

33rd Death Anniversary of the National Poet

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Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated with joy and fervour and the occasion is incomplete without the song, "O mon Ramjaner oi rojar sheshey elo khushir Eid." This song has a rich history as it played a crucial role in bringing about a cultural renaissance among Bengali Muslims.

According to Ferdousi Rahman, the daughter of Abbasuddin Ahmed and a renowned artiste of Nazrul Sangeet and Bhawaiya songs: "In those days Abba was singing in Kolkata with HMV; he had also done various songs of Nazrul by that time. He wished to sing Islamic songs and told Nazrul about his desire to record Islamic songs like the qawalis which were greatly popular at the time. In those days Muslim society considered music, singing and even listening to music a sacrilege. Bhagabati Babu, the rehearsal manager of Gramophone Company, was approached, but he angrily rejected the idea. At a suitable moment, Bhagabati was requested again

and this time he gave his consent."

Smiling, Ferdousi continues, "Together Nazrul and Abbasuddin sat with paan and cha (betel leaf and tea) and Nazrul composed the song within a matter of half an hour. The song was then ready and Nazrul taught Abbasuddin the song the very next day. The recording of the song was done using only harmonium and tabla. The song became an instant hit and this marked the beginning of the era of Islamic songs. These songs had an electrifying effect on both the Hindus and Muslims and as a result even the Hindu artistes started singing Islamic songs using Muslim names."

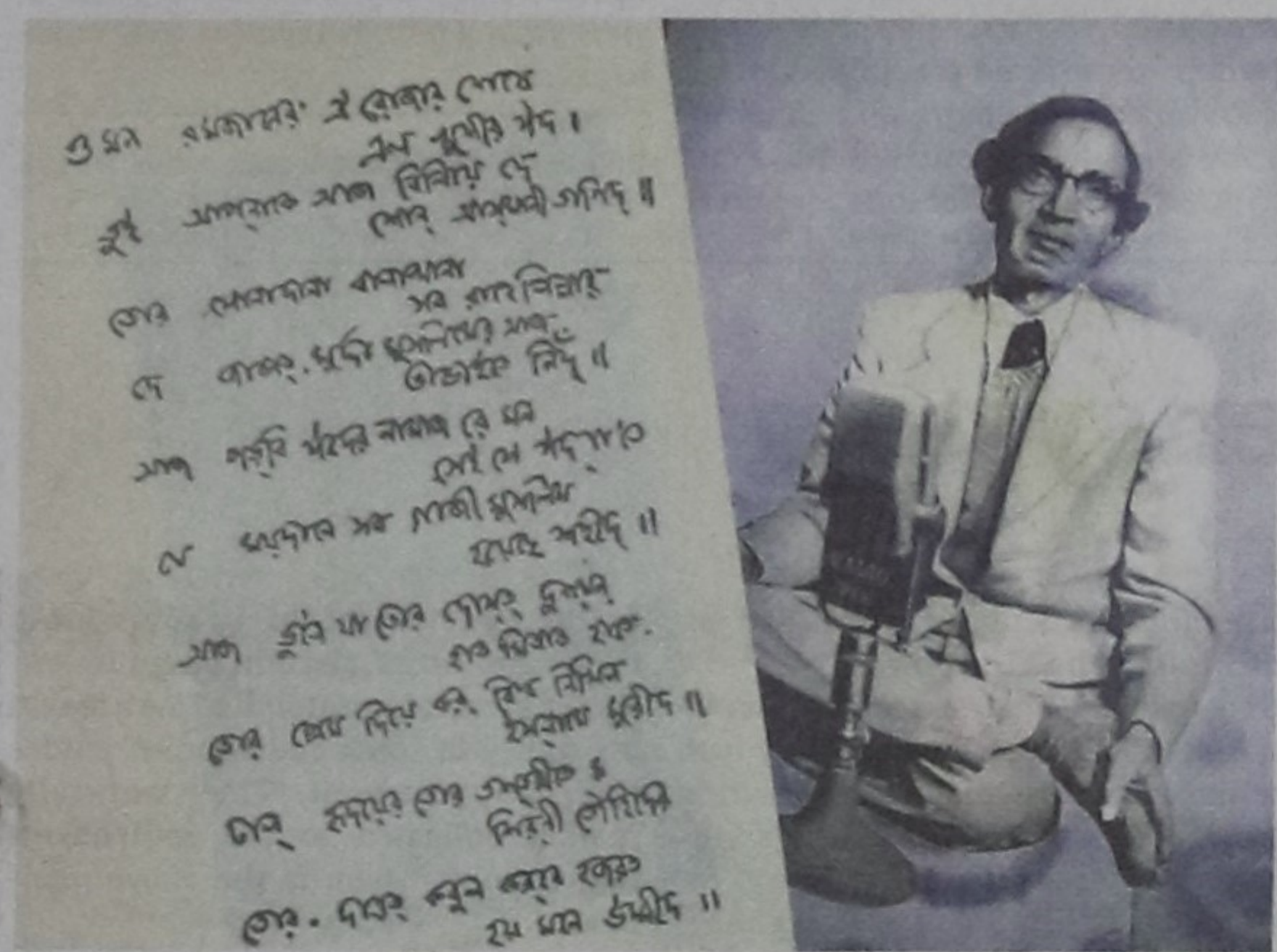
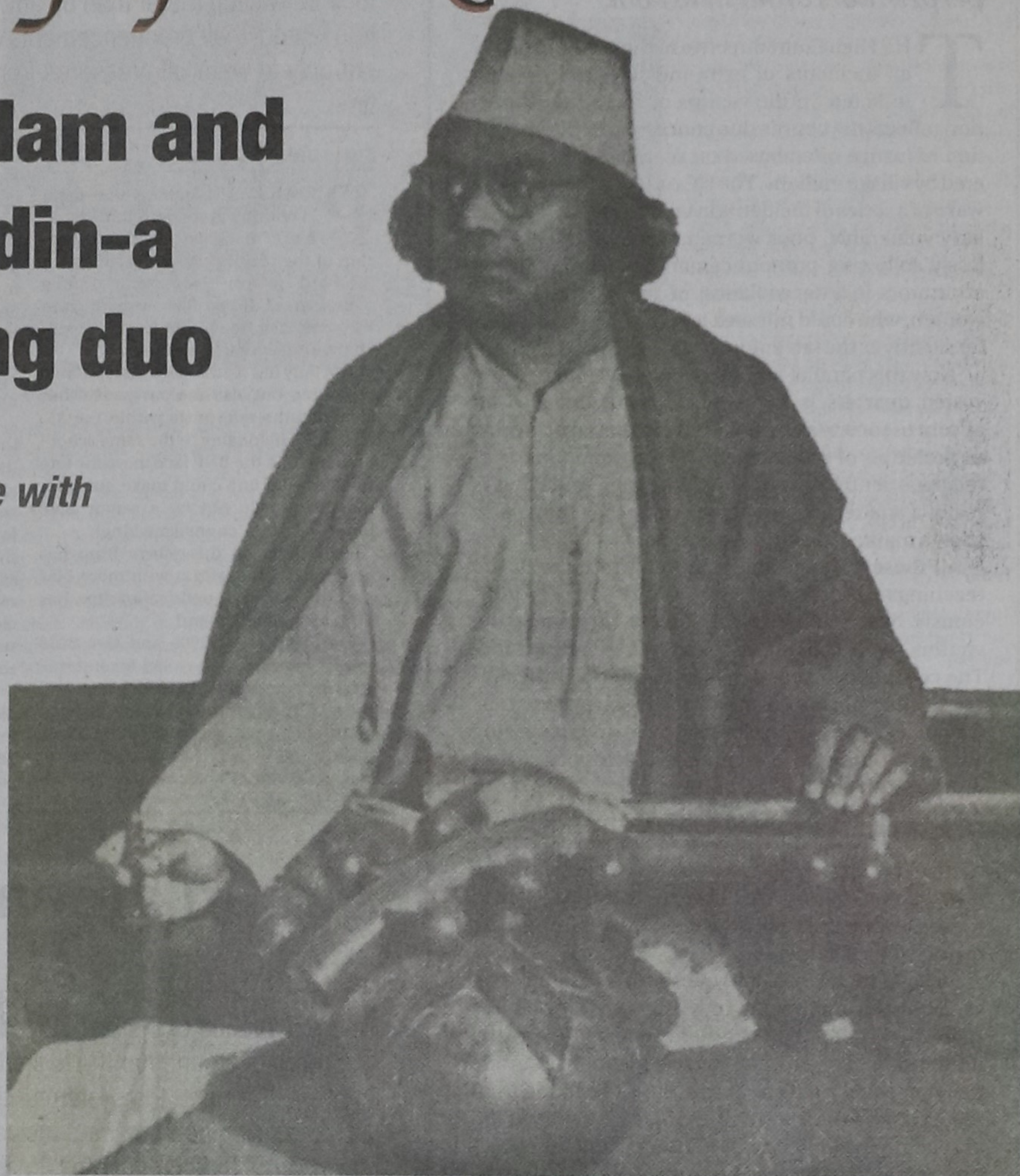
Referring to Nazrul and the chemistry he shared with Abbasuddin, Ferdousi states, "The Rebel Poet used his music and poems as a major way of disseminating revolutionary ideas. A unique lyricist and music composer, each of his songs is like a beautiful picture. He had in-depth ideas about all the raagas and his writings spread from the patriotic to ghazals, from Hamd Nahi to Bhajan, Kirtaan and love songs.

Nazrul Islam and Abbasuddin-a pioneering duo

Down memory lane with Ferdousi Rahman

He had a keen understanding of both Hinduism and Islam and that is how he could compose such classic masterpieces."

"Nazrul Islam and Abbasuddin were a triumphant duo; Nazrul with his inspirational songs and poems and Abbasuddin with his melodious voice complemented each other. Nazrul was so close to the family that he named my elder brother Mostafa Kamal Dodul which later became Dulu," Ferdousi further states, "In my mother's memoirs I read about the poet's hearty laughter, which echoed an audible expression of happiness," Ferdousi continues, "Even when I went to perform Haj, I was thinking about the great poet and his songs. He never visited these places, yet by reading his poems and listening to his songs one would say he had seen both Mecca and Medina and met the Prophet (PBUH) personally."



Going beyond labour of love

The need to take Nazrul Sangeet out of its niche, and to the masses

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

To music enthusiasts in our country and West Bengal, it is common knowledge that a Nazrul Sangeet artiste can render a song belonging to virtually any genre. It is their background that empowers their vocal abilities. Nazrul's compositions are ornate with every raaga under the sun; the poet even created some original raaga. Inevitably, an aspiring Nazrul artiste has to go through years of rigorous taalim and reyaaz to groom his/her voice, to be able to make the intricate compositions sound effortless. Perhaps this is the reason a lot of music students start off their lessons with some familiar Nazrul Sangeet and then move on to other genres. In that sense, Nazrul Sangeet bolsters their foundation.

Rationally, Nazrul Sangeet should have a certain standing, a sizeable following, mass popularity and Nazrul artistes should enjoy a pride of place in the Bangladeshi music arena. Reality, however, is not quite that. Nazrul songs do have a certain standing and has its admirers and connoisseurs but it has yet to possess popularity among the masses. A general grievance from Nazrul artistes is that they rarely get the kind of treatment and encouragement they deserve.

Three accomplished Nazrul singers, representing three generations, discussed their perceptions and views on the issue. Excerpts of what they said:

Rebeka Sultana emerged as a vocalist in the mid '60s. A student of Ustad Phool Muhammad, Sudhin Das and Feroza Begum, Rebeka belongs to a family of accomplished artistes (among her siblings is Abida Sultana).

According to Rebeka, Nazrul's works do not get adequate exposure and promotion overseas. "I've lived in several countries for 27/28 years, as my husband worked as a diplomat. I met many foreign diplomats who were not that knowledgeable in Bengali culture or literature but were aware of Tagore and his works," said Rebeka.

"That made me contemplate how our National Poet's works can be introduced globally. Bangladeshi embassies can hold cultural programmes highlighting Nazrul Sangeet and can translate his works in major languages like Spanish, French, Arabic and Chinese," she added. "NRBs (non-resident Bangladeshis) can play a



(From left) Rebeka Sultana, Yasmin Mushtari and Nasima Shaheen.

PHOTO: MUMIT M.

key role in this mission."

Yasmin Mushtari, sister of Shabnam and Parveen Mushtari, attained nationwide recognition as a Nazrul artiste in the '80s. A student of Ustad Fazlul Haque, Ustad Akhter Sadmani, Ustad Phool Muhammad and Ustad Mithun De, Yasmin outlined the difference between taalim back in the day and

now: "When we were students, ustad were totally proactive and treated us as their most important responsibilities. If for some reason, we missed a lesson, they'd come

over to our home straightaway. There was no traffic jam; life was easier, more relaxed. Going to music classes was never a hassle.

"Now, everyone is in a rush. Students try to do ten things at once. Most teachers are also performers, so they rarely have the time to bond with students outside classes."

"However, today more youngsters are learning Nazrul Sangeet than ever. Perhaps, they are taking lessons in Nazrul Sangeet to groom their vocals, many may not continue or move to other genres, but the fact that these aspiring singers are starting their musical journey with the National Poet's compositions is certainly something positive," Yasmin said.

Nasima Shaheen, who has been teaching Nazrul Sangeet at Chhayanaut for the last 15 years, emerged as an artist in the '90s. "There is a sense of contempt, on national level, when Nazrul Sangeet and artistes are concerned," Nasima said.

"Nazrul was made the National Poet of Bangladesh and seemingly that was it! National events and major programmes often end with the national anthem, but none of the events starts with or even includes a Nazrul Sangeet.

"A young singer goes through years of painstaking training to become a Nazrul artiste but rarely gets any exposure in the media. It seems that Nazrul is remembered nationwide only on two occasions - his birth and death anniversaries. These practices need to change," Nasima said.

All three artistes however agree that the general standard of Nazrul artistes in Bangladesh is far superior to Indian (West Bengal) vocalists.

"There is rampant distortion of Nazrul's tunes and artistes from West Bengal often sing wrong lyrics," said Yasmin.

Rebeka felt that promising Nazrul artistes should be included in cultural delegation to major international events and the cultural ministry in association with Bangladeshi embassies overseas should arrange Nazrul Sangeet classes conducted by seasoned singers.

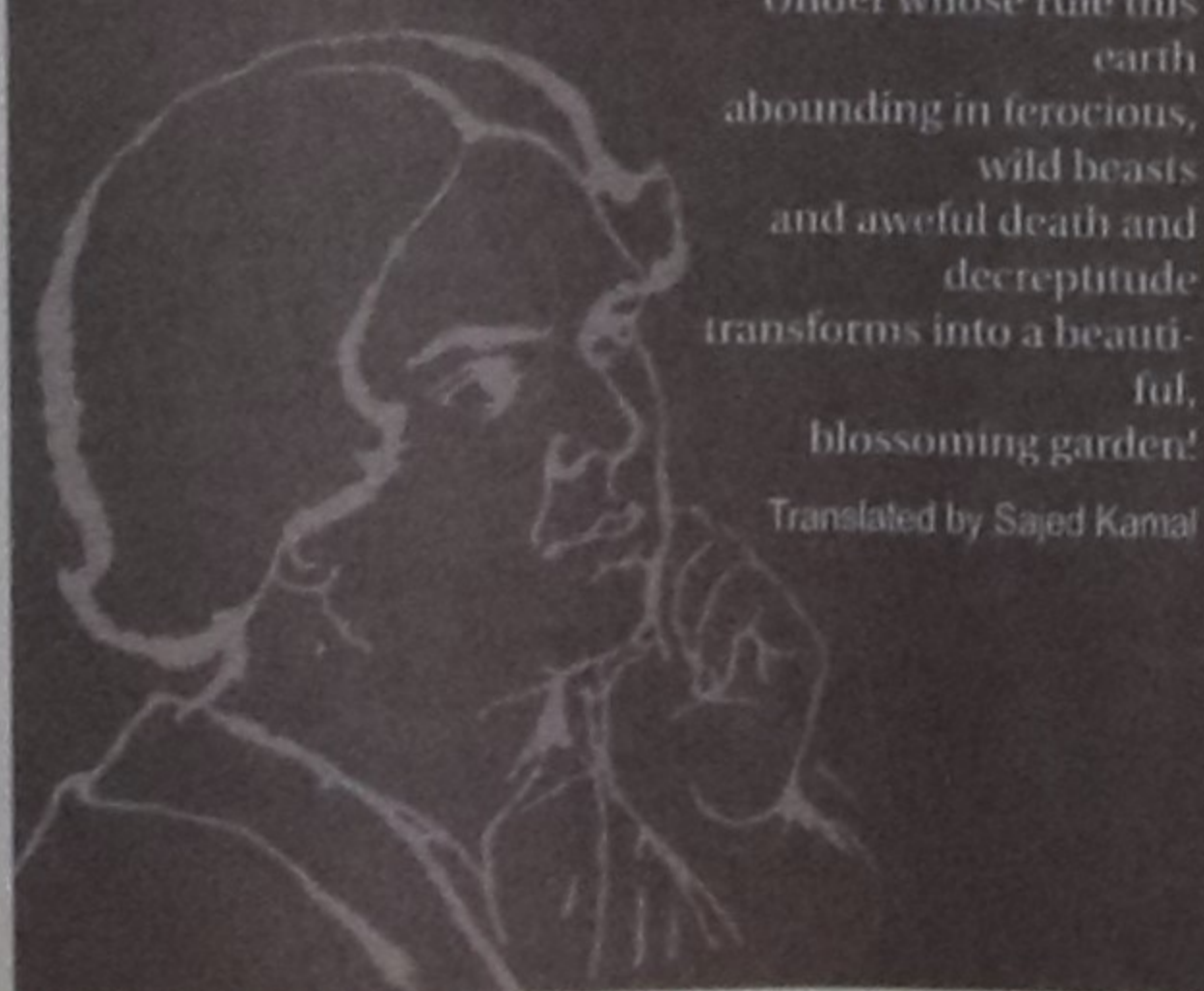
Nasima stressed on the need to promote and encourage upcoming Nazrul artistes with initiatives like talents hunts (specifically on Nazrul Sangeet) and more media coverage.

All three singers agreed that it's imperative to take Nazrul Sangeet out of the niche it's imprisoned in and take it to the masses, as that's what the National Poet intended.

A Hymn to Life

I sing of them who deliver to this earth the message of harvest. Under whose hardened, blisterous palms from merciless labor the earth offers the gift of baskets full of fruits and flowers. Under whose rule this earth abounding in ferocious, wild beasts and aweful death and decrepitude transforms into a beautiful, blossoming garden!

Translated by Sajed Kamal



HOW A FROG TAKES A FLYING LEAP?
I WANT TO SEE

Your child grows up wondering many such curious thoughts. We say let the children grow up with their curiosities. Worried about germs and diseases? Anchor Milk contains calcium, zinc and iron as well as IMU-care that boosts their immune systems keeping them protected at all times. Let them and their curiosity march forward hand in hand.

Anchor
Let curiosity thrive