



Survival of folk songs

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SURVIVAL does not depend on a few musicians or a few folklorists who are singing or writing about it. It is the people who matter. When people change, their habits, customs way of thinking, everything takes transformations. Folk songs survive in a society which is agrarian, village oriented and poor. When people become richer, folk songs are forgotten.

Bangladesh is poor, agrarian, but why then Folk songs are not thriving as it should? The reasons are varied. The globalisation of music, the global instruments, lack of patronisation of the original, lack of enthusiasm, all combined, Bengalis sacrificed a lot to

land. The main genres, which are Bhatiali and Bhawaiya can not be recognized by the young I am amazed! Not only that. The cultural activists, the well placed, in charge of funds, the leaders we see around, have sense of belonging to heritage at different point. This is our problem. They look upon Baul, Bhatiali, Jari, Sari Dehtatya, Bichedi, Kirton and Bhawaiya with one eye. I discussed with leaders who could make a difference. They laughed at me saying that folk music or music can not be a priority where forty percent of the population live under poverty line. 'They have to live first and then arrange for their basic physiological requirements'. I agree only 50% because culture survives because of the poor population still living with it. Folk music is the product of poor people during the last one thousand years of our cultural existence.

necessary for Bhatiali as well as Bhawaiya. When introducing Guitar in place of dotara, musical sounds will change without notice, the environment is lost. It is impossible for me now to impress on my young music directors to impress on this point. If you use padding in place of Dhol, Spanish Guitar in place of dotara, and try to bring instruments like flute, mandira through the unibox, it is true that the sounds will be more, but the beauty of folk music of Bengal will vanish forever. The experiments by new music directors on Tagore songs are more or less being accepted by new audience, but it will not be the 'real' thing with regard to folk songs. It will be innovation unheard in folk songs. In western countries, folk songs have been untouched because they know that this is not an area to improvise. The folk songs in America have been completely written down in notation books. They are sung by people who love them, nurture them and reproduce them as sung hundreds of years ago. These are not things for experimenets. They must be allowed to remain as they were, as they are.

I have humbly produced history of folk music of Bengal printed years ago. Leaders in their ivory tower have not touched it. Neither, have they seen the volumes of my book on Bhawaiya. These two volumes carrying the best of Bhawaiya have been made available to new generation. Where is the enthusiasm? Is it there? No. It is not there. Ten volumes of 'Bhawaiyar Janmabhumi' is planned. Who are learning these songs? Who is playing on the dotara? The most popular and sought after songs on Bhatiali, named 'Bhatir Desher Bhatiali' with notations and thesis will be out soon. Five volumes have been planned. Who are going to buy? The new generation are not properly guided to look at their own heritage. Of course, I am happy to see them and crowd the streets of Dhaka on the first of Baishakh, not knowing what to do. What else they can do? They can have a session in one corner on Baul songs remembering one hundred top Baul composes of Bengal including Lalon Shah, Panju Shah, Dudu Shah and all the Shahs (Kings). This is a corner for the king of Bauls and their compatriots. They can put their hand on a Ektara and if possible buy one, not

for the sack of drawing room decoration, but for playing the instrument, which is the easiest. In another corner, we can remember Bijoy Sarker, the best of the lyricists from Jessore. In another corner, we can have songs of Baul Abdul Karim of Deerai, Sunamganj. It is not enough to have a program on TV and remember him once in a year. We can have a corner for singing Qazi Nazrul Islam remembering his loves songs, Ghazals, and of course the songs which made our nation. We can invite in a corner the top folk musicians of rural Bengal. In another part of city, where there is enough space, we can invite one million young people to recite from Tagore, to read from Tagore and sing from Tagore. This will be an open air function for lovers of Tagore, not only restricted for handful of singers like us. We can invite some of the living exponents of Tagore songs from West Bengal, and elsewhere. Please remember that the programs live telecast from these corners are not even available to one percent of the population. So, why bother so much for the one percent? Place all your cultural planning for ninety nine percent and not one percent. This was visualized by Jawaharlal Nehru, the First Prime Minister of India while he was jailed by the British. He wrote as to how to project the culture of India to the rest of the world in his book 'Discovery' of India. This is a collection of letters written to her daughter Indira Ghandi from jail. The projection of Bangla culture is the main job of our present government. I have great respect for Sheikh Hasina, who is our leader for five years. I like to live in my country as proud Bengali trying to hoist the flag of Lalon, Hasan Raja, Radharamon, Alauddin Khan, Ravi Shanker, Uday Shanker, Qazi Nazrul, Abbasuddin, Jasimuddin and Tagore.

Last night (6th April 2009), we came back from Kolkata, where a competition program of fresh new artists from India and Bangladesh were organised by Channel I and ETV Kolkata from last two months. It is an innovative idea to bring Bangladesh and Indian artists together in a competition. We found the famous music director Bappi Lahiri from Bombay and our own Rezwana Chowdhury Banna as Chief of the Judges. We showed up as special guests

giving our comments on such a wonderful meet of Bengali music. The audience in Kolkata and West Bengal are deprived of rural music from Bangladesh as the Bangladesh Channels are not allowed to be shown there. It is their loss, not ours. We can watch their artists and their poets and litterateur on the small screen, which is our gain. We claim to be torch bearers of Bengali culture embracing painting, literature and music in the present world. We represent genuine culture to the whole world. If viewers in West Bengal and India are not allowed to watch our programs, our friends are deprived. Not we. The Program of ETV Kolkata and Channel I are forerunners because the viewers in India, Bangladesh and seven states of Assam can see this program sitting in their own drawing rooms convinced of the inner beauty and unity of our music. We have, separated our kitchens. We are: independent and sovereign, but, one and indivisible. This is how I look.

The program last night brought me near Rezwana Chowdhury Banna, Haimanti Shukla, Indrani Sen, Bappi Lahiri, his son Bappa Lahiri (an upcoming music director of Bombay), Sabina Yasmin, Jojo, many young singers of Kolkata and Bangladesh namely, Munir, Tania, Gourab and Beauty. Munit and Tania won the show but the thirty participants from Bangladesh and India could win the top position. They were simply gorgeous and fantastic! It was a wonderful opportunity for my wife Asma and me to attend this program as their Guest of Honour. In the final, I took control of the mike (as I always do) with Bappi on one side, and Rezwana on the other, Haimanti on one side and Indrani on the other with twelve singer participants singing the last para of DL Roys famous 'Bhayer Mayer Eto Sneho Kothai Gele Pabe Keho'. The entire audience sang and were with us in body and spirit. When we speak of unity, we don't shed our sovereign rights. We unite as sovereign human beings as we respect our own mother lands, our own mother tongue and our own mothers as sung by Dijendra Lal Roy.

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Establish the right of their mother tongue and a greater sacrifice for Freedom. The same is not visible to preserve the culture of Bengal, without which freedom and choice of language become meaningless.

I have devoted my time and energy to collect, preserve and disseminate the musical values of Bengal in a very humble way. It appears to me that all are in waste. Why? Because, the generation in front of me have little or less grounding for the music of my

It will survive anyway if it has its own strength. Because of cultural strings attached to globalization, music is affected. This is the problem. Even with abject poverty our culture will survive. It will survive anyway if it has its own strength. Because of cultural strings attached to globalization, music is affected. This is the problem. We need to protect them from the adverse effects of globalization. For instance, dotara is the absolutely essential instrument