

A CHAT WITH....

SHAAN

In love with Bengal

It would be difficult to find even a handful of music or movie fans in South Asia who doesn't know Shaan. The name brings into everybody's mind a very charming voice: romantic, melodious, but nevertheless versatile.

For Star Showbiz, the playback singer squeezed out fifteen minutes of his time during one of his tours to Bangladesh. The maestro's parents hail from Kolkata. The Bengal connection is apparent from the conversation, his love reflected in his fascination for all things Bengali -- from hilsa dishes to of course, music.

You have visited Bangladesh quite a few times. How do you find our country and its audience like?

Whenever I come to Bangladesh, I do not feel like I am abroad. This country and the audience have made me their own. Although my parents are from Kolkata, I was brought up in Mumbai. I miss Kolkata a lot; I miss the Bengali atmosphere. When I am in Dhaka, I am in Bengal, which I love.

A trip to Bangladesh demands savouring in Padma's hilsa, which I have already done this time. The folk music of Bangladesh also has a charm of its own. Although I started listening to this genre a little late, I now enjoy it a lot. I love the simplicity -- and at the same time, the depth -- the works of Bangladeshi poets portray.

As a matter of fact, I have recently launched an album where there are songs of Bangladeshi legends like Lalon and Nazrul. The album actually is a mix of both East and West Bengal.

Since you have been to this country a number of times, has a level of interaction and friendship developed with some of the singers here?

It should have been more. When I am in Bangladesh, I do bump into and chat with many artists-- such as James -- at different events. But it is only to that degree.

We feel that there is a scarcity of strong joint projects between East and West Bengal. What is your opinion regarding this?

It is important that both the Bengalis team up and do more ventures together. We share rivers, cultures and even many ideologies. Preserving Bengali ethos -- together, in a collaborative way -- is essential. The way forward, and not just for Bengalis but for South Asian countries or SAARC countries at large, is to work cohesively. The world may try to divide us, and that may be to their advantage, but we will remain strong if we are united.

As an artist who is familiar with the music industry of both Mumbai and West Bengal, what do you think are some basic differences between the two?

Mumbai's industry is more movie based. In Kolkata, there is a large chunk that comprises of the non-film sector. There is a strong culture of bands and folk music and so on. The scenario of Kolkata is more similar to Dhaka then it is to Mumbai. Nowadays, the music of Bengali cinema has a tendency to be more like that of Mumbai. But in doing that, I think we are losing our own Bengali heritage.

On the other hand, since a lot of Bengali songs are now being dubbed in Hindi, it's bringing in that unique flavour of Bengali music into Hindi songs. And the audience are positively accepting it.

If you were not based in Mumbai, do you think it would have been difficult for you to get in the music business over there?

Yes. I am a very laid-back person; not someone who can be termed as a go-getter. Probably, I would not have even moved to Mumbai, then. Being the complacent person I am, I might have just stayed in Kolkata or any other place and made my life there. After all, in Kolkata, I would have been in the heart of the music scene since the very beginning of my life. My late father, hailing from Bengal, was a composer himself.

Your father was the renowned musician Manas Mukherjee. Any memories you would like to share of him?

I heard from my family how passionately he went to Bangladesh in 1971, with two songs -- one was the national anthem while another was a patriotic song which he composed himself.

I lost him at a very early age. He was very passionate about his music.

Is there any food for thought you want to leave our readers with?

Everything starts from being proud of your country. Being a proud Bangladeshi can make all the difference. Go back to your roots. I think there is a tendency, in general, among our youth, to get away to foreign lands as soon as an opportunity arises.

Prosper with your country, rather than prospering yourself individually somewhere else. Make Bangladesh proud of you, and be proud of Bangladesh.

By M H Haider

