

Interview

'The cultural activists of 1971 are not recognised properly' - Rathindra Nath Roy

NOVERA DEEPIKA



RATHINDRA Nath Roy was one of most prominent performers of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Radio Centre of Independent Bangla). Recalling his early singing career, he mentions patriotic songs such as *Purba digante shurjo uthche* and *Nongortolo tolo*.

(The music director was Samar Das), *Rokto die nam likhechhi* (Shujer Sham) and songs like *Bicharjoti tomar bichar* (Ajit Roy). He also sang some Tagore songs such as *O amar desher mati* which earned popularity among the Bangalis during the Liberation War. In Roy's view there are few parallels to these patriotic songs. In his words, 'The spirit, the environment and the passion cannot be seen nowadays. Think about those songs during the Liberation War. Is there any contemporary song that can appeal to the people like those golden ones?'

Roy has also done his bit to promote folk songs, especially *Bhaaoaya* songs that are popular in the Rangpur area. In 2002 he established the *Bhaaoaya* Academy in Rangpur and branches in all the *zillas* of Rangpur like Gaibandha, Kurigram and Nilmonirhat. The objective of this academy is to promote folk songs through teaching students and youngsters and organising cultural programmes. Roy also has plans to launch a research-oriented publication and a quarterly on *Bhaaoaya* music.

According to Roy, folk music is deeply embedded in Bangladeshi culture. To quote him, 'Folk music is the music of soil, mother and soul. It is like a relationship between mother and child, which can never be torn. As long as this land exists, there will be folk music. Rock, pop or any other modern music can never take its place because it has a strong base.'

Roy also performs songs such as *Bhajan, Kirtan, Shyama Sangeet, Mursidi* and *Marpatti* songs in the Ramkrishna Mission for a long time because he took interest in the sadhus. He says, 'These sadhus are not only devoted to the religion but also very literate and inclined towards social work.' He adds, 'These monks devote themselves to the service of the common people who are affected by natural

Rathindra Nath Roy

calamities. This is why I have an attraction for these monks and perform for them.' He has written and put to tune some of these spiritual songs such as *biswa bibek jagate dhoray ele bibe kanaanda* and *Sri smriti tumije amar*.

Roy joined the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra in May during the Liberation War. Reminiscing on those days, he says, 'There were very few facilities in the radio station which was housed in a simple residence. It was quite difficult for the personnel to carry out their work. We had our dining hall downstairs and the studio was not even sound proof. It was a one-channel machine with which we used to do all the recordings. There was no place for commercialism, since the performers, instrumentalists and engineers were dedicated to their medium.'

Roy, a devoted folk singer, especially the

Bhaaoaya genre, began to perform in 1960. At that time he was the youngest member of the *Bhaaoaya* Song Group from Rangpur in the folk music festival of the then Radio Pakistan Dhaka. His singing career soared after that event. He became a regular singer of the radio and television. Initially his guru was his father Harolal Roy and later Ustad PC Gomez. He performed in a good number of programmes when he was a student of Dhaka University.

Roy feels that the new television channels are not promoting folk songs adequately. As he says, 'None of the TV channels have their own professional studio, which is a must for a television channel. If they want to produce special programmes on folk music, they need more facilities.' His major grouse against BTV is that this channel, unlike the radio medium, does not telecast folk music at prime time.

Roy has a few reservations about stage shows as well. As he says, 'There are a very few solo and group folksong programmes on stage nowadays. This is because the modern music, commonly known as band music, is given preference over folk music.' In his view, folk songs programmes appeal more to the elderly people. Roy is not reluctant to give credit to those who popularised the folk songs by remixing them. But he does not consider those pieces as folk music because if there is no flute, *Datora* or *Ektara* it will not be folk music. And he is unwilling to perform folk music with modern instruments.

Roy is also a playback singer and has won many awards like BACHSHASH (Bangladesh Cine Journalists Society) Award in 1979 and 1981, The Ekushey Padak in 1994 and the Popular Folk Song Award in the World Youth Festival in East Germany in 1973. Though he is a big name in folk music, he has some regrets and he really works hard to promote folk song in the country. But he still regrets that the cultural activists at the time of the Liberation War have not been given their due. As he says pointedly, 'There are many awards for the frontline fighters but none for the cultural activists at that time.'

Roy has active branches in 14 districts and in three universities—Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University and Islamic University. They are the regional committees.

The former President of Dhaka Journalists Association, Kamal Lohani is also the founder member of the cultural organisation Kranti.

He says, 'Though I was not a student of Dhaka University, I was the script writer of the cultural events which were arranged by the then East Pakistan Students Union,

the dominating political group of Dhaka University Cultural Students

Kamal Lohani, portrait of a cultural personality

'We register our protest through our gano sangeet'

ERSHAD KAMOL

JOURNALIST Kamal Lohani is a well-known name in our cultural arena. The founder chairman of cultural organisation—Bangladesh Gonoshishi Shongstha (BGS), Kamal Lohani is also a key advisory figure in two organisations, Shommo Shikshikritik Jote and Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee.

Explaining the origins of the Bangladesh Gonoshishi Shongstha (BGS), he says that the aim was to use *gano sangeet* (people's song) to spread awareness among the masses. In his words: 'Along with my two friends, Shubho Rahman and Shamsul Huda, I established BGS in 1983. The objective was to become an instrument for public welfare. Though it is a cultural organisation, it is very politically conscious. Whenever we see any kind of injustice we come to the street and protest against it through our *gano sangeet*. We also work in conjunction with other cultural and political organisations which share the same ideology.'

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Union (DUCSU). Then I established Kranti in 1967, as a cultural wing of the political party. In those days Kranti displayed message-based drama, dance drama to spread awareness among the common people against the oppression of the Pakistani Military regime. In 1974, we closed the activities of Kranti. Later, in 1987 it started again, however, I do not play any active role in Kranti because of the ideological differences.'

During the late 60s he had traveled to almost all the remote areas of the country with his cultural group, Kranti to awaken the nation against the autocratic military rulers through message-based events.

In May 1971, he was exiled to Kolkata and worked in the news desk of *Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra*. He says, 'I have collected

the lyrics of the songs—*'Purbo Digante Shurjo Uthechhe'* and *'Mora Ekti Phulke Banchabo Bole'* from Gobinda Halder of Kolkata. These songs have the immense power to encourage the freedom fighters to fight in the battlefield for the sake of their country.'

His organisation BGS is now in the process of preserving the original tunes of popular *gano sangeet*. He is also writing a book—*Amader Shonksriti O Shongram* and compiling the writings on Jahangir Imam.

He is yet to receive a National award, however, many organisations like Wrisz Shilpi Goshthi, Kranti and others have honoured him.

Tribute



Picture shows the memorial sculpture *Unity*, designed by Anish Kapoor, in memory of the 67 British victims of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre. The 19.5ft sculpture will form the centrepiece of a memorial garden in Hanover Square, near the twin towers site. The sculpture will be crafted from a block of black granite into which a vertical chamber is carved of approximately 3.3ft X 8.2ft X 2.6ft.

Animation

With Disney brand of humor and song, it's 'Home,' sweet home

LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

BRIGHT and poppy with enough catchy songs to make you want to buy the soundtrack (and tolerate your kids listening to it a couple of hundred times), *Home on the Range* is Disney's last stand in the corral of traditional animation, and if the studio doesn't go out with guns blazing, at least it doesn't wind up on Boot Hill.

This animated Western just wants to make you laugh and leave the theatre with a couple of Alan Menken's melodies lodged in your brain. Its main characters—three cows looking to save a ranch facing foreclosure—aren't the most memorable of creations, but there is a great yodeling villain and an old coot jackrabbit sidekick that would make Gabby Hayes proud.

The song, the wonderfully named

From Left, Mrs. Caloway, Maggie and Grace are charged with saving Patch of Heaven dairy farm in Disney's new animation film, *Home on the Range*.

Yodel-Adle-Eedle-Idle-Oo, is a toe-tapper, too. Besides introducing you to the setting and most of the

characters, the song serves as a signpost to the movie's agreeably sunny vibe.

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