

If Tagore were here to see...



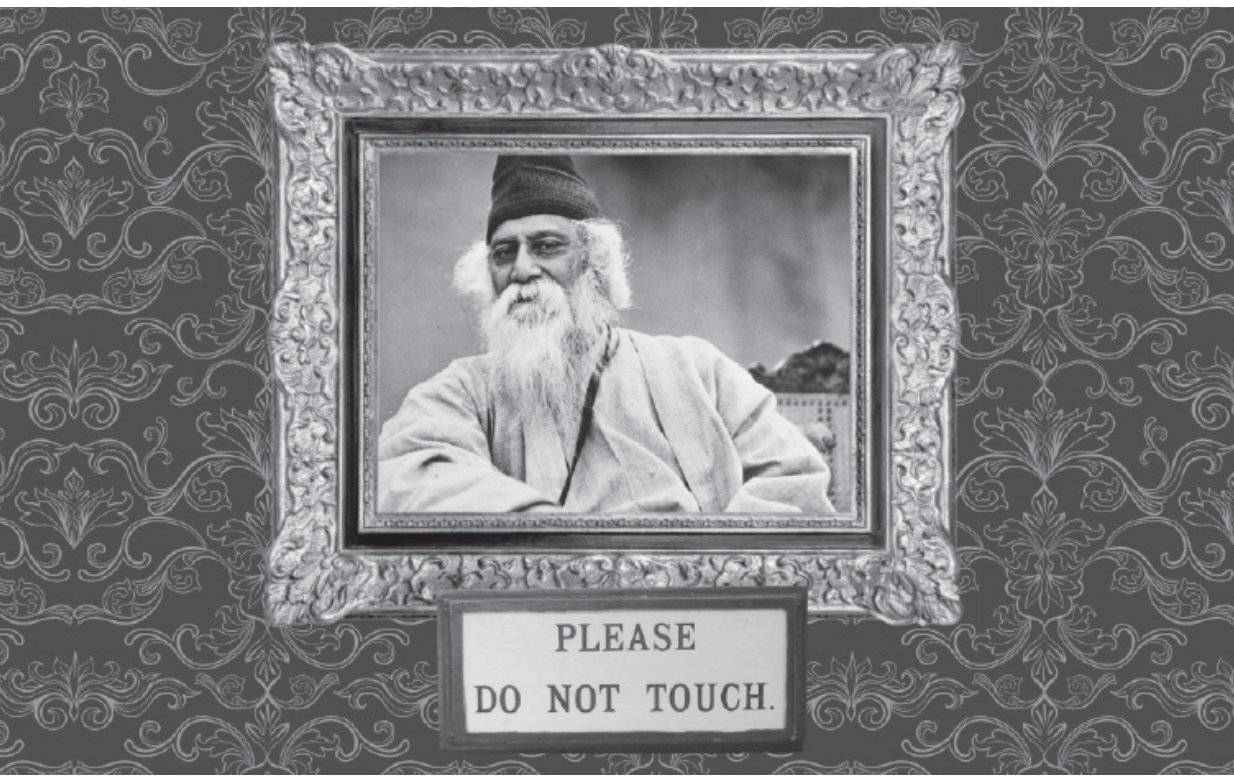
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RIFAT MUNIM

EVERY time there is a furore over an issue that relates to Rabindranath Tagore, I try to imagine: What would the biggest writer of the Bangla language think if he were here to see how he is caught up in debates that have more to do with the animosities between opposing cultural forces than his writing or music? Let's imagine a play in which Tagore has come back to the real world as a spirit, to observe how his writing is being received and studied in the 21st century. A rekindling of interest in his work, accompanied by quality translation and research, is likely to reassure him that his creations are still relevant and perhaps will always be. But how would he react to the situation here in Bangladesh? Would he be outraged at how often he is embroiled in mud-slinging, through which some people advance their own political agendas?

The latest occasion with a flurry of incidents was stirred up by Ashraful Alom Saeed. Also known as Hero Alom, he rendered an iconic Tagore song and uploaded it on YouTube, which set off a social media warfare, leading the Detective Branch of police to pick him up for interrogation on July 27 on the grounds that we are still struggling to understand. Not that police really need strong grounds to detain and interrogate singers or actors any more. The memories of how film director Anonno Mamun and actor Shaheen Mridha, Baul singer Rita Dewan, and actor Pori Moni were arrested are still fresh in our minds. They were targeted for reasons we could at least explain, no matter how flimsy those reasons were. But why target Hero Alom?

Alom's detention was the kind of moral policing that many thought would never occur in Bangladesh. We'd encountered another kind of moral policing during the Ekushey Book Fair in 2019 and 2020, when police teams were deployed to monitor stalls and check if any book was hurting religious sentiments. It was Hefazat-e-Islam – a Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organisation whose influence over policies is becoming stronger by the day – that put pressure on the government to monitor books at the fair. Writers, publishers and activists vehemently opposed the decision to send police teams to the fair, calling such acts of policing a threat to our fundamental right to freedom of expression and thought.



VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

If the book fair's moral policing was a threat to freedom of thought, how are we supposed to look at Alom's interrogation, during which he was asked demeaning questions about his skin colour and look? Worse still, he was released after he signed a bond declaring that he wouldn't render songs composed by Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam.

The religious impetus for moral policing is alarming, but equally alarming is the cultural impetus behind Alom's interrogation, which was provided by a social media explosion engineered by Tagore brigades. The Facebook ruckus has put Alom at the receiving end of a campaign through which he was, and still is, trolled mercilessly. The trolls have not gone unchallenged though. The counter-currents challenging the trolls include literary and cultural activists, journalists, and even Tagore fans, but they also include those from the anti-Tagore brigades who are known for their communally fuelled attacks on Tagore.

This is not the first time a singer has been brutally berated due to their rendition of Tagore songs. Rock singer Maqsood rendered a Tagore song more than two decades back. If my memory is serving me right, I believe by then he'd left the

popular band Feedback and formed his own band, Dhaka, with which he embarked on a new journey of blending rock elements with Baul music. His performance, which was accompanied by electric guitars and drums, angered Tagore aficionados so much that the entertainment pages of many Bangla newspapers carried angry responses for weeks. The

message was clear: No deviation from the original, in terms of composition, would be tolerated.

By the time Sahana Bajpaie released her debut album of Tagore songs in 2007, the scope for using compatible modern instruments broadened and her album was given a warm reception. In 2010, alternative rock band Shironamhin released its fourth album, which consisted entirely of Tagore songs. Shironamhin's renditions deviated from the original on many counts but were not met with the same angry responses that Maqsood's performance had been. Arnob's renditions of several Tagore songs were also warmly received.

Evidently, between Maqsood and Alom, the cultural climate has gone through a transition, becoming in the process more tolerant and welcoming towards experimentation with Tagore songs. What, then, caused this ruckus over Hero Alom? Well, one obvious reason is that while Maqsood, Sahana, Arnob and Tanzir Tuhin of Shironamhin are fabulous singers, Alom is not. When I say this, I am not judging him by my own standards. Singers from humble socioeconomic backgrounds, or singers popular among people from those backgrounds, can surely sing and in many instances, they do a

better job. When they get the right opportunity, they make it big, like Momtaz, who was discovered by Hanif Sanket. There also are many local, folk and Baul singers who attach no importance to national platforms and are happy being where they are. They follow musical conventions, many of which are way richer than the modern or postmodern trends

that we urban-educated people find sophisticated and palatable.

But Alom surely cannot sing. He is a terrible singer and he himself has no confusion about it. After Alom was released, he expressed his position vis-à-vis the whole situation in a Facebook post. In my rough translation, the relevant parts of his post appear like this:

"If you don't like my songs, don't listen to them. If you don't like my acting, don't watch my videos. But please don't conspire against me... I come from a poor family living in a small village, but I have confidence in

myself. I am a hero to myself and an inspiration to hundreds of thousands of underprivileged people.

"I am not educated, I have no quality to speak of, I'm not a singer, I'm not an actor – are all these my crimes? I try my best and I will keep trying for my audience."

Nothing can explain the fundamental principles of freedom of expression better than Alom's emotionally charged Facebook post. By the same token, every Tagore fan has a right to express their opinion on Alom's performance. But if those responses are filled with hatred and if they assume a tone that goads the police on to harass him, then it starts smacking of a form of bigotry that we associate either with jingoism or religious fundamentalism. As a Tagore fan myself, I am certain that this is not what Tagore deserves. Tagore is our biggest writer not because of the size of his oeuvre; rather, he attained this position by virtue of his powerful writing and the sheer range of his thoughts, which do not have any space for bigotry. To put Tagore on an ideal pedestal, seeking to imbue his work with a sanctity that does not warrant any criticism of his work, can never open up new doors for illuminating studies of his work. Such an approach only strengthens the anti-Tagore brigades who seem ever poised to jump in with both feet and start levelling unfounded accusations at Tagore.

Idealising Tagore also creates a lot of confusion, encouraging wrong interpretations of Tagore's work, feeding the claim that Tagore's writing celebrates the middle-class sensibilities that the ruling clique uses to govern the masses. Nothing can be more prejudiced than this interpretation. If it applies to Tagore, it also applies, more effectively, to the songs written by Nazrul, DL Roy, Atul Prasad, and Rajanikant Sen.

There is no denying the power of Nazrul's poems and songs. He has left numerous critics enamoured of his poetry and songs, just like Tagore has. Among Nazrul's critics are not only Serajul Islam Chowdhury and Jatín Sarker – both of them Marxists

– but also modern scholars like Abdul Mannan Syed and Rafiqul Islam. But why does BNP, one of Bangladesh's main political parties, find an avatar in Nazrul? BNP never issues a press release on Tagore's birth or death anniversary but it almost regularly, if not religiously, organises events to celebrate Nazrul's birth anniversary. Nazrul is also loved by activists of Jamaat-e-Islami, Hefazat and Khelafat Majlis, among other Islamist parties and organisations, just like Tagore is loved and appropriated by many Hindutva activists in West Bengal, India. Are we to believe that BNP – the party that holds on to Nazrul – is devoid of people with middle-class sensibilities? Are we to believe that the BNP's ruling clique does not use middle-class ethos to govern the masses? In BNP's case, religion is the only trump card, one might quip. If middle-class sensibilities are replaced by religion, what we get is a bleaker picture, especially since Nazrul's writing is absolutely non-communal in spirit.

It is not easy to understand why one writer is appropriated by a political party or a section of a class but when they are, it does not mean a one-to-one correspondence between that party or class and the writer in question.

Getting back to the initial thread of Tagore's fictional appearance in a play, when faced with the circus around Hero Alom rendering one of his songs, is it possible that Tagore would say: Both the brigades across the literary spectrum should go to hell? Is it possible that he'd look at the whole thing from an entirely fresh angle, that he'd feel happy to see his songs cross the class divide and reach Alom? Well, it all depends on the playwright's vision and understanding of Tagore.

As I understand it, Tagore as a writer is so great that he does not require a brigade to protect the worth of his writing. Also, to stand up for Alom's right to render Tagore songs does not stand in contradiction to being a Tagore fan.

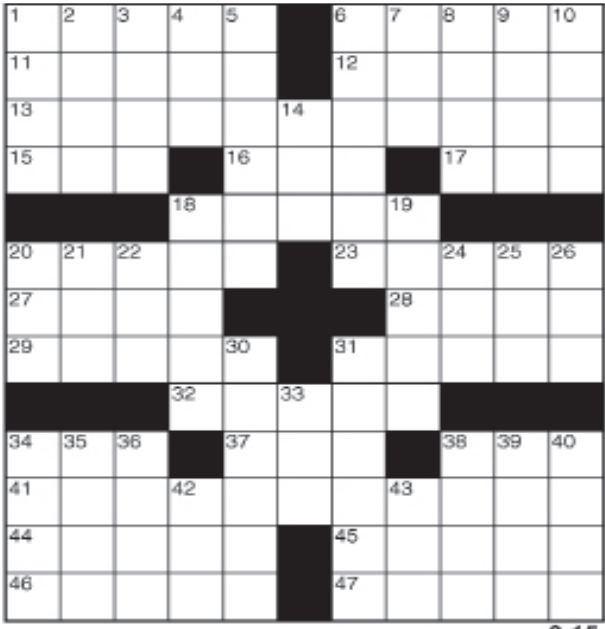
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 From the Arctic
6 Starts the bidding
11 Stand up
12 Scientist
Curie
13 2005
Johnny Cash biopic
15 Shrewd
16 Feel poorly
17 Beanie or beret
18 Deadly snake
20 Kyoto setting
23 Stories
27 Skating jump
28 Goose egg
29 Poet's concern
31 Brewskis
32 Floor squares
34 School org.
37 Musician's job
38 TV spots

41 Cover all bases
44 Quartet doubled
45 Kagan of the Supreme Court
46 Onion layers
47 Casual eatery

DOWN
1 Hound's hands
2 Test type
3 Easter symbol
4 Invite
5 Keep
6 Brunch dish
7 Crony
8 Idle on film
9 Ship of
1492
10 Ooze
14 Femur's upper end
18 Parking
pro
19 Tears
down

20 Traffic snarl
21 Fire-fighting tool
22 Parrot or puppy
24 Spike of film
25 Go astray
26 Sinking signal
30 Civil libertarian's concern
31 Implored
33 Untruth
34 Debate side
35 Nip's partner
36 Debate side
38 Prayer ender
39 Frank Herbert classic
40 Flag feature
42 Number system base
43 – Baba



2-15

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



বাংলাদেশ ফার্মেসী কাউন্সিল

১৪ লিংক রোড, রাহাত টাওয়ার (৫ম তলা), পশ্চিম বাংলামেটর, ঢাকা-১০০০।
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পুনঃদরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

তারিখ: ৩১.০৭.২০২২

“মডেল মেডিসিন শপ স্থাপন ও পরিচালনা প্রশিক্ষণ ম্যানুয়াল” মূল্য ও বঁধাইয়ের নিমিত্তে মূল্যবাকী প্রতিষ্ঠান হতে সীল মোহরকৃত খামে প্রত্যাগতিস্বত্বক পুনঃদরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্রের বিবরণ/শর্তাবলী নিম্নরূপ। অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী সিডিউলে বর্ণিত আছে।

১। মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ
২। সংস্থা/সংস্থা
৩। ক্রয়/সংগ্রহের স্বত্বাধিকারীর নাম
৪। আহবানকৃত কাজের ধরন
৫। বাজেট ও অর্থায়ন উৎস
৬। ক্রয় পদ্ধতি
৭। দরপত্র প্রকাশের তারিখ
৮। দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের সর্বশেষ তারিখ
৯। দরপত্র দাখিলের সর্বশেষ তারিখ ও সময়
১০। দরপত্র উন্মুক্তকরণের তারিখ ও সময়
১১। দরপত্র ডকুমেন্ট/সিডিউল বিক্রয়কারী অফিস

১২। দরপত্রের সাথে যে সকল কাগজপত্র সংযুক্ত করতে হবেঃ
(ক) আবেদনকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের স্থাপনাগত ব্রিড লাইসেন্সের সত্যায়িত কপি (খ) সরকারি/আধা-সরকারি/স্বায়ত্বশাসিত/বহুল অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্ন কোনকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানে সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ কাজের অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি (গ) স্থাপনাগত আয়করের সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি (ঘ) সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ কাজের ভাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি (ঙ) জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি (চ) ব্যাংক সঞ্চয়তার সনদপত্র (ছ) দরপত্রের সাথে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার।
১৩। কাজের বিস্তারিত বিবরণ

পত্রের নাম	পত্রের পরিমাণ	দরপত্রের মূল্য (টাকা) (অফেরতযোগ্য)	দরপত্র জামানত (টাকা) (অফেরতযোগ্য)	কাজের মোদনকাল
“মডেল মেডিসিন শপ স্থাপন ও পরিচালনা প্রশিক্ষণ ম্যানুয়াল”	২৫ হাজার কপি (১১x৮.৫” মাপের ৩২.২৫ ফর্মার ৮০ গ্রাম নাদা অফসেট কাগজে ৪ রঙের মুদ্রণ, পয়েন্টিং, প্রুট। কাজের ৩০০ গ্রাম আর্ট কার্ড কাগজে ৩৬ পেমিশনেশন পয়েন্টিং, প্রুট এবং পুরা ১৩০+৫ (পেইজ ২৬০+১০) ৩৬ বার্ডিজ বঁধাই)	১০০০/- (এক হাজার)	২,৫০,০০০/- (দুই লক্ষ পঞ্চাশ হাজার)	কার্যসেধ প্রতিটি ৩০ (ত্রিশ) দিনের মধ্যে

১৪।	দরপত্র আহবানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম, পদবী ও ঠিকানা	মুহাম্মদ মাহবুবুল হক সচিব, বাংলাদেশ ফার্মেসী কাউন্সিল ১৪ লিংক রোড, রাহাত টাওয়ার (৫ম তলা), পশ্চিম বাংলামেটর, ঢাকা-১০০০ ই-মেইল info@pcb.gov.bd , ফোন: +৮৮-০২-৯৬৩২৭০৩
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১৫। কোন কারণে সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ ব্যক্তিকে কর্তৃপক্ষ দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।
বিশেষ শর্তাবলী:
ক) স্বত্বাধিকারী নিজস্ব ফর্ম/প্রতিষ্ঠানের খাত্তে এক কপি পাশপোর্ট সাইজের সত্যায়িত ছবি সহ আবেদনের মাধ্যমে পুনঃদরপত্র ক্রয় করতে পারবেন। প্রতিষ্ঠানের ক্ষেত্রে স্বত্বাধিকারীর নিজ টেলিফোন/মোবাইল নাম্বার উল্লেখ করতে হবে। অফিসের দরপত্র ক্রয়ের আবেদনের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে।
খ) নির্দিষ্ট সময়ের পর আর কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না।
গ) কার্যসেধ পাবার ০৭ (সাত) কর্ম দিনের মধ্যে চুক্তি সম্পাদনে বাধ্য হলে জামানতকৃত টাকা বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে।
ঘ) দরপত্র উন্মুক্তকরণের পরিমাণ কম/বেশী করার ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করেন।
ঙ) দরপত্রের সাথে সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ কাগজপত্রাদির অনুলিপি গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়নপূর্বক দাখিল করতে হবে।
চ) দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ অনিবার্য কারণবশত সরকার কর্তৃক ছুটি ঘোষিত হলে সেক্ষেত্রে পত্রবর্তী তারিখই দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ হিসাবে গণ্য হবে।
ছ) কার্যসেধ প্রদানের পূর্বে দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিলকৃত কাগজপত্র সম্পর্কে তদন্ত করে সত্যতা যাচাই করা হবে। দাখিলকৃত কাগজপত্রের কোন অখিয়ম পরিলক্ষিত হলে তা বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে।
জ) দরপত্র মূল্য বাবদ ১০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা “বাংলাদেশ ফার্মেসী কাউন্সিল” এর অনুকূলে পে-অর্ডারের মাধ্যমে জমা দিতে হবে।
ঝ) দরপত্র জামানত বাবদ ২,৫০,০০০/- (দুই লক্ষ পঞ্চাশ হাজার) “বাংলাদেশ ফার্মেসী কাউন্সিল” এর অনুকূলে পে-অর্ডারের মাধ্যমে জমা দিতে হবে।
ঞ) ছড়াক মুদ্রণের পূর্বে বাংলাদেশ ফার্মেসী কাউন্সিল থেকে পূর্বানুমোদন (প্রকৃ বিজ্ঞ, ডিজাইন) গ্রহণ করতে হবে।
ট) বিধি মোতাবেক ভাট, আয়কর কর্তনযোগ্য।

(মুহাম্মদ মাহবুবুল হক)
সচিব
বাংলাদেশ ফার্মেসী কাউন্সিল

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