjali Museum caught my attention.

A wonderful museum was recently opened by Indian Railway, containing rich information about Tagore and his life. The salon compartment which was used by Tagore for his last journey from Shantiniketan to Howrah Station in 1941 was kept for public viewing on the bard's 150th birth anniversary.

The beautiful ambience of Shantiniketan fascinated me. I had the opportunity to observe noted artist Jogen Chowdhury's exhibition that was on at Nandan (named after Shilpacharya Nandalal Bose) at that time. I was lost among Tagore memorabilia kept in the museum, the bard's several houses, shreeniketan and many rare species of trees.

The splendid sculptures, including one by Ramkinkar Baij at the entrance of Kala Bhavan, unique frescoes, murals and paintings of Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Binod Bihari Mukhopadhyaya and others at Shantiniketan made me go back to yesterdays.

I watched the evening beauty of glow-worms and heard the buzzing of crickets all around the idyllic ambience.

Shantiniketan is an artistic assembly of Bauls, urban artists, classical artists, academics and many more. Perhaps no other university has had a tribal component and cross-cultural assimilation like this during the colo-



onial period. Tagore's experiment greatly influenced educational experimentation worldwide. Tagore was a 'free spirit in movement' and emphasised endless learning. He would encourage children to help their creative faculties flourish. In 1901, the bard started a school at Shantiniketan named "Brahmachari Ashram", modeled on the lines of the ancient Gurukul system. It later came to be known as the Patha Bhavan, the central premise being that learning in a natural environment would be more enjoyable and fruitful.

With financial backing of the Maharajah of Tripura, the Visva-Bharati Society was established in 1921. Tagore envisioned a center of learning combining the best of both East and West. The school was expanded into a university named Visva-Bharati, which was defined by Tagore as "Where the world makes a home in a nest." The open-air education as opposed to being confined in the four walls of a classroom became a reality there.

Eminent people from all over the world came to Visva-Bharati during its peak period. Visva-Bharati became a central university in 1951. Leaves of the Chhatim (Saptaparni or seven-leaf sprigs) trees are given to graduating students at the annual convocation. Many world famous teachers have become associated with it over the years. Late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray, and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen are among the illustrious students of Shantiniketan.

Kala Bhavana, the art college of Shantiniketan, is still considered one of the best art colleges in the world. Shantiniketan is also famous for many fairs and festivals like Poush Mela, Joydev Mela, Dol/Basanta Utshab, Borsha Mongal, Sharodutshab, the well-known assembly of mystic baul singers along with the bard's birth and death anniversary programmes.

Shantiniketan is a small town near Bolpur in Birbhum district of West Bengal, and is about 180 kilometres north of Kolkata. The place now attracts thousands of visitors each year.

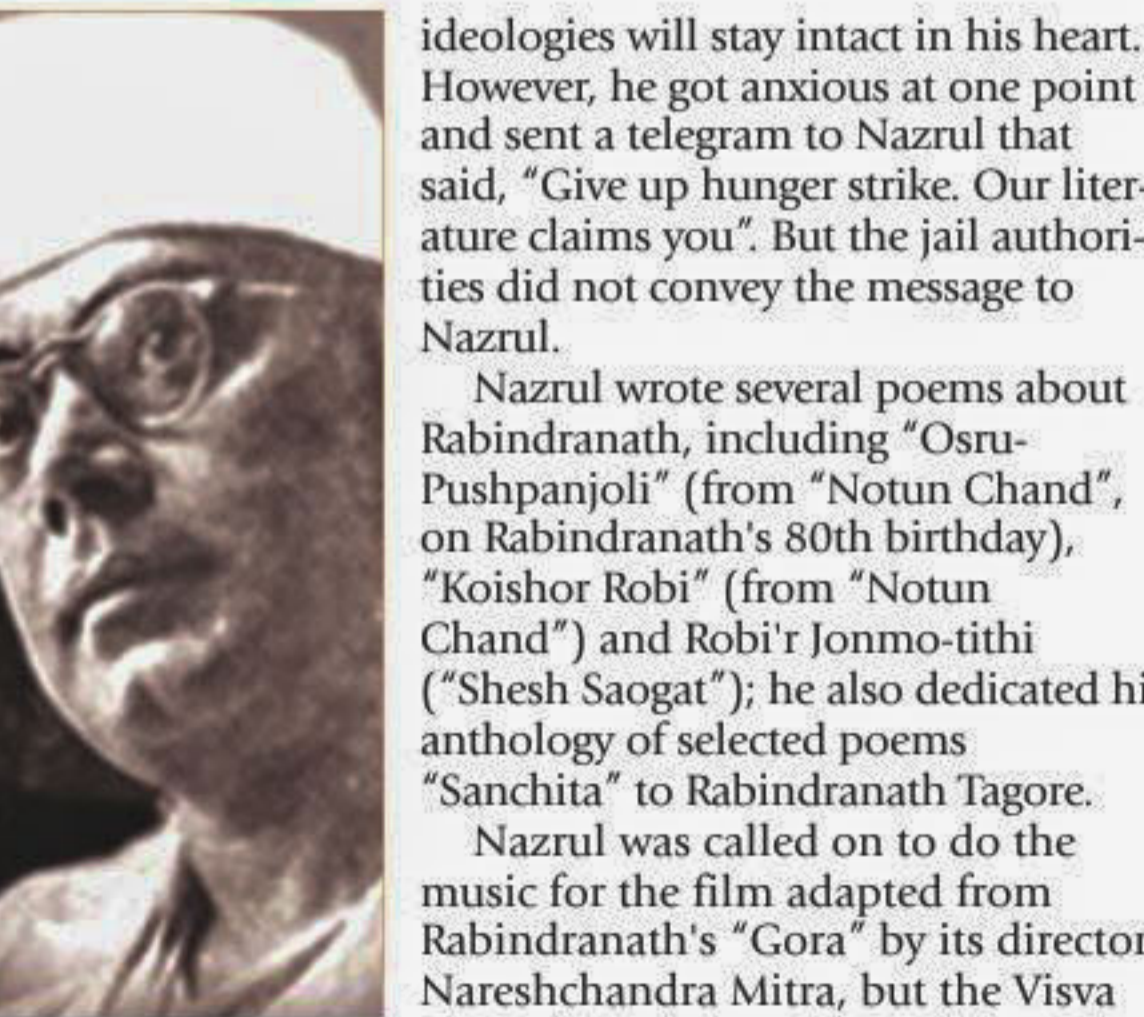
Tagore's Nazrul connection

FAHIM FERDOUS

Although to any discerning Bangalee, Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam are two distinctive pinnacles of Bangla literature, instances of contrast and comparison of various aspects of the two stalwarts have never been a rarity. How they are paired together, often almost face-to-face in an unspoken debate of supremacy -- according to their literary styles, philosophies, and overall volume of works, can make any new reader wonder what relations between Tagore and Nazrul themselves were like.

When Kazi Nazrul Islam was born, the rays of Robi (Bangla for sun) had already reached distant corners of Bangla literature. Nazrul himself was an avid fan of Rabindranath's writings, as is evident from the poem "Tirtho-Pothik" which he sent to Rabindranath expressing his awe of Rabindranath's writing, and the excitement of being remembered by him. Rabindranath, in turn, welcomed Nazrul's stormy arrival to Bangla literature, and blessed him on the publication of his first bi-weekly literary publication "Dhumketu", expressing confidence in Nazrul's ability to banish darkness and awaken people with his writings.

When Nazrul was taken to prison for his political poem "Anondomoy'r Agomone" (published in the 12th edition of "Dhumketu", September 26, 1922), Rabindranath expressed his support for him, dedicating his lyrical play "Bashanta" to Nazrul. After Nazrul was transferred to the Hoogly prison, he went on a 40-day hunger strike protesting the misbehavior of the jail super. As he was being ill-treated in prison, Rabindranath was requested by the literary community to convince Nazrul to break his fast, knowing of Rabindranath's influence on him. But Rabindranath understood Nazrul better than others, and said, "To ask an idealist to surrender his ideologies is equal to killing him. Even if Kazi dies of the hunger strike, his



ideologies will stay intact in his heart." However, he got anxious at one point and sent a telegram to Nazrul that said, "Give up hunger strike. Our literature claims you". But the jail authorities did not convey the message to Nazrul.

Nazrul wrote several poems about Rabindranath, including "Osrushpanjoli" (from "Notun Chand", on Rabindranath's 80th birthday), "Koishor Robi" (from "Notun Chand") and Robi Jonmo-tithi ("Shesh Saogat"); he also dedicated his anthology of selected poems "Sanchita" to Rabindranath Tagore. Nazrul was called on to do the music for the film adapted from Rabindranath's "Gora" by its director Nareschandra Mitra, but the Visva Bharati Music Board was of the opinion that the seven songs used in it did not have proper tunes, and the film's release was at risk. Nazrul visited Rabindranath with a print of the film and a projector, and after seeing it, Rabindranath said, "You have adapted my songs, and in what sense do they find you at fault? Do they understand my music better than you do? Can they honour it more than you have?" and signed a no-objection paper.

Rabindranath Tagore's demise shocked Nazrul as much as the rest of the subcontinent; he wrote the elegy "Robi-Hara", which he recited from the Calcutta Betar Kendra. He later wrote another poem, "Salam Ostro-Robi", and a song, "Chumaito Dao, Sranto Robi re Jagayo Na, Shara fibon Je Alo Dilo Deke Tar Chum Bhargayona".

Sajankanta Das and Mohit Lal Mojmudar of the literary magazine "Shonibar Chithi", envious of Nazrul's meteoric rise and his pleasant relations with Rabindranath, attempted repeatedly to cause a rift between the two, but only succeeded in creating a temporary misunderstanding, that did not hold in the long run. As long as they lived, the relationship between the two greats of that time -- was of mutual admiration, respect and affection.

K. Z. ISLAM

Kidar Sharma, the well known Bollywood film producer and director, signed 13-year-old Madhubala as the heroine for "Neel Kamal". She was cast opposite Raj Kapoor who made his debut as a hero with this film. Sharma observed once that of the two it was Madhubala who was more spontaneous and intuitive. She would often act out scenes for Raj Kapoor if he found them difficult.

Even as a teenager, confidence and laughter would be her guiding motive. Between 1947 and 1949 she had a phenomenal number of releases. Seventeen films in two years!

Although she never had any formal education she succeeded in learning English in just three months. Her teacher Sushila Rani, wife of Baburoo Patel publisher of Film India recalled "I had been dragged along by Guri Dutt. It was a hot day so I made myself comfortable under a tree. Suddenly I was startled by a female voice saying 'Maan liya, jaga bahut khub dhundi hai...' It was Madhubala who came and sat down next to me very close. Being from a typical Muslim background, I was most

plexion required no artificial aid. She was well-built and a complete natural.

With "Asha", Madhubala tasted her first major success as a heroine. The far away look in her eyes as she swayed gently on the garden swing singing "Ayege aanevala... ayege", before fading away into the mist, is one of the most enduring images of Indian cinema.

The studio was for Madhubala her workplace and playground. She extracted her moments of pleasure before the clock struck six. "She was quite a tease," remarks Dev Anand. "Extremely playful she would egg you on and then hold back". He describes her as a schoolgirlish tomboy, a little immature, just stepping into her teens. "She would burst into peals of laughter for no particular reason and we would have to wait till her laughter subsided."

Script writer Abrar Alvi recalls an incident "We were shooting a song for 'Mr. & Mrs. 55' on the outskirts of Bombay; I had been dragged along by Guri Dutt. It was a hot day so I made myself comfortable under a tree. Suddenly I was startled by a female voice saying 'Maan liya, jaga bahut khub dhundi hai...' It was Madhubala who came and sat down next to me very close. Being from a typical Muslim background, I was most

uneasy with her proximity and extremely conscious of the unit's eyes on us. But she was least aware of all this. This was the star's way of enjoying lighter moments as she slugged to fill her father's coffers. Madhubala was most playful seeking an escape from her regimented life.

K. Asif's "Mughal-e-Azam" which took 10 long years to make it, perhaps, one of the most passionate films of Hindi cinema, in no small measure due to Madhubala's searing performance. Her coquettish expression as she seduced the her-apparent of the Mughal throne with "Mohe panghat pe Nandalal cheh gayo re", the fire in her eyes as she defiantly sings "Pyar kia to darma kya" and the pure angst as she cries "Mohabbat ki jhooti kahani pe roye", whilst being dragged to the dungeons in chains, show the entire range of emotions of a star-crossed beloved.

The romantic scene in the garden when Prince Salim strokes Anarkali's face with a feather, to the strains of Bade Gulam Ali Khan's music in the background, is one of the Hindi cinema's most sensuous scenes.

The stunning beauty that she was, Madhubala captivated audiences with her expressive eyes, mischievous giggles, lopsided smile, half husky whispers and imp-

ish sensuality. Success followed her devotedly.

Madhubala's unique allure was known worldwide. She had featured in many American magazines, including LIFE magazine which printed many of her photographs. Theatre Arts magazine of Hollywood carried a feature length article on Madhubala calling her 'The Biggest Star in the World'. Her photos mesmerised the world and offers started trickling in. If fate had her sway then Madhubala would have ruled the roost in Hollywood but her father tampered with her destiny and we are left with a sense of what could have been.

Madhubala had a congenital heart problem. It was only many years later in 1959, when Madhu fainted during the shooting of "Mahalon Ke Khwab" that she was taken to a well known cardiologist who diagnosed Madhubala's heart problem, for which there was no cure in those days.

Though the medical fraternity did not give her much time, Madhubala lived for nine years bedridden. Having got accustomed to stardom and adulation, she found it difficult to lead a life away from the arc lights.

The writer is a connoisseur of music.

Cultural programme marking Tagore's death anniversary

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

A cultural programme and discussion were organised in Dinajpur on Wednesday evening, marking the 73rd death anniversary of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Dinajpur unit of Jatiya Rabindra Sangeet Sammilan Parishad (JRSSP) organised the event at the auditorium of Dinajpur Shilpakala Academy.

Rabul Awal Khoka, President of Dinajpur unit JRSSP chaired the discus-

sion. The speakers included Mirza Anwarul Islam Tanu President of Dinajpur unit Sammilito Sangskritik Joka Kazi Borhan, principal of Dinajpur Natya Samity and Professor Monotosh Dey, Nurul Matin Saikat, Secretary General of Dinajpur unit JRSSParishad, delivered the welcome speech.

Later, artistes of different cultural organisations performed Tagore songs, dances and recitation.

The programme wrapped up with a play and dance.



AKSG observes Tagore death anniversary

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

A leading cultural organisation of Bogra, Amra Kojan Shilpi Goshti (AKSG) observed the 73th death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at its temporary office of Paturo School Premise in Bogra town on Wednesday evening. The organisation arranged a cultural programme titled "Majhe Majhe Tobo Dekha Pai" to mark the occasion.

Artists of the organisation took part in poetry recitation and dance on the songs of the bard.

Before the cultural ceremony, a short discussion was held on the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore. The speakers were prof. Hasina Akhtar, Prof. Mahfuza Begum, Salma Akhtar, secretary of Bogra Nazrul Parishad MA Majid Mia and secretary of AKSG Abdul Mobin Zinnah.

Finally, national award-winning dancer Rubaiyat Mehjabin Anika presented a dance. Hundreds of spectators enjoyed the cultural programme, which was directed and presided over by the president of the organization Abdus Samad Polish and conducted by Mahabub Hasan Shohag.



Salma Hayek, Samuel L. Jackson and Penelope Cruz are among the very few actors representing ethnic diversity in Hollywood.

Hollywood films 'do not reflect diversity' in US

Hollywood movies are under-representing non-white ethnic groups in the US, a new study says.

Hispanic actors played only 4.9% of speaking parts in 2013 blockbusters, despite making up more than 16% of the population. Black actors were cast in 14.1% of roles and 17% of films had no black speaking characters.

The University of Southern California report studied almost 4,000 characters in the 100 top-grossing films of 2013.

Although 2014 saw Steve McQueen become the first black director to win an Oscar for his film "12 Years a Slave", the study found that there were only 1.1% more black characters on the big screen than in 2007.

It added that if a film had a black director, more black actors were likely to be involved. "Adding diversity to the director's chair may influence what we see on screen," the report said.

It said there had been no "meaningful change" - which it set at 5% - in the frequency with which any racial or ethnic group had appeared in popular films in the seven years from 2007-2013.

Hispanics were "clearly the most underserved" racial or ethnic group, the report said.

Although they were cast in only a small percentage of parts, Hispanics bought a quarter of all movie tickets in the US, and command about \$1 trillion in spending power.

Despite the changing demographics of the US population, "films still portray a homogenised picture of the world," the report said. "In fact, nearly half of children under age five in the US are not white," it continued, "which means that both the current and future audience for films is far more diverse than what is shown on screen."

The report also found that Hispanic women were shown in "sexualized" portrayals more than any other ethnic group.

The report suggested that this "illustrates how existing cultural stereotypes may still govern how characters from different backgrounds are shown on screen."

Source: BBC

Musical and recital evening at Bengal Shilpalaya

A CORRESPONDENT

Bengal Foundation has arranged special programme "Morome Baje" on August 9 at 6:30pm at Bengal Shilpalaya in Dhanmondi. Aditi Mohsin and Luva Nahid Chowdhury will pay tribute to Tagore through their musical renditions, while Bhashwar Bondyopadhyay will recite poetry at the programme.



IT'S TRUE!

Canadian rock singer Bryan Adams works as a photographer as well as musician; aside from being published in British Vogue, L'Espresso, Harper's Bazaar and Esquire, among others, he has also shot advertising campaigns for Guess Jeans, Sand, Converse, Montblanc and John Richmond. He has won Lead Awards twice in Germany for his fashion work. Adams has also worked with many of his musical peers, including Lana Del Rey, The Who, Sting, Shania Twain, Mick Jagger, Ray Charles, Tina Turner, Rod Stewart, Robert Plant, Celine Dion, Billy Idol, Moby, Lindsay Lohan, Amy Winehouse and Lenny Kravitz.

