made me sit beside him. His attire, way of talking and especially his laughter set him apart from the rest. I was rather irritated having to talk to so many unknown men. But, the man requested me to render a song."

"I rendered Jodi porane na jage akul piyasha. Then he became more interested and wanted to know about my family and about me. He found me quite interesting and again requested me to render another song and asked another man (Kamol Dasgupta), who was working in the next room, to listen. Then the latter asked me to present the song on a harmonium. In fact, that was a double reed harmonium, which I was not used to. I refused to play that harmonium considering it broken since every time I pressed one key another key from another octave rose," recalls Feroza.



Feroza Begum's solo performance at the Rabindra Sadan in Kolkata.

"But they kept on requesting me to render more songs. Then I started rendering DL Roy's Kalo pakhita mor-e keno kore eto jalaton, but could not complete the song since I was really quite irritated by then. Then again he (Nazrul) asked me whether was I interested to learn music," Feroza continues, "He offered me to come regularly to the place to learn music."

That was the amazing beginning of her formal training on music under the legends. Chitta Roy was her first trainer, later she had 'voice training' under Kamol Dasgupta from 1942. In 1941 Feroza Begum recorded a few songs under the HMV banner, which used to air on radio during the British period.

"My first trainer Chitta Roy always insisted that I sing easy songs, however, I always pressed him to allow me to render Nazrul Sangeet. At one stage Kazi Nazrul Islam was so delighted by my performance that he wished a bright future in my music career," she says.

But, no sooner had Feroza Begum come into the limelight, she faced hurdles from for family. "At the beginning of my professional career as a singer," I faced huge obstacles from my family. They told me to quit music and to go back to Faridpur. They tried to marry me off, since they considered that an unmarried Muslim girl should not be allowed to continue artistic career far from home."

"But I could not agree with them. For three years I had to struggle with my family. And then a new door was opened when Pakistan radio launched its regional office in Dhaka after the partition. I managed to get them to allow me to perform in Dhaka. I along with Talat Mahmud rendered songs during the inauguration of the office."

Feroza Begum could not, however, continue her career in Dhaka for long. According to her the scenario in Dhaka radio station was totally different from that of Kolkata. Describing the fundamental attitude of the radio authority Feroza Begum says, "In Dhaka radio the authority always insisted that we render Kalam E Iqbal and created obstacles of rendering thumri and dhadra, considering the music genres to be too unconventional. We were not allowed to render Rabindrasangeet. Even they used to censor words such as 'Shyam' in Nazrul Sangeet."

Conforming to the wishes of the authority, most of the singers used to render Islamic songs. But, I revolted and made them allow me to sing Rabindrasangeet, Atul Parasad's songs, DL Roy's songs, dhadra, thumri and diversified Nazrul Sangeet," she adds.

But, she could not cope with such a situation and faced hurdles this time in a new form. "I had to refuse many lucrative offers from Kolkata after the partition. In fact, the partition became the main obstacle to nurture my music career," says Feroza Begum.

In 1955, Feroza Begum made the most challenging decision in her life. She migrated from Dhaka to Kolkata to an uncertain future with her optimism as the only constant to bank on. Subsequently she married Kamol Dasgupta and became so engrossed in family life in Kolkata that she could not continue music for six years.