

Firoza Begum with her daughters-in-law (above) and sons Hamin, Tahseen and Shafin (below). Both and Hamin Ahmed and Shafin Ahmed, members of the band Miles, are successful musicians in Bangladesh.



At last, HMV came to an agreement, I could record two Nazrul Sangeets for the puja."

"To compete with adhunik songs I selected two light Nazrul Sangeet: *Dur dwipo bashini* and *Momer putul momeer desher*. And both of the songs were hits. My husband was overjoyed and conducted the musical arrangement of the songs. In fact, that was a revival of recording Nazrul Sangeet at the HMV rehearsal room," she adds.

Subsequently, to generate interest on Nazrul Sangeet in Kolkata again taking help from leading cultural personalities she initiated to organise a three day Nazrul Conference at Mahajati Sadan. Feroza Begum was the Programme Secretary where legendary singers like Chitta Roy, Shyamal Mitra, Shatinath, Kamala Jhariya, Radharani, Manobendra Mukhapadhyay, Shandhya Mukharjee, Pratima Banarjee rendered Nazrul Sangeet while Tarashankar Bandypadhyay, Probadh Shanyal, Nalini Kanta Sarkar, Baroda Guho, Budhadev Basu and others presented papers at the conference.

Feroza Begum says, "I brought Angur Bala and Indu Bala again to perform live concerts. On my request even legends such as Pankaj Mallick, Shuchitra Mitra and Kanika Banarjee rendered Nazrul Sangeet at the conference."

"On my part, I released hit Nazrul Sangeet records one after another. Records of two songs rendered by me Musafir much re ankhi jal and Amar jabar shomoy holo became so popular that I was invited to Delhi and performed in Durdarshan television. I performed 380 solo Nazrul Sangeet recitals," she adds.

In 1963, the most successful Nazrul Sangeet long play was released under the HMV banner featuring six leading artists: Feroza Begum, Shandhya Mukhapadhyay, Pratima Banerjee, Shatinath Mukhopadhyay, Manobendra Mukhopadhyay and Dhananja Bhattacharya.

Commenting on her huge success as a singer Feroza Begum says, "My struggle and dedication for music is the secret of my success. I'm a born talent and groomed under guidance of Kamol Dasgupta. Through practice I've developed my unique style."

In 1968 the artiste's life took a tragic turn with the death of her husband Kamol Das Gupta. "After his death I felt unsecured living with my three babies in Kolkata. Which is why I wrapped up my journey in Kolkata," continues Feroza Begum, "But, nowadays, I feel that was the worst decision I had ever made. I could have contributed more to uphold the legacy of Nazrul Sangeet if I had continued my music career in Kolkata."

Feroza Begum does not consider Bangladesh an ideal place for nurturing talents. According to her, the government has not been supportive at all, nor has it ever given much thought to patronising cultural activities. "Which is why I discouraged my sons to take music as professions. They play music as a passion but not as a profession," she says.

"More shocking to me is that even the artists are jealous and don't have any respect for others. It's not so in the present situation, but, I have had a bitter experience since my return to Dhaka in 1968. I still can't believe that a few prominent singers actually published statements against me in the newspaper saying that I did not know how to sing," Feroza says.

According to Feroza Begum the current scenario of Nazrul Sangeet in Bangladesh is getting worse day by day. "We don't have many quality singers since getting popularity has become so easy. Here everybody considers himself/herself the best, but can't do anything meaningful," she says.

For a better scenario Feroza Begum emphasises on proper training. She says, "Selecting quality vocalists, the government should organise intensive training programmes under someone who has vast knowledge on the music genre. If they offer me I can take the offer. But, I've never received such an offer from the government. In fact, they are least bothered that a living legend like me lives in Bangladesh," she adds quite boldly. ■