

THROUGH THE EYES

EMBEDDED IN SOUL AND MUSIC MAQSOODUL HAQUE

Maqsoodul Haque is one of the pioneers of progressive music in Bangladesh and founding member of the band 'Maqsood O' dHAKA'. He made the popular festive song 'Melay Jaire' and has left his brilliant marks on many other creations. This week, the music maverick shares the unheard stories of his life.

THE MAGICAL BEGINNING

I was brought up in Narayanganj. The school I enrolled in was a Christian missionary English medium school. We had a Scottish headmistress. While preparing for a performance in our annual function, I was asked to sing a long lead portion without a chorus, which somehow I sang very well. That was the first time, I realized, music was bestowed on me by God. I am the first person from my family who was intrigued by music. I believe that music is a blessing. It somewhat comes naturally and I am well versed in this language of music; notwithstanding the fact that I have literally no traditional training in it. I am still imbued with a magical sense of melody and while working with my team, I am always the first person to find fault with the chords. Also, I will not deny that I have little to no aptitude for musical instruments. My understanding of music, in that sense, is limited to tune, lyrics and singing.

An abrupt transformation

I spent my childhood reading and writing in English. Even when it came to music, I was more inclined towards Western music. Back then, immediately after our Liberation War, I got to stumble across Azam Khan, the living legend. His personality was unquestionably charismatic, and I was fascinated by both his ideology and music. On one such day, we were shooting the breeze about music and all. Azam Khan genuinely asked me why my team and I were not taking a look at Bengali music. At that time, I was snobbish to such a point that Bengali music was almost incomprehensible to me. I told him that I found Bengali lyrics somewhat nagging and not suitable for rock music. I couldn't even draw a conclusion to my sentence before Azam bhai slapped me hard across the face. "You are an educated and learned young Bengali soul. You're not supposed to entertain only the wealthy, consumerist foreigners in five star hotels and disdain the entity of an artist in you", he said! Thus, I earned interest and abandoned myself to Bengali music and began to peer through it.

BELIEF IN INSTINCT

I have always given credence to my instinct. My innate propensity for music and walking through the off-the-beaten paths never let me stick to something I could not take delight in. I worked in a Hong Kong based airline for 13 years at a stretch and then in a Middle east based airline for more 5 years. After a certain

period of time, I left that job because it was very apparent that those could not ensoul my interest. Also, I worked in the first private radio station of Bangladesh – *Radio Metrowave*. Later on, I joined *Dhaka FM* as the Director of Operations and took it to an appreciable standard.

LIFE AS A WRITER

I turned my hand into writing columns years back in *The Daily Star's* Teenage Page. Rifat Bin Rashid was the then editor of that page and I often sent my write-ups. Those were published almost on a regular basis. I have written political columns, articles on art, culture and music of versatile genres from time to time. The worst part of writing columns in newspapers is their impolitic censorship and unrestrained editing. I am not a professional writer and when I am writing

audience. We had made it within 24 hours and Rahaman Boyati was not only a down-to-earth soul, he was supremely brilliant in terms of the sense of music and everything related to it. He could catch and capture all the chords and rhythms overnight and co-operated us wonderfully. That song was a mammoth success. More than 1 lakh of our cassettes were sold within months, which was, in fact, beyond our expectation. At that time, a handful of people could master the courage of blending rock music with *Baul* songs. Even who did, mostly dissociated the original taste and essence of *Baul* music from those songs. I was the only one who had collaborated the embryonic *Bauls* of different villages from different corners of the country and let them indulge in the soulful music of their root.



something, I am incapable of restricting it to a certain number of words and if the editing is so overwhelmingly indulgent that the true essence and gist of my write-up is lost, I am very unwilling to let it get published on such platforms. The good thing nowadays is that, there are a number of infamous news portals that are equipped to publish my write-ups at once, without any censorship and unnecessary restrictions.

FUSION OF ROCK AND BAUL

Feedback had produced a fusion of the song *Diner Alo Nibhe Gelo* years ago. Mustafiz Bhai heard the song and decided to put another song *Mon Amar Deho Gori* on a TV show for Eid program. I still consider myself immensely fortunate to have met Rahaman Boyati. He was then the Michael Jackson for the rural

I worked with the late Hiru Shah, Santosh and many others. My last album with *Feedback* was *Bauliana*. In the *Dhaka Lit Fest 2017*, I organized a *Sadhu Sanga* and quite a few *Bauls* who have always stayed out of the ostentatious fame and limelight were noticed and highly appreciated by the audience.

DIPPED IN SPIRITS

My transformation in life is very idiosyncratic. The day I had first prostrated myself before the shrine of Lalon Shaiji in Kushtia, something just happened and I felt an indomitable tug in my head. I was not able to move for a while, as if an invisible force illuminated me from within and I was trembled inside. The moment I could comprehend that *Baul* music constitutes more than just a syncretic religious sect and it is not a

mere musical tradition, rather *Baul* music is the root culture of us and it is embedded in every vein of Bengal. Initially I did not adopt a preceptor, later on I came across Darbesh Hossain Ali Shah (Lyangta) and he became my spiritual teacher. I wrote a small book years ago named *Bauliana* and a lot of students from English medium and more western-prone background read it and the beauty of *Baul* music, its profound lyrics bewitched them. Last year, an expanded version of it, which in fact, holds my 42 years of musical experience, got published. It has not been reviewed by anyone yet, not even by any prominent newspaper.

THE RECENT VIBES

I have performed in *Wind of Change*. Taposh made a remake of *Geeti Kobita*, and since there was no copyright fuss over it, he chose this song for his show. Taposh and I jointly made a musical documentary named *Road to Bauliana*, which is yet to be released. Performing in *Wind of Change* was delightful because it was very soothing to perform with the foreign players. I am very optimistic about the future of rock music in Bangladesh. *Nemesis*, *Indalo*, *Artcell*, *Warfaze*, *Shironamheen*, *Arbovirus*, *Mechanix* and several other bands are doing a great job. I myself have performed for four generations hence I know once a genre survives a decade, it lasts forever.

MY FRIEND, MY BROTHER

Recently I have lost a friend of mine. He was more than an artist to me. It is quite impossible to actually define Ayub Bachchu. *LRB* and *Maqsood O' dHAKA* performed together in multiple concerts. These days, any concert in or across the country seems to be a nostalgia trip and tribute to Bachchu. He was majestic. His sudden departure left me shuddered.

THINGS THAT PUT DAMPER

Like the garments and all other industries, our music industry is also being exploited exceedingly. I am not against corporate sponsorship, but it definitely should not cross the boundary and take a shape of corporate exploitation. Media is not supposed to decide who is an artist and who is not, especially since our media is not even acquainted with terms like Rock Journalism. I am all for eastern music as well. I spend many nights listening to *Ghazals* of Jagjit Singh. An artist should not be a musical conservative and needs to learn to accept music of different genres even if that does not conform to the kind of music he practices.

By Sharbani Datta