

Sanjida Khatun: Different and defiant



Mofidul Hoque is an author, researcher and publisher, and a trustee of the Liberation War Museum.

MOFIDUL HOQUE

It is not easy to draw a portrait of Sanjida Khatun as she is a person with many identities and a lady with 10 hands, like the *dashabhuj*a of Bangla myth. She is a singer par excellence; her renderings of Tagore songs are those of a maestro; she holds a special place along with Nilima Sen, Kanika Bandyopadhyay, Rajeshwari Dutta, and others. Usually, singers have no claim to scholarship on Tagore's songs, his music, literary works, or philosophy of life. From that perspective, Sanjida Khatun holds a special place among the Tagore scholars and her book *Rabindra Sangiter Bhabasampad* (The Richness of Tagore's Songs) has become a classic in its own right. She embodies the combination of a singer and a scholar, a rare feat that distinguishes her from all others in her respective field.

These two achievements are enough to define one as an accomplished person with a place among successful ones—but Sanjida Khatun has performed other tasks of importance. She was a professor of Bangla literature at government colleges and later joined Dhaka University. She left behind many students whom she had introduced to literature. As an academic, she stands tall among many with her analytical mind and

eloquent way of presentation. In 1978, she earned a PhD from Visva Bharati, the university of Tagore. In the mid-1950s, she completed her MA in Bangla literature at the same university, which was highly exceptional at that time. As an academician, she continued her pursuit of new knowledge and earned a Doctor of Literature degree from Visva Bharati with her research on poetics based on phonetics, pronunciation and transformation—meaning of words in poetry. This highly original work was lauded by scholars when it was published from India.

Sanjida Khatun, the scholar, has penned many other books on

It is through songs and music that Sanjida Khatun observed the world around her. Music nourished her soul and drove her to embrace the challenges of life, both personal and social/national. But more than anything else, Sanjida Khatun was a cultural interlocutor, a defender of Bangalee national identity.

literature, culture and society. Most of these books are based on Tagore's song. It is through songs and music that Sanjida Khatun observed the world around her. Music nourished her soul and drove her to embrace the challenges of life, both personal and social/national. But more than anything else, Sanjida Khatun was a cultural interlocutor, a defender

key organisers of the “*Buddhir Mukti*” or “Freedom of Intellect” movement of 1920s in Dhaka. A friend of Kazi Nazrul Islam, his literary writings have earned a place of its own. He played Esraj and promoted music in the family. From early life, his daughter Sanjida Khatun distinguished herself as a cultural activist and a performer

or activity were allowed. It was a long era of darkness that was shattered in 1961 by people's initiative to observe Tagore's birth centenary by organising public programmes with songs and dance-drama. Tagore centenary was celebrated in other towns like Chittagong, Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi etc. Soon after the organisers in Dhaka felt the urge to keep the cultural activities alive and Chhayanaaut was established with poet Sufia Kamal at the helm and Sanjida Khatun as its motor. Chhayanaut established a musical school to raise new generations of artists with a commitment to uphold the rich tradition of Bangalee culture. Sanjida Khatun dedicated herself to teaching, learning, and inspiring disciples to be skilled singers with commitment to serve the people in times of crisis. Chhayanaut, as a seat of learning and centre of public performance, ushered in a new upsurge in the cultural arena, especially with the early morning celebration of Bangla New Year under the banyan tree at Ramna Park. First held in 1967, this became the symbol of Bangalee people's resistance against Pakistani domination by upholding their cultural identity. In a short time Pahela Baishakh turned to be the largest secular festival of the nation.

Since 1980, with the establishment of Rabindrasangeet Sammilon Parishad she embarked on a journey to take music lessons to the districts and small towns all over the country. She conducted workshops, teaching and touching the hearts of young aspirants and made a lasting impact. The Parishad, with more than 60 branches all over the country, organises annual conference alternatively in a district town, which

exemplifies her commitment to the spread of cultural practices.

In 2001, an extremist religious group violently attacked the Baishakh festivities in the park, causing the death of many innocent spectators. The brutality caused deep pondering in Sanjida Khatun's mind, and she decided to add a new chapter in her work. She and her colleagues started a formal school with a medley of education and culture based on learning with pleasure. Nalanda added a new dimension to the concept and practice of education.

Sanjida Khatun embraced other tasks to rejuvenate the society with meaningful cultural practices. She headed the Bangladesh Bratachari Samity to organise camps promoting the practice of Bratachari. Pronunciation and recitation are other areas of her interest. She was a master tutor in this art and conducted workshops in Kanthashilon. Various domains of Sanjida Khatun's work represent the breadth of her philosophy and praxis of life.

In totality, she dedicated herself to building a society rooted in its culture and tradition, imbued with a secular liberal humanist spirit whereby to be a Bangalee meant to be universal also. She aspired to create a generation that could steer through the complexities of the modern world with a firm footing in its own culture and tradition. All her life, she worked with 10 hands, excelling in various acts, and enriching us with her dedicated, multifaceted contribution.

She is part of the cultural history of Bengal and Bangladesh and will remain a source of inspiration for nation-building.



Sanjida Khatun (April 4, 1933 - March 25, 2025).

PHOTO: COURTESY

of Bangalee national identity. From her college days, she was an activist, took part in the language movement, practised music, joined in all kinds of musical events and started a life-long journey with Tagore songs.

Surprisingly, she never received any formal lesson in music. She was raised in a liberal, secular, enlightened and musical environment. Her father Dr Kazi Motahar Hossain, a great scholar and professor of mathematics at Dhaka University, was one of the

with promise. She returned from Shantiniketan with a master's degree and as an accomplished singer. It is not that she studied music at Shantiniketan, but as she said, music was always in the air and environment of Shantiniketan. At that time, the Pakistani ruling coterie did their best to confront the national struggle, both politically and culturally. This culminated in the imposition of military rule in 1958, all political parties were banned, civil rights curtailed, no political meeting

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO WASTE

Do I really need that new piece of clothing?



Raida A. K. Reza is doctoral researcher at United Nations University's Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES), Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER), and Technische Universität Dresden and the founder of Zero Waste Bangladesh (ZWBD).

RAIDA A. K. REZA

In the grand scheme of things, with rising expenses for everything else, clothing often does not seem like a thing to consider or bother about. Although the days of Tk80 t-shirts seem like a thing of the past, the cost of clothes isn't a burning issue for us. There are always options for different buyers, from broke students to the handful luxury item purchasers.

Let's go through the life of a t-shirt. For a typical Bangalee, the t-shirt will stay with its owner for a few years, with maybe around a hundred or so washes, and then it will eventually end up as a rag to clean the house. And one day, it will be too torn up and washed up to even use as a cleaning rag. And when it is thrown away, someone else will use it in some other way.

While the life-cycle for a single t-shirt seems nice, imagine the mounds of thrown-away t-shirts when every single person owns not one but an increasing number of t-shirts, oblivious to the true cost of clothing. The true cost might not come from our pockets directly, but the price is paid by our rivers and our environment that have been polluted through the entire clothing-making cycle. The cost of clothing is always hidden in its lifecycle, something we never really think about much.

The average person today buys

60 percent more clothing items than they did 15 years ago, while keeping each garment for half as long, according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Textile matters because it is an integral part of human life. Responsible use of textiles is something that each person in this world should be accountable for, be it from a consumer's perspective or from a producer's perspective.

March 30, 2025, will be observed as the International Day of Zero Waste with the theme “Towards zero waste in fashion and textiles.” The global fashion industry significantly contributes to resource consumption and carbon emissions, requiring 79 billion cubic meters of water annually (about 20 percent of the world's total water consumption), generating 1.7 billion tons of carbon dioxide (almost 10 percent of the world's total carbon dioxide emissions), and producing 92 million tons of textile waste (equivalent to a truckload of clothing being incinerated or sent to landfills every second).

When big celebrations like Eid come up, we purchase a lot for our loved ones, limiting our behaviour only through a monetary lens. When was the last time you asked yourself if your favourite designer/brand had thought about the sustainability and

durability of the clothing, reducing waste in the production process, using sustainable and non-toxic materials and providing fair wages to their suppliers? I, myself, seldom think about these perspectives while purchasing that really cool kameez set, or when I am swayed by that gorgeous piece of saree, or when that influencer is swaying my decision to

“need” that piece of clothing? Our surroundings have been propagating this cycle of overconsumption, making us purchase the next thing and the next and then the next. By simply saying no to fast fashion, we can make the biggest impact! Question whether you truly need this purchase and if you will wear this at least 30 times. This “30 wears”



The global fashion industry produces 92 million tons of textile waste, and one extra clothing purchase contributes to that.

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

purchase something needlessly. It's just a piece of clothing, and for some reason, I really “need” it. I do not think about its life with me.

The model of *fast fashion* is the leading cause of clothing waste. Remember how I said that I really

test helps break the habit of impulse purchasing.

When you cannot wear the item 30 times (it happens; who is going to wear that poofy lehenga 30 times?), invest in higher quality, durable items that last longer.

When possible, explore secondhand options first, without stigma! The habit of swapping clothes in your networks is also an excellent one. The environmental impact of a second-hand purchase is dramatically lower than buying new, as it requires no additional manufacturing resources.

Material selection is also very important when we do customise

typically require more intensive bleaching and chemical processing during their manufacturing to achieve this bright colour, which means more chemicals are leached into the environment while they are produced.

Choose natural fibres like linen, which requires less water than cotton and can thrive without intensive pesticides or fertilisers, alongside other not-so-common options like hemp, which requires fewer chemicals to produce. Avoid synthetic materials like polyester in your fabric which shed microplastics on washing.

And for the eventuality of disposal, never discount how helpful repurposing your textiles is. Turn it into a kantha or quilt; remake that old saree into a dress!

Consumers are not the only group with a responsibility to do better, it is also on the producers to rethink the way they produce clothing. For designers and clothing producers, sustainable thinking can enhance their creativity. Reducing waste starts at the beginning, with every scrap of clothing saved, when materials are selected sustainably and with innovation focus. Even fabric scraps can be reincorporated into new products through techniques like fibre recycling, among others.

Achieving zero waste in fashion requires collaboration between producers and consumers. This symbiotic process can only start when we start thinking about the “real” cost of our textiles.

Let's ask ourselves the next time we make bulk purchases, “Do we really need that extra piece of clothing?”

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Rams' mates
5 Base-eight system
10 Valleys
12 Pack animal
13 Billing leeway
15 Paris pal
16 Tissue layer
17 Programming error
18 Soprano Scotto
20 Glass section
21 Museum piece
22 Early carmaker
23 Bakery workers
25 Le Pew of cartoons
28 Track contests
31 Arkin of "Argo"
32 Peripherals
34 Mule of old song
35 Utmost
36 Mauna N̄
37 Compact items
40 Fancy tie
41 Ocean's motions
42 Oozes
43 Wyoming city

DOWN

1 Painter Degas
2 Appliance for buns
3 Pal of George and Jerry
4 Brief time
5 Follow, as orders
6 Nasty dog
7 Of the clan
8 In the area
9 Ski resort buildings
11 Bacteria-ridden
14 Diner souvenirs
19 UFO flyer
20 Did some modeling
24 Cardinal's symbol
25 Successfully imitate
26 Go by
27 Royal home
29 Sword-making city
30 Was a noisy sleeper
33 Pert
35 Brooklyn team
38 Member of the force
39 Tayback of "Alice"

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42							43		

5-23

FRIDAY'S ANSWERS

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D	R	I	E	S	T		I	N	I	T
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dsopinion@gmail.com.