

## The 'Pachhise Baisakh 1418': A Master Artist in Universal Cultural Celebrations

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### Abstract:

*Memories of our past experiences occupy an important space in the overall make up of our tastes and temperaments as Individuals, societies and nations. Memories can be of particular events- political, social or cultural, witnessed by us individually or collectively. Memories can relate to prominent Individuals also, who hold some kind of influence on us individually or collectively, depending upon the actual experience of the nature of our interaction with such individuals. And, certainly our memories pertain to certain geographical locations too, stayed or visited by us in the past. The generation of the Indian people which witnessed the midnight celebrations of India's independence from the British Empire on the intervening night of the 14/15th August 1947, for instance, have lived with the memories of this event, permanently etched at the back of their minds. The generation of Indian people which interacted directly with leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, each such interaction formed episodes in the overall memories of such people, which they could recollect and cherish for their lifetimes. Subsequent generations rely on 'retold or relived' experiences, yet nostalgically connect to those memories on each revisit. Similarly, one usually relishes nostalgically the place of his/her formative years, particularly more, if she / he shift out of that location. A visit to tourist places or abroad often remains in the form of well stocked cherished memories for one's lifetime.*

*Memories, normally, have a visual format. When we walk down the memory lane, things of our past appear in visual form with all attached details. These can be a very useful resource to connect to the near past and prepare authentic historical accounts for perusal of the subsequent generations, which may not have a direct experience of that near past. The Indian people born after 1947, who did not witness the freedom struggle of India, have been fed with secondary narratives, pictures and annual celebrations of this event. Each generation of the Indian people, post 1947, has its own set of memories of this event, formed on the basis of what they are told, or read and seen in secondary medium. Similarly, many biographical (memory based) accounts by people who interacted with Mahatma Gandhi become the vehicle for the subsequent generations to reconnect to that era with all its elaborate details. In such cases where the eminent individuals from the past have left rich cultural legacies behind, remembrance and offering tributes to them very naturally take the route of following the steps of the same art forms by persuasions followed by the people of the subsequent generations. The instance of Rabindranath Tagore is one such example, where the most befitting way to offer tribute to him and thereby to get connected to him, his works and the ambiance within which he lived and worked, is to follow his artistic persuasions by people of subsequent generations, who did not have the chance of sharing the time span directly with him.*

*The focus of this paper and my principal concern, as a student of History, is to explore the potential of visual memories of people pertaining to significant individuals, events and places of our historical near past to be used as authentic source to transport the audiences to that bygone historical era and thereby address the principal concern of academic discourse in History, i.e., viewing the past from the standpoint of the present. Each of such performances remains etched in the visual memories of audience for a much longer period compared to what they read (in print) about the same or similar historical icons of the bygone era. It, therefore, becomes an easy yet very important medium for the people of the present generations to celebrate history, art, literature and culture and the latter thereby assume popular character. This method however differs from the conventional mode of Historical enquiry wherein the past is approached on the basis of investigations into literary and archaeological remains of the era under study. Here, we get connected*

*to the past on the basis of historical art, literature and culture through performances conducted in the present and in such performances the past becomes alive.*

**Key words:** Pachhise Baisakh 1418, Rabindranath Tagore, historical art, literature, culture, performances

## I

A person of the bygone era, like Rabindranath Tagore, with such rich and diverse cultural heritage when is remembered in the present era, by the generations of people who did not live in the same era, very naturally, plays and replays of the art forms practiced by him become the most fitting medium for a befitting tribute. His poems are recited routinely on important occasions for a select gathering of audience. Trained Rabindra Sangeet singers perform his verses on such occasions. And theatre groups in India and abroad stage his plays time and again. Such performances cross political frontiers and linguist barriers and thereby reach to global audience and thus offer a collective platform for the people of the present era to travel back to the lanes and by lanes of history in accompaniment of the feel of the ambiance within which our Historical icons lived and worked.

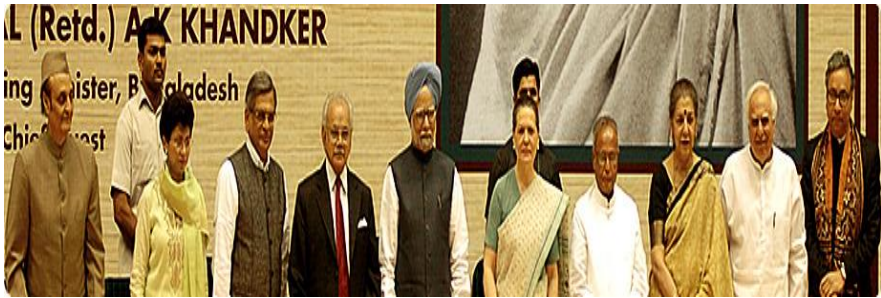
While one finds no dearth of a variety of performing arts performances based on the literary masterpieces of Rabindranath Tagore, his birth and death anniversaries offer ideal set up to revisit the past and get connected to the master artist and his works. Of the two, the former is celebrated with much more pomp, elan and grandiose than the former. Termed as the *Pachhise Baisakh*, with the 9<sup>th</sup> May as its equivalent in the English Calendar, his birth anniversary acts as the perfect set up for organization of a series of lectures, seminars, workshops, exhibitions and song, dance and theatrical performances. The *Pacchise Baisakh*, strengthened by

celebrations of it in multifaceted ways within and outside India, has assumed a cultic stature, over the years, as the standard way to remember the *Koviguru* and offer tribute to him through dance, dramatic and musical adaptations from his works. The Bengali community, in particular, takes the lead in all such parts, both within and outside the country, which has sizeable Bengali populations. It has emerged as an important festivity in a culturally rich Bengali Calendar. The Non-Bengali communities, in general, have also progressively become a part of this cultural feast.

Of all *Pachhise Baisakh* celebrations till date, the *Pachhise Baisakh 1418* stands out completely from the earlier ones, in terms of extent, scale and grandeur of its celebrations worldwide. Corresponding to the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the *Gurudev*, the English equivalent of which comes to the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2011, its celebrations were universal in character in true sense of the term universalism. While such widespread celebrations of the birth anniversary of the *Kobiguru* go in a long way to consolidate the process of institutionalization of the festivity called the *Pachhise Baisakh*, the spectrum of intellectual, cultural and artistic engagements on this occasion will remain in the visual memories of people who, although, are deprived of the direct accessibility to Rabindranath Tagore in person and his age. It is at this juncture that the present gets connected to the past and celebrate the past in the present.

The occasion of the *Pachhise Baisakh 1418* was declared a yearlong Joint celebration by the governments of India and Bangladesh. It opened between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> may 2011. In India, the famous Vigyan Bhawan at Delhi was the main venue which hosted inauguration of celebrations at behest of the central government, with prominent members of the Indian Government, including the Indian prime minister, in attendance. Other venues in Delhi such as the Gandhi Darshan and Smriti Bhawa, New Delhi, the Lalit Kala Academy, The National Gallery of Modern Art, the Sahitya Academy and the

Sangeet Natak Academy also hosted a range of cultural shows based on the life and times of Rabindra Nath Tagore. Besides, under these joint Indian-Bangladesh celebrations, venues outside Delhi, such as, Kolkata, Allahabad, Hyderabad and Luck now also showcased replication of variety of arts practiced by the master artist.



(The Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and other dignitaries at the inauguration of Indo-Bangladesh joint celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi) inputs and Photo courtesy-The website of the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting).



(The Indian Vice President Mohammed Hamid Ansari receives a photograph from Sheikh Hasina, the Bangladesh Prime Minister at the inauguration of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at Dhaka; Photo courtesy, the Hindu, dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012. ([www.thehindu.com/news/joint-celebration-of-tagores-150th-birth-annive...](http://www.thehindu.com/news/joint-celebration-of-tagores-150th-birth-annive...)))

The yearlong joint celebrations finally came to an official end on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The closing ceremony was held at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre at Dhaka and

the closing speech was delivered by the Bangladesh Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina. The then Indian Finance Minister Mr Pranav Mukherjee, as the chief guest of the honor and many prominent Indian cultural personalities such as Sharmila Tagore, Dr Pratibha Sircar and a dance drama group from the Sangeet Natak Academy (New Delhi) also joined the closing ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the 150<sup>th</sup> year of Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary (the *Pacchise Baisakh* 1418) thousands of commemorative functions were organized in India, Bangladesh and other countries.

## II

In 1961, the Government of India and UNESCO had agreed to jointly launch yearlong commemorative celebrations of Tagore on the occasion of the poet's 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. In 2011, once again they teamed up, this time to launch yearlong commemorative activities to mark the beginning of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore at Maison de L' Inde city university in Paris. The Paris- based Indian cultural exponent Sharmila Roy Pomnot's 'Weaves of Joy', was the inaugural event which was a composite presentation of music, dance and poetry in Bengali, English and French. Rare memorabilia and iconography of Tagore, obtained with the help of Visva Bharati University, including rare photographs of Tagore with Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Einstein were put on exhibition at the venue. The event was attended by the additional director-general-designate (culture) of UNESCO, Chairperson of the executive board of UNECO, nearly 50 ambassadors, permanent delegates, artistes, intellectuals and prominent members of the Indian Community in France.<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO lists a range of activities organized by its partner networks on this occasion. These include two day symposium in honor of Tagore at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, Tagore festival in

Dartington Hall at Devon U. K. between 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2011, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's Tagore weekend on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May at Stratford-upon-Avon-U.K, celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> year of Tagore's birth anniversary in Toronto etc.<sup>3</sup> The Indian High Commission and the British Museum jointly organized a lecture by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen on "What Difference does Tagore Make?" and an exhibition of Tagore paintings. The High Commission, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the Nehru Centre facilitated a series of commemorative events in U.K., which included an exhibition of Tagore's work at Victoria and Albert Museums, seminars, a range of films inspired by Tagore's works, poetry recitals, music concerts, and performances by well-known modern dance group Tanusree dance Company in London, Birmingham and Edinberg.<sup>4</sup> The Beveridge Hall, Senate House (a part of the University of London) hosted a three days workshop wherein renowned scholars like Dr. Uma Dasgupta<sup>5</sup>, Dr Michel Collins, Liesbeth Meyer, Dr Elzbieta Walter, Krihna Dutta, Dr Imre Bangha, Dr Joseph O'Connell, Dr Ketki Kushari Dyson, Dr Martin Kampchen, Dr William Radice etc., dwelt upon various facets of Tagore's life and works.<sup>6</sup> The Tagore Centre Scottish branch collaborated with the Bengali Performing Arts( Glasgow), Bangiya Sanskritik Parishad (Glasgow) and the Bengali Cultural Association (Edinburg) organized an evening in the honor of Tagore on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at the Mitchell Theatre in Glasgow.<sup>7</sup>The Tagore Centre, UK, also installed a bust of Rabindranath Tagore in the Gordon Square, at the heart of London, which was unveiled by Prince Charles ( The Prince of Wales).<sup>8</sup>Tagore celebrations were organized in Argentina also, particularly in the capital Buenos Aires. Tagore had visited the city and stayed in the garden of Vila Ocampo, the residence of Argentine feminist writer, literary magazine editor and cultural activist, Victoria Ocampo. Naturally, the same place was chosen to be the venue of Tagore's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebrations. Shreyasi Mishra from Kolkata gave Rabindra

Sangeet rendition; Gustavo of Hastinapur Foundation (Argentina) recited some of the Tagore poems and Axel Maimone, an Argentine scholar, delivered a lecture on Tagore and his works.<sup>9</sup>The Argentine film director Pablo Cesar started his new film project based on the theme of Tagore's 'intimate but platonic' relationship with Victoria.



(Prince Charles, Kalyan Kundu[ Chairman, the Tagore Centre, UK] and the Bust; Photo Courtesy-Monish Sengupta: [www.tagorecentre.org.uk](http://www.tagorecentre.org.uk))

Tagore had visited Argentina in 1924 and there he developed a deep emotional bond with Victoria.<sup>10</sup> The Consulate General of India in New York, in collaboration with the Tagore Society of New York, organized a cultural evening at the consulate ballroom to celebrate the event with much fanfare. Professor Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and affairs at Harvard University and author of several books, including translations of some the finest poetry of Tagore, was the keynote speaker. This gathering also witnessed a range of intellectual and cultural activities centering on Rabindranath Tagore .<sup>11</sup> The UNESCO House on Avenue de Suffern in Paris served as the venue for UNESCO which in collaboration with the culture ministries of India and Bangladesh organized this event on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2011. Tagore's poems, *Ami*, *Africa* and *Tomar Srishthir Poth* were recited by prominent director-actor Aparna Sen and her father Chidananda Dasgupta. Famous Indian singer, Kavita Krishnamurty rendered Tagore songs in



Hindi and her husband and classical violinist L Subramaniam made a solo violin recital on a Tagore song, *Baajere Korune Shurey*.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from holding Academic lectures and workshops and cultural events, based on the works of Tagore, certain other activities were also organized to commemorate the *Pacchise Baisakh 1418*, on European and American soils. The Union Culture Ministry of India had organized a series of exhibitions of Tagore Paintings abroad in September 2011. <sup>13</sup> The first circuit of exhibitions opened at the Asian Art Museum, Berlin, where 98 of Tagore's paintings, hitherto, kept in the confines of the Visva Bharati, the National Gallery of Modern Art and Rabindra Bhavan, were displayed. The next destination of this exhibition was the Museum Jan van Togt, Amstelveen. From there, it traveled to Petit Palais in Paris and the national Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rome. The second circuit opened up at the Asia Society in New York where 61 of Tagore's paintings were on display. It moved to the Art Institute, Chicago thereafter. The third circuit of this exhibition began at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul with 49 of Tagore paintings. Finally, this exhibition concluded in March 2012 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.<sup>14</sup> In, yet another way to commemorate the grand event, the Royal Mail, UK decided to bring out a sheet of 10 stamps in the honor of Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>15</sup> The Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland signed a pact with the Indian Council of Cultural Relations for setting up a Rabindranath Tagore Chair in a bid for promoting Indian culture, education, philosophy and literature.<sup>16</sup> In Poland, the Bengali Department of the Warsaw University, led by Elisabeth Walter, who herself was a student of the Bangla language and literature at Shantiniketan, released a Polish anthology comprising Tagore's poetry, short stories, essays, paintings, letters and the famous play *Dakghar* (Post Office) in April 2011. This anthology was financed by the Indo-Spanish Chamber of Commerce and Industries.<sup>17</sup> (The

Indian Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has written a special introduction for the anthology. Musical tributes were offered in Poland on this occasion. Korzhov based dance group, *Taal* delivered two special performances at Warsaw and Krakow and staged Tagore's play *Shyama* under the direction of Sabina Sweta Sen. The impact of such events can best be summed up in what Janusz Krzyzowski, an Indologist and president of the Warsaw branch of Indo-Polish Cultural Committee, had expressed as:

“This is one of the best performances I have seen of Tagore's work in Poland. We have been seeing only Tagore's 'Post Office' all these years. Now we have really moved ahead to understand Tagore's genius. Hopefully we will see two other dance musicals, 'Chitrangda' and 'Chandalika' in future.”<sup>18</sup>

Tagore celebrations were also held at various places in Spain through which Tagore reconnected to thousands of his Spanish admirers. He was slated to visit Spain in 1921 on extension of a warm welcome by the Spanish Government and elaborate preparations made by the Spanish poet Juan Jimenez and his wife Zenobia Camprubi. However, Tagore cancelled his visit in the last moment citing some other pre-occupations. Tagore celebrations in Spain included release of a book titled *Redescubriendo a Tagore* (Rethinking Tagore) as a part of a larger project, 'Tagore in Spain', a celebration of his literature and performing arts in several cities in Spain and Costa Rica. Co-edited by Indranil Chakravarty, a professor of Film Appreciation at the Whistling Woods International Film Institute in Mumbai and S. P. Ganguly, professor of Spanish Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and released at the Instituto Cervantes, was a joint collaboration between the Embassy of Spain, the Spanish Culture Centre and the Sahitya Akedami. A team of Indian scholars and performers travelled to this country and collaborated with Spanish students and scholars on Tagore's plays, poetry and music. In Costa Rica, school children dressed up in Tagore T-shirts recited his poems

in chorus. Tagore films such as *Nauka Dubi* and *Charulata* were screened across the country.<sup>19</sup>

The 'Pacchise Baisakh 1418' celebrations were also organized at many places outside Europe and America. In Suriname, for instance, the local Indian Culture Centre collaborated with the Ministry of Culture and other organizations, such as the ART VIBES UNITED, ALPHAMAX ACADEMY and SCHRIJVERS '77, to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore. The Government of Suriname was represented by Her Excellency Mrs. Ingrid Boutersewolding, the first lady of Suriname in this function and K.J.S. Sodhi, the Indian ambassador to Suriname, represented the Government of India. The cultural activities included Tagore's art exhibition, exhibition of Tagore films like *Kabuli Wala* and Satyajit Ray's *Tagore* and art competition and school creative writing competitions etc.<sup>20</sup>. The UAE also had its share of Tagore's celebrations on the occasion of the 'Pacchise Baisakh 1418'. The India Social and Cultural Centre (ISCC) and the Abu Dhabi India Bengali Community joined hands for the event in June 2010. Presentation of songs, music and drama based on Tagore works, marked this festivity. The inauguration was graced by the presence of a prominent NRI businessman and Padma Shri winner, B.R. Shetty and the ISCC president Thomas Verghese.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok organized a two day seminar on 'Tagore's Vision for Asia- Human solidarity beyond Nationalism'. This seminar was supported by the Indian Embassy and ICCR. The venue had a direct nostalgic connect to Tagore as the latter had delivered a lecture at the same venue in 1927. A number of speakers from around the world deliberated upon the theme with reference to Tagore, which included among others, Saranindranath Tagore (the poet's grand nephew who teaches at the National University of Singapore), Dhammnanda Bhikkuni ( a female monk from Thailand and an alumnus of Shantiniketan, Prof. Sugata Bose from the Harvard University and Kim Yang Shik (

a Korean poet from the Tagore Society of Korea who has translated many of Tagore's poem into Korean).<sup>22</sup>

Chaina and Tagore shared special relationship. Tagore visited the country three times between 1924 and 1929 and received some Chinese men of art to his Shantiniketan, as well. He was invited, on one occasion, by the Beijing Lecture Association to deliver a lecture as part of its objective to enable foreign scholars to come and interact with Chinese intellectuals. He visited Hangzhou, Nanjing, Jinan, Beijing, Taiyuan, Hankou and Shanghai. China was undergoing a massive politico-social changes in the wake of overthrow of the ageold monarchy as an outcome of the 1911 Revolution and establishment of nascent democracy. Therefore, Tagore's concepts of unity, tolerance and social justice. Of all these places in China, Shanghai was special to him because his translator and an old friend Xu Zhimo lived in the city. Xu, who studied in Cambridge was only 27 years old and shared a father-son relationship with Tagore. He offered hospitality to Tagore at his home in Simingcun in Shanghai when Tagore visited China in 1929. It was only expected then that China too organized commemorative events as tribute to Tagore on his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. The (then) Indian President Smt. Pratibha Patil, in course of her six- day official visit to China in May 2010, unveiled a Tagore statue in Shanghai. The statue weighing 125 kilograms has been sculpted by Gautam Pal and is located at busy junction of the Mao-Ming Road and Nanchang Road in China's business hub. The special statue unveiling ceremony was attended by a host of Chinese officials and dignitaries. China also decided to set up a gallery at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore.<sup>23</sup> The Literature Fest at Kolkata had, among other things, launched a book titled *Tagore and China*, which comprises collected articles and essays on Tagore by both Chinese and Indian writers.<sup>24</sup> The Shanghai Municipal Archives prepared a showcase of more than 50 archival photographs and

press clippings under the title Rabindranath Tagore in China. This exposition was kept for the public viewing at the ICCR (Indian Council of Cultural Relations) at Delhi and was jointly collaborated by the Shanghai Municipal Archive, Shanghai's People Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, Indian Mission in Shanghai and the ICCR. At display were four black and white photographs, shot in 1929, which show Tagore, his friend Xu Zhimo, his wife Liu and friends at the Fayuan temple in Beijing. Tagore had invited a famous Chinese painter Xu Beihong to visit Vasva Bharati in 1940. He spent a lot of time with the poet and painted Tagore at work and at leisure reading newspaper. The showcase displayed five photographs exhibiting the painter's visit to Shantiniketan and the drawings he made of Tagore.<sup>25</sup>

Tagore enjoyed a strong association with Sri Lanka, visiting the island nation three times between 1922, 1928 and 1934. He had laid the foundation of the Sri Palee University when he visited Sri Lanka for the third time. To commemorate Tagore's bond with Sri Lanka, a series of events, including the release of special postal stamp. In Colombo, the department of Sri Lankan Postal Services released a stamp and first day cover in a function, organized to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore.<sup>26</sup> A commemorative volume *Remembering Rabindranath Tagore*, highlighting the poetic, philosophical and cultural expressions of Tagore, was released with a compilation of articles in English, Sinhala and Tamil by Sri Lankan and Indian writers. The commemorative volume which was published by the University of Colombo with the support of India-Sri Lanka Foundation, received a special message from the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksha. A classical music programme on Tagore was organized by the Amar- Daya Foundation and the students of the Sri palee University performed several cultural activities in memory of the founding father of this university. To commemorate the fact that Tagore had staged one of his plays, *Shap Mochan* on his

third visit to Sri Lanka, this play was also staged. Other related activities included organizing of a photo exhibition on Tagore's life and travels and an exhibition of Tagore's paintings by the Sri Palee Campus and cultural performances by students of this university. The campus also held talks on Tagore and screened a documentary on Tagore made by the students of this university. A festival of films based on Tagore novels and stories exhibited films like *Agantuk*, *Pather Panchali*, *Charulata*, *Ghare Baire* and *Teen Kanya*. An essay competition in Sinhala, English and Tamil on Tagore for undergraduate students in the universities in Sri Lanka was also held.<sup>27</sup>



(The Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Ashok Kantha, speaking at a function to release a stamp on Rabindranath Tagore in Colombo; Photo Courtesy- *The Hindu*, Dated 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2011) For more details see <http://ccis.cmb.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Annual-Report-2012.pdf>

### III

Bangladesh shares and celebrates the cultural legacy of Tagore as much and in similar fashion as it is shared and celebrated in India. The Government of Bangladesh jointly organized with India, as noted above, the year long celebration of the *Pacchise*

*Baisakh 1418.* The inauguration of this celebration was organized at Dhaka with the Bangladesh Prime Minister Ms Sheikh Hasina as the chief guest and the Vice President of India, Abdul Hamid Ansari, as the guest of honor. The closing function was held at the Bangabandhu



(Clockwise top): Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya and a thousand more at the musical extravaganza; Debojyoti Mishra conducts the orchestra. Nobel laureate Professor Amartya Sen launches 'Shruti Geetabitan'. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates the festival. (Clockwise bottom): Artistes of Shurer Dhara perform to a receptive audience. Srikanto Acharya performs

several romantic melodies of Tagore. A scene from *Chandalika*. Bratati Bandyopadhyay during an enthralling Performance: .Photo: Mumit M.Zahangir Alom: Photo Courtesy, *The Daily Star*, 31 Dec. 2011) [archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=216336](http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=216336)

International Conference Centre on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2012, which the then Indian finance minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee, attended as the guest of honor. As a part of it, a three day festival was organized at the Shilpakara Academy, which was marked by lectures, exhibition, dance and musical performances. Dr Sanjida Khatun, the president and a founder member of Chhayanaut, a prominent cultural organization of Bangladesh, delivered a lecture on the intricacies of reciting and singing the Tagore verses, to an audience comprised of intellectuals, cultural personalities and Tagore enthuthiasts, at the National Theatre Hall, the Shilpakara Academy. This three day celebration started with exhibition of works of 150 painters, which were inspired by Tagore's short stories, poems and songs at National Art Gallery.



Sanjay Kumar- The 'Pachhise Baisakh 1418': A Master Artist in Universal Cultural Celebrations



(Clockwise (from top-left): Dr. Sanjida Khatun speaks at the programme; Swagatalakshmi Dasgupta sings and Amra Kojon Shilpi Goshthi (Bogra) stages a dance. Photo: Mumit M. Akram Hosen Mamun: Courtesy, *The daily Star*, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2011) [archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/printnews.php?nid=184813](http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/printnews.php?nid=184813)

Prominent Rabindra Sangeet Artists, Swagatalakshmi Dasgupta, Abdul Wadud and Iffat Ara Dewan rendered some of the Tagore songs and Jayanta Chattopadhyay recited Tagore poems. Bogra based Amra Kojon Shilpi Gosthi presented a dance performance.<sup>28</sup> Further, a prominent Dhaka based music school, Shurer Dhara, organized a three-day festival to commemorate the event. It released 22 DVDs comprising of 2222 dance, drama, opera and songs. The eminent economist and Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, unveiled the DVDs titled,

*Shruti Geetabitan*. The programme was followed by a mesmeric rendition of tagore songs by 1000 singers on a single stage.<sup>29</sup>



(A section of the 1,000 singers singing a song of Rabindranath Tagore on a single stage built in front of Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital yesterday. The programme was organized to mark the 150th birth anniversary of the poet. Photo: Mumit MBss, Dhaka: Photo Courtesy, *The Daily Star*, 30th December, 2011) [archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/print\\_news.php?nid=216286](http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/print_news.php?nid=216286)

Exhibitions of Tagore's paintings, musical soirees, seminars, workshops, commemorative publications and performances of dances, and dramas, based on Tagore's stories and songs were organized, throughout the year, across various parts of Bangladesh, as part of the programme. Besides, a plethora of seminars, workshops and cultural programmes, based on the life and works of Tagore, were also organized by a number of local cultural groups and associations. The Standard Chartered Bank, Bangladesh, organized a cultural event titled as, '*Ananda Jatra-e Rabindranath*', at the ballroom of Raddison Water Garden Hotel at Dhaka on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Prominent Indian and Bangladeshi artists, such as, music exponent Karunamaya Goswami, veteran indian actor, Saumitra Chatterjee, noted Bangladeshi Rabindra Sangeet

artist, Aditi Mohsin and Indian singer Monomoy Bhattacharya etc., recited and rendered Tagore's poems and songs on this occasion.<sup>30</sup> Raktokarobi, a renowned cultural organization, working on music in the port city of Chittagong, arranged for a full-house auditorium of Chittagong's theatre Institute, a cultural event, in commemoration of the *Pachhise Baisakh 1418*, titled '*Arup Tumar Bani*' in February, 2012. The event featured rendition of 20 Rabindra Sangeet which were written by Tagore, while touring Various European Countries.<sup>31</sup> Jatiyo Rabindra Sangeet Sammilan Parishad ( Dhaka Metro Branch) organized at the main auditorium of Chhayanaut Sanskriti Bhaban a programme featuring the nobel laureate's songs and poetry on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Tagore's *Geetanjali* was the prime focus of this event, and therefore, songs and recitations were made out of this collection.<sup>32</sup> The Bengali Department of Rajshahi University celebrated in April 2012 the *Pachhise Baisakh 1418* by organizing two seminars titled, 'Amarattyar Jala' and 'Lokodorpone Rabindranath' at University's Kazi Nazrul Islam auditorium. Besides, it also hosted a daylong programme including colorful processions and cultural programmes.<sup>33</sup>



(Adity Mohsin (Left) and Nishat Jahan Rana (Right) performing at the Chhayanaut Sanskriti Bhaban, Dhaka, in a cultural event organized by Jatiyo Rabindra Sangeet Sammilan Parishad; Photo courtesy, *The Daily Star*, dated, 12 June 2011). <http://www.dailystar.net/newDesign/photo-gallery.php?pid=189565>

Similarly, the Padatik Natya Sangsad, Bangladesh organized a special programme titled, *Robisandhya*, at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakara Academy in October, 2011. The programme featured Tagore's timeless songs and recitation from *Geetanjali* and staging his play, *Shey*.<sup>34</sup> The main auditorium of Bangladesh National Museum at Dhaka hosted a cultural programme featuring Rabindra Sangeet and recitation of Tagore poems, at behest of the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) and the Indian High Commission at Dhaka, as part of joint Indo-Bangladesh celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> year of 'Kobiguru's' birth anniversary. Artists like Abhirup Guhakurta and Indrani Sen rendered some of the Tagore's song and Bratati Bandopadhyay recited Tagore's poems.<sup>35</sup> Rain songs composed by Tagore became the focal theme in a musical soiree, titled, *Hridoy Mondrilo* organized by Shishu-Tirtha Ananda Dhani Sangeet Biddayatn at Zila Shilpakara Academy in July 2010. The songs performed were based on different ragas, such as, Malhar, Megh-malhar, Mia-malhar, Behag and Kafi added a classical touch to this event. Tagore songs like *Hridhoy mandrilo domoru guru guru*, *Nilanjana ghana punja chhaye*, *Tomar geeti jagalo smiriti*, *Aj sraboner purnimate*, *Tomar khola hawae*, *Puub hawate dei dola* and *Oi sraboner buker bhitor* etc., captivated the large audience which attended this programme.<sup>36</sup>



**Indrani Sen**



**Bratati Bandopadhyay**

(Indrani Sen and Bratati Bandopadhyay, performing at the main auditorium of the National Museum, Dhaka; Photo courtesy, *the Daily Star*, 13 Feb, 2012). [archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/newsdetails.php?nid=222135](http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/newsdetails.php?nid=222135)

These are only a handful of references from out of continued and elaborate Tagore celebrations on the occasion of the *Pacchise Baisakh, 1418*, both numerically and territorially, in Bangladesh. Obviously, owing to the very natural space constraint, each of such celebrations is difficult to be covered in this paper.

#### IV

India and the Indian Government left no stone unturned in making the Tagore celebrations, on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore, a universal affairs in true letter and spirit. The occasion was just perfect for India to show its gratitude to one of its biggest literary and cultural icons who has brought by his life and through his works, universal acknowledgement, recognition and appreciation of India's creative and artistic talents. A glimpse of what could it actually turn out upon reaching the 150<sup>th</sup> year, one may find in the 'Pacchise Baisakh, 1415' celebrations at Kolkata. The 2200 seater Sience City Auditorium was jam-packed to witness a

series of cultural performances to celebrate the 147<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore. The brilliant décor focused on portraits of Tagore in different mood against which were set scintillating performances by Pulak Sarkar and his 20 piece strong orchestra, and song renditions by Sraboni Sen, Lopamudra Mitra, Rezwana Choudhury Bannya (Bangladesh), Kavita Krishnamuty, Sree Radha Bandopadhyay, Laisa Ahmed Lisa and Shounak Chatterjee.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Pragati, a Bhubaneshwar (Odisha) based Bengali cultural outfit, hosted a well-attended cultural event of dance and music, to commemorate this occasion, at the Rabindra Mandap at Bhubaneshwar.<sup>38</sup>

Naturally, the 150<sup>th</sup> year of Gurudev's birth was a huge occasion compared to the preceding and following anniversary years of Tagore. Therefore, not just the celebrating fervor and flavor were raised to the highest, but also, the widest possible level within India and outside. It has already been briefed about the celebrations at Delhi, Kolkata, Allahabad, Hyderabad and Lucknow at behest of the Government of India. Besides, a wide range of cultural events and activities were organized throughout the year between May 2011 and 2012, in different parts of India by different cultural outfits.

The Government of India constituted two committees in April 2010, to frame guidelines to commemorate the poet's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary and to evolve implementation machinery. The guidelines committee was headed by the Prime Minister of India and included KG Balakrishnan (then Chief Justice of India), Pranab Mukherjee (then Finance Minister), S.M. Krishna (the then External Affairs Minister), Kapil Sibal (the then HRD Minister), Ms. Mamta Banerjee (then Railway Minister), and MS Ambika Soni (then Information and Broadcasting Minister), as other members on the panel. This committee also included the Leader of Opposition Ms. Sushma Swaraj, Communist Party of India- Marxist and the chairman of the Parliament Standing Committee on Culture Sitaram Yetchury, the President of the Indian Council of Cultural

Relations Karan Singh and the Noble Laureate Amartya Sen. Besides, the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and heads of the Sahitya Akademy, Lalit Kala Akademy and Sangeet Natak Akademy were also included in the committee along with the Vice- Chancellors of the Rabindra Bharati and Shantiniketan Universities, Indian film maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Padmabibhusan Tan Chung. The Indian Finance Minister headed the other Committee Called the National Implementation Committee. Other members on this committee were Ms Mamta Banerjee, Kapil Sibal, Ambika Soni and Namwar Singh.<sup>39</sup>

Delhi served as one of the main centers of India in its lead in 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebrations of Tagore. A series of commemorative events were organized, as noted above, at behest of the central government of India at venues like the Vigyan Bhawan, Gandhi Darshan and Smriti Bhawan, Lali Kaka Academy, The National Gallery of Modern Art, the Sahitya Academy and the Sangeet Natak Academy. At the Vigyan Bhawan, an international seminar on 'Tagore Universalism' was organized by the Raja Ram Mohan Roy Foundation Library. Resorted Tagore films like *Khuditi Pashan*, *Charulata*, *Ghaire Baire*, *Teen Kanya* and *Kabuliwala*, sourced by the Ministries of Culture and Information and Broadcasting were screened by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Further, a programme on poetry, titled 'Bhartiya Kavita Utsab' was organized by the Sahitya Academy with focus on Tagore poetry. At the Gandhi Darshan and Smriti Bhawan, the commemorative events included, staging of Tagore's play, *Dak Ghar*, *Tasher Desh* (the Dance Opera), a play on Tagore's short story, *Chutti* etc. The venue also hosted national and international conventions and seminars, such as, a National Convention on 'Gandhi and Tagore's version of Peace and Education', an International Dialogue on the 'Social Thought Process of Mahatma Gandhi and Gurudev Tagore', a National

Seminar on 'Social Concerns in the Literary World of Rabindranath Tagore', 'an interaction on Child Psychology and Tagore's Writings on the Mind of Children'. Besides, prose and poetry of Tagore were recited by eminent artists and the Tagore film *Kabuliwala* was screened. The Lalit Kala Academy organized some exhibitions- an exhibition titled, 'Rabindranath Tagore-In search of Frozen Music' and another exhibition from the Viswa Bharti's Shantiniketan Collections. Besides, it published books- a book of fresh essays on Rabindranath Tagore as painter, a book on essays on each of 15-20 selected paintings of Tagore and a book on the artists of Shantiniketan. The National Gallery of Modern Art organized an exhibition of 235 works of Tagore Art, between 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2011 and then these works were sent for exhibition abroad. The Indian Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh inaugurated this exhibition titled, 'The Master Strokes: Art of Rabindranath Tagore'. The Sahitya Academy undertook a series of literary activities as mark of commemoration of Tagore's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Some of these included, instituting Tagore Fellowship where a Nobel laureate in the field of literature would be invited for a month for his/ her readings and lectures in different part of the country. It decided to send 150 young writes, inclusive of women artists, selected from 24 Indian languages, to Jorasanko (in North Kolkata) and Shantiniketan in four batches on a quarterly basis. It undertook reprinting of all Tagore's works published by the academy. An exhibition on Tagore and his works in English and in other Indian languages, published by various Indian and foreign publishers, was also organized at its behest. A seminar on *Geetanjali* and its translations in different Indian languages, a national seminar on the novels of Tagore with reference to the





(Bimbavati Devi and her troupe (top) and Pallavi with her group at Rabindra Pranati, Delhi, rendering Koviguru's works in Manipuri and Mohiniattam dance styles; Photo Courtesy-The *Daily Star*, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2011). [http://www.dailystar.net/newDesign/photo\\_gallery.php?pid=179632](http://www.dailystar.net/newDesign/photo_gallery.php?pid=179632)

significance of *Gora*, a series of local/ regional level seminars on other important Indian writers and places connected to Tagore,

and some others etc., were other important activities of this institution. It organized few cultural events as well, such as Rabindra Sangeet performances, staging of Tagore plays and screening of Tagore films. The Sangeet Natak Academy decided to confer the 'Tagore Samman' (Tagore Honor) to 150 elderly artists above 75 years, who have not received Sangeet Natak Academy and Fellowship. It collaborated with all the Indian states and local institutions in order to organize a series of programmes on music, dance and drama festivals for 3 to 5 days, all over India, between June 2011 and April, 2012. It commissioned 20 productions based on Tagore's work and presented them in special festivals.<sup>40</sup> The 'Rabindra Nrtityotsav', the 13<sup>th</sup> National Festival of New Choreography was presented by Impresario India, Habitat World and India Habitat Center in Delhi. The programme included a tribute to Tagore in a Kathak dance performance, choreographed by Pt. Birju Maharaj and his disciples, performance of Tagore's famous dance drama, *Chitangda*, by the students of Mayur Lalit Dance Academy and choreographed by Debamitra Sengupta, performance on 'The Journey from Sanctum to Proscenium' in Sattariya style choreographed by Ranjumoni Saikia, Kathak Performance of 'Chhand Pravaah' by Swati Sinha and her group, Mohiniattam performances on Shankaracharya's 'Panchabhuta' and Tagore's 'Ritu Ranga' and 'Amitajyoti', choreographed by the Kolkata based dancer and choreographer Bimbavati devi. It was based on Tagore's essay 'Viswa Parichay' and performed in Manipuri dance style.<sup>41</sup>

At Delhi's Azad Bhawan Auditorium, the Kolkata based Odissi Vision and Movement Centre presented a dance theatre, titled, *Thakur Barir Saaaj Poshak* (The Sartorial Fashion of the Tagore Family). The programme which looked at how Tagore's large family made wardrobe choices was part of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Tagore. It was presented by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations.<sup>42</sup> Delhi's Kamani Auditorium staged a puppet theatre show, titled, *Interpreting*

*Tagore*, performed by eight dancers of the Astad Deboo Dance Company. This event combined dance, recitation, puppet show, mask and opera music was designed around three of Tagore songs, *Ekla Chalo Re*, *Your Grace*, and *Every Fragment of Dust is awakened*. The eight dancers, belonging to the Salam Balak Trust had started their lives as street children, but now they are part of the Astad Deboo Dance Group and artists who perform on various facets of Rabindranath Tagore's life and works.<sup>43</sup> The Kamani Auditorium also hosted between 26 and 30 September 2011, a number of dance dramas. These included, *Chitrangda*, by Kathak Kendra Repertory and choreographed by Gitanjali Lal; *Chandalika* by Sattariya Kendra, Guwahati and choreographed by Jatin Goswami; *Shyama* by Kalamandalam, Kolkata and choreographed by Thankamani Kutty; *Bidai Abhishap* by Jawahar Lal Nehru Manipuri Dance Academy Repertory, Imphal and choreographed by N. Amusana Devi; and another edition of *Chandalika*, presented by Kucchipudi Academy, Chennai and choreography by Vempatti Chinna Satyam. The Shri Ram Centre, Delhi, hosted a play between 28<sup>th</sup> and 30 June 2011, titled, *Tamasha Na Hua*, produced and directed by one of the most prominent theatre personalities of India, Bhanu Bharati. Bhanu attempted to revisit, through his play, the ideologies of Rabindranath Tagore in the context of tumultuous modern times.<sup>44</sup> The Indo American Friendship Association organized a cultural event at the Nehru Memorial Museum, a cultural event to commemorate the occasion. Ambassadors from several countries were present and each of them recollected Tagore's visit and its cultural impact upon their respective countries. Renowned artists like Pandit Birju Maharaj and Saswati Sen performed for this respectable gathering. Jayati Ghosh performed short but mesmeric recital of Tagore poems.<sup>45</sup> At Delhi Rabindra Bhawan (built



(The Kiran Sehgal Dance Group performing in Rabindra Pranati at Delhi's Rabindra Bhawan, as part of Tagore's 150th birth anniversary celebrations: Photo Courtesy- Anu Pushkarna; *The Hindu*, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2010). [www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tpfeatures/tp.../article790123.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tpfeatures/tp.../article790123.ece)

during poet's centenary year), a three day cultural event titled, *Rabindra Pranati*, was organized to commemorate the occasion. It featured dance performances and art shows. Tagore's *Geetanjali* was recited in its translated versions by well-known Sanskrit, Oriya, Manipuri, Kahmiri, Malayalam, Marathi and Kannada et al. One of the prominent Rabindra Sangeet artists from Kolkata, Pratima Mallick rendered some fine Rabindra songs. Kiran Sehgal's group performed an Odissi dance on Rabindra rain song, *Sabanero Gaganero Gaye*. The cultural events also included Manipuri, Bharatnatyam and Kathak performances on Tagore songs.<sup>46</sup> The Union Finance Minister Sh. Pranab Mukherjee released a special commemorative coin on this occasion at Rabindra Pranati.<sup>47</sup> At the India International Centre, a compilation of songs from Tagore's, anthology *Geetanjali* accompanied by recitation was presented by Jayati Ghosh. This event was presided over by the Chhatisgarh Governor Shekhar Dutt and was held in collaboration with Impresario and Rabindra Bharati University.<sup>48</sup> The 15- Day Delhi International Arts Festival was hosted at the 16<sup>th</sup> century monument Purana Qila in November 2011. The festival opened with a tribute to Tagore by troupes from Shantiniketan's Sangeet Bhawan and South Africa. The Shantiniketan troupe, led by Professor Sandip Basu

Sarvadhikari, presented song dance choreography in commemoration of Tagore and in remembrance of an illustrious alumnus-Indira Gandhi-who spent a few years at the university in the 1930s for her post matriculation degree. Veruskha Pather & troupe, a South African fusion dance ensemble presented a dance and poetry recital, titled, 'Ocean of Love' as a tribute to Tagore.<sup>49</sup>

The Tagore Theatre at Chandigarh, hosted similar festivities, organized to celebrate the occasion. Students from the Shantiniketan staged Tagore's dance drama *Chitrangda*, at the Tagore theatre, sector 18 in Chandigarh. The dance drama was directed by Indrani Mukhopadhyay, a faculty member of Shantiniketan.<sup>50</sup> The Punjabi Sahitya Academy, Ludhiana, paid tribute to Tagore on his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary by re-editing and publishing a series of 12 books of Tagore. It also decided, in order to promote the Tagore literature, to sell these books at 50% discount to interested school, colleges and institutions and anyone interested in buying these.<sup>51</sup> The Punjab based theatre group Rang Rangmanch, organized a theatre festival at Punjab Naatshala in Amritsar (?) dedicated to the literary genius Rabindranath Tagore. Plays, such as 'Jeebito', based on Tagore's short story *Jeevat Ya Mrit*, 'Samapti', 'Var Mala', 'Visarjan', etc., based on Tagore Stories were staged. With Powerful female protagonists and characters, the festival emphasized on women's plight and position in our society over the years. *Jeevat Ya Mrit*, for instance, was a monologue presented by actor Seema Biswas, which depicted women who live various kinds of Death throughout their lives.<sup>52</sup>

In Ganganagar (Rajasthan), the Peoples Media and Theatre (PMT) organized the *Rabindra Rachna Mahotsav*, to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> birth celebration of Tagore. Budding dancers Gargi Bannerji, Surbhi Kumawat, Uma Vijay, Mamta Tiwari and others mesmerized the gathering by presenting the play *Charulata*, based on Tagore's novel *Nastanirh* (The Broken Nest). They were supported by vocalists Chander Kant

Gautam, Om Prakash Nayar, Shyam Sunder Sharma off the stage. The play was choreographed by Rekha Thakur and music composed by Dhruvad singer, Madhu Bhatt.<sup>53</sup> In Shimla, the abandoned fire service building at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies underwent conversion and the renovated form took shape of a pool theatre with a capacity to accommodate 100 people at a time. This pool theatre hosted in April, 2011, a film festival comprising of exhibition of 15 films based on or inspired from Tagore works. This was the first activity related to the newly set up Tagore Centre in the institute and through this event an attempt was made to enable scholars and researchers to have some serious discussion on Tagore's work and provide new insights into the philosophy of Tagore.<sup>54</sup>

Jammu ( & Kashmir) also celebrated the occasion with much fanfare. A local theatre group, Natrang staged a Dogri play titled *Suno Tagore Di* and a Hindi play *Parvaaz* at the tourist bungalow in Ramban on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012. Both the plays were written, produced and directed by Balwant Thakur. The project was approved by the North Zone Tagore Commemoration Committee (NZTCC), Chandigarh. The Jammu & Kashmir police and Department of Tourism supported the theatre group in its endeavor to propagate Tagore's reformist ideas relevant to women and youth. These plays were later staged in all 9 other districts of Jammu province, namely, Doda, Kishtwar, Jammu, Katra, Udhampur, Samba, Kathua, Rajouri and Poonch.<sup>55</sup> Three performances-*Ritu Chakra*, *Street of Voices*, and *With Love*, formed part of the 36<sup>th</sup> Vikram Sarabhai International Arts Festival, Inter Art 2011, held between 28 and 30 December 2011, at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, Gujarat, as a fitting tribute to Tagore on his 150<sup>th</sup> Birth anniversary. In the *Ritu Chakra* (Cycle of Season), the transition music linked Rabindra Sangeet, representing each season. The second performance was written and directed by Symon Macintyre, a Scottish

puppetry theatre director was based on an interpretation of Tagore's short story, *The Wife's Letter*. With Love was directed by Mallika Sarabhai, a prominent Indian classical dancer of big repute, and Steve Mayer Miller. Well known film and stage actor Tom Alter played Tagore in this performance. This act personified Tagore on the stage for the realization of the audience that Tagore is not just a chapter in a textbook; rather he is a living heritage.<sup>56</sup>



(Mallika Sarabhai's Tribute to Tagore at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, Gujarat. Photo Courtesy, Yadavan Chandran, *The Hindu*, 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2011) [www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/poet...writer/article2744478.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/poet...writer/article2744478.ece)

Kolkata pioneered the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore. An exhibition series was organized in the Nand Lal Bose Gallery & Jamini Roy Gallery at Rabindranath Tagore Centre in June 2011, by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Rabindranath Tagore Centre and ICCR, Kolkata. This exhibition series reflected diverse facets of Tagore's life and works such as Tagore in advertisements showing a variety of products including Books, medicines, cosmetics, food products and stationary as tools to forward the nationalist agenda; Tagore and Cinema, featuring his notes on cinema, rare pictures of him with cast members of *Natir Puja*, a film in

which he also acted as well as many posters and stills of films, he inspired in later times etc. It also exhibited philatelic items on Tagore from all over the world, including official postage stamps and postal stationaries.<sup>57</sup> Many students, teachers and Tagore admirers gathered at Jorasanko's Thakurbari and the adjoining Rabindra Bharati University and took part in the singing of Tagore songs, reciting his poems and staging dance and drama composed by him. The heritage building of Tagore's birth place was kept open for the public to offer tribute to him. The state Government organized a day-long function at Rabindra Sadan, Nadan Academy and several other state owned auditoriums where various academic and cultural activities, with Tagore as the central focus, were conducted. At Shantiniketan, the day of Tagore's birth (9<sup>th</sup> May) began at 5.30AM, with holding of special prayers at 'Chhatimtola', the meditation place for Rabindra's father, Devendranath Tagore. This prayer meeting was presided over by the Viswa Bharati Vice Chancellor Rajat Kanto Day. The students danced in the campus and sang 'Baitalik', (meditation prayer with songs). An exhibition on Tagore, mainly of photographic accounts of his life and works, his foreign trips, his family life etc., was also organized. The Next day, Tagorean nostalgia was rekindled when his piano (gifted to him in 1922 by Maruy Van Egghen, a Dutch lady, who visited Shantiniketan to meet the poet) featured in a recital by Jyotisko Dasgupta, grandson of late Maitreyee Devi, noted writer who came close to Tagore during his lifetime.<sup>58</sup> The then Indian Railway minister (now, the Chief Minister of West Bengal), Mamta Banerjee flagged off a special exhibition train named 'Sanskriti Yatra' from the Howrah station and this five coach exhibition train carried Rabindranath Tagore's literary and art works, ran throughout the year in a bid to taking Tagore to every nook and corner of the country.<sup>59</sup> The coaches were named 'Jibon Smriti', 'Gitanjali', 'Mukto dhara', 'Chitra Rekha' and 'Shesh Katha' on the basis of different themes relating to Tagore's Arts and



writings. An additional coach, 'Smarika', was also added exhibiting the handicrafts of Shantiniketan where visitors could buy items and souvenirs.<sup>60</sup> The National Library in Kolkata also organized a variety of functions to commemorate this occasion. It released a printed bibliography, along with its online version, listing books written by Tagore and available in this library, in all major Indian language and in English. It uploaded the 'Rabindranath Tagore-A Digital Archive in the National Library website in December 2011. Besides, it organized a cultural programme in June 2011 wherein Lopamudra Mitra, a noted singer, presented Tagore songs. The Bengal Motor Sports Club organized the 12<sup>th</sup> Kaviguru Rally 2011 on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2011. The rally started from the Central Avenue Gate of the Jorasanko Thakurbari and traveled through Howrah, Hoogly, Burdhan and Hoogli Districts and after covering 260 Kilometers, it ended at Uttarayan, Tagore's home in Uttarayan. Thirty four- wheelers and 15 two- wheelers participated in this event which enjoys the status of a national competition, granted by the Federation of Motor Sports of India.<sup>61</sup> Mungpoo, near Siliguri, in the West Bengal, has special association with Tagore. Tagore visited this place four times between 1938 and 1940 because of his love for the place and special bond with Maitreyi Devi, the daughter of his friend and wife of Manmohan Sen, the then director of Directorate of Cinchona and other Medicinal Plants Plantations. She had published a book *Mungpoo Rabindranath*, containing an account of the poet's stay at the Director's Bungalow. Later Maitreyi Devi converted this house as Rabindra Smriti in 1944 to preserve the poet's memories. The place was further converted into a museum by the Left Front Government of the West Bengal in 2000. The place celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebrations organized by the state's Information and Culture Department, district administration, directorate of Cinchona and other medicinal Plants, the Rabindra Memorial Model Labor Welfare Centre and the local people of Mungpoo.

People from all walks of life flocked in there to take part in these celebrations. K. B. Yonzon, the 18 year old boy who had wheeled the poet around the Bungalow in 1940 on Tagore's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, recounted his memories 70 years later, in 2011, now as an 88 year old man, to the gathering in 2011.<sup>62</sup>

Similar commemorative functions were held in Uttar Pradesh. At behest of The North Central Zonal Cultural Committee (NCZCC), A composite presentation on Tagore was presented by Shri Salim Arif which had recitals of Tagore poems by eminent personalities like Ashok Chakradhar and Gulzar. It also had dramatization of Tagore's famous works like *Chandalika*, *Kabuli Wala*, *Dak Ghar* (Post Office) *Geetanjali* etc. This show was prepared at NCZCC headquarter at Allahabad. Similarly, The Allahabad Museum hosted a series of activities on this occasion. In collaboration with the Allahabad Cinematic Society, film shows on Rabindranath Tagore were screened for the public viewing between June and July 2011. In September 2011, it put up a national level seminar on 'Tagore and His Association with Allahabad'. In December, 2011, an international collaboration was proposed with the Tagore Centre at Edinburg University for research and exchange of literature. Dr Imre Bangha, an eminent scholar from the department of Hindi, Oxford University, was invited to deliver a lecture on Tagore in the Context of European and World Politics in February, 2011. Lucknow celebrated the commemorative event in a unique style. Naveen Saradiya Utsav, one of the cities' oldest Durga Puja Committees, erected a replica of Jorasanko Thakur Bari and paced the idol of goddess Durga inside. Thus, the local people performed their prayers inside and had the feel of the ancestral house of Tagore. This massive replica covered an area of over 10,000 square feet in the city's Anand Nagar locality.<sup>63</sup>

Bihar, too, had its fair share in Tagore's commemorative celebrations. The Patna University organized a two-day Tagore Commemorative function at Patna College seminar Hall. It was

jointly organized by the University's Bengali Department and 'Bangla Sanskriti Parishad', an association formed by the teachers of the Bengali department. The Main event of this function was an international seminar titled; 'Nana Roope Rabindranath Tagore' (Various shades of Tagore) participated by scholars from Bihar, Bengal and Bangladesh. Various aspects of Tagore's life and works were explored in this seminar.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, as part of the poet's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebrations, The Rabindra Parishad, in collaboration with the Department of Art and Culture, Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation and All Bihar 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Celebration Committee, organized a recitation and speech competition participated by scores of children and adults alike, at Rabindra Bhawan in Patna.<sup>65</sup> Another notable feature of Rabindra Parishad's collaboration with the aforementioned organizations was the staging of Tagore's two dance dramas, namely, *Shyama* and *Chandalika* by noted Kolkata based artist Dipa Choudhury at Rabindra Parishad. The audience was kept glued to their seats and as a correspondent to the *Telegraph*, reports, "cheers and applause rang out in the hall throughout the 90-minute performance...." (*Shyama*).<sup>66</sup> Another component of the year-long celebration of Tagore's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, organized by the Rabindra Parishad in Patna, was the Rangoli Competition in its premises, wherein about 100 people- from school children to home makers, participated and made colorful designs on papers.<sup>67</sup> Besides, a three- day national workshop, sponsored by the UGC (University Grants Commission) was organized by the Magadh Mahila College, Patna, on "Influence of Hindustani Classical Music on Rabindra Sangget". The music department of this college collaborated with the Bhartiya Nritya Kala Mandir in order to organize this event. Academic and performers from at least five universities- Rabindra Bharati University (Kolkata), Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, The Banaras Hindu University, Tilka Manjhi University (Bhagalpur) and Magadh University-

deliberated in this workshop.<sup>68</sup> The Bhagalpur district unit of Rabindra Parishad, in collaboration with the Department of Art, Culture and Youth Affairs of the state Government, and All Bihar 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary Celebration Committee, organized a five-day fair-*Basant Mela*, in memory of the Noble-laureate poet at Bhagalpur to mark the sesquicentenary birthday celebrations of Tagore. Lectures on various facets of Tagore, on the spot drawing and painting competition, and cultural performances on Rabindra Sangeet and Tagore dance dramas, marked the main features of this event.<sup>69</sup>

The Bhagalpur chapter of the Bihar Bengali Association also decided to celebrate this occasion on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2012. The date has some historical significance as on this date in 1910, Tagore had visited Bhagalpur and had attended the Third Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan (Third Bangiya Literary Conference). He was made the chairman of the concluding session of the conference where he proposed Hindi to be the link language of India. The Tagore celebrations, therefore, was planned to focus on Tagore and his love for Hindi, apart from holding *Prabhatpheris* (morning procession) and a range of cultural events on this occasion.<sup>70</sup>

Different commemorative events were organized at various places in Jharkhand. At the state capital Ranchi, the Union Club brought alive these celebrations at the Union Club and Library at the Plaza Hall, with events such as singing of traditional songs written by Tagore, recitation of Tagore's famous poem, *Gandharir Abedan* (Gandhari's Prayer), and staging dance dramas based on Tagore's poem *Urbashi*, choreographed by Sayani Nath and directed by Subir Lahiri, and *Ritu Rango*, depicting six seasons, showcased by Paromita Choudhury. The Society for Preservation of Tribal Culture and Natural Beauty, a city based voluntary organization, celebrated the birth anniversary at Tagore Hill<sup>71</sup> by organizing an on the spot painting competition for children, a portrait art camp-where art painters made portraits of state's freedom fighters,

such as, Siddho Kanho, Tilka Manjhi, Jatra Bhagat, Birsa Munda and Sheikh Bhikari etc., singing of Tagore songs by Madhusudan Ganguli and a discussion



(Elisa Verma and Prachi Singh performing on *Phoole Phoole Dhole Dhole* in Ranchi; Photo Courtesy-Hardeep Singh; The *Telegraph*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2011). [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com) › [Front Page](#) › Jharkhand

on Tagore and the need to protect the serenity of the Tagore Hill.<sup>72</sup> The function also included presentation of dance by two small girls, Elisa Verma and Prachi Singh on popular Rabindra song, *Phoole Phoole Dhole Dhole*, and rendering of Rabindra Sangeet by artists like, Seema Brahma, Bedatrayi Sarkar, Julia Aditya and Moupia Patra. It also included performances by Saji Dutta Sarkar, Koyna Ganguly Nilanjana Mahapatra, Sharmila Dey, Apuraba Ghosh and Bidisha Biswas and recitation of Tagore Poems by some of the other local artists such as Ratnin Chatterjee, Anju Thakur, Rini Sinha and others. Majlish, an organization of Mecon-Sail employees also held a function to pay tribute to Tagore. Various songs based on Rabindra Sangeet were rendered by local singers, like, Amrita Chatterjee, Shukla Dasgupta, Shampa Bhattacharya and Tanima Chatterjee.<sup>73</sup> The Ranchi University organized an international seminar in its Aryabhata auditorium to celebrate the occasion. The two-Day seminar was sponsored by the UGC,

and it focused on the life, works and contribution of Tagore to the society. The academic discourse on Tagore was followed by some cultural events, such as, a dance drama performed by students of the Rabindra Bharati University and a Manipuri dance performed by Shruti Banerjee.<sup>74</sup> At Jamshedpur, the Tagore Society organized cultural events to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> year celebrations of Tagore's birth. The events including dance performances, recitations and an exhibition of art works, all based on Tagore works. At the Bharat Scouts and Guides Campus in Dhanbad, similar cultural events were organized.<sup>75</sup>

A Bhubaneswar (Odisha) based Bengali cultural organization 'Pragati' has been organizing commemorative functions to pay tribute to Tagore since last many years. Although, Tagore's works in Bengali are very widely known in Odisha, the Oriya version of some of the Tagore's songs have only recently came into existence after a Cuttack based eminent English professor, A. C. Shukla translated some of the Tagore songs in Oriya and his daughter in law Trupty Panda rendered her voice to these. 'Pragati' had organized a function in 2008 at Bhubaneswar where Trupty Shukla rendered some of the Oriya songs on Tagore. Besides, she cut two Tagore albums in Oriya, recently, titled, *Tume Sandhyara Meghamala*, containing a collection of 12 love songs and *Hey Jibanatha*, which contains 12 devotional songs.<sup>76</sup> Odisha celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore with great fanfare.

In a programme titled 'Rabindranath Tagore in Orissa', a collage of cultural programmes, art workshops, and discussions revolving around Tagore's creations, was organized at



Bhubaneswar. One of the Tagore's poems' *Maranare Tuhu Shyama Soman*, was transformed and presented as an Odissi dance by Janhavi Behera, depicting the authority of death over life. The event was organized by the Eastern Zonal Tagore Commemoration Committee and a local cultural outfit called 'Angarag'.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the people of Cuttack were treated to a powerful dance drama performance based on Tagore's *Nataraj: Ritu Rangshala* at the Shaheed Bhawan in Cuttack. About a dozen artistes from the capital based dance troupe 'Nrutya Pratiya' participated in this performance which was choreographed by Pratiya Panda and Sushant Kumar Dash. Later, the troupe presented the same dance drama at other places of Odisha, such as Talcher, Rourkela, Behrampur and Bhubaneswar. The dance drama brought alive the brilliance of Tagore's literary imagination in the form of his work, *Nataraj: Ritu Rangshala*, which depicts mutual love and unspoken interaction between Lord Shiva and the six seasons- summer, monsoon, autumn, pre-winter, winter and spring. While *Nataraj* (Shiva) is enamored of the unique beauty of each season, his valor and enigmatic *Tandav Nritya*, (a particular form of dance attached to lord Shiva) is admired by the nature.<sup>78</sup> The Sanjukta and Raghunath Panigrahi Cultural Heritage Foundation organized a similar function at Bhubaneswar, where Odissi dancer Dona Ganguly and her troupe 'Diksha Manjari' from Kolkata presented *Chitrangda*, one of the most prominent dance dramas of Tagore. Dona Ganguly enthralled the audience with her powerful portrayal of the principal female lead- *Chitrangda*, a Manipuri princess who falls in love with Arjun (one of the Pandava brothers from the epic the *Mahabharata*). Disguised as a man she learns martial art from Arjun and secretly loves him. Blessed by the Hindu God of love, Kamadeva, she turns very beautiful and succeeds in attracting Arjuna and reveals her true identity to him, who then decides to marry her.<sup>79</sup>

Assam and other Indian north-east states did not lag behind in hosting Tagore festivals across the state on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Tagore. The Sangeet Natak Academy, Delhi, Sangeet Natak Academy, North East Centre and Sattariya Kendra, Guwahati organized 'Natyanjali', a six day festival at Rabindra Bhawan in Guwahati. Artistes from Den School of Music, Susanta Choudhury and Bibhu Ranjan Choudhury of Guwahati and Tithi Dev Barman of Agartala performed Rabindra sangeet. A troupe from Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy staged a Tagore dance drama, titled *Bidai Abhishap*. The Sattariya Kendra presented another dance drama, *Chandalika* which was choreographed by dancer Jatin Goswami. Another dance drama *Rather Rashi* was also staged with Sukrachariya Rabha as its director. Besides, dance dramas-*Abhisaar* in Assamese, Angangba Kabirei ( a play in Manipuri, presented by Paradise Theatre, Imphal), *Chitrangda* (performed by Gitanjali Dance Academy, Shillong), and *Bisarjan*, presented by Sankar Dance Academy, etc., were also staged as part of the six day festival.<sup>80</sup> In February, 2012, a five- day Assam Theatre Festival was organized at Rabindra Bhawan in Guwahati. The festival was an attempt to raise the relief fund meant for Assam theatre artistes. Of the plays staged in this festival, two were based on two short stories of Rabindranath Tagore, namely, *Strir Patra* (wife's Letter) and *Jibit Ya Mrit* (Alive or Dead). In both these plays, Seema Biswas, a prominent Hindi film actress and theatre personality played brilliantly the lead female character.<sup>81</sup>

At Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, similar commemorative functions were held. Tagore visited Shillong on many occasions in his life time and had stayed at the Brookside bungalow in Rilbong, Jetbhoomi in Rilbong and also at the Sidli House in Laitumkrah (belonging to the erstwhile late Maharani manjula Devi), on different occasions. He wrote some of his famous literary pieces such as, the dance drama, titled,



*Raktakarabi* (The Red Oleanders) and a poem *Shillonger Chitti* (Letter from Shillong). The Brookside Bungalow was subsequently christened as Rabindranath Tagore Art Gallery by the Art and Culture Department of the state. At the commencement of the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth anniversary celebrations, a life size statue of Tagore was unveiled at behest of the Meghalaya government. A four- day 'Tagore Utsav' (Tagore Festival) was organized between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2011 which featured dances and other art forms from the Northeast based on poet's works. The festival also included holding seminars, workshops and lectures on Tagore's life and literary and art works.<sup>82</sup> The state's Art and culture department joined hands with the Tagore Sesquicentenaries' Birth Celebration Committee and organized multifaceted cultural functions at Shillong throughout the year. The concluding function of the yearlong celebrations was equally mesmeric. A band of 150 singers from Shillong performed four Tagore songs in Hindi and Bengali in front of the specially decorated life-size statue of Rabindranath Tagore at Brookside bungalow. A variety of dance performances-Manipuri, Mohiniattam and Bharatnatyam, were presented by renowned artistes. Tagore's favorite *Rajnigandha* (The Night Queen) flowers were imported from the Jagannath Ghat at Howrah in Kolkata.<sup>83</sup> Malabika Bisharad took this opportunity to release her book titled, *Rabindranath Ebong Shailabas Shillong* (Rabindranath and Abode of Ice-Clad Shillong), which explores the influence of Shillong with its rich beautiful scenic landscape on Tagore and his creative literary imaginations. Malabika was born and brought up in Kolkata but settled in Shillong after her marriage. She played as an activist also, writing to the Governments of Meghalaya, West Bengal and at the centre, in the campaign for restoration of the house Tagore lived in as a Tagore Memorial. In this volume, she has attempted to present a graphic account of the Natural beauty of Shillong's landscape and how it rejuvenated youthfulness in Tagore, each time he

visited there.<sup>84</sup> At Agartala, the capital of Tripura, a Bangladesh based theatre group Padatik staged its play *Shey* on the inaugural day of five day festival organized by Mahakaron Binodon Sanstha. Tagore had written 15 short stories under this title when he was 76 years old. The play was adapted and directed Debashish Ghosh.<sup>85</sup>

## V

As the world celebrated the *Pachhise Baisakh* 1418, visual memories will go a long way to be attached to persons across the globe, who participated in any of these events at any location. The man, who lived his life through conceiving the philosophy of Universalism and practicing a variety of cultural arts-poetry, painting, music, dance, drama etc., was very naturally given the most befitting tribute in the form of plays and replays of these art forms. The geographical reach of this celebration was truly global, given the enormity of the occasion as the Bengali year 1418 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. The past was approached in the present through the optimum use of resources of the present and this, indeed, provides the student of History, like the author, with a novel approach to reconnect to the past through the present.

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