

| ENDEAVOUR |

# STEPPING OUT OF THE COCOON

NILIMA JAHAN

PHOTOS: COURTESY

To encourage more young women into community media and journalism, and to work for the development of rural communities, in 2013, Bangladesh NGO's Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), in partnership with Free Press Unlimited (FPU), launched a three month fellowship programme entitled "Youth women in Media and Journalism". In the programme, an experienced mentor trains the attendees how to produce news, reports, features, case study and human profiles.

"We believe that the story of rural underprivileged women can be best depicted by these journalists, as they can bring out their prospects and problems", says AHM Bazlur Rahman, CEO of BNNRC. BNNRC has a special focus on 'Dalit' young women too.



According to a statistics of BNNRC, at present, more than 350 female journalists and volunteers are working in 16 community radios in Bangladesh and they are bringing tremendous success in their own fields. They are mainly covering issues related to women and children- importance of family planning, pre-primary education system, awareness against child marriage, employment of indigenous women in the forest department, violence against women, suicidal tendencies among women,

children being victims of pornography, healthcare facilities in local maternity hospitals and many more. The journey of these promising young women is not smooth at all. Many of them are from very conservative families that don't accept their daughters' participation in media. "I was born and brought up in a family plagued with religious bigotry and superstitions. No woman before me here had stepped out of the house, let alone have a job", says 23 years old Shahrina Sultana Jui, Head of News at Borendra

Radio, Naogaon, the one and only female journalist of Naogaon and a fellow of BNNRC's fellowship programme. "Coming from that family, and becoming a journalist today- it's like a dream", she adds. She has produced a number of news stories depicting the miseries of the people of her community and has been able to draw the attention of her community, local administration and law enforcers. Like Shahrina, many female journalists in different community media are



struggling to make a change in the male-dominated rural areas. But very often, they are interrupted by the encirclements. "Some girls joined our radio without informing their parents. But when their parents come to know about it, they take them back", says Parvin Nahar, station manager of Radio Jhenuk, Jhenaidah. Apart from these, there are bigger problems in the working areas. Sometimes they need to go a long way on foot for collecting information, sometimes people don't want to talk to them about sensitive issues, and give wrong information, as they are not aware of their rights. The local administration makes them wait for days for data collection, many a times they don't provide the data at all.

"When I went to cover a report on family planning issues, people of my community didn't even want to talk to me. For them, it's a very private issue to talk about", says Baishakhy Khatun, presently working as a programme host at Bangladesh Betar (started her career at Radio Jhenuk, under the fellowship of BNNRC). "But later on, that programme got the family planning media award from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare". Apart from these, Baishakhy received a number of national and international awards for her outstanding achievements for Radio Jhenuk.

Conquering all obstacles, rural women journalists are now creating a platform for people of different communities, by picking up the stories of success and sorrow. They demand an indiscriminate environment for performing their duties properly and yearn to move a long way in future with the help of the initiators. ■

| MUSINGS |

Gauhar Jaan was a songstress of Hindustani music who came into limelight in the last decade of 19th century and dominated the first two decades of 20th century with her repertoire of musical talents, enchanting music lovers and patrons that consisted of nouveau riche and the Nawabs and Maharajas of India. Patronage of music and 'Bajjis' courtesans/fancy girls were an inseparable part of their culture. Gauhar Jaan was benefited by the patronage of this class.

Gauhar Jaan was endowed with a well-groomed melodious voice and exceptional beauty and had a natural gift of expressing, with befitting ease, highly charged lyrics of the song and the complex musical syntax. Gauhar Jaan received lessons in *Kathak* dance and *Thumri* from highly regarded Bindadin Maharaj (1836-1917). Krishnachandra Das taught her Bengali *Kirtan*, from Srijanbai she learnt *Dhrupad*, which was essential for singers of *Kheyal* and *Thumri*. From her mother she learnt *Urdu* and *Farsi*.

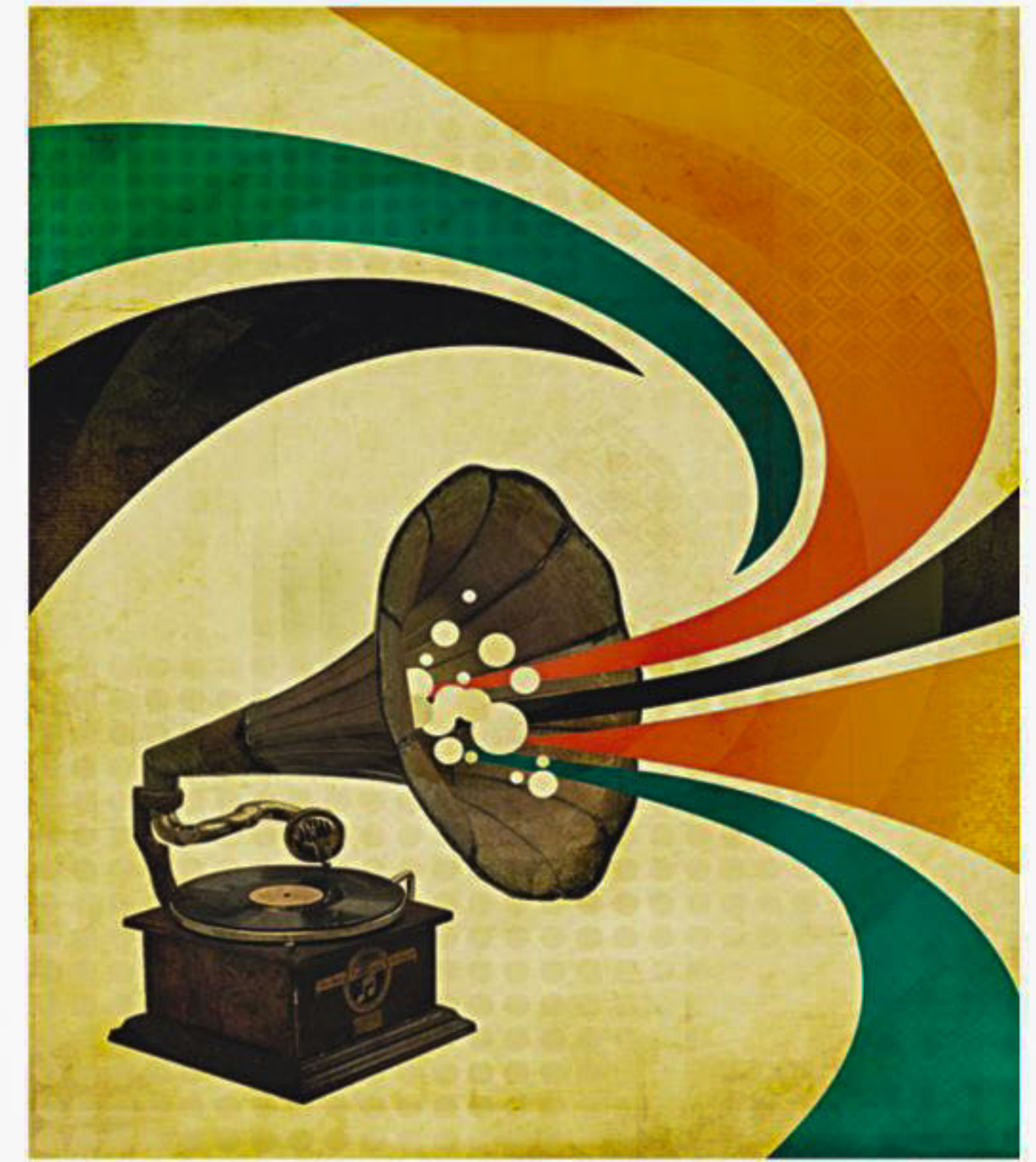
Gauhar Jaan and her mother were of Anglo-Indian parentage. Her mother, Victoria Hemmings Bicki married a young Armenian engineer, Robert Yeoward of Allahabad. A daughter Elin Angelina Yeoward was born at Azamgarh, Agra. The marriage did not last and ended in divorce in 1879.

## GRAMOPHONE'S GAU HAR JAAN

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

Bicki left Azamgarh along with her mother and daughter and shifted to Benares in 1879. There she and her daughter embraced Islam. Her mother became Bari Malka Jaan and her daughter became Gauhar Jaan. The title Jaan was for those 'Tawayefs' (fancy woman) whose trade dwelt on songs and singing only.

In 1883, they shifted to Calcutta and took residence in three small rooms of 49 Chitpur Road. Gauhar's first public performance was at the court of Raja of Darbhanga. The young lady won over the hearts of the personages present with her splendid performance. She



COURTESY: INTERNET

was made the court musician of the Maharaja. Before 19th century was to come to an end, Gauhar Jaan was the shining star among the songstresses of the time. She excelled with great command in all branches of Hindustani music, Bengali songs, and even Rabindrasangeet.

But the coming 20th century was holding a golden era for Gauhar Jaan. Emil Berliner, a young man from Germany succeeded in developing the first zinc Gramophone record in 1891. Following that a company was incorporated in London -GTL's Fred Gaisberg arrived in Calcutta on 27 October 1902. He was taken to the exclusive function of a Bengali Babu. He could guess from the beginning that the artiste of the evening is not going to be a run of the mill nautch girl. She was tastefully dressed and her ornaments added to her grandeur. To him she was exceptionally attractive, fair, possessing a graceful figure. She was Gauhar Jaan.

Her song was recorded on 11th November 1902. She asked of Mr Gaisberg pointing at a funnel shaped cylinder whether she was to sing into it. Yes! Indeed! And she cannot move a bit and has to sing as loudly as possible and that she would have only three minutes for it! Gaisberg understood that this lady was to be the first Gramophone celebrity of India.

At the beginning, each record ended with a short message 'My name is Gauhar Jaan' presented in the girlishly sweet but immaculate English accent of Gauhar Jaan. From 1902 to 1920, in her colourful singing career, nearly 600 songs of Gauhar Jaan were recorded and marketed. The songs were in 20 languages. Although Thumri was her forte, she excelled in all branches of Hindustani music. Her most famous songs are, thumri sung in Bhairavi, *nahak laye gavanavamora, jabse gaye mori sud huna live, Ras ke bhare Tore Nain, Mere dard-e-jigar* and Bhajans like, *Radhey Krishna Bol Mukhse, Bhalobasibe bole bhalobashine* (Bengali) and many more. She also sang the Rabindra Sangeet *Keno choker jole bhi jiyer dilem na pather shukno dhulo joto*.

In December 1911, she was invited to perform at the coronation of King George V at Delhi Durbar, where she sang a duet, *Ye Hai Tajposhi Ka Jalsa, Mubarak Ho Mubarak Ho*, with Jankibai of Allahabad.

Later she lost her mother. Misfortune started following her one after another, devastating her with calumny and vengeful and fabricated litigations filed by a beneficiary of her mother, and later by one on whom she learnt to depend. In these two litigations of enlisting the services of renowned lawyers of the country her fortune sank to the bottom.

She was in dire straits and took a job of court musician of the Maharaja of Mysore for a mere a pittance of 500.00 taka per month. She was deeply depressed. Her health started declining and she died on January 17, 1930. ■

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