



A CHAT WITH

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

Passion for Nazrul Sangeet

The ever affable Sadya Afreen Mallick is the recent winner of the prestigious Nazrul Award. It's been a long journey for the Nazrul Sangeet exponent whose passion for Nazrul's music is matched with a commitment to her professional life as Editor of the Arts Entertainment section of leading English newspaper The Daily Star. She talks about her commitment to Nazrul Sangeet and what it means to her in her life.

How did you set out on your journey as a singer?

I started to sing when I was eight years old. My first teacher was Sudhin Das. Later, I trained at leading cultural organisation Chhayanaut where my mentors suggested that I master the art of Nazrul Sangeet. I have continued on that path.

Can you elaborate on the numerous accolades that have come your way over the years?

I received the President Award as a child artiste way back in 1969. Later, I won the gold medal from Chhayanaut in 1974. This was followed by 'Anandadhara Gold Medal', 'Jai Jai Din, viewers' choice --Best Nazrul singer', 'President Abu Sayeed Award—by Surjomukhi', and more. In 2015, I won the prestigious Nazrul Award, which is a great honour as it puts me in the same league as many renowned singers of Nazrul Sangeet and is the highest national award on our National Poet.

Apart from singing Nazrul's songs, you are also a well respected writer. How did that come about?

Many of us are unaware of the factual history of our National Poet, and I strongly felt people deserved to know the reality. So I figured that writing would be an effective medium to add depth and meaning to the genuine richness of our National Poet.

Who inspires you as a Nazrul singer?

I believe that a song is a 'practice' and the singer is a 'preacher'. So, I am encouraged by those who preach the songs of Nazrul honestly. To name just a few singers who inspire me: Afsari Khanam, Abdul Halim Chowdhury, Nilufar Yasmin, Sandhya Mukherjee, Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty and my mentors Sheikh Lutfur Rahman and Sudhin Das.

Have you written any books on Nazrul?

Not yet, but I intend to with all the material that I have compiled over the years.

Why doesn't the government undertake more initiatives to conduct research on Nazrul?

Even I wonder why at times. It's a pity as there is an abundance of research material, but for some reason difficult to fathom, it has remained unused.

What initiatives have you taken to

promote Nazrul Sangeet?

My primary aim is to promote the upcoming and talented singers of Nazrul Sangeet. I also conduct a musical event titled "Star Melodies" at The Daily Star premises, where I create a platform for everyone to showcase their talents, and thankfully, it has been well received by the audience.

Have you made any music videos on the songs of Nazrul?

Although I desired to make two music videos on behalf of Nazrul's death anniversary, I have been successful in my endeavors to do only one so far. My most recent music video with prominent and upcoming singers and students from different universities has been aired on the Nazrul's death anniversary across various national television channels as well as The Daily Star website.

Why do you think both Tagore and Nazrul are celebrated only occasionally?

Because of our apathy, if we as a nation continue to go back to the days when Rabindranath and Nazrul were put on a pedestal, I believe we will tend to honour them always. We also need to make sure there are more TV programmes and plays by maestros, so that a larger audience will be attracted towards these towering personalities and their large body of work.

Tell us about the albums you have

released so far?

I have quite a few albums. However, the most important album is the one from HMV, under the direction of the legendary Feroza Begum, titled "Elo Phuler Morshum". Besides this, a few more albums were released by the Nazrul Institute, Soundtec, EMI and Modhumita.

What are your ideas on the promotion of Nazrul?

With the help of technology, we can further spread the magic of Nazrul by teaching eager students across the world via the internet. We can also allow Nazrul songs to be played in public transport, so that commuters can subconsciously listen to them. I have been fortunate enough to have taken part in a documentary produced by BBC Channel 4 with legendary singers Feroza Begum, Manabendra Mukherjee and Dhirendrachandra Mitra back in 1984, but we are yet to have a documentary on our National Poet in our country. We could conduct a reality show based on Nazrul, and I am sure it will gain popularity. I also hope for a train service from Dhaka to Kolkata named "Dhumketu" so that more people become aware of our beloved poet's works.

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*Interviewed by Zahid Akbar
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