

Lund International Tagore Choir tour to Bangladesh

Thursday 26 December 2019:

• Group leaders Lars and Bubu Eklund + Staffan depart Copenhagen Airport at 19.50 for Kolkata (via Delhi) by Air India

LARS: Time 18.20, half an hour before boarding the Air India flight for Delhi. Little tired after hectic planning for the Bangladesh tour and changes in the programme being made even yesterday. Bubu and I travel with Staffan who will be with us not only in Bangladesh but also afterwards two weeks in India.

Friday 27 December:

Main group of choir singers depart Sweden for Dhaka by British Airways and Qatar Airways, via London and Doha.

LARS: Delhi airport, time is 14.45, arrived here at 07.30 and we were supposed to continue for Kolkata at 14.00 but flight is rescheduled for 16.30. However, after long rest and light lunch at Food Court. Finally arrived Kolkata at 7 pm, only to find that we had to wait in an enormous queue for immigration, OCIs like Bubu and me are now put together with ordinary Indian citizens. Reached our residence at 21.30.

Saturday 28 December:

All members of choir arrive in Dhaka.

16.40: Main group arrives

17.30: Lars and Bubu Eklund + Staffan arrive Dhaka

Stay at Ambala Inn Hotel, plot 39, Road 2, Dhanmondi, for whole group, for all nights in Dhaka.

LARS: Woke up at 06.30, found a message from the big choir group that they are now on their way. Staffan and I took a walk around Lake Market in Kolkata and down to the Lakes, the oasis area close to our Kolkata residence, and after lunch the three of us took a taxi for the airport, arriving at 2 PM, in due time for the 16.10 Indigo flight to Dhaka. At Dhaka airport we immediately found Sheila, who waited for us to fill in the immigration cards correctly. The rest of the choir had already got out to fetch their luggage and change money. And outside we were greeted by our friends Menal and Gulubhai plus our Bangladeshi choir member Alfi and her husband Arman.

Out into the chaotic traffic, waiting for the two pre-ordered minibuses, one for the nine Swedes, and the second for our bags. Constant traffic jam, it took 1,5 hours to reach the hotel, but we enjoyed being together full of interesting conversations. And after checking in at the nice hotel in Dhanmondi, one of the best areas of Dhaka, Alfi and Arman showed us the way to a food court nearby with restaurants serving lots of different food.

Sunday 29 December:

16.00: Performance at Zainul Festival in Dhaka, 20 minutes programme. A rrangement by Prof. Nisar Hossain, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka.

LARS: Finally news about the festival in Internet, the festival is held in commemoration of Zainul Abedin, who was a pioneer in Art Education in Bangladesh. We had a rehearsal in the morning at our hotel, and now looked forward to our first Bangladesh performance. The next will be in Jessore on 1 January.

Nice to be back at Dhaka University an its wonderfully green and peaceful campus, last time I and Bubu were there was in 2015 on invitation by Mashiur Rahman, at that time Professor of Sociology (now he is Pro Vice Chancellor at National University, where we will go go later), meeting the students and also had a formal meeting with the then DU Vice Chancellor. Previously I have also visited Dhaka University twice on SASNET missions, both in 2002 and 2005.

Our mini-concert consisting of five beautiful Tagore songs was held at the Faculty of Fine Arts (the Arts College) for a large audience who seemed to appreciate our performance greatly. Afterwards we met many people who liked to discuss our performance, and one lady said that our Bengali pronunciation was perfect, fantastic!

After our performance came several other music programmes, including strong Baul singing, of a kind we hope to experience more in depth when we visit Kushtia and Lalon Fakir's grave next week.

Monday 30 December:

10.00: Meeting with Mr. Mahadi Hasan from CLEFS, planning for choir workshop on 6th January

11.00: Meeting Dr. Rifat-ur-Rahman, Rabindra University, friend of Lars and Bubu since he studied at Lund University

19.00: Dinner at residence of choir member Ms. Alfi Shaharin.

LARS: Second day of Choir Bangladesh tour. Visit to Dhaka University with Rifat Rahman and Dr. Mohammad Tanvir Ahmed from Rabindra University. Rifat has studied archaeology at Lund University and is a close friend to us. He came to our hotel and met our group and we discussed history and society of Bangladesh, since he and Dr. Ahmed now works in a department of Cultural Heritage and Bangladeshi studies.

After lunch we went on tour to Dhaka University and visited several departments and also the university museum, with interesting artifacts.

A tour to Old Dhaka had to be cancelled due to heavy traffic, and the fact that we were invited to dinner at a great restaurant in the evening by our Bangladeshi choir member Alfi and her husband [Arman Ahamed Subash](#), so we needed to take some rest inbetween.

It was a buffet dinner with lots and lots of dishes, and we met the family members of our hosts. Nice evening and before leaving we sang together and Staffan played his violin much to the delight of the restaurant staff.

Tuesday 31 December:

08.30: Green Lines Volvo Bus from Dhaka to Jessore, 8 hours.

Hosted by family of choir member Momota Hena. Private accommodation in Hena family residence (5 people) and City Plaza hotel (Lars & Bubu, Jonas & Karin). All food served by Momota's mother during the two days stay in Jessore, heartily thanks!

LARS: New Year's Eve in Jessore. Third day of Tagore choir's Bangladesh tour, early departure with comfortable Volvo bus from Dhaka, ferry crossing over Padma River (that is Ganges with changed name after passing the border from India) and arrival in charming small town of Jessore where posters are posted all over town about our concert on the Uddichi stage tomorrow at 5.30 pm.

Warmly welcomed by our choir member Momota's family who generously accommodates half the gang while me and a few others stay at the Plaza Hotel.

Offered a wonderful typical Bengali lunch consisting of Hilsa fish in mustard oil sauce, and we spent the evening with watching super talented local musicians at Udichi and thereafter enjoying an exciting Bengali musical theater. Where our ladies got to participate in an inauguration ritual whereby everyone sang Tagore's wonderful song *Anandaloka mongolaloke*. We who can sing the song of course.

Wednesday 1 January 2020:

18.00: Concert at Udichi premises (not in Jessore Town Hall due to cold weather). Contact person: Liaquat Ali. Poster for concert put up all over town.

LARS: Fourth day of the Tagore choirs Bangladesh tour. Such a great day with a well-organised concert at Uddichi cultural centre in Jessore for a crowded and enthusiastic audience, listening to our general programme including both Tagore songs and some Swedish tunes. Posters had been all over town since weeks, and people we met during the day were anxious to know when the programme should start exactly. And all newspapers and local TV were there making interviews, already published in the papers web editions, and tomorrow we will appear in TV.

What a delightful contrast to the first concert at Dhaka University. With no publicity at all, and with a minimum of efforts by the organizers to promote our performance and draw an audience.

Add to this an excellent stay by Momota's family with delicious home made food and a warm atmosphere here in Jessore. Thanks for that.

Finally, we were happy with our singing at the concert. Great work by all members, and excellent solo songs by Bubu, Karin and myself (*Tiggaren från Luossa*, Dan Anderssons song so much influenced by Tagore).

Thursday 2 January:

10.00: Transport by minibus from Jessore to Kushtia, 2 hours 30 minutes. Accommodation for three nights at Desha Tower hotel, five twin rooms.

Mr. Mesbah ul Haq and Mr. Akbar Malek Gulzar (friends of Lars & Bubu) arrive from Dhaka and join the group during entire Kushtia stay.

16.00: Visit the shrine of famous Bengali baul singer Lalon Fakir (1774-1890).

LARS: Only a few hours by road from Jessore to Kolkata – Bubu's ancestral home is actually located close to Jessore Road in north Kolkata. But such difference there is between Bangladesh and neighboring India with the latter country's modernity, English language proficiency, and a political debate right now focusing on the controversial new law on immigration and the countrywide protests

against it. Compare with the situation here where the poverty is appalling, the infrastructure poor (that is outside the capital city Dhaka), not a single foreigner is visible in the countryside and smaller towns, few people speak English, the political setting is a world apart with the Awami League domination, and the newspapers mainly report about ministers meetings and similar news.

165 million people live on an area equal to south Sweden – Götaland. Still it is a country that works, there is a steady development and the social indicators are more positive than those of other south Asian nations. And the government has been able to put the Islamist forces under control. And add to this the important role Rabindranath Tagore plays, this is extremely nice to experience since his ideology is connected to a secular society, religious harmony and a rejection of chauvinist nationalism so prevalent in other countries.

Today we departed from Jessore by hired minibus in the morning and reached Kushtia after 2,5 hours. Staying at newly built Desha Tower Hotel, close to the coming new Kushtia Medical College, still under construction. We were met by our dear friend Menal who acts as our guide during three days in Kushtia.

Kushtia is famous for being the place where the Baul master Lalon Fakir lived till he passed away in 1890, and today his shrine is one of two major sights for visitors – the other being Tagore's house Shilaidaha (that we will visit tomorrow).

In late afternoon we visited the shrine and learnt about Lalon's extraordinary life, his ideology on peace, harmony and each persons individual path to come close to God. The Baul culture is amazing, a mixture of Sufi Islamic mysticism and Hindu Vaishnava piety and with music as an important means to reach the goal.

At the shrine several Baul singers turn up every day, and so also today. Great show to watch and listen to the white clad men and women with their intensive clear strong voices. And a few of our team, Karin, Staffan and Jonas, became so enthusiastic that they joined the dancing, and again Staffan was tempted to join the musicians show with his violin. Wonderful.

Friday 3 January:

09.00: Minibus excursion to Shilaidaha Tagore Kuthibari (Tagore museum) outside Kushtia.

18.00: Evening programme at Tagore Lodge in Kushtia with support from the local unit of Jatiyo Rabindrasangheet Sammelon Parishad (JRSP).

LARS: Back in the evening after an amazing concert at Tagore Lodge in Kushtia, the most successful concert ever given by the choir. Super-efficient organisation by the Kushtia branch of Jatiyo Rabindrasangheet Sammelon Parishad (JRSP) – the Bangladeshi national association to promote Tagore songs. Nice setup in the courtyard of the historic building connected with the 19th century business firm Tagore & Co. in the city centre, equipped with a good sound system and plenty of microphones. Plus an enthusiastic and knowledgeable audience who fully enjoyed our programme with songs from the *Chandalika* dance drama and a bouquet of beautiful songs from our general programme. Plus two Swedish chorus songs, and finally a pair of solo performances, again Dan Andersson sung by me, and Karin with her clear voice singing the sweet folk song *Sorgen och Glädjen*. Chief guest at the function was the Mayor of Kushtia.

The positive reactions – singing along and several times screaming out “Excellent” – from the audience inspired us in the choir to do our utmost and we were really satisfied with our performances this evening – even Bubu had no complaints, unusual.

We finished by singing the national anthem *Amar Shonar Banglar*, and the entire audience rose up and sang loudly all the three verses. Followed by photo sessions en masse.

Otherwise the highlight of the day, now perhaps degraded to be the second highlight – was our morning visit to Tagore's house Shilaidaha, a place I long wished to visit. A complimentary to Shantiniketan in India, the place where Tagore spent much time, and wrote and composed many of his most beautiful songs, and where he translated into English *Gitanjali*, the book he was awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize for.

Interesting with lots of unique photos and items connected to Tagore when he stayed here with his houseboat on Padma River. So happy to finally get the chance to visit Shilaidaha after many years.

One more thing: the whole night before it rained constantly, strange phenomena for this time of the year. The lifts were out of function for some hours and also Internet was stopped. Luckily, the weather cleared up in time for the Shilaidaha visit.

Saturday 4 January:

10.00: Attending 'Sadhusangha', a congregation of followers and believers of another prominent mystic philosopher and sufi composer Panju Shah, in Harishpur, Jhenaiah, outside Kushtia (one hour drive). A festival held once a year, this time 3-4 January. A great opportunity!

LARS: Another gorgeous experience, attending the once-yearly festival commemorating Panju Shah (1851-1914), leading mediator and sufi poet of mystic philosophy, writer, composer and legendary mystic bard,. Initially he was a disciple of Lalon Fakir, but later he developed his own philosophy. In one of his songs he declared, 'All human beings have the same mind, however different their activities'.

We were so lucky that this year's festival happened on 3-4 January in Harishpur, a village south of Kushtia housing the graves of Panju and his two wives. The festival is organised by a devotee of him and we were warmly welcomed as we came there in the morning. The place was crowded with devotees and Baul singers, men and women, who sang with strong voices. When we arrived to the site we became the main attraction for a while, and our presence was apparently a great experience for the festival visitors and the local village people. Menal and a friend of his, a professor from Islamic University of Kushtia, had prepared for our visit, and we were served the most delicious food including hilsa and ruhi fish dishes by the organisers. We also enjoyed the Bauls singing in spite of the fact they were tired after having sung all night long. The festival ended today with serving all the devotees wonderful vegetarian food cooked over open fire.

As everywhere else, we had to stand for photo session after photo session, since nowadays almost every citizen owns a mobile phone, so it took quite some time before we could return by our hired minibuses to Kushtia on bumpy country roads travelling through charming traditional Bengali villages.

Sunday 5 January:

09.00: Return by luxury bus from Kushtia to Dhaka. Again staying at Ambala Inn Hotel

LARS: Back in Dhaka after nice tour to Jessore and Kushtia. Dhanmondi is the name of the part of town where we are staying, it is a wealthy district full of good restaurants and shops, a world apart from the simplicity prevalent in rural and urban areas outside Dhaka.

Travelled from Kushtia, again crossing the Padma River by ferry, six hours by big bus, a Hyundai one, with almost the same standard as the immensely popular Volvo and Scania buses that provide luxury comfort to Bangladeshi road travelling.

Half way through our tour, I have planned for the remaining events and concerts. Tomorrow we will participate in a choir workshop organized by CLEFS, an institution promoting western music in Bangladesh, and in the evening a reception is held for us by the Swedish Embassy in Dhaka.

The following days we will first perform at the Government Music College on Tuesday, and at the National University main campus on Wednesday, followed by a tour to Sylhet where we will perform at Dakshin Surma College on Thursday. All three concerts made possible by initiatives from our key academic contact person and close personal friend Prof. Mashiur Rahman, pro vice chancellor, National University (with 2 400 affiliated colleges all over the country). Unfortunately he has been so busy the last week, so we had no chance to meet until this evening. A wonderful person with a PhD in Sociology from Lund University.

Monday 6 January:

10.00 till 13.30: Choir workshop with students and performance at Clefs Music Foundation (CMF), an independent non-commercial institution introducing western classical music in Bangladesh. Contact person: Mr. Mahadu Hasan, CMF chairperson.

18.30. Reception for the choir hosted by Swedish Embassy in Gulshan, Dhaka, at Ambassador Charlotta Schlyter's residence.

Contact person: Mr. Gabriel Hjort, Second Secretary, Political, Trade and Communication Section, and Mr. Alim Bari, Communication Officer. We had provided a list of guests to invite, and the embassy invited people working with culture in Bangladesh.

LARS: Success for the choir workshop organised by our choir together with Clefs Music Foundation (CMF), and the Dept. of Music at University for Development Alternative (UODA) in Dhaka. Mahadu Hasan, the CMF chairperson came to our hotel in the morning and we travelled by cycle rikshas to Dhanmondi 27 and the UODA auditorium there.

Karin Ullstad and Jonas were our key resource persons in teaching western choir techniques to the interested students and Staffan demonstrated different folk music rhythms.

After the workshop a concert followed with our choir singing three rabindrasangeet tunes and a couple of Swedish songs. But before us the Dept. of Music students performed with their band of musicians and singers extraordinary good songs. And CMF students playing flute, clarinet and violin

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Program Schedule:
Reporting time: 9.30-9.45
Workshop: 10.00-12.00
Concert: 12.00 - 13.00
Closing Ceremony: 13.00-13.30

Place:
UODA Auditorium (3rd Floor)
Rangs Tower
Dhanmondi 27, Dhaka.
(Beside Bangladesh Eye Hospital)

**For Seat Reservation
Contact:**
01674708448
01306426963

REGISTRATION FEE
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Organized by:

CLEFS MUSIC FOUNDATION
COLLABORATES WITH
DEPT. OF MUSIC,
UNIVERSITY OF
DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

**WORKSHOP
ON CHOIR**

Instructed By
LUND INTERNATIONAL
TAGORE CHOIR



western style showed their proficiency .

Second highlight of the day: Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh, Charlotta Schlyter had invited us to a reception at her residence to which some of the most renowned rabindrasangheet artists in Bangladesh were also invited to listen to our songs. Great!!

The traffic was however even worse than otherwise, completely stuck almost the entire way from Dhanmondi to Gulshan, so in spite of departing at 5 PM it was impossible to reach the address before 6.30, the invitation time. Instead we arrived after 7 pm. Many others were even more delayed. A nice assembly of diplomats from Sweden, Norway and Netherlands, embassy staff, researchers well-known to me, and finally several renowned rabindrasangheet artists curious to listen to our choir. Mingling around, tasting wine for the first time in Bangladesh and making a short performance that became well received. The ambassador held an informative short speech on Tagore. Back to hotel at 10, now much quicker.

Tuesday 7 January:

10.30: Concert at Government College of Music in Dhaka (Sher-e-Bangla, Agargaon). 90 minutes, general Tagore programme (10 songs) + Swedish folk songs and Staffan playing violin. Invited by Professor Kristee Hefaz, Principal (initiated by Mashiur Rahman, Pro-Vice Chancellor, National University).

19.00: Choir invited for dinner to Mr. Mesbah-ul Haq's residence.

LARS: Fantastic day, totally amazing warm welcome to Government Music College in the morning with flower bouquets and reception at Prof. Kristee Hefaz (the principals) office, with Mashiur Rahman and all professors. Then it was time for our concert, which became a real success, with an audience consisting of brilliant students of music.

afterwards we were invited for a luxury Bengali lunch, prepared by the college teachers, again in Prof Hefaz office. Staffan entertained with his violin, and a number of teachers sang songs for us, rabindrasangheet as well as nazrulgeet (songs by the second Bangladeshi national poet Nazrul Islam, who actually lived as a neighbour to bubus family at Tala Park in Kolkata till he moved over to the newly liberated Bangladesh in 1971), and also patriotic songs and Baul songs.

The entire programme for our concert was so professionally organized so we agreed that this concert was the absolutely best we experienced during our tour, even though we have had wonderful concerts in Jessore and Kushtia as well, and we stayed several hours. Even up to our departure students wanted to play with us, and Jonas enthusiastically borrowed a guitar to join.

Back to hotel for some hours rest before a dinner invitation to Menal at his residence on 14th floor in one of the large number of high rise buildings being constructed all over town. There we met not only Menal's family but also our other Dhaka friends Gulubhai and Sunny, known to Bubu since the Bangladesh war of liberation in 1971, they being freedom fighters who sometimes relaxed in Kolkata at Annada Munshi's roof. And another old friend happened to be present at the occasion, namely Jamil from Gothenburg and his wife Daisy, who belonged to the same gang of friends. Jamil was the one person who introduced me to the Munshi family in 1982 which led to me meeting Bubu and marrying her.

In between Mashiur called me on my Bangladeshi telephone and warned about possible severe traffic problems on Sunday when the choir tour is over and we will fly back to Kolkata and Copenhagen. The worlds second largest religious festival (after Mecca Haj), the Sunni Islamic Tongi festival will be held near Dhaka airport for several days. Mashiur recommended that's we change to a hotel close to the airport when we arrive from our Sylhet tour on Saturday

This caused me a lot of trouble, but eventually everything was fixed, with Mashiur's kind assistance.

Wednesday 8 January:

11.00, Visit to National University main campus at Mymensingh Highway, Gazipur (north of Dhaka) with musical performance. Invited by Vice Chancellor Harun-or-Rashid, and Registrar in charge Molla Mahfuz al-Hossain (initiative by Pro Vice Chancellor Prof. Mashiur Rahman).

15.30: Transport to airport from Gazipur.

18.15: Flying Dhaka-Sylhet by Biman Airlines.

Staying at Shahjalal University for Science and Technology (SUST) guest house.

Invited by SUST Vice Chancellor Prof. Farid Uddin Ahmed.

LARS: Now in Sylhet... Before we had a successful concert for a large audience at National University in Gazipur. Woke up at 6, packed our bags, had breakfast at 7, and left the Ambala Inn by a 30-seater bus belonging to National University, in our service because of Mashiur Rahman's assistance. Reached Gazipur quite far to the north from Dhaka after two hours travelling.

The university in Gazipur is only few years old and has two major buildings, one of them beautifully decorated with a frieze over the main entrance depicting Bangladeshi history from the 1952 language battle till independence 1971. We were met by an all-male delegation of National University senior

officers led by Vice Chancellor Prof. Harun-or-Rashid, the registrar Molla Mahfuz al-Hossain and of course our dear friend Mashiur, being the pro vice-chancellor (who has his office here at Gazipur). We went straight to a conference room for short introduction and eating some snacks, but soon off for a major hall that had been converted into a concert arena, where a large audience consisting of teachers and students was already waiting for us. I was all the time treated as being the sole leader of the Swedish group, little annoying since Bubu is the real choir leader, but so what! The usual speeches by honorees followed, and then local artists sang two songs before we entered the stage for our programme. We started with *Anondoloke Mongolaloke*, then Bubu sang *Dhay Jena Mor Sakal Bhalobasha* solo, after which the choir performed five songs from Tagore's 1938 *Chandalika* dance drama, sensitive songs like *Je Amare Pathalo* and *Swarnabarne Sammujjwale* but also widely popular *Nabo Boshonter* and *Matir Toder Dak Diyeche*. We finished with another popular songs, *Namo Namu* and *E Din Aji Kon Ghore Go*, much to the pleasure of the audience, and finally a few Swedish songs, accompanied by Staffan on violin.

After completion of the concert, we were taken for a guided tour around the campus and had a delicious lunch in the conference room. Then we had some spare time before going to the airport, and we had the opportunity to take some rest in Mashiur's office. Left for airport at 15.30. Happy on board the bus traveling to the airport, but severe traffic situation with constant queue turned into a nightmare. Arriving airport 3 minutes before last reporting time, rushed inside to the check in desk with the luggage we liked to bring with us (the rest of the bags Mashiur would take care of and deliver to our new hotel, Richmond Hotel in Uttara on Saturday).

Amid the confusion, Bubu happened to take the wrong bag with her and I was too busy with the tickets. So when arriving Sylhet in the evening (after a 30 minutes flight) we came to the university guest house and found that we had not a single set of extra clothes, no toilet utensils and most worrisome no Levadopa medicine for my Parkinson..

In Sylhet we were met by National University representatives who escorted us out of the airport via the VIP exit, and with a waiting minibus we travelled through the calm Sylhet traffic, mostly consisting of auto rikshas, to Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) guest house. Nice rooms with mosquito nets.

Kind choir friends gave me extra pair of trousers, underwear etc, to compensate for our missed bag. And our helpers promised to buy medicine for me tomorrow....

Thursday 9 January:

10.30: Sylhet, Performance Of Chandalika programme + Swedish songs at Dakshin Surma College, invited by Principal, arrangement by Prof. Mashiur Rahman.

LARS: In charming Sylhet, staying at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) guest house, but today's concert was held at Dakshin Surma College.

We had no expectations before this eight and final Bangladeshi concert, but how surprised we became when we arrived to the college and found it to be an another extremely amazing experience. After so many warm welcomes wherever we have performed we thought nothing more could happen. But arriving to Dakshin Surma college was extraordinary. Boy scouts stood in line forming a corridor for us to walk through, and then the entire teachers corps stood waiting for us, the male ones on left side and the females on the right. Accompanied by the principal Md. Shamsul Islam and the National University regional Centre director Dr. Md. Golam Rabbani we walked into the auditorium that was completely crowded with more staff and hundreds of enthusiastic students.

As usual we were first introduced to the principal at his office (and later had a delicious lunch served in the conference room), followed by several introductory speeches by honorees and a number of performances by local artists before we were invited to the stage.

Our concert programme was focused on songs from the dance drama Chandalika, but also included songs from the general programme as well as Swedish songs and Staffan playing violin. The audience was really appreciative, and we were also satisfied with our singing. We ended by singing la-la-la the popular Swedish song *Gärdebylåten* with full swing making the atmosphere great. The students among the audience, sitting in the back rows became more and more enthusiastic.

Sylhet TV was there and recorded the whole concert.

<https://www.facebook.com/syltvdotcom/videos/612964992786694/>

After our performance, the local artists again entered the stage and asked Bubu to join them. With a forceful song our choir members started to dance and so did several of the teachers, and even the principal took part in the wild great final of the concert (and also of our Bangladeshi programme).

In the evening, the whole group went by auto-rikshas from SUST to the so-called Manipuri market in central Sylhet, to do some shopping of shawls and sarees. Manipur is a state in northeastern India, but some Manipuris and other indigenous peoples also live in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. It has historical roots, since Sylhet pre-1947 was part of the multi-national region of Assam in the undivided British India. At time of partition between India and Pakistan, Sylhet was the only part of the empire that was allowed to have a referendum on whether belonging to hindu dominated India and muslim Pakistan, and then Sylhet with a majority of Bengali muslims opted for Pakistan (its eastern wing finally becoming Bangladesh in 1971).

Friday 10 January:

10.00: Sylhet. Excursion to tea gardens outside city.

LARS: Sitting whole group in the university guest house dining hall and summarizing the Bangladesh tour, extremely satisfied and full of wonderful memories. Today was the first non-performing day this week, and instead we went on an excursion by National University minibus to the tea gardens outside Sylhet and also to a restaurant serving excellent food – typical of Sylhet, since most cooks at Indian restaurants worldwide come from this rather small town in northeastern Bangladesh, which also resulted in daily direct flights from Sylhet to London.

In the evening I took a long walk around the SUST campus, remembering my previous visit to Sylhet, on a SASNET mission in 2005.

In the evening Mashiur called, to inform that the SUST Vice Chancellor who had arranged for our stay in Sylhet unfortunately was out of town over the weekend, and therefore we had no chance to meet him. However he was proud over our visit and we did not have pay for our accommodation.

Forgot to mention that I received Levadopa medicine from a pharmacy and today I felt so fine, climbing the tea estate hills with ease.

Tomorrow back to Dhaka, but to a hotel near the airport since the Tongi Sunni Muslim festival takes place in the area with millions of devotees.

Saturday 11 January:

11.20: Return flight Sylhet-Dhaka, by Biman Airlines.

Staying at Richmond Hotel, Uttara.

LARS: Richmond Hotel in Uttara (Dhaka northern suburb) Saturday night. Fourteenth day of the choir Bangladesh tour, 11 January. Sitting in our grand suite.

Woke up at 6 and had breakfast at the Sylhet guest house before departure by National University transport. Arrived Dhaka at 12.15 after a 25 minutes flight, and were brought to the hotel 10 minutes away by the hotel's minibus.

Our friends Menal and Gulzar waited for us at the hotel, for a warm farewell and giving the choir members tea cups with Shilaidaha motive + photo of the choir. They joined us for lunch in a nearby restaurant. We are so grateful for all assistance Menal has provided us during the two weeks of touring.

In the evening we had a long phone conversation with Mashiur. He has had so much work to complete so there was no chance for him to visit us today, and tomorrow the Tongi festival will make city traveling almost impossible. We owe so much to Mashiur whose contributions has added so much to our Bangladesh programme, including three concerts at National University affiliated colleges.

Our extra luggage that we did not bring to Sylhet has been kept at National University's Dhanmondi office, but a staff person delivered it to our hotel at 3 PM.

Later Bubu and I have packed our bags for tomorrow when we will fly to Kolkata at 15.30.

Sunday 12 January:

Final day in Dhaka for most of the choir.

15.30: Lars and Bubu Eklund + Staffan return flight to Kolkata by SpiceJet

18.50: Main group return flight to Europe by Qatar Airways/British Airways

LARS: Fifteenth and final day of the choir Bangladesh tour. Enjoying being back in my second hometown Kolkata and our Sardar Sankar Road flat, along with Bubu and Staffan. Whereas most of the rest of the choir just now travel by Qatar airways from Dhaka to Doha, on way to Copenhagen via London.

The Tongi festival (More correctly named the *Bishwa Ijtema Festival*) first part took place near the Dhaka airport, and whole morning there was an enormous crowd of people, Muslim devotees, walking, travelling by buses or standing on lorries, towards the festival ground. On TV we could follow the happenings till the final prayer time at noon, whereafter all the devotees returned home. We also followed the movement of people from our windows at the hotel, and when we left for the airport at 12.30 it took quite some extra time due to the queues.

The festival will have a second part next week, attracting devotees from all over the world making it the second largest religious festival in the world.

The hotel manager was lyrical about our stay at his hotel, because he had learnt about our tour and the TV transmission of our Sylhet concert, making us kind of cultural stars in Bangladesh.

The time is 22.50, closing down this Bangladesh tour diary with a glass of excellent Bhutanese whiskey bought in Dhaka airport's taxfree shop, on our way to Kolkata. Eight dollars only for a bottle of superb first class whiskey from Himalaya, great.

Monday 13 January:

Main group back in Sweden

Jonas and Karin H remain in Dhaka till 14th.

GROUP MEMBERS:

Bubu Munshi Eklund, Choir Leader

Lars Eklund, Choir Chairperson

Staffan Bengtsson

Sheila Mallik

Pia Holmberg

Jonas Bredford

Karin Hagard

Karin Ullstad

Gunilla Leijon

+ Alfi Shoharin and Rifat Tabassoom Tompa

(Dhaka residents)



সুইডেনের শিল্পীদের কণ্ঠে রবীন্দ্রসংগীত, মুক্ত শ্রোতা

যশোর অফিস

অসংখ্য রবীন্দ্রসংগীত বিভিন্ন মানুষের কণ্ঠে যশোরের মানুষ আগে বহুবার শুনেছে। কিন্তু বিদেশি ভাষাভাষীদের কণ্ঠে এ অঞ্চলের মানুষ রবীন্দ্রসংগীত আগে কখনো শোনেনি। গত বুধবার সন্ধ্যায় সুইডেনের নয়জন শিল্পী একের পর এক রবীন্দ্রসংগীত গেয়ে দর্শকদের মুগ্ধ করেন। বাংলাদেশ উদীচী শিল্পীগোষ্ঠী যশোর জেলা সংসদের সত্যেন সেন মঞ্চ নন্দনিক এ সংগীতানুষ্ঠানের আয়োজন করা হয়।

উদ্বোধনী পর্বে উদীচী যশোরের শিল্পীরা জাতীয় সংগীত ও সাংগঠনিক সংগীত পরিবেশন করেন। এরপর সুইডিশ শিল্পীরা 'আনন্দলোকে মঙ্গলালোকে...' সংগীত দিয়ে তাঁদের পরিবেশনা শুরু করেন। পরে 'হে নূতন...' গান গেয়ে দর্শকদের মাতিয়ে তোলেন। অসংখ্য সংগীত গেয়ে সবশেষে তাঁরা 'আমার সোনার বাংলা আমি তোমায় ভালোবাসি' গেয়ে অনুষ্ঠান শেষ করেন।

ভারতীয় বংশোদ্ভূত সুইডিশ নাগরিক বুবু মুসী সংগীত দলের নেতৃত্ব দেন। অন্য শিল্পীরা হলেন লার্স একলন্ড, স্টাফেন বেনসন, শিলা মালিক, পিয়া

হোমবার্গ, জোনাস ব্রেডফোর্ড, কারিন হ্যাগার্ড, কারিন আলস্টার্ড ও সুনিলা লিজন। তাঁরা রবীন্দ্রসংগীতসহ সুইডিশ ভাষার গান পরিবেশন করেন। সংগীতানুষ্ঠানের সঞ্চালক ছিলেন আবুত্বিশিল্পী কাজী শাহেদ নওয়াজ।

সুইডিশ শিল্পী লার্স একলন্ড জানান, '১২ বছর আগে রবীন্দ্রনাথের জন্মবার্ষিকীর এক অনুষ্ঠানে আমরা সুইডেনে ঠিক করি রবীন্দ্রসংগীতচর্চা। তখন থেকেই শুরু করি। এখনও গাইছি।'

আরেক সুইডিশ শিল্পী শিলা মালিক বলেন, 'বাংলাদেশকে ভালোবাসি। রবীন্দ্রনাথকে ভালোবাসি। এখানে গান গেয়ে মানুষের আন্তরিকতা খুব ভালো লেগেছে।'

উদীচী যশোরের ভারপ্রাপ্ত সভাপতি মাহবুবুর রহমান বলেন, 'উদীচীর উপদেষ্টা মশিয়ার রহমানের মেয়ে মমতা হেনা পড়াশোনার কারণে সুইডেনে যান। সেখানে তাঁর সঙ্গে এসব শিল্পীর পরিচয় হয়। সম্প্রতি তাঁরা বাংলাদেশে ঘুরতে এসেছেন। যশোর অঞ্চলে আসায় তাঁদের সংগীত পরিবেশনার আয়োজন করা হয়। ৯ সদস্যের শিল্পী দল রবীন্দ্রসংগীত পরিবেশন করেছে। অনুষ্ঠানে উদীচীর পক্ষ থেকে তাঁদের ফুলেল শুভেচ্ছা জানানো হয়।'

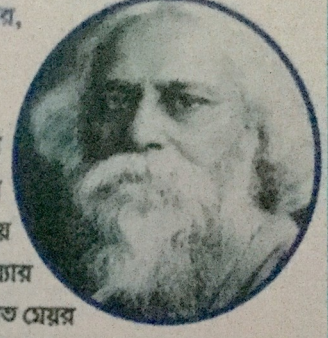


সুইডেন থেকে আসা শিল্পীরা রবীন্দ্রসংগীত পরিবেশন করছেন। গত বুধবার রাতে উদীচী যশোরের রুহুল হক মঞ্চে। ছবি : প্রথম আলো

পশ্চিমে আজি খুলিয়াছে দ্বার, / সেথা হতে সবে আসে উপহার,
দিবে আর নিবে, মিলাবে মিলিবে, যাবে না ফিরে—

সুধী

সুইডেনের লুন্ড ইন্টারন্যাশনাল টেলোর কন্ফারেন্স -এর নব্বইতম সম্মেলন একটি সুইডিস দল আগামী
৩ জানুয়ারি ২০২০ শুক্রবার সন্ধ্যা ৬টায় রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুরের স্মৃতিবিজড়িত কুর্কিয়ায়
টেলোর লজে রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত পরিবেশন এবং স্থানীয় রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত শিল্পীদের সঙ্গে যত বিনিময়
করবেন। দলটির নেতৃত্ব দেবেন বুবু মুন্সি একলুড (কন্ফারেন্স লিডার) এবং লর্স একলুড (কন্ফারেন্স
চেয়ারম্যান)। অনুষ্ঠানে প্রধান অতিথি হিসেবে উপস্থিত থাকবেন কুর্কিয়া শোয়সভার জননন্দিত মেয়র
জনাব আনোয়ার আলী। অনুষ্ঠানটির সার্বিক সহযোগিতায় জাতীয় রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত সম্মিলন পরিষদ, কুর্কিয়া শাখা।



রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত সন্ধ্যা

সুজন

শুভেচ্ছা। আমরা অত্যন্ত আনন্দের সঙ্গে জানাচ্ছি যে, সুইডেনের নাগরিক
আমাদের কয়েকজন বন্ধু বাংলা ভাষার প্রতি অনুরক্ত হয়ে দীর্ঘদিন
রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত চর্চা করে আসছেন। সম্প্রতি তারা বাংলাদেশ সফরে
এসেছেন। আগামী ১ জানুয়ারি ২০২০ বুধবার সন্ধ্যা ৫:৩১ মিনিটে উদীচী
যশোরের রুহুল হক মঞ্চের তারা রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত পরিবেশন করবেন।

আপনার উপস্থিতি রবীন্দ্রপ্রেমী শিল্পীদেরকে অনুপ্রাণিত করবে।

শুভেচ্ছান্তে

সাজ্জাদুর রহমান খান বিপ্লব
সাধারণ সম্পাদক

মাহবুবুর রহমান মজনু
সভাপতি (ভারপ্রাপ্ত)



বাংলাদেশ উদীচী শিল্পীগোষ্ঠী, যশোর জেলা সংসদ



Dhaka Sunday January 5, 2020



Members of Lund International Tagore Choir performing at a musical programme at Tagore Lodge in Kushtia on Friday. PHOTO : COURTESY

Swedish choir renders Tagore songs in Bangla

Staff Correspondent

Lund International Tagore Choir, a group of Swedish singers who practice and sing Rabindra Sangeet (Tagore songs) in its original language, Bengali, is now at Kushtia as a part of their tour of Bangladesh.

On Friday in an exclusive musical programme the nine-member group performed at Tagore Lodge at Kushtia.

Local unit of Jatiya Rabindra Sangeet Sammelon Parishad organised the function where Kushtia city Mayor Anwar Ali was chief guest.

The function drew many enthusiastic music lovers and singers of the city and around.

The Choir also visited Tagore's Kuthibari at Shilaidaha and the shrine of Baul King Fakir Lalon Shah.

Google Doodle celebrates Zainul's 105th birth anniv

UNB, Dhaka

Search engine giant Google yesterday celebrated the 105th birthday of renowned Bangladeshi painter, educator and activist Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin.

He is widely considered a founding father of Bangladeshi modern art. Throughout his colorful life, Zainul Abedin strived to preserve and honour Bangladeshi heritage.

Google Doodle made an alteration on its Bangladeshi homepage on Sunday, showing the great artist painting Google sitting under a tree with his brush while another man passing by carrying two pots.

Zainul Abedin was born along the Brahmaputra River in Mymensingh in 1914. He attended the Government School of Art in Kolkata studying European academic styles.

After completing his education, he was inspired to create an art piece that paid homage to the scenic views of his childhood, which won him the Governor's Gold Medal at the age of 23.

Free to craft his own style, Zainul

Abedin released a series of sketches in 1943 depicting an avoidable famine that affected the region, which is widely seen as his most popular work. He would continue to draw inspiration from the human experience throughout his career, such as with *Struggle* which was painted more than 30 years after his famine sketches.

To foster Bangladeshi cultural life, he established the first centre for modern art in the region with the Government Institute of Arts and Crafts (now the Faculty of Fine Arts) at the University of Dhaka in 1948. A decade later, he was honoured with his country's highest civil award, the Presidential Award for Pride of Performance, for his cultural contributions.

Four years after Bangladesh gained its independence from Pakistan in 1971, Zainul Abedin opened the Folk Art Museum at Sonargaon and the Zainul Abedin Sangrahashala (a gallery of his personal collection) in Mymensingh to instill pride in native culture.

The International Astronomical Union named an impact crater on Mercury for Abedin in 2009, calling it 'Abedin'.

