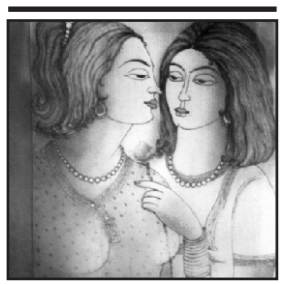


Music

Culling of classical notes

Shameema Parveen talks of the essence of eastern classical notes, sitting at Alliance Francaise

RECOMMENDATIONS



Art Exhibition
A solo exhibition of paintings by Abdus Satter is going on at the Saju Art Gallery.



Ghazal Evening
A ghazal evening by Mesbah Uddin Ahmed will be held at the Best Western La Vinci Hotel today at 7 in the evening.

15th National Fine Arts Exhibition 2002

The 15th National Fine Arts Exhibition 2002 started on December 28 at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

Exhibition

December 27-January 8
A solo exhibition of paintings by A H M Bashirullah is being held at the Alliance Francaise de Dacca.

FAYZA HAQ

SHAMEEMA Parveen, who gave an Uchchanga sangeet recital at a soiree at Alliance Francaise recently, explaining what drew her to her particular genre, said, "I've been drawn to this since my childhood as I feel in 'Uchchanga sangeet' I can put in my innermost feelings as in no other branch of eastern songs in Bangladesh, I feel that this is more creative than any other parallel genre. That evening I sang 'Sudh kalyan' and then a 'Thumri' in 'Bhairabi'."



Shameema Parveen

Asked to say a few words on "Uchchanga sangeet," Shameema said, "I believe that we have been rather unfortunate in our inheritance of 'Uchchanga sangeet', those who practiced this genre left either for India or Pakistan quite some time back specially after the Liberation. Those who are practicing it now do not have the same training as before. In East Bengal, the 'guru shishu param para' has not been maintained as elsewhere in the subcontinent as regards eastern classical music. Here the tradition was more for folk and the popularity of 'Rabindrasangeet' came much later so that the artists tended to go in for it as it appealed to the general masses. From 1972 and 1973 the Indian government began to give aspiring and deserving students some scholarships."

"When I sing is north Indian classical music which is different from south Indian classical music. There is a difference in notes: in south India they use 'komol' notes while in north we use 'shaptak' or seven basic notes, which comprise of 'Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni'. In the south the notations are definitely different. They have the 'Sa-re-ga-ma...' but their tunes are different from those of ours. Before I got the scholarship, I had normal basic music lessons at the Holy Cross School and after the Intermediate I got the scholarship to study Indian classical singing. I had begun earlier with Akhter Sadmani for two years and as a child of seven I already had Khwaja Moinuddin as my 'ustad'.

At my school level I took music exams. While others had art or Arabic, I realized that the fun in classical music is that you have a lot of independence in rendering your songs.

"Of course I have to remain within the basic frame. In 'Yaman' you can't add 'Komol daivath': singing Indian classical music is like composing within a given frame. One brings in one's own variations within a certain framework. I can have my own combinations which I can't in 'Rabindrasangeet' which has its own notes, tunes, and workings. I love to listen to 'Rabindrasangeet' and find the wordings in 'Nazrulgeeti' very rich and powerful but in both I'll have to copy in my own voice. My mental leanings are for pure classical songs. I believe that this is most creative genre in music that one finds in Bangladesh. In painting you can see what is blue or gray but in tunes one cannot see anything: you feel the sensations. Just as you cannot see God (or Allah or Ishor) but you feel his presence. Thus singing 'Kamal daivat' one has to bring in the essence of dawn. In my type of music there is a lot of scope for thinking and planning before I pour out my notes. When people sing 'Nazrulgeeti', on the other hand, thousands of singers sing the song in the same tune. However,

in classical singing, one applies the brush strokes, so to say, according to one's fancy and desire, within the set frame.

"This frame is called 'arohi abrohi' of the 'raag' as 'Bhairabi' has 'sa' and you have to use 'komol' 're' as in 'malkosh' you can't use 're' and one can't use 'pa': in other words the notes guide you in your travel through the song. That is why there are so many 'ragas' such as 'malkosh', 'bagesri', 'bhopali' as used in the 'Sudh kalyan' which I had sung at that occasion; if I use 'bhoirabi' instead of the 'bhopali' the 'raag' is spoiled."

Asked if there were any particular numbers of "raags", Shameema said, "No, there are no fixed numbers, as such; there are about a hundred although there are basic ten 'thatas' from which origin the 'arohi abrohi' which result in innumerable 'raags'. 'Thatas' include 'bhoirab', 'kaafi', 'khambaj', 'bilawal', 'yemeni', 'purabi', 'tori', 'marwa', 'kollan' etc. The main 'raags' use the basic 'thatas' and have variations. This one can regard as the grammar of classical music. 'Thata' is the structure, while 'raag' has a lot of additions and subtractions in it or rather 'spices'."

Dwelling on her favourite "raags" Shameema said, "They include 'megh' which is very dear to me. The 'rags' tend to be seasonal, such as 'megh' sung during the rainy season, 'basant bahar' during the spring. These should be sung in such a manner that the layman can imagine that he is surrounded in the atmosphere that the 'raag' invokes. Thus 'basant bahar' must make one feel that flowers are blossoming and butterflies are flitting about and settling on flowers, leaves, grass and treetops as well as bushes. Similarly, 'megh' should have the evocation of heavy shower, thunder and lightning. They listen surely cannot see anything but must feel everything that season brings in."

"Tori" is to bring the ambience of the morning and this tends to be poignant and painful and it was

created by Bilash Khan Sahib; restlessness is also its integral part as in 'basant bahar'. 'Darbari kenada' is meant for the night and is serious. "Sandikhan" is meant to capture the period from dawn to dusk and the changes in between; there is an overlapping of time with begins with 'ushkaal' and ushers in mixed feelings as the day is over and one is not quite sure what the rest of the evening will be. There is risk, fear, expectation all blended in this. The poignancy and pain arises from the fact that the day is over and one is not sure what the rest of the day will be. Similarly 'Bhairabi' is

meant to emulate the feelings of dawn. One cannot sing from the notations alone: one must put in one's own feeling and passion: this is not something that you can sing mechanically or in any set pattern. The frame is there no doubt but you have to fill it with colours of your own perceptions, feelings and imagination. When the singer has managed to be successful only then has the song not been in vain."

Dwelling on tracing how "Uchchanga sangeet" has been developed in North India, Shameema said, "I believe that this is not for the masses. It began

in the courts of the Mogul rulers and rajas who had a lot of time in hand. They had little else to amuse them except for listening to singing, watching dancing, hearing of recitation of poetry and examining of paintings. Their life was so leisurely that they gave little thought as to where their daily bread came from as the ordinary man at that time had to do in India. They used to sing themselves too and their 'vilambet' (slow beat) was unending. Only later was this genre of music to the common listeners.

"People ask me why we have not been able to make this classical eastern music as popular as 'Rabindrasangeet' or 'Nazrulgeeti' and the reason is that according to my opinion Shakespeare or the plays of Tagore are not for all to appreciate. It requires a cultivated taste and long exposure to this particular type of music. As Tagore said, 'Kichol to holona' in a 'toppango' song, there is something that expresses that feeling in us all. There is often the emptiness within us - that something is missing somewhere within us. 'Uchchanga sangeet' should be made popular for the tea-stall owner, the paddy-field worker and the rickshaw-puller. Even if I read Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' many times, I'll not understand many of the lines and hidden meanings and symbols. In order to bring in popularity one must lower the standards - one must compromise - which I'm not prepared to do. Thus 'Uchchanga sangeet' remains for a limited audience, specially in Bangladesh, vis-a-vis the rest of the Subcontinent."

Touching on her favourite "Uchchanga-sangeet" exponents at home and abroad, Shameema said, "In Bangladesh I respect all those who have kept up this genre of Indian classical music. I have learnt at Santiniketan, India, for six years, with my teachers being Sushil Banerjee, Alok Chotopadhai, Mohan Singh Khargur, Dribarta Joshi, and finally Ustad Younus Hussain Khan (from Agra 'gharana'). Santiniketan is such a

place that one came across people like Ravi Sankar, Satyajit Ray, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and such icons of culture. Tagore chose this place so that those in search of culture could move about freely and be inspired by nature around: there were festivals of all sorts there which ushered in such illustrious people. I believe the best years of my life were the six years I had spent at Santiniketan. It is there that I learnt to appreciate the autumn sky, with its combination of blue and white."

"Asked to comment on the other genres of Bengali music, Shameema said, "I as a teacher and the head of the Department of Classical Music at the Government Music College at Agargaon, classical music is taught as compulsory and the options are 'Nazrulgeeti' or 'Rabindrasangeet'; here one can get a Bachelor's degree. I tell my students that whatever they sing, even if it is pop songs, one must learn the basics of music and all there is to know about Rabindranath Tagore or Nazrul Islam. This will bring in the necessary depth in rendering the songs. I feel that Tagore and Nazrul were great writers and musicians who should be studied in depth. I believe that their legacy should be preserved. Our next generation should be taught to study and know them in details. For the singers of 'Rabindrasangeet' and 'Nazrulgeeti', classical eastern Indian music remains the basic of studies as the grammar of both the other genres is based on 'Uchchanga sangeet', whether in vocal or instrumental music. Having practiced in the classical eastern music one can move on to the more modern eastern genres."

It is indeed fascinating to meet the different interesting individuals that one comes across at Alliance Francaise. It is no wonder that many in the city flock there to satisfy their cultural thirst.



Shameema Parveen performing at a function

TV GUIDE

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