

REMEMBRANCE

SHAHID QADRI SALUTE TO ONLY YOU



APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTOS: INTERNET

This week, we have lost one of our finest -- a person whose poems started a new revolution in terms of urban poetry. His resolute verses gave poetry lovers a new admiration for love and romance. While urban poetry was mostly confined to city life, he revealed himself as a romantic- writing about love and affection—infused with patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Only with four published books, his contribution to Bangla poetry will forever be remembered. Though he was living on a hiatus in New York, Shahid Qadri once said that writers and artists never forget their roots, no matter where they are. After years of fighting with kidney disease, Shahid Qadri died on August 28, 2016.

In 1942 Shahid Qadri was born in Kolkata. His childhood followed a typical Eng-Bong lifestyle, enjoying cowboy movies and having ice creams on weekends. As a child, Qadri witnessed the Hindu- Muslim Riot that occurred during the partition of India. His experience later made him write verses such as *Ekta Meye Khopay Tar Komol Lal Golap, Churite Bedha Kolkatar Shanano Footpath*. In 1952, Qadri, with his mother, came to settle down in Dhaka.

Around 1950, Dhaka started to turn its way around from the quiet city it was. During that time significant number of young writers and poets began to rise—writing about city dilemmas. Shahid Qadri quickly became one of the significant figures in that group. When he was only 14 year old, his work got first published in *Kabita*, a literary journal edited by Buddhadeb Bosu, a major poet of the 30's.

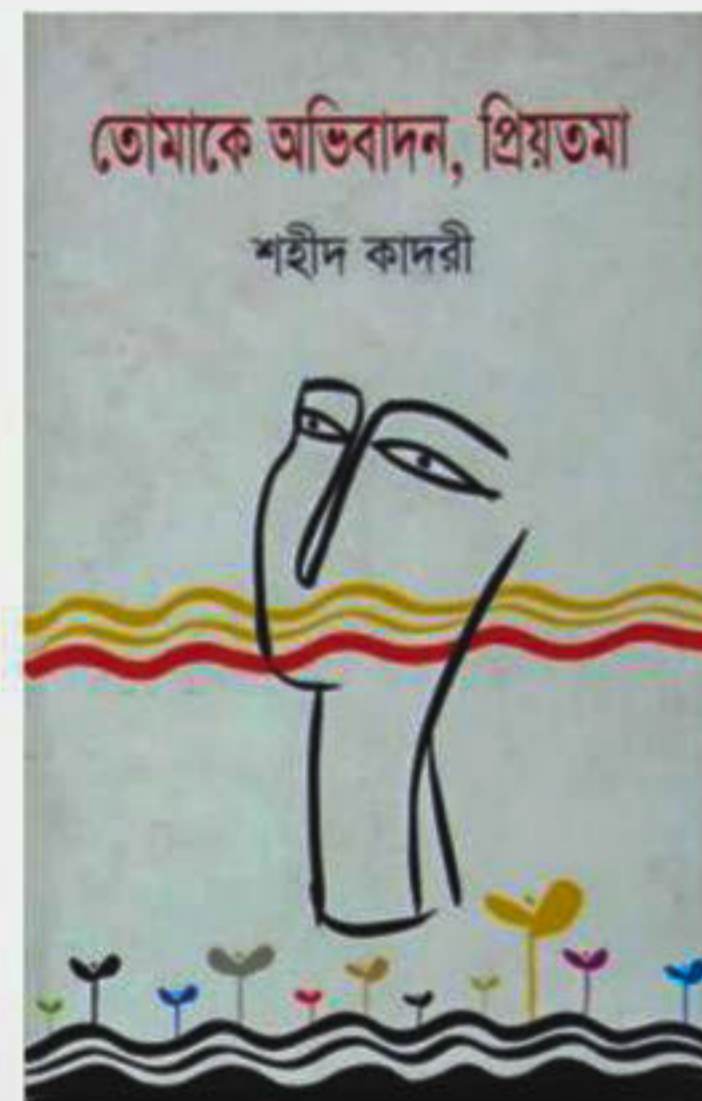
His young bohemian look along with his urban-centric creations helped him become an iconic poet. Qadri's poems used to be very progressive and he would use very modern and expressive language, something that was, a rare feat in our poetry during that time, he believed. In 1967 Qadri published his first book titled *Uttaradhikar*. After its success, Qadri wrote his famous book *Tomake Abhibhadon Priyotoma*, which is his most famous and considered to be his best work. His other books include *Kothayo Kono Kronon Nai* and *Amar Chombongullo Pouchhaya Deo*.

Qadri was known for his *addabaji*. It was him along with Samsur Rahman who popularised the famous rendezvous of writers and poets in Beauty Boarding. Both of them were regulars in the boarding and aspiring writers from all over used to come there just to chat with these two icons. Famous poets and writers like Belal Chowdhury, Akhtaruzzaman Ilias, Rafiq Azad used to join them in those sessions. For his poetry, he was awarded the Bangla Academy Award in 1973 and Ekushe Padak in 2011.

After his third book, Shahid Qadri left for United Kingdom, leaving his poetry and loving city behind. Qadri was not quite thrilled about leaving though. It is said that he was hurt by some of his loved ones which led to his somewhat hiatus. For years he did not pick up the pen, until recently, just before his death he started writing poems for the literary magazine *Kali O Kolom*.

In an interview when he was asked what he regrets the most Qadri said, "It was leaving Bangladesh in 1978. No one should leave their motherland, especially artists. Yes, there are exceptions but we have to start from scratch. We are constantly reminded of our country and what we see here comes nowhere close to our imagination."

Poets like Shahid Qadri are rare. His contribution to Bengali literature will forever be remembered. ■

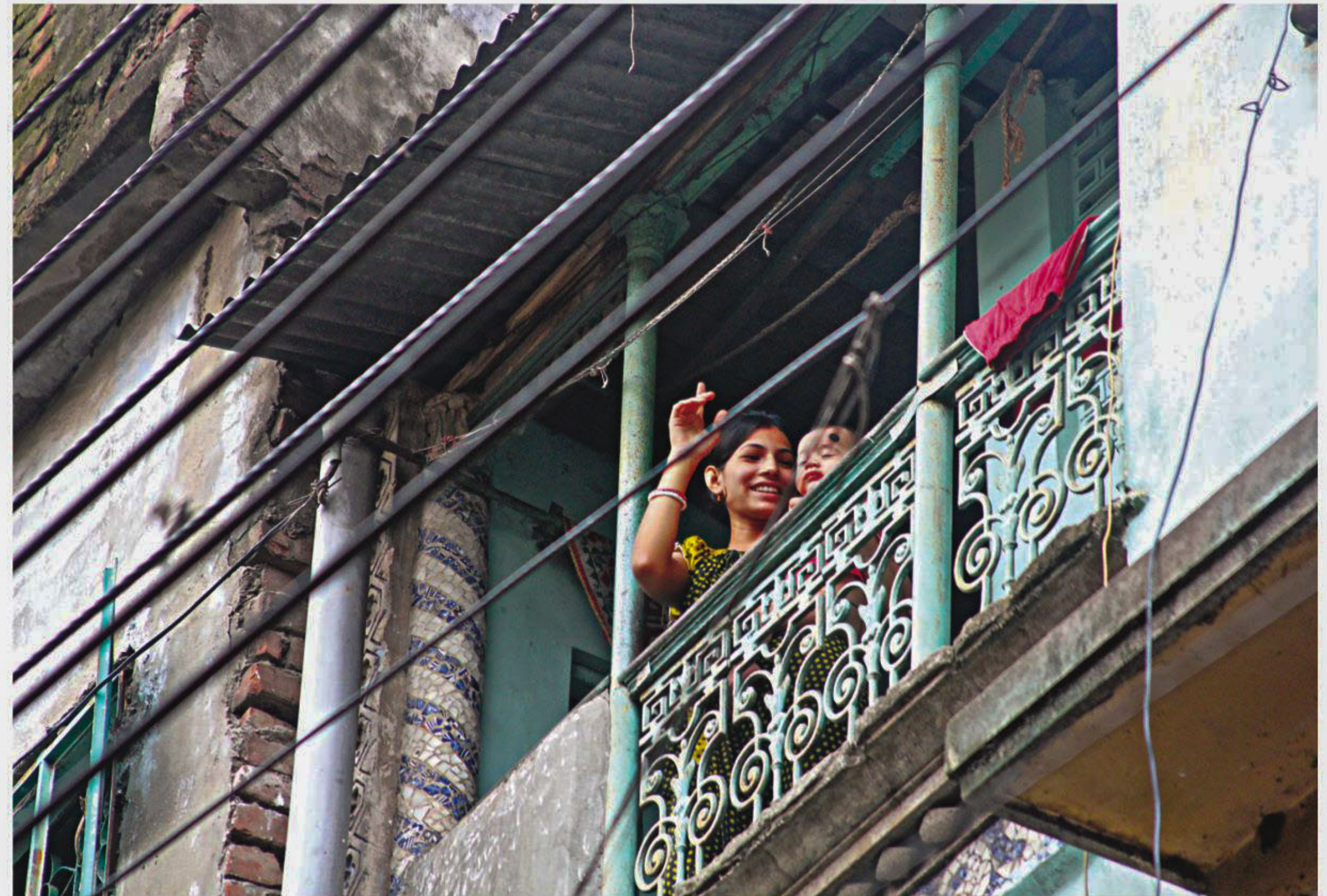


HERITAGE

During the last decade, Dhaka has experienced enormous changes in terms of architecture, lifestyle, and also the job market. Some of the professions that we used to see twenty years back, are now in the verge of extinction, and have been taken over by modern careers. One of the areas which still holds on to the heritage of the past is none other than Shankhari Bazar.

According to James Wise, a famous civil servant, Shankharis first came into then East Bengal during Ballal Sen's regime. They were first allocated in Bikrampur. In the 17th century, after the Mughal period started the Shankharis came to Dhaka. Astonished by their craftsmanship, the Mughals promised these artisans an entire area dedicated for shankha. It is the same area that we now know as Shankhari Bazar. Mughals had to pay sky-high prices for purchasing lands in this area, as it was one of the most expensive localities in Dhaka. Till 1793 these artisans did not have to pay taxes for their buildings. The place was partly demolished by the Pakistani army during the liberation war, but some of the architectures are still there.

If one looks at some of the remaining buildings from the Mughal period, one can notice that most of the buildings look



THE SHANKHA STORY

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PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

exactly the same. Most of the structures are two storey buildings surrounded by many other old, rickety buildings. "The Shankharis were given very little space, and they had to manage with whatever was given to them," says Taimur Islam, heritage conservationist of Urban Study Group. "Most of these houses are not wide and look more like a cramped alleyway. The corridors are 10 to 20 feet long."

Most of the artisans, who lived during that period, were followers of Krishna and Vishnu. They celebrated their main religious festival on the Bangla month of Bhadra. During this time they would take a five day holiday, and prayed to the sage Agastya. They believed that Agastya, who once concurred a demon named Shankha Ashur, used the same tools that the artisans use to cut Shankha. "Artisans who used to live in a different area were socially boycotted. This is one of the reasons why Shankharis have been living here for such a long time," says Taimur.

Like other historical sites, Shankhari Bazar had its fair share of problems. The artisans went through severe torture under the reign of Jamindar Abdur Razzak and Raja Ram Ray, son of Raja Raj Ballabh. It is said that when these zamindars were in power, they used to kidnap women from



the Shankhari area. According to James Wise's articles, Shankhari Bazar used to be very unhygienic for which epidemic diseases were common in the area.

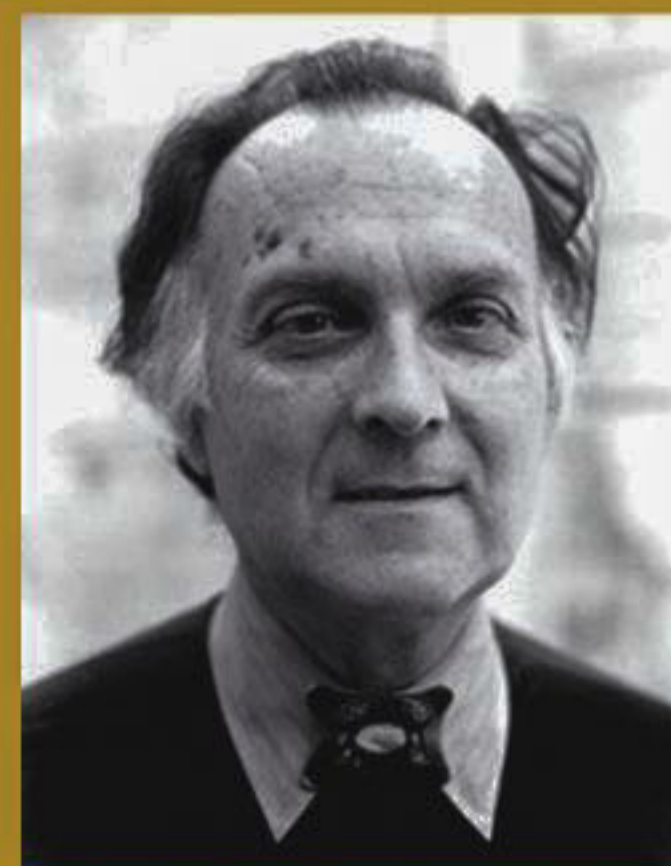
Other than being the ultimate hub of Shankhas, Shankhari Bazar is also used for celebrating the Holy Festival. People from all over the city come to this place to celebrate the festival of colours. The area turns into a vibrant locality with loud music and dancing.

This is one of the few areas in our country which is struggling to keep its roots alive. In this age of modernisation, places like Shankhari Bazar can remind us of our roots which are as glorious as the Shankha itself. ■

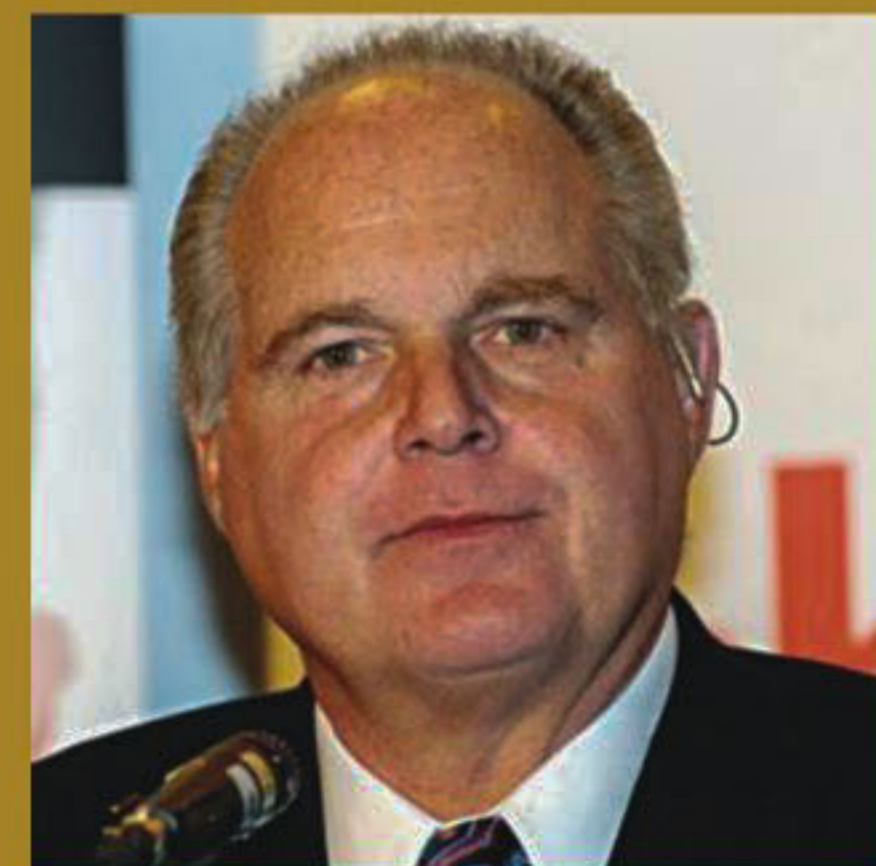


PEARLS OF WISDOM

"IF THE GOVERNMENT IS GOING TO MANDATE LEVELS AND PUNISH SCHOOLS FOR FAILING, THEY SHOULD SEND THAT MONEY TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM."
ROBERT DUNCAN
American poet



"THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM DOESN'T GET EVERYBODY. EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS REBELS."
RUSH LIMBAUGH
American entertainer, radio talk show host, writer, and conservative political commentator



"I BELIEVE THERE OUGHT TO BE SCHOOL CHOICE, SO THAT PARENTS CAN CHOOSE WITHIN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM."
WILLIAM H. GRAY
American politician

