

TRIBUTE TO OUR NATIONAL POET

Kazi Nazrul Islam

Preserving Nazrul's treasure troves

Sudhin Das, the renowned exponent of Nazrul songs for over half a century, has almost single handedly worked painstakingly to authenticate the original notation of Nazrul Sangeet, the 'swaralipi'. For his untiring commitment, he has achieved a revered status at home and abroad. He has been awarded the Ekushey Padak, Nazrul Gold Medal, Nasiruddin Gold Medal, Zebunnissa-Mahbubullah Trust Gold Medal and the Altaf Mahmood Gold Medal and felicitations from Shilpkala Academy and Bangla Academy amongst others. Nearly 30 years after Nazrul's death, Sudhin Das is still as committed to his task as he was when he first started. Excerpts from his frank and insightful interview...

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

It was a sweltering day, when I entered the Nazrul Institute. Sudhin Das was as usual, sitting deeply engrossed behind stacks of old gramophone records and busily instructing a group of young students. There was a gleam in his eyes as he noticed my surprise, listening to the popular lyrics of the song, albeit a slightly different tune. 'I never tire from teaching the original tunes...' he said. As we settled down, he explained the nature of his work.

The disks, as you know, are collected through different sources.

tampered beyond imagination,' says Das.

He went on to add, 'I was myself a victim of circumstances. I taught the students the songs which I could easily gather from West Bengal. These works had gained immense popularity by then. But as time went on, we realised that a group with a shallow understanding of Nazrul were adapting the songs, and commercialising it for profit. This group was at the heart of distorting the poet's heritage. It was then that we started our campaign for authenticating Nazrul Sangeet notations.'



Sudhin Das

between words,' says Das. He adds: 'As an ardent fan of the five main poets of Bengal (The Pancha Kabi) I took it as my prime responsibility to work on Nazrul's creative works which was at a risk of extinction.'

'Distortion was rampant in Nazrul's songs, more than in songs of other famous composers,' added a despondent Das.

Tagore's creations are guarded against distortion under the copyright of Biswa Bharati. However, the same was not applicable for Nazrul's literary pursuits. Nazrul's legendary popularity, his immense stock of songs and the lack of copy-

er secretaries of Nazrul Academy inspired me to work on the authentic notations of Nazrul and offered me a platform. From then on, I took the initiative to work on this difficult yet challenging work. But this project failed to continue after five publications, due to a difference of opinion,' says Das.

In 1982, the then-Executive Director of Nazrul Institute Md. Mahfuzullah took over and requested Das to work for a project in the Authentication Board of the Nazrul Institute. Stalwarts like Laila Arjuman Banu headed the board for 10 years. Other experts on the field like Sheikh Lutfur Rahman, Sohrab Hossain, Bedaruddin Ahmed and later on Ferdousi Rahman joined in as members in the Board. Much later eminent singer Feriza Begum took over as the President of the Board.

'So far I have worked on more than 500 songs. Each song takes several days to decipher,' adds Sudhin Das. Eminent composer and singer Sheikh Lutfur Rahman, his students SM Ahsan Mursheed, Rafiqunnabi and Salauddin Ahmed have followed Das in making authentic notations from the original disks recorded before Nazrul fell grievously ill.

'But there is more to accomplish in terms of preserving Nazrul's work. TV and Radio should have a cell from where Nazrul's original songs should be scrutinised. If strict measures are taken for a year the authentic tunes will once again be practised by all,' he says.

The National Poet's songs are timeless gems. One can only hope that future artists and exponents of Nazrul Sangeet would continue to adhere to the original tune, and appreciate the true genius that was Nazrul.



L-R: Kanan Devi, Dilip Kumar Roy, Angur Bala and KL Saigal—the legendary artistes of Nazrul Sangeet

Most often, they are in such a dilapidated condition that, it is a painstaking job to even grasp the words, let alone the delicate intricate filigree works of the different styles of Nazrul songs. The songs range from anything from classical to the folk, Ghazal to modern and one has to understand the exact technical nuances to carry on with the task,' said the eminent artiste.

'After Nazrul was incapacitated by neurological illness in 1942, his works fell into the hands of the so-called intellectuals and well-wishers who took advantage of the situation. From then these were

During 1976-77, a noted publication house of India, had printed a third edition of 900 songs of Nazrul. However, a careful scrutiny revealed that most of the songs in the book were not authentic. It was then that Sudhin Das visited Kolkata and challenged the works by Abdul Aziz Al Aman, the author of the notation book.

'Do you think one would ever be allowed to add a few brush strokes here and there to the original works of Rembrandt, Picasso or Michelangelo? Or change the lyrics or tunes of Tagore, according to his taste? That would be a clear distortion of

the creativity; in short, it would be a crime,' he said.

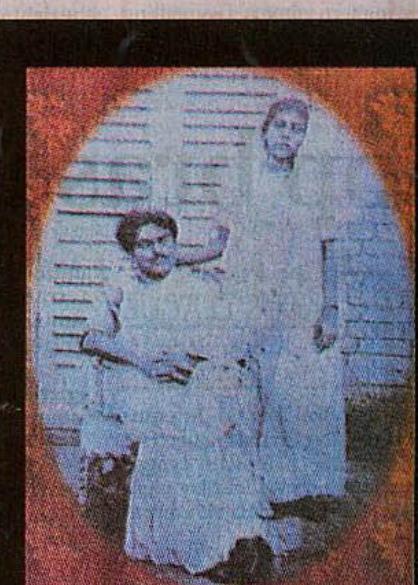
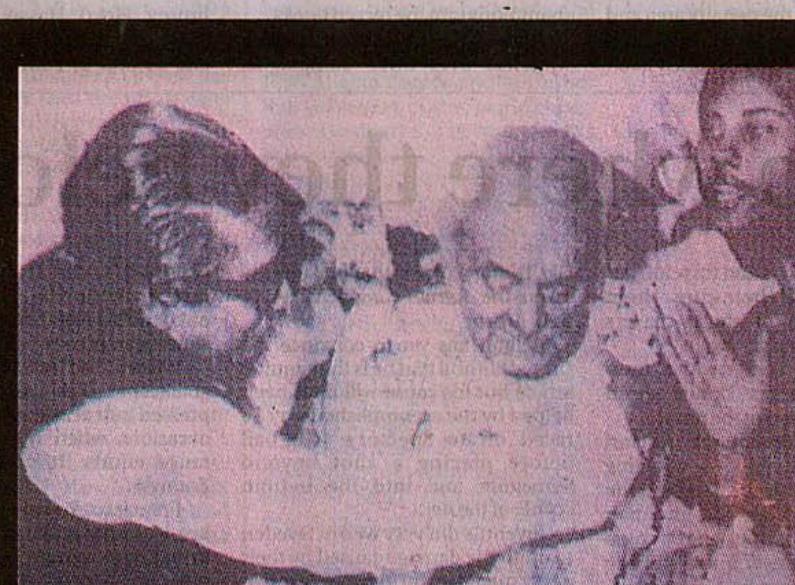
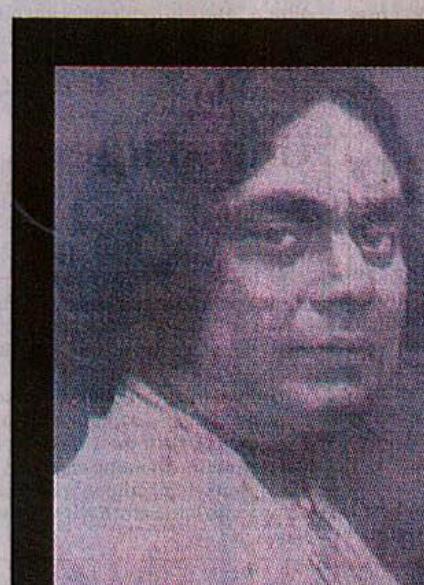
Nazrul was very liberal with his songs and allowed eminent artistes to make variations keeping the original form intact. But, he hardly imagined that the immortal songs that he composed in 'Bhairabi Raga' would be tuned in 'Bagesree', or some of his classic songs would be sung according to whim. Singers preferred the classical genres where one could implement their own style. This was in contrast to Tagore songs which were structured; the singers had no option to change the style or even breathe in

rights was certainly at the core of the problem'.

Three authentic notation books titled Nazrul Swaralipi, Sur Mukur (by Nazrul) and Surlipi (by Jagat Ghatak) were printed before Nazrul's illness. A low spot in his life was in 1927, when he faced grave financial crisis. He was deceived by the publishers. He found it difficult to make ends meet and often sold his songs for a meagre amount.

'With such differences of opinion amongst experts, how difficult was it to start this initiative?' I asked.

'Talim Hossain, the founder gen-



Kazi Nazrul Islam at different stages of his life: (left) An early portrait of the poet (centre) Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman presenting a garland to the poet upon his arrival in Bangladesh; (right) the poet with his wife Pramila

Prevent distortions of Nazrul Sangeet--Khalid Husain

NOVRA DEEPIKA

Khalid Husain, an eminent Nazrul singer, recently talked about different aspects of Nazrul Sangeet. On the occasion of the death anniversary of the poet, he talks about its popularity, importance of its promotion as well as the negligence of this genre.

Khalid is of the opinion that the practice of Nazrul songs has undoubtedly increased during the last 20 years. Yet, problems regarding controversy on the original tune and maintaining the originality of these songs still persist. To quote Khalid, 'Among the 4000 songs of which Nazrul composed, not all the songs were recorded before he fell ill. Which is why very few original records are available in the market.'

Collectors of these rare songs like Ershadul Haque and Abdus Sattar owned these and later on handed them over to the Nazrul Institute.

The Nazrul Institute sorted out some of the notations and released them in the market. But Khalid Husain points out that these nota-

tions are unusable for laymen whose aim is to listen to the songs. He adds, 'For the listeners the original records or the undistorted remake versions by the modern day artistes should be in the market. But the record companies or the artistes are not really keen in releasing such records. That's why it has not been easy to generate wide spread popularity. An easy way would be to release Nazrul songs on a mass scale and in a manner which is comprehensible to the general listeners.'

Khalid Husain regrets that the Nazrul Institute has done very little to promote Nazrul songs because of their limitations while putting in an effort to further his other creative works. As a government organisation, he says, the Institute has difficulties and limitations in promoting Nazrul Sangeet.

The media is also indifferent towards Nazrul songs. The radio and television media have earmarked a tiny spot for Nazrul songs and that is also not in the prime time. Expressing his regret at this phenomenon, Khalid says, 'It is very unfortunate that the television channels have chosen to ignore Nazrul Sangeet. Likewise, artistes who feel that they will be more popular in the country are getting uninterested about Nazrul songs. Similarly, the artistes feel that they will be more popular by singing modern or contemporary songs rather than Nazrul songs.'

Because of the non-availability of the original tunes, some scheming artistes of our neighbouring country are releasing Nazrul songs with distorted tunes. As Khalid says, 'They have a lame excuse that the new generation listeners are interested in a new style and they have to do accordingly. However, the classic songs of Nazrul, DL Roy, Rajanikanta, Tagore and Atul Prashad should not be distorted even if people are not appreciative of the original form. It is our responsibility to preserve the songs of Nazrul as he is our National Poet.'

According to Khalid, there is very little effort to protect the original Nazrul songs from any kind of distortion. To quote him, 'I don't find any valid reason for this negligence in promoting Nazrul songs. Cheap entertainment has no relevance to Nazrul songs. Nazrul songs should be practised with respect.' Khalid complains that our National Poet is not focused duly even in the government organised tours.

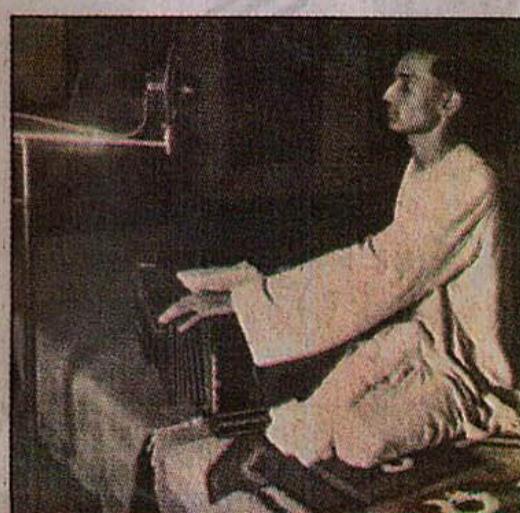
Khalid strongly believes that the appeal of Nazrul songs is everlasting. As he maintains, 'While Bengal

was overwhelmed by the songs of Tagore, DL Roy, Rajanikanta and Atul Prashad, Nazrul brought a new dimension in music with his diverse appeal. He wrote about 35 varieties of songs like folk, ghazal, patriotic songs and much more. And he wrote 4,000 to 4,500 songs from 1921 to 1942 while he also created 20 newrags and six newtals.'

To quote Khalid, 'To promote Nazrul songs effective and innovative measures like music videos and CDs should be released. The onus lies on the audience as well. Nazrul Institute, the most suitable institution for research and preserving Nazrul songs, does only one tenth of what it should do to further Nazrul songs.'

In a fitting tribute to Nazrul, Khalid quotes the late poet: 'Music is the realisation of my heart. Whatever you say about my other works, don't say anything about my music.'

On his death anniversary on August 27, music lovers should take a pledge to prevent the distortion of Nazrul's songs.



Young Abbasuddin Ahmed during a recording session of Kolkata Radio

folk songs to be recorded,' informs Ferdousi.

Abbasuddin recorded hundreds of Nazrul's songs, which enjoyed tremendous popularity at that time and still are. His first record of 'Adhunik' Bangla song, 'Laili tornar eshechhey phiriya' has become an icon of modern Bangla songs.

Once Abba was invited by the students of Joypurhat but he was requested not to harmonium as people considered it irreligious,' says Ferdousi. Abba came on stage and told the audience that he was going to talk only rather than sing. Then he described how the whole world rejoiced Prophet Mohammad's (SM) birth, and started to sing, without any instrument of course, Nazrul's famous song 'Tora dekha ja Amina mayer koley.' After singing another song Abbasuddin wanted to leave the stage, but the audience was won over by that time. Then he im-



Khalid Husain

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