

Many Things Rolled into one

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Batukda to his friends and admirers, Jyotirindra Moitra, was a poet at heart. His flair for music and contribution in the field too proved quite remarkable. He spent nearly twenty years in Delhi influencing many people young and old apart from adding much to the overall cultural scene of the city.

Jyotirindra Moitra (1911-1977), a science graduate, for the sheer love of it, ultimately took his master's degree in literature. His early years in the vicinity of the vast and vigorous Padma and the greenness around it moulded his mind in one way, the liberal family tradition helped him develop a rare rational outlook with finer sensibilities. No wonder then that at one stage, instead of taking his CA articleship seriously he could be found observing birds and studying their sounds with more alacrity and attention. An artist out and out, his life's course was destined to be far from the ordinary.

Initially he came to be noted as a poet emerging on the scene during the worst of times—second world war, famine and fast changing values. And precisely because of this, his *Madhu Bansir Gali (A Blind Alley Tale)*, not just attracted attention, but turned out to be somewhat significant earning him a distinct place in the realm of Bengali poetry as came to be reflected in inclusion of his pieces in several anthologies of modern poetry. Incidentally, *Gali* came to be recorded on a disc with well-known theatre personality Sombhu Mitra lending his voice.

But the poet was soon overtaken by the musician in him. Not that he stopped writing, he began devoting more time to music as was evident from his regular training under Bhishmadev Chattopadhyay for Sastriya sangeet and Indira Devi Chaudhurani and Anadi Dastidar for Rabindra sangeet. His strong grasp over the form was readily acknowledged, specially his contribution to choral music, which culminated in famous *Naba Jibaner Gaan (Music of New Life)* subsequently made popular by the IPTA or the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association. In this, he set to tune his own words following the tradition of Tagore, Atul Prasad and Kazi Nazrul Islam.

In a way, Batukda proved himself akin to the little bird—a poetic creation of his own—that kept on building nests but hardly settled down at one place for long. The restlessness, of his inner self, may have forced him to move from Calcutta to Bombay and again from India's commercial capital to some quiet spot in Bihar and later to Delhi. Friends like Nirmala Joshi, Govind Vidyarthi and others if were there, the circumstances lately compelled him to "migrate" once again.

His Delhi stint saw him primarily confined to the Bharatiya Kala Kendra's productions as its Music Director. His musical score for the famous Ram Lila, which still forms the core according to experts, could be considered the most significant contribution, noted for its melody and richness. Narendra Sharma, Uday Shankar-disciple and noted choreographer, who once collaborated with the said production, felt that Batukda's literary aptitude and sense of drama enhanced the quality of the music. He ensured thereby the ballet's success.

Yet another indelible mark he succeeded in making with the music for the Lambakarana Pala (in yatra form) based on a story by Parasuram, dramatised by Abanindranath Tagore. This Karolbagh Bangiya Samsad production (Direction : Pratap Sen) was staged both in Delhi and Calcutta winning applause from discerning audience.

The Music Director's unusual sense and grip over music made him a much sought-after person, which he responded with warmth and friendship. Out of deep respect and personal equation with poet Bishnu Dey, Batukda got involved in the musical score in respect of a mime-based stage presentation. The occasion was the bestowing of the Jnanapith award on the said Bengali poet. Similarly our unassuming "maestro" extended his cooperation readily when requests came from eminent film-makers like Ismail Merchant—James Ivory, Ritwik Ghatak as also Satyajit Ray.

So easy and intimate were his ways that even a kid of about ten in his Delhi neighbourhood considered the company worth seeking from his amazing personality. He, to him, happened to be a storehouse of information relating to birdwatching, cricket and anecdotes in particular. The young admirer hence could describe this jethu of his as the most impressive character for his class easy. Luckily, the class teacher too appreciated the off-beat approach and read out the piece in the class for the benefit of other students.

The bugbear of poetry never really left him. Though he was never very productive, the Delhi phase nonetheless saw him occasionally taking up pen even scribbling on the otherside of a pay-in-slip, while waiting in a bank. With an uncanny knack for adda, he took the initiative in literary exchanges by launching a wall magazine—Ajanta, named by himself. In a poem with same title, in the first issue, he wrote : "Here the fawn of life plays/Gleefully in the green of the forest."

Thanks to his pioneering zeal and energy, the magazine soon took a more permanent shape in printed form and Ajanta can now look back with pride to its over forty years of meaningful existence. It deserves mention here that in celebration of its silver jubilee the authorities organised a seminar on 'Little Magazine' with participants drawn from many other linguistic groups including Oriya, Assamese, Tamil, Malayalam apart from Bengali, in the Capital.

Batukda and the organisation in the neighbourhood and he publishers of Ajanta, the aforesaid Karolbagh Bangiya Samsad, virtually got intertwined over the years. So, in response to call of duty and social service, when the Samsad decided to raise funds by way of relief to suffering humanity, the poet-musician hardly could be a silent observer. With a harmonium placed on a bicycle-carrier before him, he would lead a group of musicians, men and women, in the procession along the Ajmal Khan Road or any other nearby street to collect donations in cash and kind from the shopkeepers and passerby, to alleviate distress faced by people, no matter if that was due to draught in Bihar or floods in north Bengal.

It was in the fitness of things that on the eve of Batukda's departure from Delhi, the Samsad was able to present him an anthology of his poems written during his stay in the capital, titled 'Je Pathei Jao' (Whichever way You Go). But yet another honour for him must be mentioned here. His friends like Nemi Chand Jain, mostly by way of translation brought the poet closer to mainstream. Although he little bothered about fame, money or acceptability, his admirers held a different view. They felt elated when Batukda was publicly felicitated and honoured by the Delhi's Sahitya Kala Parishad thereby acknowledging his valuable contribution in enriching the capital's cultural scene.

A carefree attitude or better to say, a poetic fancy prevailed at the time of Batukda's final departure from his mortal world. He breathed his last during a train journey. By the time the train reached Howrah, Batukda had already left for another destination !