

ART

CHARCOAL'S VISUAL RETREAT

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTOS: COURTESY

We all know that engineering and architecture students pull all-nighters very often, struggling under a regular wave of stress of their assignments, quizzes and submissions. Amidst this overwhelming academic pressure, for many of them, art has always been a go-to stress relief activity.

To experience the thrill of art together, the journey of Charcoal, an art community of some students of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) was launched last year.

Charcoal started its journey with a simple intention - to create a platform where would-be engineers and architects can come together with their artistic ability, and further explore their creativity in an encouraging environment. Recently, they organised their second exhibition in BUET auditorium complex, where around 40 young artists displayed their paintings. "Our exhibition which was opened by Architect Mubasshar Hussein, lasted for only two days, but we were carried away by the flood of visitors in this exhibition," says Tanvir Imtiaz Limon, President of Charcoal. "A total of 92 artworks of various mediums - oil, acrylic, pencil sketches - were exhibited and we also had live portrait sessions going on during the exhibition."

While many would just quietly walk around and enjoy this wonderful visual feast, a large number of people were found taking shots of their feet with an untitled painting, depicting a pair of feet, that was kept on the floor, covered with glass. "That painting probably had the most number of visitors, in fact some visitors crouched down really low to

take the perfect feet shot, and somehow, in the process, the glass cover broke," Tanvir laughs.

"Organising this event was not an easy feat for us given that we had glitches and limitations. We are lucky to have Dr Md Sabbir Mostafa Khan as our moderator. Finding the sponsor was particularly difficult, but, considering the response that we got this time, we are planning to carry on this artistic journey."

Despite ungodly study hours and unimaginable academic hours, these young students have been successful in creating an art space that gives wings to their passion for art. Once again, this endeavour proves that our students are filled with potential that is yet to be untapped.



STRANGE HISTORY

CATS COULD HAVE SAVED EUROPE

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Who doesn't adore fluffy kittens when they roll over onto your feet, rubbing their feathery furs to show their love for you? Cats, for their cuteness and intelligence, are considered some of the most adorable pets in the world. However, in 12th century Europe, the continent's entire cat population was almost slaughtered to extinction due to a weird papal regulation. However, the Europeans also had to pay a heavy price for mercilessly killing millions of cats. Pope Gregory IX (1145-1241 CE) once

decreed that black cats are the incarnation of Satan. Since black cats can be born of any cats, that decree was taken as the death warrant for all cats in Europe. Soldiers were deployed in the city streets to capture and exterminate cats to free the European cities from evil spirits. However, this killing spree did not bring fortune for the Europeans. The sudden decline of cat population allowed the rats running freely all over the towns. The rat population boomed and it brought the bubonic plague, one of the most devastating diseases in human history that killed 100 million people all over the world. The epidemic, termed as the Black Death, first started in the Middle East and Asia Minor. Before hitting Europe, the epidemic also claimed thousands of lives in these parts of the world. This disease, the bubonic plague is actually spread by the fleas on rats. Consequently, due to the sudden fall of cat population, the epidemic soon hit Europe and lasted long enough to kill almost half its population. Upon realising the importance of cats, the remaining animals were spared- a decision that saved the Europeans from being obliterated completely.



PHOTO: INTERNET

HERITAGE

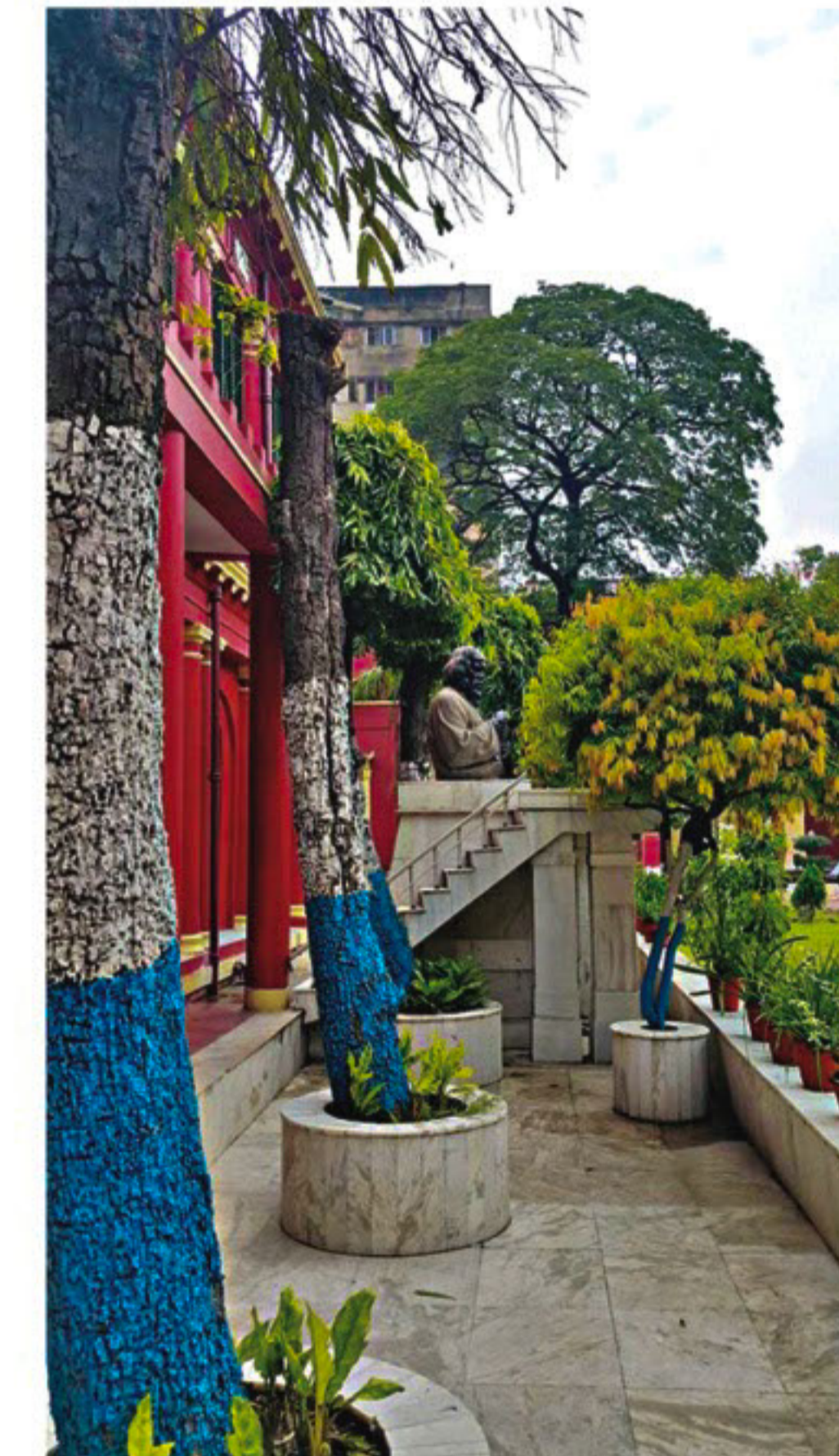


A GLIMPSE OF THE TAGORES

TEXT AND PHOTOS: APURBA JAHANGIR

In the year 1784, a wealthy Bangali zamindar built a mansion in an area of North Kolkata. His name was Nilmoni Tagore who after a family feud decided to move out and build his own home. The mansion was located in an area called Jorasanko and the land for it was a gift from another zamindar named Baishnab Das Sett. This mansion started the Jorasanko part of the famous Tagore family and was named Jorasanko Thakurbari. Very soon after establishment, it became one of the Landmarks of the Bengali renaissance. More than two hundred years have passed, but within the chaos of Kolkata, Thakurbari still stands with its head held high—telling the tales of the Tagore family.

The Jorasanko Thakurbari now acts as the Rabindra Bharati Museum located at Girish Park on Chittaranjan Avenue, Kolkata. Though Thakurbari had its own legacy, the place is best known for being the birthplace of Rabindranath Tagore. The museum has been restored to reflect the way it looked when the Tagore family lived there—painted in red with green wooden windows. Before moving to its own campus, this mansion also served as the main building of Rabindra Bharati University.



The tales of Jorasanko Thakurbari starts from Rabindranath's grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore. Though Nilmoni Tagore took the initiative of the Jorasanko part of the family, it was Dwarkanath who established the unorthodox legacy of the Tagores. In many texts it is him who is considered the founder of the Jorasanko Tagore family. Other than being one of the first Indian industrialists and a merciless zamindar; Dwarkanath was also the first secretary of Brahma Sabha (A monotheistic, reformist and renaissance movement of Hindu religion led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy). His contribution to Bengal's revival movement took the Tagore family to its peak. After Dwarkanath's death, the responsibility of Jorasanko, with other estates of the family, was passed on to his son Debendranath Tagore. Other than being a zamindar, Debendranath's life circled around astrology and Brahma philosophy.

May 7, 1861; Jorasanko witnessed the

birth of our very own Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindra Bharati Museum is decorated the same way it was when *Kobi Guru* was born there. What the visitors see now are the same decorations, the same balconies and the same rooms that Rabi Thakur saw and walked on. Walking down the corridors, you can still feel his presence lurking around.

It was in this house, where at the age of 16, Rabindranath under the name of Bhanusimha Thakur wrote "Gahana Kusumakunja-majhe". This was one of his first (at the age of 8 he wrote 'Jol Pore Pata Nore') endeavour into poetry which followed a collection of Vaishnava lyrics composed in Brajabuli. These lyrics were published in a book named "Bhanimha Thakurer Padabali" on July 1, 1984; and were dedicated to Tagore's sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi.

The Rabindra Bharati Museum has a collection of 2071 books, 770 journals, 16 paintings, 3297 photographs, 27 crafts and sculptures, 208 personal belongings and 53 pieces of furniture. From Rabindranath's bedroom to the family's living room, everything is the way it was when the Tagore lived there. The robe collection are still hung in Rabindranath's bedroom by his arm chair, giving a detailed look into the maestro's life. There are other rooms exhibiting his travels in various countries including China, America, the United Kingdom etc. The

museum also exhibits the works of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Jyotirindranath, Abanindranath and Dinendranath Tagore. The entrance showcases the rare Humber 16-60 Snipe of 1933, the vehicle used by the distinguished family.

Next to Rabindranath's bedrooms is the room where he breathed his last. Interestingly enough both the rooms- the one he was born and the one where he died- are side by side. In his last days, it is said that Tagore may have been suffering from prostate cancer which led to a bacterial infection in the kidney. Famous doctor Bidhan Chandra Roy suggested surgery but Rabindranath hesitated. At one time his condition became very critical and there was no other way but surgery. The poet was brought back from Shantiniketan to Jorasanko and a sterilised OT was created outside his balcony for the procedure. He died in 1941 at the age of 80.

Rabindranath Tagore is considered as an eternal being. After 155 years, he still lives with us through his work. One cannot imagine the essence of Bengal without him. He lives among us not just as one of the forefathers of modern Bengali literature but as a friend—one who understands us more than anyone else. Visiting this museum is as personal in that aspect - it's just like visiting a friend's home. ■