

Tagore to Ray, a trail of autographs

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Calcutta: Imagine one of Bengal's greatest sons trying to imitate the signature of another icon.

Visitors stepping into the ground-floor hall of the Nehru Children's Museum can see a piece of paper on which Satyajit Ray painstakingly practised recreating Rabindranath Tagore's signature, alongside his own sketch of the bearded Bard.

The document is one of many priceless fragments of the city's cultural heritage preserved in private collections of archivists. Twelve autograph collectors, under the banner of Kolkata Kathokata, have assembled such treasures for Soi Sabud, an exhibition that continues till Sunday.

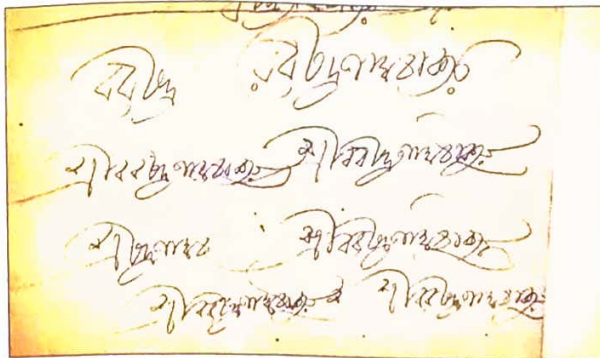
"Ray's attempts to copy Rabindranath's signature were for a scene in his documentary on Tagore. His zeal for perfection can be seen in how closely his version resembles the original autograph," said Souvik Mukherjee, one of the participating collectors.

The exhibition has been arranged thematically.

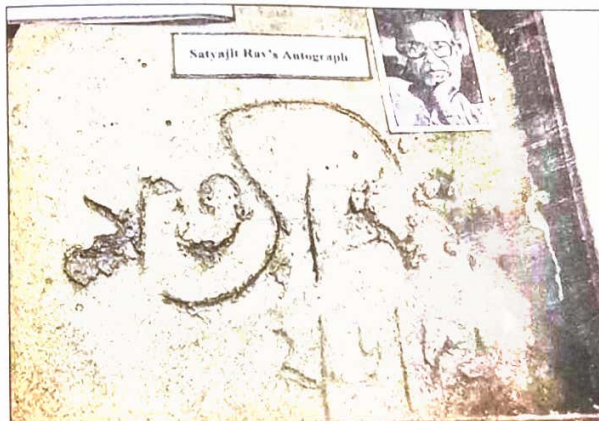
"We have divided our combined collection into several sections — British Raj, freedom fighters, politicians, literature, the spiritual world and scientists," said Ujjwal Sardar, another participating collector.

Among the specimens from the colonial era are the signatures of Lord Curzon, Warren Hastings and Lord Wellesley.

"That is the signature of Sir Elijah Impey on a judicial



Satyajit Ray's copies of Rabindranath Tagore's signature.
Pictures by Sudeshna Banerjee



Ray's autograph inscribed in cement

document. This is the same judge who ordered the execution of Maharaja Nandakumar in 1775," said Falguni Dutta Roy, who contributed the exhibit.

Autographs of aristocrats such as Dwarkanath Tagore and Mutty Lal Seal sit alongside those of freedom fighters Ganesh Ghosh and Bina Das, as well as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru. The collection also in-

cludes a letter written by Mahatma Gandhi.

The signature of Gopal Mukherjee, better known as Gopal Pantha, is displayed next to a letter by Hassan Suhrawardy — not Mukherjee's political adversary during the Great Calcutta Killings of August 1946, but the distinguished Bengali surgeon who renounced his knighthood.

Particularly cherished by the collectors is a poem writ-



Saumitra Chatterjee's autographed painting



Nandalal Bose's hand impression and autograph

ten in Rajsekhar Basu's own hand in 1958.

"Khata bhora autograph, guchchher photograph, nana desher dakticket, homrachom-rar certificate..." goes the poem by the author who wrote under the pen name Parashuram.

"It is as if he has written on us," said Moloy Sarkar, who has contributed a collection of autographs from sports stars.

The collectors have borrowed three unusual autographs from another legend, whose own autograph, as well as that of his father, have found space in the exhibition. "These are signatures impressed with nails on cement bases by Satyajit Ray, Chintamani Kar and Jyoti Basu, from the personal collection of magician P.C. Sorcar Junior," Sardar said.

The exhibition also has autographs of Sorcar Junior and his father, the pioneering magician.

There are several autographs on miniature cricket bats ranging from Bishen Singh Bedi to V.V.S. Laxman, as well as a cap bearing Rohit Sharma's autograph. Several autographs appear on vintage magazines, with the signatories featured on their covers. There are autographed books too.

The exhibition opened on Friday in the presence of several prominent Calcuttans, including actors Chiranjeet and Barun Chanda, former footballer Bidish Bose and politician Tathagata Roy.

Chiranjeet suggested to fellow attendee and publisher Tridib Chatterjee that a book documenting the autographs of the city's notable figures be brought out.

"A visit to this exhibition would open a door to the city's rich heritage for Gen Z," he said.

Sunday is the last day of the exhibition.