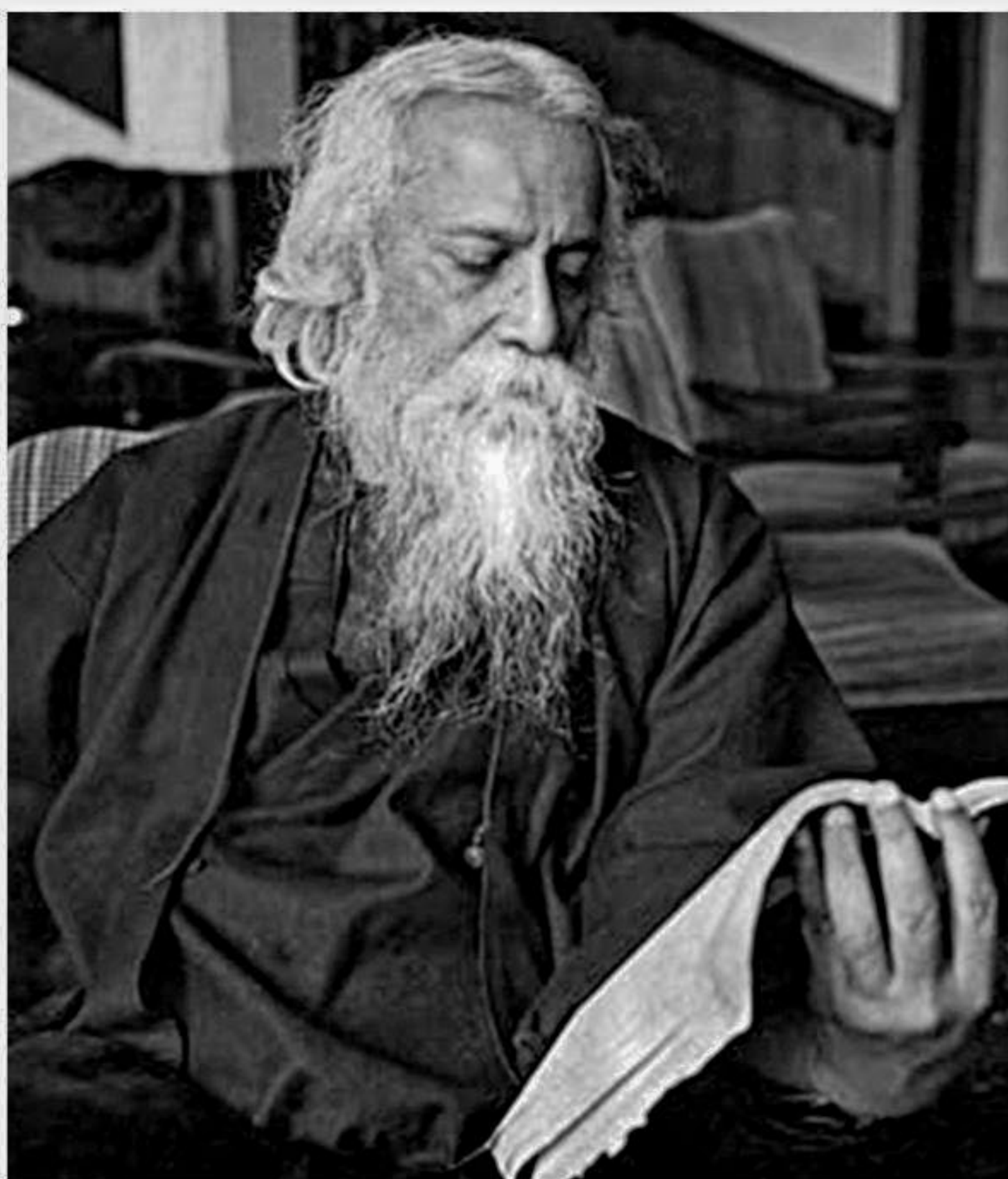


75TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)

The multi-faceted influences in Tagore's work

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK



When Tagore came to Rajshahi and Kushtia (1890) to take charge of his family estate, it seemed miles away from the life he was used to. The setting was a sharp contrast to Kolkata. Eventually, he settled down and spent long stretches of time watching the panoramic scenery from his boat on the river Padma. During rainy days, he would watch the lightning dart across the dark clouds and listen to the thunder echoing over the plains. During the summer, amidst the unruffled peace and tranquility, the truant boy who played the flute on the sultry afternoons, enchanted him. And most importantly, the young 30-year old zamindar became increasingly fascinated by the folk melodies of the bauls, fakirs and bhaisnabas (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 whom 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.

Tagore's compositions of nearly 2,300 songs are seen as falling mainly into four varieties -- Spiritualism, Patriotism, Romance, and Nature. Tagore further composed roughly 60 patriotic songs, mostly during the 1870's, they earned him a great degree of recognition during the Swadeshi movement. Besides his vast collection of songs that have become an integral 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 such as *Baro Asha Korey*, *Aaji Subho Din-e* and *Sakatara Oi Kandiche* (Kannada) and *Anandaloke Mangalaloke* (Mysore).

During this period, many of his works were also reflective of Western influence in his songs. Some remarkable examples include *Katobar Bhebechinu*, *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.

Tagore's legacy of songs underlines his sensitivity to the changing settings and cultures he encountered. 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.

"Tagore knew death up close"

...Sadi Mohammad



ZAIMA ZAHRA

Renowned Tagore artiste Sadi Mohammad is known for his beautiful rendition in our cultural circuit. Today, this prominent artiste talks about Tagore and his songs in conversation with *The Daily Star*.

Tell us about Tagore's favourite season?

Sadi: Monsoon is Tagore's favourite season. Among all the seasons, Borsha was the one that he wrote most songs about. He was not a big fan of Shantiniketan's monsoon as he had already experienced the non-stop monsoon of Bengal. He had the opportunity to see the monsoon of the Padma River, Chalan Beel and Kuthi Bari. Compared to ours, Shantiniketan's monsoon was the complete opposite. Tagore has added the touch of monsoon in most of his song genres- Puja, Prem, Prakriti and Bichitra as well as in his nritya-natya, gitī-natya and beauty. This reflects the love and affection he had for monsoon and this would not have happened if he had not spent a decade in the now-Bangladeshi region.

Can you elaborate the thought and portrayal of death in Tagore's works?

Sadi: Tagore has experienced the death of many of his loved ones during his lifetime. His nephew Dinendranath Tagore, the Swaralipi writer, who he had named "Gaaner Kandari", was one of them. Later, he saw the death of two of his daughters and his son. Tagore wrote a lot of songs and poems reflecting death. He believed someone's death cannot change the rules of the world. Mother Nature will keep going by its rules, no matter who lives or dies. Out of this realisation, after his son's death, he wrote "Aj Jochna Ratey Sobai Gecche Bon-e". Then he wrote "Morite Chahina Ami Shundro Bhubane", "Keno Ei Duar Tuku Par Hotey Shongshoi, Joy Ojanar Joy" and "Kheya". These reflect his concern about the afterlife as well as the beauty of life. Even Sanchita's first poem was about Radha comparing death with lord Krishna. To him, the thought of death is about strength. For me, Tagore knew death up close.

How can Tagore help us to bring peace in our society?

Sadi: Tagore's songs can definitely help bring peace and happiness. His songs are about life, death, love and spirituality. These are the core elements of life that can help us to appreciate it even more. Being an ambassador of Tagore's songs, I have always cherished my responsibility to spread their essence.

Bridging gaps with Tagore

In conversation with Lily Islam

ROBINA RASHID BHUIYAN

"O death you are like Shyam (Krishna) to me...you are the giver of immortality, lead us from death to immortality."

Tagore has lived on through the renditions of musicians and reciters through the ages, marking death as the continuation of the legacy he had left behind. This would not be without the efforts of those who revere him, as they bear the responsibility of teaching and passing on the heritage of the bard's works. For Tagore exponent Lily Islam, learning Tagore also opens up a wealth of opportunities for young artistes to establish a footing in the competitive industry.

This brought about Uttarayan, a musical organisation founded by Lily Islam, where students gather to learn music, and display their talents through events and other performances. "For many reasons, it is hard for new artistes to carve a place for themselves within the realm of well known performers, which is why I have founded this platform. Most of the people involved are my students, and apart from a couple of artistes, the rest are yet to emerge and are virtually unknown," explained Lily Islam. "I try and create opportunities through television and other programmes, so that they can prove to viewers and judges that they are good performers," she added.

As an ode to the eminent bard, the artiste hosts an annual event at Uttarayan, portraying the endless facets of Tagore's compositions. "Every year, I play upon a particular theme that is recurrent throughout his works," described the artiste. "By organising the event



based on a particular mood found in Tagore's compositions, I ensure that people keep coming back to a different show each year. Within these events I organise solo performances for the better performers, and try to bring them recognition. As a result of this endeavour, they have been invited to perform in prestigious platforms such as Shilpakala, and many others."

These events, however, do much more than celebrate Tagore; Lily Islam establishes a close liaison with Tagore exponents from Bangladesh and West Bengal, India, by inviting artistes from Kolkata. "During the rehearsal, artistes from both countries have a chance to mingle and get to know each other, and forge beneficial relationships," explained the artiste. This practice is in keeping with

Tagore's philosophy, as unity and communal love are both strongly stressed upon throughout his works.

The importance of the exchange of human experiences is one of the many lessons the Lily Islam has learned from her years in Santiniketan. "During the Barsha Utshob, we would spend the whole monsoon season in celebration and special reverence, starting with Brikhorupon (tree-planting ceremonies) on 22nd of Srabon, followed by Holokorshon (cultivation) the next day. Every single department from schools to universities got involved. During the Holokorshon Festivals, the neighbouring Shantal tribes also come together and participate with us. And this is where I have learned to find joy in learning from one another."

Maasranga's day long programmes on Tagore

A CORRESPONDENT

On August 6, Maasranga Television is hosting a series of special programmes commemorating Rabindranath Tagore's death anniversary. Beginning with director Nurul Alam Atik's TV play, "Ekti Khudro Puraton Golpo" which will air at 10am, it will be followed up by a

programme on Tagore's song and poetry compositions, produced by Nahin Shafique, at 10:30 am. At 9pm, a TV play titled "Shomapti," directed by Sraboni Ferdousi, will be telecast. The play's cast members include Shojol and Sabila Nur, among others. This will be followed by "Gaaner Pechone Rabindranath" at 11pm, a music

programme produced by Swikriti Prasad Barua, featuring Audity Mohsin, Mohiuzzaman Chowdhury and Munira Yusuf Memi as guests. At midnight, the channel will conclude with a single episode TV play titled "Dorpooron," directed by Shubhro Ahmed with Bidya Sinha Mim, Niloy and others as cast members.

