

AAJ ACHI KAL NEI



I'm not a very emotional memory trotter, and I prefer to not be one. But, despite saying so, all the wonderful gifts of lessons that I had received from my guru, I treasure them, relish them, chew on them, brush them and whole heartedly respect and love them.

It was 1968. I was a student of standard five. I was already enrolled as a child artist in the then Pakistan Television and Radio of Dhaka, which had arranged a special children's program titled "Aam Kuranirbao" with Abdul Latif bhai, the amazing music composer and prolific lyricist, as the conductor of the whole show. We had a month-long rehearsal and all the child artists of the radio station were invited to participate. It was a huge arrangement! Amongst so many children I noticed Happy, and yes, he was truly happy! He was smiling all the time. He was 'music' all the time. Either he was singing, or playing the tabla, harmonium or flute. Whatever he was playing, he was performing like an accomplished musician. He was a child, but not just a mere human; he was the epitome of music itself. We soon became very good friends. He would come over to our old

D.O.H.S. house and we would practice and sing together and learn new songs. He also tried to teach me different musical instruments, which I admit I was not able to carry through due to lack of interest, as only singing interested me. Nonetheless, Happy's musical spontaneity mesmerized me, and still does.

The same year I met Happy, Kalim Sharafi chacha, again an awesome music personality, introduced my mother to a person whom Kalim chacha thought very high of as a musician. Kalim chacha advised my mother, whom I call 'mamoni', to groom my musical ability under the guidance of this person. One fine afternoon the one and only Lucky bhai came to our home and became my music groomer. He never stopped calling my mother 'mamoni' from that day on.

What a surprise it was for me when I got to know Lucky bhai! Happy and he were brothers – what a pair of brilliant musicians! Lucky bhai was like a musical umbrella to me and Happy, and I treated him like my musical god. Besides providing us with classical training, we joyfully learnt different kinds of music from him. It comprised of classical, Bengali, Urdu, English, Spanish, Japanese, French,

Russian, German, Iranian, and so much more. Boundaries of languages and countries never hindered him from learning and teaching music. Lucky bhai used to collect and place request orders to different embassies and we would listen to those records for hours in our record player. We learned the songs with perfect pronunciation and perfect pitch. He made sure me and Happy did our homework. Life was a school of musical homework.

The political scenario of the then Pakistan was slowly changing. The cultural scenario was always in the forefront of any kind of revolution in this land. Patriotic songs became the spontaneous creative energy of music creators to usher in the most beautiful, most horrendous, the bravest year of the Bengalis – for 1971! Mr. Mustapha Monowar, the head of the then P.T.V. Dhaka, masterminded a musical program which only showcased patriotic songs. The program was designed to be aired at 12 AM, midnight. It was a very brave and intelligent play to shove away the necessity of displaying the Pakistani flag as well as the singing of Pakistani national anthem.

Lucky bhai was one of the composers scheduled to make his appearance in the

program. Rigorous rehearsals were carried out with the lyricist S.M. Hedayet, who was constantly changing certain lines from the lyrics to make the patriotism stronger and more powerful. Three beautiful patriotic songs emerged. The artists included Sabina Yasmin apa, Papia Sarwar, Kadery Kibria, Azad Hafiz, Dahia Hafiz, Minu Haque, Shelly Akhand and Jesmin Akhand. After days of rehearsals, I also donned a saree, feeling very grown-up, and got ready for the performance. It was 25th March, 1971.

Three amazingly beautiful patriotic songs were almost coming to an end when the electricity of Dhaka was turned off. I still remember everyone, including the senior and the junior officers of the television station, as well as the artists and my parents, having serious discussions with grim faces. At that moment, Happy was playing the tabla, while Lucky bhai was accompanying the songs with his beautiful piano. I remember them bidding us goodbye and carrying their instruments on to a baby taxi and my father drove towards our house in old D.O.H.S.

(To Be Continued)

By Shampa Reza