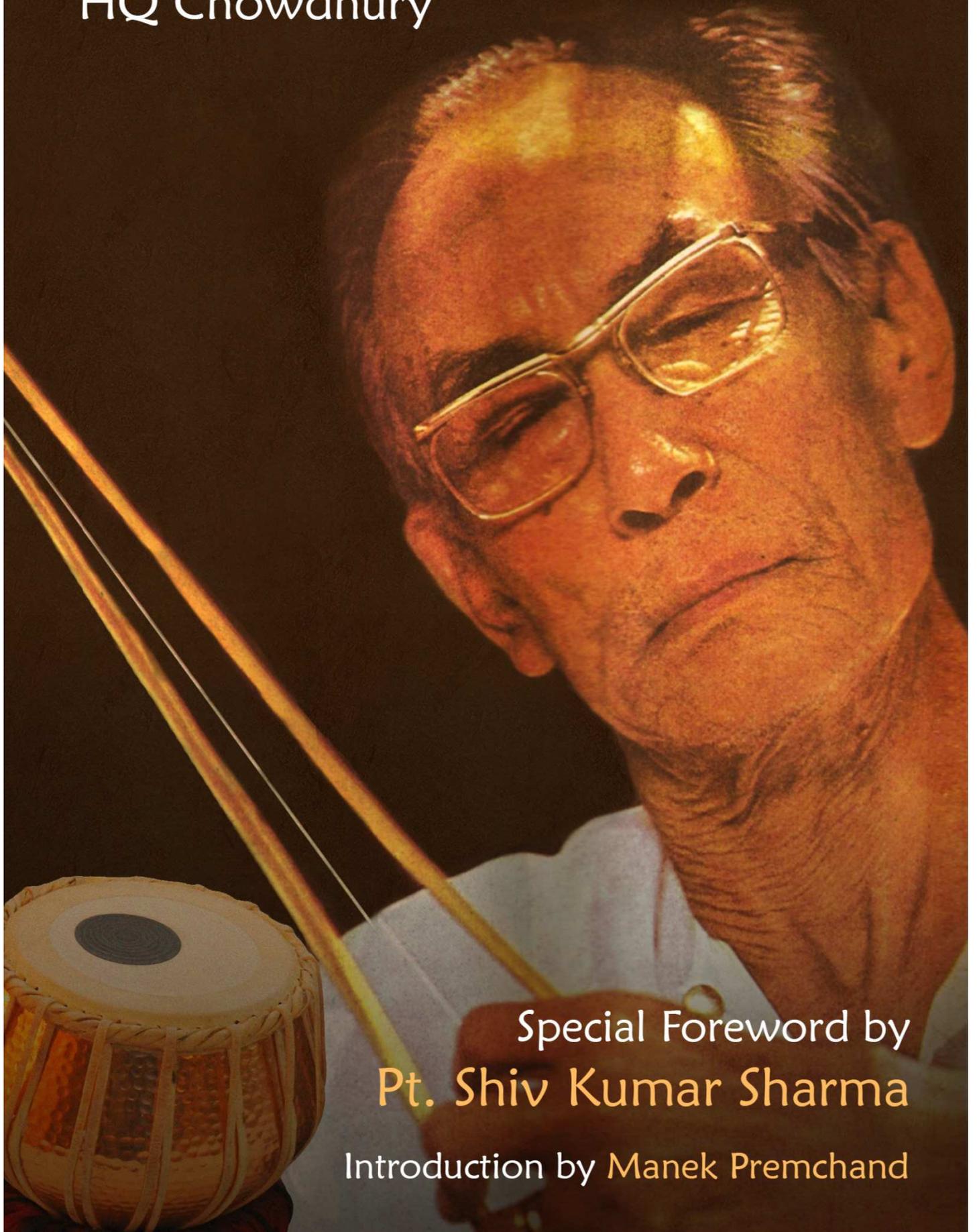


Incomparable Sachin Dev Burman

HQ Chowdhury



Special Foreword by
Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma

Introduction by Manek Premchand



BLUE PENCIL

INCOMPARABLE SACHIN DEV BURMAN

HQ Chowdhury is a freelance writer on music and films. He first wrote in the late 1960s for the *People*, an English daily from Dhaka and then for a while in the early 1970s for *Cine Advance*, published from Kolkata and Mumbai. He is a recipient of the 2006 'Sachin Dev Burman Award' from the Government of Tripura, India.

HQ Chowdhury is the CEO of Plasma Plus, an application laboratory of science and technology of which he is also the founder. He was listed in the Marquis WHO's WHO in the World of Professionals from 1997 to 2002.



Incomparable Sachin Dev Burman

2nd Edition

Revised and Updated with Complete Discography

HQ Chowdhury

Special Foreword by
Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma

Introduction by
Manek Premchand



BLUE PENCIL

First published in Bangladesh by TOITOMBOOR 2011

This Revised and Updated Second Edition is published by Blue Pencil 2018

BLUE PENCIL

An Imprint of Wisitech InfoSolutions Pvt Ltd

A Venture of Learning and Creativity-Silhouette Magazine

76/2, 3rd Floor, East of Kailash, New Delhi - 110065

Ph: + 011.4651.6521, 4162.4097

Email: editor@learningandcreativity.com

www.learningandcreativity.com

www.silhouette-magazine.com

www.wisitech.com

Copyright © Saiq'a Shabnam Chowdhury 2011, 2018

HQ Chowdhury asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

The views and opinions expressed in this work are the author's own and the facts are as reported by him. The publisher is in no way liable for the same.

Front and Back Cover Pictures: Collections of SMM Ausaja

Cover Design: Antara Nanda Mondal (Wisitech)

All rights are reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the author.

ISBN: 978-81-939555-0-5

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Blue Pencil Special Sales at + 011.4651.6521, 4162.4097 or sales@bluepencilpublishers.com

This is in celebration of my friendship with:

Maajid Maqbool (Pakistan)

and

Ritu Chandra (India)



Table of Contents

SPECIAL FOREWORD	ix
FOREWORD - First Edition	ix
PREFACE - Second Edition	xv
PREFACE - First Edition	xvii
Introduction	xxiii
Prologue	xxix
CHAPTER 1 - Family Background	1
CHAPTER 2 - Early Formative Years	7
CHAPTER 3 - Calcutta Days 1	16
CHAPTER 4 - Calcutta Days 2	28
CHAPTER 5 - Calcutta Days 3	47
CHAPTER 6 - Bombay Days 1	73
CHAPTER 7 - Bombay Days 2	113
CHAPTER 8 - Bombay Days 3	137
CHAPTER 9 - Bombay Days 4	166
CHAPTER 10 - Bombay Days 5	181
CHAPTER 11 - His Music	205
CHAPTER 12 - Dada on Music	260
CHAPTER 13 - Close Colleagues	272
CHAPTER 14 - The Other Side	311
CHAPTER 15 - At a Glance	327
Epilogue	333
Songs Sung by Dada	338
Dada's Music in Films	360
Glossary	421
Bibliography	425
Index	431



SPECIAL FOREWORD

SD Burman - The Music Legend

Legendary music composer of Hindi films SD Burman was trained in Indian Classical Music by the great maestros of that era. He had great knowledge of *raagas* and besides that he had a treasure of Bangla and Assamese folk songs, which he had imbibed from his childhood.

I met Burman Dada around 1960-61 and developed a very close rapport with him. His son, Rahul Dev Burman, an extraordinary musician was a great friend of mine. As a person Burman Dada was a very warm, simple and humble human being. There was a kind of innocence in his personality. He was deeply engrossed in his thoughts – always thinking about the music, the compositions and the situations in the films. We would see him sometimes lost in his thoughts and this process would start once he had his favourite *paan* in his mouth.

Many a time when he was doing his rehearsal sessions at his bungalow called ‘The Jet’ located in Khar, Mumbai, I along with Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia and other musicians would be present. He would share his musical ideas with us and take our reactions and feedback about a particular song or interlude music. I played the Santoor in many of his films like *Guide*, *Tere Ghar Ke Samne* to name a few. Particularly in the film *Guide*, the song sung by Lataji, *Mose chhal keeye jaaye*, Pancham persuaded me to play the Tabla which I had stopped playing long back. This is the genius of the Musical Maestro.

Burman Dada was a very versatile composer who had the ability to compose music according to the requirements of the story and the situations. Films like *Taxi Driver*, *Paying Guest*, *Devdas* and *Guide* are a few examples of his musical genius. He also, had a rare quality of appreciating the work

of other music directors. I remember on one occasion, in one of the recordings, there was an improvised music interlude of Santoor played by me. Next day I had a huge surprise. There was somebody honking below my residence. On coming to the balcony I saw Burman Dada standing in front of his Fiat car and waving at me saying he is coming upstairs to meet me. I told him I will come down as there was no lift in my building. He persisted and asked me to wait in my flat and climbed the two floors and sat inside my house. I was a bit surprised by his sudden visit. On relaxing the first compliment he gave me was, “*Shiv, kal tum bahut achha bajaya Santoor*” and immediately presented me with a note of Rs 100 and left.

That was Burman Dada an artiste who was touched by other artiste’s music. There are many such incidents and anecdotes about this Great Maestro – SD Burman who was one of his kind, a rare Gem in the world of Indian music whose music will always remain fresh in the mind of listeners.

I am very very pleased and elated at the valuable content you have incorporated about the Great Maestro Burman Da. You have captured each and every aspect of the Maestro’s life and placed it very beautifully before the readers to visualise an era gone by where music and musicians ruled the roost with the connoisseurs of music. Everything about the great Maestro has been laid bare before today’s generation to understand the Golden Era of Indian Music, embellished by such rare gems like Burman Da.

Musically,

Shiv Kumar Sharma

November 1, 2018

FOREWORD

First Edition

This is a work of love; of pure love for the subject and the person. A student of science by training, running perhaps the most advanced private laboratory in the country and also a businessman by profession, the author, HQ Chowdhury or Humayun, as I know him, has produced a magnificent work I can only read and admire. Honest by nature, painstakingly accurate and meticulous, which I understand his profession makes him, Humayun did produce this book with incredible thoroughness that I would only ascribe to a scholar preparing his doctoral thesis or else a lover, falling in love for the first time.

I repeat. This is a fruit of love.

SD Burman does not need introduction to those who were born before 1975 and were interested in Bengali songs, Hindi film songs and light classical songs. This leaves out only a few of that age. Born in the oldest known royal family of this sub-continent (of all the existing dynasties in India, the Tripura Maharaja dynasty is the oldest), he opted for the still higher realm of music. SD Burman was a genius, who acted as a path-finder. He could explore the frontiers of music and rhythm naturally. He collected his gems mainly from the field of folk music and often mixed these up with the classical music of North India.

In the world of music, once in a while a brilliant new personality arrives. SD Burman was one such. He did not have the most melodious voice. He has not given proofs of great mastery over the classical music of North India. Yet he was wonderful. He was a musician. All the fibres of his soul must have vibrated with music. He could bring the beautiful,

untainted nature, mainly of Eastern Bengal, into the hearts of listeners of his Bengali songs. They vibrated with the smell of the rice-fields, the simmering of the moon on the waters of the rivers and mellow warmth of the late autumn sun. For those who have some relationship with North Indian Classical music, Ustad Abdul Karim Khan was one such. He would sometimes even forget the *raag* he was singing or words of the *khayal*. But, whatever he sang was music.

Coming to Ustad Faiyaz Khan, the wonderful pieces and the beautiful transformation of words (*bol banana*) and expressions which he introduced in his singing, were also picked up from anywhere and everywhere. Be it *qawwali*, folk music or anything else. Had he heard jazz, he would have picked up impressions from that also, specially the syncopation. However, he never waived from the strict classical rules but his 'heart' automatically collected these on the path.

SD Burman also did the same things in his music. He took from everywhere and anywhere and then he fused them in his music. With his nasal twang, he was inimitable. Whatever he produced was music.

When he entered the Hindi film world, with which I am not very familiar, he did wonders, which I now realise after reading this book by Humayun. A vast majority of the film songs that I had liked were composed by him. I was not aware of this till I saw the list in Humayun's book. And yet, how different the songs were from each other! In another way, SD Burman had the capacity to draw out the essential music; both from the folk and the popular within the limits of what the cultural background of South Asia would allow the listeners to consume. He was a trendsetter.

Today with the help of electronic equipment and popularisation of classical music, I find many performers (I will call them performers rather than musicians) displaying

wonderful virtuosity. It is admirable but somehow the music is getting lost. SD Burman captured music in his records and Humayun has captured SD Burman in his book.

This book, a fruit of love and admiration, should help those who are not yet acquainted with SDB, to get to know him and those who are familiar with SDB, to explore his genius further.

Alim-ur-Rahman Khan

Musicologist

November 28, 2010



PREFACE

Second Edition

Quite a few years back, my good friend Sundeep Pahwa, a Hindi film music enthusiast beyond measure from Delhi, put into my head the possibility of a second edition of *Incomparable Sachin Dev Burman*, so as to reach out to readers at large in India and across the world. Years went by until one fine afternoon in Delhi, Sundeep raised the subject again. I thought over it seriously and came to the conclusion that this could be an opportunity to fine tune the information and also plug those 'holes and leaks' that were there in the first edition.

But the big question remained as to who would go through the manuscript to make it suitable for readers of such a big and culturally diverse country like India? This required the expertise of someone who is equally proficient in English, Bengali, Hindi and Urdu. It was at this point that Antara Nanda Mondal, a wonderful and compulsive writer on films and music came on to the scene. She is the Chief Editor of *Learning and Creativity* ezine, Consulting Editor of *Silhouette Magazine* and Founder-Editor of *Blue Pencil*. I knew Antara much before Antara came to know me and that was through her writings on the net. Sundeep once again made things happen and I passed on the material to her.

Sachin Dev Burman in his lifetime was addressed as "Sachin Karta", "Kumar Sachin Dev Burman", "Sachin Dev Burman", "Burman Dada" and "SD". For the last 43 years since his transition, Dada has been a subject of intense discussion both in the print and electronic media just like any other great singer or composer. This also has resulted in many myths, cooked up stories and unconfirmed information. Keeping this in mind, in this edition too, whatever has been added about Dada's life were sourced from matter that was in print during Burman Dada's lifetime and from Dada's colleagues who were either professionally active or medically fit to speak about Dada.

These were then cross checked, as with time, information either gets lost or becomes subject to distortion.

And yes, Peeyush Sharma, a music connoisseur thousands of miles away in Canada was always in the “standby mode” to clear any confusion. He was such a source of strength for us. Monica Kar, an aesthete who “breathes” music and also from the same zone but in the United States, spontaneously sponsored to take a last look at the edits despite her busy schedules and being out of station. Then the illustrious SMM Ausaja became one of us by sharing those stunning cover photos, while the young Sounak Gupta from Calcutta sprung surprises with some rare stills. Last but not the least Prabuddha Sircar and Dr Suresh Chand who stood by us, rock like, for those issues that could have gone out of control.

So far, so good. But the gut questions remained.

Who am I in India? Which company would take over the responsibility of publishing the book? Fortunately, a series of incidents happened within a few days. The guru of Hindi film music, Manek Premchand kindly wrote the introduction at a short notice! Thank you Manek! Santoor maestro, Padma Vibhushan Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma sent a touching piece on Burman Dada. Icing on the cake! What a joy! And Partho Mondal and Madhu Verma of Blue Pencil did the rest! As Sahir Ludhianvi and Dada jointly “said” in *Funtoosh*, *Dene wala jab bhi deta, poora chhappar faad ke deta!* Words will never be enough.

I sincerely hope that my Indian readers would find *Incomparable Sachin Dev Burman* helpful and they would discover a new Burman Dada for which I would like to applaud Sundeep Pahwa and Antara Nanda Mondal for their immense contribution in bringing this work to fruition, despite all the logistic constraints.

Thank you Sundeep and Antara!

HQ Chowdhury

November 2, 2018

PREFACE

First Edition

Way back in 1965, when music to me meant only the songs of Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Harry Bela Fonte, Engelbert Humperdink, Elvis Presely and then Cliff Richards and The Shadows, The Beatles, The Beach Boys, a melody struck my ears when I accidentally tuned into Radio Ceylon. The music reverberated time and again and I longed for a repeat of the song. A few days later, when I tuned into Radio Ceylon again, I was rewarded with the complete commercial programme on *Jewel Thief* and it included that very song, the delightful *Rula ke gaya sapna mera*, along with the prized *Honthon pe aisi baat* and *Raat akeli hai*. The commercial proudly canvassed 'AAAAAAND music by SD Burman'.

I first became familiar with this name courtesy my uncle *Mitu chacha*, whose favourite music maker was SD Burman. But I never bothered about him as I was then in my 'teddy boy' days, hooked and glued to western pop stars of the era. But *Rula ke gaya sapna* got me totally bewitched. Later that day, I came to know from my eldest sister, Minufar, then a radio singer, that SD Burman was *Mono dilo na bodhu's* Sachindev. It was unbelievable! How could a man who sang *Mono dilo na bodhu* compose such diversified tunes! There were more surprises waiting for me! The hits *Saiyan dil mein aana re*, *Tum na jane kis jahan mein*, *Thandi hawayein*, *Jayen to jayen kahan*, *Hai apna dil*, *Khoya khoya chand*, and many more were all scored by him.

As a convent school boy, listening to Hindi and Bengali songs was rare and so it was hard to get buddies of my type. But I was lucky, as in my university days, I befriended two souls, Salauddin Ahmad, aka Sal, who read the same Physics books as I did though a bit earlier, and Late Tarik Ahsan, aka Shomi,

studying Economics (God knows how these two came to enjoy Sachindev). The two shared my taste for the unconventional kind of music that Sachindev, we thought, created. Then Sanjay Sarkar, a brilliant student of Physics, who came from nowhere, joined us. I, along with Sal, Shomi and Sanjay were intrigued by the Bengali-singing Sachindev, but mind you, the Hindi SD Burman was never a subject of discussion here. For that, my partner was another Physics mate, Ahsan Chowdhury. Then there was Shawkat Osman, my school mate, now a big name in “gourmet culture”, with whom I also shared Sachindev’s songs on odd days at odd hours.

Thirty seven years later, an SD Burman addict reached me through the internet. He was Maajid Maqbool from Islamabad, Pakistan. Maajid Sahib’s love for the grand old man of Hindi film music astounded me and we became friends. Our love for Sachindev or Burman Dada grew more and more and soon we discovered another one of our kind, a young and bubbling IT specialist, Ritu Chandra, based in New Jersey, USA. So, www.sdburman.net was launched.

Sachin Dev Burman was a big name in Hindi films where he was popularly known as SD Burman or Burman Dada. But in West Bengal and Bangladesh he was an all-time great singer, Sachin Karta or Sachindev. This meant the maestro had two separate identities – one as a composer and the other, as a singer. It occurred to me that there was an opportunity to write on the two musical worlds of Sachin Dev Burman and make it available in a language common to all. *Incomparable Sachin Dev Burman* is such an attempt.

The journey initially began in 2005. But it had to be interrupted time and again for months because of professional commitments, family issues and what not! Writing a book was tough and there is no reason why I should make another such attempt. Let me therefore, salute all those who write books – good, ok or shoddy. It is an uphill task!

I have no pretensions about the maestro's biographical material being exhaustive or comprehensive. Nor are there any strikingly new revelations about him or his work. That has not been my purpose. The basic aim has been to put together in one package the information available to listeners from different sources. Of course, every possible effort has been made to cross check the available information for validation. A bibliography at the end of this book includes a number of recommended reference studies in Bengali and English. I am sure I may have missed quite a few including some "quotes" and therefore welcome anyone's input for inclusion in future editions. Memories fade with time! My apologies for any unintentional lapse.

Also, there could be some confusion in connection with the spelling of certain (common) Bengali and Hindi words. These are mainly due to the difference in pronunciation.

There is also no attempt at a musicological analysis of individual songs, barring a few. The aim basically has been to provide listeners with an idea of the songs to enhance their listening pleasure. No music book can ever equal the experiences and pleasures of listening whether on a home system or in a car. It is my hope that the information in this book will encourage, extend and enhance those pleasures.

While writing this book I had in my mind my two *gurus* of classical music – the one and only Late Pandit Kumar Prasad Mukherjee from Calcutta and the second-to-none Alim-ur-Rahman Khan from Dhaka. They gave me the musical aura of the golden past with their personal experiences with the various artists of the Sachindev era, though neither Kumar Da nor Alim Bhai had heard the maestro "live", as by then he was well-settled in Bombay. Whenever I recall their experiences, I get a vivid picture of the music culture of yesteryears that Sachindev belonged to. It was, therefore, my desire that the two be present during the launching of this book. Unfortunately,

Kumar Da had already left for the heavenly abode. But Alim Bhai, fortunately is still kicking and fine (Mashallah) and was very kind to write the foreword of the book.

Frankly, the book would not have seen the light of day had it not been for some of my very good friends who inspired me and kept track of its progress. Today, I admire their patience and also feel proud because of the immense confidence they had in me. Maajid Sahib, Ritu Chandra, my wife Nainu, my daughter Saiq'a Shabnam, Girin Majumder, Pannalal Roy, Partha Pratim Ganguly and my friend Nerun Yakub, who from the very beginning goaded me on.

I must also acknowledge my four office colleagues, Jahangir, Saad, Debu and Dipson who did book-related jobs for me at late hours. When I did not know who to approach for publishing the book, Toitomboor, a well-known publishing house, came to my rescue. Nayak of Toitomboor deserves more than this acknowledgement.

Credit is also due to Dr CS Srinivasan and Moti Lalwani who as *Sachin bhakts* helped me in their individual capacities with whatever material they had on Sachin Dev Burman. Then of course my friend, Salil Sarkar from Kolkata who travelled with me long distances in West Bengal to help me source some material on the maestro.

Thanks to the laptop technology, careless and lazy writers like me bypass/overlook mistakes per paragraph, obviously because of having the scope to correct those later without any paper wastage. The basic idea was to concentrate on the thoughts first and the grammar and punctuation to be taken into account later. But thank God, I did not have to go through the later part. Friend, Nerun Yakub kindly offered to, as she put it, “cross the t’s and dot the i’s!”

A point to note: I have deliberately retained the old names of the cities of India, i.e. Calcutta (therefore Harrison Street), Bombay, Madras. This is for nostalgic reasons only! For the

same reason, “Bengali” here represents “Bangla”, “Bengalee” and “Bangali”.

The success of the book would only be visible if non-Bengali readers discover a singing star in Dada Burman and Bengalis could gauge that their Sachin Karta or Sachindev excelled also in the domain of Hindi film music.

HQ Chowdhury

20 Dootabash Rd, Apt E1, Baridhara Dhaka 1212 Bangladesh

Tel: +8801711521184 and +88029887273

Email: aqchowdhury@aqchowdhury.com

December 12, 2010



Introduction

I have many things in common with my friend HQ Chowdhury. Both of us are writers, both of us love travelling and both of us love music, especially that of Nat King Cole and The Shadows. But it amused me to learn, a few years ago, that he, like me, was first zapped by an SD Burman composition.

Not just that, the songs that hit both of us belonged to films which had Dev Anand as the hero. In his case, it was *Rula ke gaya sapna mera*, delivered amazingly by Lata Mangeshkar for Shailendra's lyrics in *Jewel Thief*. For me, it was Geeta Roy's rendition of Sahir's poetry in *Baazi: Suno gajar kya gaaye*. At the time I was too small to understand the nuances of what went into the making of these songs, and, in a sense, I am too small to completely grasp them even now. But now we know what it is about the two songs, at least at an academic level. *Rula ke gaya sapna mera* has Vyjayanthimala in a boat, but so low is she feeling that she could well be plumbing the depths of despair as represented symbolically by the waters she is rowing the boat through. This song has a charming beat maintained by a rhythm guitar, cabasa, reso-reso and snare drums, while the latter song has some incredible use of violins, a fascination that has me enthralled to this day. Much of the music that Dada Burman created had greatness showing up, and it showed up usually in more than one representation, sometimes with the vocals, at other times with the perfect use of musical instruments.

Is music a universal language?

I think the jury is out on that one. Many of us think that the glass is half full, in that music can be a universal language only some of the time. When you go to China and hear someone in a band, you may like the music, but the words may escape you,

so it's not going to be a complete connect. The appreciation cannot be as complete as when you can understand the lyrics accompanying the melody.

And yet, when non-Bengalis hear Dada Burman sing *Ghum bhulechi nijhoom e nishithe jege thaki* (the Bangla version of *Hum bekhudi mein tum ko pukaare chale gaye* from *Kala Pani*), they are lost for words, because his soulful expression overwhelms them. It is at these times that music receives greater support for the proposition that it sometimes can be, indeed, a universal language. And when Hindustani music lovers hear the maestro sing in Hindustani, then, of course, we are talking about nothing short of divine magic. His *Wahaan kaun hai tera* from *Guide*, and *Safal hogi teri aradhana* from *Aradhana* as also *Doli mein bitthaike kahaar* from *Amar Prem* are clear examples of the glimpses we catch of heaven, rendered in his unique voice.

But while we are talking about the universality of music, how interesting that Burman worked for 30 years in Hindi cinema, and yet remained personally challenged by the Hindustani language right up till the end! It seemed as if he would offer that Buddhist monk smile while telling lyricists to please prepare the poetry for him so that he could take over and make their work magical. He must have simply asked that the situation for the song be explained to him and that would suffice. Guru Dutt understood him, as did Vijay Anand. Many others were aware; they saw his magic work, time after time, while he himself understood just a clutch of Hindustani words! In fact, it was perhaps this very handicap of his that made him give us some incredible *ghazals* in an iconoclastic way. We will look at a sampling of such *ghazals* soon, but just in case you are unaware, here's something about the *ghazal* genre.

Ghazals are considered the queen of Urdu poetry. The challenge is to express the entire idea in a universe of 2 lines, a

couplet. The whole poem must have such couplets, which may or may not carry the same theme. But there is also a rhyming grammar to follow. It is for the genre of *ghazal* that Urdu poets seek praise, above all. When it comes to compositions, the *ghazal* resides in a very sober world. It is not in its nature to be irreverent. Check out the *ghazals* rendered by any singer, in and out of cinema, and you will get a clear idea of the composition having been treated with sobriety and proper behaviour.

But Burmanda's reduced understanding of the intricacies of Hindustani poetry, in fact, made him uniquely equipped to do what he wanted to do with *ghazals*, perhaps in some cases without even realising he was doing something innovative. Thus, as is evident from his work, he stepped forward and made many of such poems comic! He would add an impish element in the treatment, and each time pulled the act off beautifully.

For example, just consider these *ghazals*, all set in a light, unconventional mood:

- *Chaahe koi khush ho chaahe gaaliyaan hazaar de* from *Taxi Driver* (comic effects like “*Arre teri ki, hawa nikal gayi*”)
- *Dil ki umangen hain jawaan* from *Munimji* (“*Gaiye na, kya mushkil hai? Sargam bataoon?*”)
- *Hum hain raahi pyaar ke* from *Nau Do Gyarah* (Whistling)
- *Jeevan ke safar mein raahi*, the Kishore version from *Munimji* (“*Ta ra ra ta ra ra ra ra ra ra ra ho ho*”)
- *Tadbeer se bigdi hui taqdeer bana le* from *Baazi* (“*Hey hey hey*”)
- *Wo dekhien to unki inaayat* from *Funtoosh* (“*Haiyya ho haiyya*”, and “*Baazi baazi baazi baazi*”)
- *Teri duniya mein jeene se* from *House No 44* (“*Oo oo*”)

But if you think SD Burman did not know how to be serious in a *ghazal*, please do a quick re-think. He made Talat go sober in *Bharam teri wafaon ka mita dete to kya hota* in *Arman*, in

which the maestro not only went minimalistic in instruments, he entirely discarded the rhythms. Mubarak Begum's *Wo na ayenge palat kar unhen laakh hum bulaayen* from *Devdas* is exempt from light-hearted fun too. Quite simply put, he was a genius who knew exactly when he could break away from the norm and when he didn't need to do anything different.

Dada Burman was an ignited human being, and we sometimes learnt from insiders where he derived some of his inspirations from. For example, in his creative moments he loved chewing those *paans* which are essentially areca nuts and additives wrapped inside betel leaves. We learnt that he loved football and that he loved his early morning walks. Some years ago, I met a new composer who wanted to replicate Dada Burman's habits, in the hope that the great man's formula—for want of another word—would work for him too. If only that was all it took to make a genius! Everyone has a different script, and while the ordainment comes from above, the execution must be our own. It is for this reason that Dada Burman, executing his role perfectly, was able to make wonderful tunes till the very end of his life, a unique achievement for any man who was creative even at nearly 70 years of age!

I have read what HQ Chowdhury has written about this phenomenal musician, and, to say that I am impressed with his study, would be a rank understatement. It is a passion that shows through each paragraph on each page. I learnt in this book that when Dada came to Bombay and was started up by Filmistan, he was given a music room to share with composer Khemchand Prakash. In these pages is a beautiful SD Burman timeline, right from 1906 till 1975, with important milestones mentioned for each year. But there's much more than all that too. The critiquing of a great composer is, thus, in very able hands, and I am delighted to have a small part to play in the opening ceremony of this venture. I am confident others like

me will take away a lot from this beautiful book.

May you grow in strength, HQ, and share the light of your obsession with us in the years to come. May you continue to be inspired like SD Burman, and may your creativity never run dry.

Manek Premchand

Historian, Hindi Film Music

October 20, 2018



Prologue

Padmabhushan percussionist, Tirkawaj, was restless. It was the pathos in the song, *Sun mere bandhu re* that made him so. He heard the song coming from a nearby radio. He asked for the record from his host but it was hard to find. When it was finally sourced, he listened to it with rapt attention, again and again; his eyes welling. The song had the *bhatiali* bent of folk music of East Bengal with the smell of wet soil emanating from the soulful baritone of Sachin Dev Burman. He gave him a ten rupee note as *nazrana*, which the maestro treasured throughout his life.

SD Burman's music is a rare pleasure, coloured and revered. Such was his love for the folk and the rustic country-side that the religious training in Hindustani classical music received from a plethora of *gurus* like Badal Khan, Allauddin Khan, KC Dey and Vishmadev Chatterjee (in order of seniority) plus the doses from Shyamlal Kshetri, Amiya Nath Sanyal, Faiyaz Khan and Abdul Karim, could not dilute the essence of his hinterland – East Bengal, now Bangladesh. Folk touches had to be there even in his rendition of the semi-classical, which according to Ravi Shankar, had opened a new frontier in Bengali music.

Sachin Karta, as he was known in Bengal, first cut his musical teeth in 1932 with Bengali songs and during the decade delivered songs like *Nishithey jaiyo phulobone*, *Jhan jhan manjiro baje*. His musical gems created through the forties – *Aami chhinu eka*, *Rangeela rangeela*; the fifties – *Mono dilo na bodhu*, *Ghum bhulechi nijhum*; the sixties – *Banshi shuney aar kaaj nai*, *Borne gondhey*, and the early seventies – *Ke jash re bhati gang baiya*, *Radhar bhabey kala hoilam* continue to charm the old and the young even today. He forged a style of singing that remains till today inimitable and is a school of its own. His vocals were steeped in Indian music – essentially East Bengal folk and Hindustani classical.

He sang these for 41 years creating new music all through, to the pleasure of his generation, as also generations before him and after.

In Hindi films, where he came to be known as Burman Dada and amongst the younger set as “SD”, he struck a chord with all, from the man on the street to the middle and upper middle classes. This journey began in 1946 when he settled in the unabashed commercial city of Bombay leaving behind the mecca of Indian culture, Calcutta. Here, throughout his career, like his Bengali songs, he strove for quality and went to any lengths to achieve that. He turned down lucrative offers fearing too much of work would affect his output. It was like a well requiring enough time to fill up before one could extract anything out of it.

He was part of a 100-odd films, many of which stood out and achieved cult status.

Tadbeer se bigdi hui (Baazi)
Saiyan dil mein aana re (Bahar)
Thandi hawayein (Naujawan)
Tum na jaane (Sazaa)
Yeh raat yeh chandni (Jaal)
Jayen to jayen kahan (Taxi Driver)
Jeevan ke safar mein (Munimji)
Mitwa, mitwa (Devdas)
Teri duniya mein jeene se (House No: 44)
Dukhi mann mere (Funtoosh)
Aankhon mein kya ji (Nau Do Gyarah)
Mana janab ne pukara nahin (Paying Guest)
Jane woh kaise (Pyaasa)
Babu samjho ishaare (Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi)
Hum bekhudi mein tumko (Kala Pani)
Hai apna dil (Solva Saal)
Waqt ne kiya (Kaagaz Ke Phool)

Jalte hain jiske liye (Sujata)
Chalri sajni ab kya soche (Bombai Ka Babu)
Khoya khoya chand (Kala Bazar)
Na tum hummein jaano (Baat Ek Raat Ki)
Pawan diwani (Dr. Vidya)
Mora gora aang lai le (Bandini)
Poochho na kaise (Meri Surat Teri Ankhen)
Tere ghar ke samne (Tere Ghar Ke Samne)
Dil mein ek jane tamanna (Benazir)
Kaise kahoon kaise kahoon (Kaise Kahoon)
Raat ka sama jhoomo chandrama (Ziddi)
Khwab ho tum ya koyi (Teen Deviyani)
(Kaanton se kheenche ke) Aaj phir jeene ki tamanna (Guide)
Honthon pe aisi baat (Jewel Thief)
Roop tera mastana (Aradhana)
Palkon ke peechhe se (Talaash)
Yeh dil diwana hai (Ishq Par Zor Nahin)
Khilte hai gul yahan (Sharmilee)
Neend churaye (Anuraag)
Teri bindiya re (Abhimaan)
Yeh laal raang (Prem Nagar)
Maine kaha phoolon se (Mili)

These are only some songs which played an intrinsic part in the success of the films. And in these films, he dabbled in folk, classical, *qawwali*, western, macho, comic, romantic, sad, rebellious lover, sex appeal...in short, all genres of music. He was so versatile.

In films, Burman Dada's method of composition was to make different playback singers rehearse the same song and finally go with the one that he thought would best match the situation of the film. He, unlike his contemporaries, never fell prey to the pressure of either the producer or the director of the film to take the most sought after singer. He had ears to detect

the fall out of voice quality of singers, which was done through telephone calls. In the process, all singers of his era crashed at some stage of their careers. That included Shamshad Begum, Mukesh, Talat, Rafi, Lata, Hemant Kumar, Asha, Manna Dey, Suman Kalyanpur and Kishore Kumar.

As film situations kept changing with time, so did his music. Therefore, *Mera sunder sapna beet gaya* in 1947, *Chod do aanchal zamana kya kahega* in 1957, *Tere naina talaash karen* in 1969, *Badi sooni sooni hai* in 1975 all sounded refreshingly current to pull in new fans. He was a great value for listeners as he was never out of date or off the mark.

Dada believed in simple presentation of film songs. To him, it was very easy to make a song difficult but extremely hard to make a song simple for all to hum. The result is, arguably till today he is the THE music director, who has the highest number of hit songs per film. He was the only composer who composed at least one memorable song for every known singer of his time from Amirbai Karnataki and Ashok Kumar to Suman Kalyanpur and Manhar. Also he was the only music director to have an outstanding hit with every brand lyricist of his time from Hemendra Kumar Roy, Sailen Roy, Ajay Bhattacharya, Mohini Chowdhury, Gauri Prasanna Mazumder to Robi Guha Mazumder and wife Meera Dev Burman (in Bengali) while in Hindi films from Raja Mehdi Ali Khan, Rajinder Krishan, Narendra Sharma, Sahir Ludhianvi, Shailendra, Kaifi Azmi, Majrooh Sultanpuri and Shakeel Badayuni to Gulzar, Anand Bakshi and Yogesh. Not only that, he enjoyed the confidence of top Hindi film producers and directors including the likes of Sasadhar Mukherjee, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Dev Anand, Vijay Anand, Shakti Samanta, NC Sippy, Hrishikesh Mukherjee. None of his contemporaries can make these claims.

Dada believed that a film was not the medium to show one's knowledge of classical music. "*Shastriya sangeet mere ko*

bhi aata hai, par mein kyun dikhaoon chaar anna wale aadmi ko. I will give stage performances if I have to prove myself? But when films needed the use of classical music, he proved his mettle with *Naache mann mora, Kisne chilman se maara, Pyaar ki aag mein, Tere naina talaash, Sajan bin neend na aave, Saiyan beiman, Ghayal hiraniya, Jhan jhan payal baaje*, to cite a few. He advocated the use of sound that, in later years, his son Pancham experimented so much with in his music.

He gave up everything for his music. From the most trivial to the most valuable. Football, volleyball and lawn tennis to the administrative position of the state of Tripura and of course, money. As a result, life was no cakewalk as it moved in turbulent waves from days of royal insignnia to nearly being penniless after the death of his father; from soaring success to a nose dive when he fell sick and producers shied away. Music, however, remained the only constant. Here was at once a composer of immense variety and depth, an inimitable singer. International by art, Bengali at heart.





CHAPTER 1

Family Background

Nabadwip Chandra Burman was a cultured, progressive and kind man. Despite being so highly placed in the government, Nabadwip led a simple and quiet life. He loved literature, sculpting, painting, singing specially – dhrupad, fishing and gardening. Pirs, fakirs, bauls, gazis, vaishnavs, bostamis¹ were always welcome in his Comilla house.

He was the only one of his kind, and with time was known by several names. Tripura's "Sachin Kumar" was first "Kumar Sachindra Deb Barman". The connoisseurs of Bengali music then loved to call him "Sachin Karta". The giant film industry operating from Bombay fondly referred to him as "Burman Dada", while Bollywood film fans addressed him as "SD Burman". But for the young ones of his time, he was just "SD". On October 31, 1975, one of Bengal's greatest musicians and the prince of Hindi film music, the second-to-none Sachin Dev Burman became history.

Sachin Dev Burman had a noble lineage. He belonged to the royal family of Tripura which ruled the state until 1948. Acharya Dinesh Chandra Sen, in his famous treatise *Brihatbanga*, mentioned that of all the existing dynasties in India, the Tripura Maharaja dynasty was the oldest, spanning 184 generations. The origin of this family is well documented in the history books published during the British era.

¹ *Bostams* and *bostamis* are male and female followers, respectively, of Sree Chaitanya who usually make a living by singing *Harinam kirtans*

Sachin Dev Burman was born on October 01, in 1906 (though some claim the year is 1903) at Comilla, about 90 kilometres from Dhaka, then a growing cultural centre of Eastern India. There are many stories regarding his birth in Comilla.

Sachin Dev Burman's father, Nabadwip Chandra Burman (born 1850) was the son of King Ishan Chandra Manikya's third wife, Jatishwari Devi. Ishan Chandra ascended the throne on February 01, 1850 as the 180th king of the Manikya dynasty when he nominated his younger brother, Upendra as the crown prince, and the two sons, Brajendra and Nabadwip the *Bada Thakur* and *Bada Karta*, respectively. But there was trouble in the kingdom from the very beginning. Upendra's early mysterious death, followed by Ishan Chandra's passing away at the age of 34, put Tripura in a state of disarray. This led Ishan Chandra's other brother, Bir Chandra, to claim the throne by presenting a "will", allegedly left by Ishan Chandra. The "will" was however, challenged by the step brothers, Neel Krishna and Chakradhwaj, who went to court on the grounds that it was a fraud, and that Neel Krishna, being the eldest, was entitled to be the king. Pending a verdict, Bir Chandra was made the de-facto king as Ishan Chandra's two sons, Brajendra and Nabadwip, were minors. The elder one of the two, Brajendra soon died, leaving the court in 1870 to finally give the verdict in Bir Chandra's favour, who was then proclaimed the king.

According to the well-known Tripura historian, Kailash Chandra Sinha, with the death of Ishan Chandra, and later son Brajendra, Nabadwip, the legal heir to the throne, was tortured by Bir Chandra and stripped of his power and property. This forced Nabadwip and his mother to eventually leave Agartala and settle in Comilla. That was in 1867.

Kailash Chandra Sinha was known to be a strong critic of Bir Chandra and therefore, many of his writings may be

exaggeration of facts or simply false. However, there was an element of truth regarding the “will” that Ishan had supposedly left behind. It was to be revealed later that there was no “will” at all. When Ishan died, the Council of Ministers, which included Kailash Chandra’s father, Gokul Chandra Sinha, “created” a “will” overnight to save the state from the English take-over, as Ishan’s sons were “minors”.

Here is yet another story, which many believe even today. When Bir Chandra took over after Ishan’s death, a few years later, Ishan’s eldest son Brajendra, then a teenager, also died. It was at this point that a group inside the palace wanted to reinstate the 14-year-old Nabadwip as the King, with the administration to be controlled by the queen mother under the guidance of a Council of Ministers. Fears loomed over a possible blood bath. Anticipating that Nabadwip might be kidnapped or killed, the queen mother Jatishswari Devi fled with the young Nabadwip and settled in Comilla.

Also, old timers used to swear, that once upon a time, Nabadwip as a young man left the palace to take up the life of a *sanyasi*. When he returned and made his claim as the Maharaja of Tripura, he was rejected. This forced Nabadwip to look for an alternative place to settle down and Comilla was the place of choice.

It is well documented that in 1875, Nabadwip, then 25 years of age, filed a suit against Bir Chandra for the throne as the legal heir. But Nabadwip lost the case. The ex-Chief Minister of Bengal, Mr. Peacock, then mediated with the Maharaja and Nabadwip, and it was agreed that Nabadwip, as a member of the royal family, would be given an allowance of Rs 525 per month, along with the Comilla property. There are therefore, reasons to believe that Sachin Dev Burman’s birth in Comilla was subsequent to the internal political conflict.

Bir Chandra ruled Tripura from 1870 to 1896. Termed as the *Vikramaditya* of Bengal by many pundits of the time, Bir

Chandra was a great social reformer. He formed the Agartala Municipality (1871), introduced stamps, the postal service (1875), the court of justice and many more public institutions. Public laws in Tripura were introduced by him and Bengali was made the state language; he built schools, colleges and hospitals. Sati and slavery were banned.

On the cultural front, he was an excellent singer and a poet. He could play several instruments and invited musicians like Jadu Bhatt, Nisar Hussain, Kashem Ali, Kulunder Bakht, Panchanan Mitra, Khetra Basu, Bholanath Basu, Madan Mitra and many others to perform in his court. He sang *khayal* and *tappa*² and was an outstanding painter himself, holding annual painting exhibitions. He spoke Bengali, Urdu, Manipuri, Tripuri, English and Sanskrit fluently and penned six books of poetry of which *Hori* and *Jhulan* are still well-known. He had Vidya Ratan Pandit Ram Narayan translate *Gita* into Bengali and helped Acharya Dinesh Chandra Sen to publish the famous *Bangla Bhasa and Literature*. He was the first person to spot talent in Tagore after reading *Bhogno Hridoy* (Broken Heart) and prophesied that the young writer would be world class. In fact, Tagore received his maiden award from the king for his *Bhogno Hridoy*. Later, the two developed a close bond.

It is not known how close Bir Chandra was to nephew Nabadwip or vice versa after the court's order on the throne. But Nabadwip on a personal level never spoke ill of Bir Chandra. As a matter of fact, it was the other way round. During the famous case for the throne, Nabadwip freely admitted in court that Bir Chandra had always treated him with respect during his Agartala days and that he also taught him to write poetry. It

² *Tappa* is an intricate and complex singing style that owes its origin to a folk tradition of singing in the Punjab. The origin of this style is credited to Miyan Shourie who adapted the folk style of singing lighter *raagas* like *Khamaj*, *Kafi*, *Jhinjhoti*, etc. This style became popular and spread all over India. In Bengal, a very well known singer, Nidhu Babu is stated to have done much to popularise *tappa* in Bengali.

can therefore be assumed that Nabadwip's filing a suit against Bir Chandra, during the early part of his life was because of his immaturity and palace politics of which he was a victim.

Interestingly, Bir Chandra always desired to have Nabadwip back in the kingdom but Nabadwip never returned to Agartala during the Maharaja's lifetime. Perhaps he could never accept his cousin, Radhakishore as the crown prince or it could be his guilty conscience for filing a suit against his uncle. It was only at the invitation of Birendrakishore, son of Radhakishore, his nephew, did he go back to Agartala to operate as the 'President, Council of State', a position next only to the Maharaja.

It was well-known that Nabadwip was a kind, cultured and progressive man. He commanded respect of people from all walks of life. It was through his initiative that 'The Theosophical Society of Comilla' was founded, of which he was the President. He was also the President of the Tripura branch of *Bongiyyo Sahitya Parishad* (Bengal Literary Society). His work *Bangla Sahityer Char Jug* (The Four Decades of Bengali Literature) was published in the *The Robi*, a well-known vernacular of the time. He wrote a popular memoir feature *Barjonar Jhud(r)i* (A Basket of Junk) regularly in the widely-circulated magazine, *The Tribeni*. He was also the Chairman of the Comilla Municipality Corporation.

Recollected Sachin Dev Burman of his father: "I was cast in the mould of my father. His education was my backbone and he was like a saint to me. It is through his teaching that I developed the little bit of fine arts in me. He loved me very much and was a true artist. A sitar player, an exponent of *dhrupad* songs, a painter and a sculptor - he excelled in all. During the Saraswati, Kali and Durga Pujas, he was the one who would make the statues. The artisans were not required."

Nabadwip was a very humble man, despite being the direct and only descendant of Maharaja Ishan Chandra Manikya. He was neither proud nor prejudiced. He married Nirupama Devi, who belonged to the royal family of Manipur. Nabadwip and

Nirupama had nine children, five sons, i.e. the twins Prasanta and Profulla, Tribendra, who died early, Kiran Kumar and Sachin Kumar; and four daughters. Not much is known of the daughters except for the second daughter, Tillottoma Devi, who was known to be a good singer.

Nabadwip had unusual hobbies that included gardening and fish breeding in the three ponds at his Comilla home. This was considered odd for a man of his stature and background. He led a disciplined life, took his nine children to prayers every evening and occasionally discussed with them classical music, specially *dhrupad*; and he spent a great deal of time reading books and sculpting. He liberally patronised *pirs*, *fakirs*, *vaishnavs*, *bauls*, *gazis*, *bostamis*, etc., to perform at his residence.

As mentioned earlier, Nabadwip kept himself aloof from the royal family since he left Agartala. In the year 1909, with the death of Radhakishore Manikya, Birendrakishore took over as the Maharaja. Birendrakishore immediately went for a patch up with uncle Nabadwip and invited him to be 'President, Council of State' of the State of Tripura. It was time to forget the past. Nabadwip responded and thus ended the cold war between the two families. As history goes, Nabadwip alone ran the state of Tripura as Birendrakishore did not live long and the new king Bir Bikram was young. In 1929, as a token of appreciation, Maharaja Bir Bikram honoured him with the title *Maha Manya Mor*. Nabadwip Chandra Burman, the then father figure of Tripura and father of Kumar Sachin Dev Burman passed away on September 05 in 1931. He was then 81. The state of Tripura mourned for three days and all government offices and schools remained closed.



CHAPTER 2

Early Formative Years

Nabadwip's simple life allowed Sachin Kumar to freely interact with the common people that included domestic helps like Madhav and Anwar, fishermen, boatmen, vaishnavs, bauls, pirs, fakirs, etc. With Anwar whose Bhatiali attracted him, he moved from village to village on boats and also on foot; rather odd for someone of the royal background. This culminated in Sachin Kumar's ultimate flair for folk culture and later its impact on the music he was to create.

Those were the days when Comilla used to be surrounded by natural vegetation, patches of hills here and there, and of course the great size and number (around 400) of water storage tanks and lakes. There were big lakes too, like Dharmasagar about one mile in circumference, and Ranidighi and Nanua. In the north, the river Gumti, a tributary of the Meghna, flowed merrily with colorful boats. There was no dearth of retreats in the town to take the heat off during the day. Today's environmentalists would have qualified it as nature's haven. A cultural hub, next to Calcutta and Dhaka, Comilla was also the home of an ancient civilisation that dates back about a thousand years. The bounties of nature in Comilla gave rise to many poets and musicians.

Nabadwip Chandra's house at Chartha, where Sachin Kumar was born, was almost in the heart of the town. It was a building not worthy of housing a Maharaja, neither a Nawab. But it was not an ordinary building either. It stood on a sprawling 60-acre land with rich natural vegetation. Three

lakes, one in front and two at the back, added lustre to the greenery. There was a tennis court at the backyard that gave Sachin Kumar his first break as a sportsman. Within a few minutes' distance by foot was the huge, beautiful Ranidighi lake and the famous Comilla Victoria College. Both stand even today in their respective glory. The sunset across the lake is not easy to forget.

Sachin Kumar's world was well defined. For every child of Nabadwip, a dedicated *Dhaima*, or governess was designated. *Robirma* (Robi's mother) was Sachin Kumar's *Dhaima* and there were Madhav and Anwar, the two helping hands. To *Dhaima*, the fair-complexioned Sachin Kumar was *Dalim Kumar* – the expression for the charming prince in Bengali fairy tales. Since his birth, it was *Dhaima* who took care of him round the clock. She would wait for hours by the window for *Dalim Kumar* to return whenever he went out and this lasted till his college days. When he was late, *Dhaima* never hesitated to take him to task. To *Robirma*, *Dalim Kumar* was all in the world, so much so that she went as far as Calcutta to take care of him. Old age finally caught up with her and in 1927 she returned to Comilla to spend her final days.

The old domestic help Madhav, was the Ramayana expert. On lazy Sundays, he hummed *slokas* from the Ramayana. To his *Chhoto Karta* – the expression used by the *prajas* for a male member of the royal family – the tunes were simply fascinating. Anwar, was the Huckleberry Finn kind, Sachin Kumar's first fishing *guru*. The adventurous Anwar taught his *Chhoto Karta* chiseling and weaving to make fishing rods for angling in lakes and rivers. The two spent hours with the fishermen, farmers and boatmen to get a taste of their life and music. *Guru* Anwar, was also a *Bhatiali* singer with a *Dotara*, the two-stringed instrument used in folk music. No matter what, every evening, Anwar sang the finest of his *Bhatiali* collections to his *Chhoto Karta* and the young Sachin Kumar

clung to him like a child. He was often so carried away by it that his evening's grammar lessons would remain unattended on the shelf. The school teacher reprimanded him often but that did not deter him. Anwar was like a shadow, morning till dusk.

"I loved classical music but Madhav and Anwar's songs were equally appealing to me. No *meend*, no *sargam*, no *loi*, no *taan* – simple, sweet words and straight from the heart. No *ustadi*. I used to sing Anwar's songs during the tiffin break at the school under the old banyan tree, in the open field, by the Dharmasagar lake, rain or shine, winter or summer and what fun! The city dwellers would never know its charm, value and depth. Anwar's songs had spiritual messages, Radha-Krishna lore, love and devotional songs linking the creator and the created. Clearly, Madhav and Anwar were my first folk *gurus*," recalled Sachin Dev Burman.

In Comilla, Nabadwip first put his son into Kumar Boarding in Agartala, the school for the members of the royal family. This was when Nabadwip was back in the kingdom. But Nabadwip was not happy with his son's studies at Kumar Boarding. The teachers were reluctant to discipline the children lest it should annoy the lords. Nabadwip took Sachin Kumar out of this school and put him first into Yusuf School and then in Class V of Comilla Zilla High School. It was the time when Sachin Kumar was more into playing the flute (*Tiperra banshi*) and the tabla. Singing then was secondary.

Sachin Kumar's brothers, the twins Profulla and Prasanta, were already at St. Paul's School in Darjeeling after the initial schooling at Tagore's Shantiniketan. Kiran Kumar joined them too. Sachin Kumar now expressed his desire to go to St. Paul's as well. But for Nabadwip, to distance his favourite son was too much to take. He therefore, kept Sachin Kumar with him.

The First World War broke out in 1914 and the British were under pressure but it did not have much effect on Tripura.

The culture life of Comilla continued to flourish. Come the Saraswati Puja and Sachin Kumar gave his first public performance. He sang a Nabadwip composition. That was in 1916 when he was a student of class five. It was an instant hit and the school gave him a certificate of appreciation. He now became very popular amongst his friends and in fact, their “hero”.

Nabadwip loved *dhrupads* and soon summoned Shyama Charan Dutt, a well-known exponent of *dhrupad* and *khayal* of the time. He wanted Sachin Kumar to be under his tutelage but the boy refused. He fancied musicians from the western part of India. It was therefore, left to Nabadwip to give his son the first lessons in classical music. Side by side of course, was Madhav and Anwar’s music.

Music was seeping more and more into Sachin Kumar’s psyche. He looked for new avenues wherever he went with Anwar. He merged with the common people to learn *Bhatiali*, *Baul*, *Sari* and other folk songs. Thus, at home it was classical music, and folk from Madhav, Anwar and the common people he directly interacted with.

“When I was in class nine, I along with my friends went to attend a *Puja* festival at Kamalasagar about 16 kilometers from Comilla. The permission from baba was not sought as we expected to return home by sunset. But that was not to be. We were late and we rushed into the train without tickets. In no time, the station master spotted us and when the train reached Comilla, he locked us all in the store room. I was scared and started crying when my friend Mohit came up with an idea.

“The station master’s mother loves songs. She was weeping when she heard *kirtans* at our house. Sachin, start your *Bhatiali* and *Baul*. If you sing, there will be a way out.”

I started singing with a depressing tone. There was no ‘life’ in my song. My only thought was to go home on time. I struggled with the song but as fate would have it, that was

good enough! The music reached the station master's mother and within ten minutes, she walked in, heard our plight and released us. Not only that, she treated us to sweets!"

It was widely known that everyone in Tripura was a born singer with a gifted voice. From each and every member of the royal family to the servants, the boatmen, the fishermen, the masons, the daily labourers – all carried music with them, especially when at work.

To Sachin Kumar, music was his first love. As a prince of the royal family, he obviously grew up in style. And there were rules set for the members of the royal family which forbid free movement. Sachin Kumar disobeyed these as he wanted to be with the common people. This became an issue for the royal family.

In 1920, Sachin Kumar passed the matriculation examination. He was then 14 years of age. Though widely acknowledged as a good student, school life was however, not much fun. Arithmetic and grammar gave him headaches. It was time to go to college for intermediate studies. He made a faint appeal to go to Calcutta. But Nabadwip wanted him in Comilla. Sachin Kumar had some fascination for literature and so he took Arts at Comilla Victoria College. He had little time for studies though! He moved from village to village, sailed from one river to the other, skipping classes... all to collect folk songs; and during the days at home he would sit by the lake or river with his flute.

"*Chhoto Karta*, it's time to go." The young man with the flute knew it was Madhav. The sun had just set and the rays cast a spellbinding effect on the Ranidighi lake. There was no reaction in *Chhoto Karta*. He continued with the flute. This was the *Tiperra* flute made out of bamboo, which is no longer seen these days. Sachin Kumar was immersed in his world of music. This was a common sight also by the bank of the river Gumti or the Dharmasagar lake, writes researcher Pannalal

Roy of Sachin Dev Burman's early days.

The next door neighbour was a Nawab. Beautiful *tawaiifs/baijees*, or courtesans, came from Calcutta, Benaras and Lucknow to perform in his house. At dusk, the enticing sound of music and the hypnotic jingle of anklets could not keep Sachin Kumar home for long. The nights became short as music kept everyone spellbound. Sachin Kumar's addiction to music soon attracted the Nawab and he took a liking for the boy. It is said that the Nawab later developed a close bond with young Sachin Kumar and presented him with a harmonium.

Skipping classes and traveling in the company of *Bhatiali* and *Baul* singers became a regular habit. Of course, Anwar was always with him. The two travelled sometimes on foot and on occasions by boat. During leisure, they enjoyed fishing in the lakes at home, a habit that Sachin Kumar continued up to his later days in the lakes of Calcutta or in the well-known Powai lake in Bombay when Nitin Bose's younger brother Mukul Bose, and producer-director Guru Dutt were his regular partners. This was also the transition phase for Sachin Kumar. From playing the flute and the tabla, he was now switching to his vocal chords. Baba Nabadwip Chandra was never a barrier in Sachin Kumar's pursuit of music. In fact, after matriculation there was no restriction in Sachin Kumar's movement. He told him:

"You are now a grown-up. You know your own good. I have no objection to your singing. Do as you deem fit. But make sure of your studies and take your meals at the right time."

Apart from fishing and music, Sachin Kumar was also hooked to sports. He played tennis at the Town Hall field and was a champion. An ace footballer, he played at centre forward and occasionally, as 'left out'. He excelled in badminton and volleyball too and was very fond of cricket.

Sachin Kumar passed his I.A. in 1922. He now planned to

move to Calcutta, essentially with music in his mind. “You are my youngest son and I want you to be by my side for another two years. Complete your B.A. from Comilla,” said Nabadwip Chandra Burman.

Sachin Kumar obeyed his father’s instruction and was back again to Comilla Victoria College. The decision did him good. There was virtually no village, river or lake in that area of East Bengal that Sachin Kumar did not traverse for his songs. In college, he was the music director of choice for all the dramas staged. The director was the history professor who also penned the lyrics for him. But whenever he found an opportunity, he moved out of Comilla to merge with the fishermen, boatmen, *vaishnavs*, *pirs*, *fakirs*, *bauls*, *murshids*, *gazis*, *bostamis* with new gusto sharing food and even the *hookah* (the local smoking pipe) with them. His constant mingling with the common men was now becoming too much for the high-ups in Agartala. There were signals given to him to change his lifestyle but Sachin Kumar could not care less, for music was all that mattered to him.

While Nabadwip was operating from his official residence in Agartala, what is now Rabindra Sadan, Sachin Kumar lived in Comilla and made occasional visits to him. Musicians from all over India performed regularly in the royal Ujjayanta Palace, built in 1901 by the King, in Moghul style. It was kind of a ritual for all the musicians to perform at Nabadwip’s house in Comilla, either while going to Agartala or on their way back. Thus the exposure to classical and folk music continued unabated throughout Sachin Kumar’s formative years.

The Maharajas of Tripura, starting from Bir Chandra, had vision. The middle class of Agartala was yet to develop while art and culture outside the palace were still not popular. There were no “think tanks” or intellectuals. Comilla was better in this respect. Subsequently, Bir Chandra invested in Comilla in setting up a Town Hall, a Community Centre for theatre and

a Library for all. People soon relaxed with music, theatre and sports. The result was, within a span of a few decades, Comilla produced such luminaries like Sachin Kumar, Himangshu Dutta, Ajay Bhattacharya, Mohini Chowdhury, Samarendra Paul, Shailbal Dham, Shanti Deb Ghosh, Sauren Das, Sudhin Das, Sushil Mazumder, Subodh Purokayasthya, Nani Mazumder, Brajen Bannerjee, Jitu Dutt, Arun Mahanaboli and Dashu Bardhan, etc.

Like any other Bengali, Sachin Kumar also loved the *adda*, the Bengali synonym for chatting. And the venue? The Young Men's Club in Comilla. The mates? Sanjay Bhattacharya of the well-known literary magazine *Purbasha*, his brother Ajay Bhattacharya, Sushil Mazumder (the noted film director), Prof. Sudhir Sen and Nazrul Islam, the rebel poet, to name a few. As it was no simple chatting, creativity was at the core. The centres to come up were the *Shurolok*, which was Sachin Kumar's first musical platform, *Shabuj Shangha* and *The Great Vernal Theatre Party*, where all would often merge to brain storm about culture. Comilla was now culturally a hot spot, apart from being a city of "tanks and banks".

It was a common sight those days to see Sachin Kumar singing at the Young Men's Club, Union Club or in the college. Upcoming poets, music composers, lyricists, literati all surrounded him. The stage was usually a table with some chairs around. Table beating *taals* accompanied Sachin Kumar's songs. The combination of Sachin Kumar and Ajay Bhattacharya was soon to become the talk of the town in Comilla. Rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, a great composer-cum-lyricist in his own right, was incidentally then in Comilla. The rapport between him and Sachin Kumar was instant. They exchanged notes on music and were often seen together in Kandirpar or Taalpokur. Nazrul Islam was so impressed with the young man's music that he became a regular visitor to his house. He even asked him to compose tunes based on his lyrics.

In 1924, Sachin Kumar completed his BA degree to become the first graduate of the Tripura royal family. It was now time for him to move to Calcutta for his MA in English Literature and Law leaving behind his close friends, Sauren Das, Kulundu Das, Shukhendu Chakrabarty, Dilip Sinha Roy and Ajay Bhattacharya. Music continued to play at the back of his mind.



CHAPTER 3

Calcutta Days 1

Sachin Kumar chose KC Dey, the celebrated singer-composer of the time as his first guru. He went through a rigorous training and KC Dey was very happy with his ward's progress. Around 1928, Sachin Kumar sang for the first time for the newly established "Radio", India Broadcasting Company, Calcutta. Sachin Kumar presented two of his self-composed songs, for which he was paid Rs.10. However, some are of the opinion that he first sang for Dacca Radio in 1926. But this is not correct as Radio Dacca went into operation only in 1939.

In 1925, Sachin Kumar, accompanied by father Nabadwip, arrived in Calcutta for his MA in English literature. They checked into the massive "Tripura Palace", belonging to the royal family in the well-known Ballygunge Circular Road.

"Kolkata", or "Kolikata" as pronounced by the Bengalis, was a big cosmopolitan city. It was founded by Job Charnock in 1690 when he settled there as a trader of the then East India Company. It was the capital of undivided India from 1772 to 1911 till Delhi took over.

Calcutta was then the seat of modern education, science, culture and politics. The city already boasted of big names like Ronald Ross, CV Raman, JC Bose, R Ahmed and other men of Science & Medicine. In literature, there were Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and others. There was Ashutosh Mukherjee in education; Ram Krishna, Swami Vivekananda and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in philosophy; Girish Ghosh in theatre; Jamini Roy and Nandalal Bose in painting; Deshbandhu

Chittaranjan Das and Manobendra Roy in politics. Even in sports, there were the barefoot footballers, Samad and Goshto Pal.

Apart from this, Calcutta had a long history for its appreciation of classical music and revolutionary heritage. It was “the place” for Indian literature and artistic thoughts. The city of enormous creative energy had many buildings built with Gothic, Baroque, Roman, Oriental and Indo-Islamic Moghul motifs. It was also known as the “city of palaces in a concrete jungle”.

Sachin Kumar was baffled. It was so unlike Comilla. No trees, fields, lakes, rivers, birds, and above all, no love for people. The glittering lights and the city’s hustle and bustle disturbed him and on occasions it was frustrating. For a while, he thought his decision to come to Calcutta was wrong. Life was totally different here. Throughout the day, Sachin Kumar was in the library working hard at his academic chores and at the end of the day, when the sun went down he wanted to see the open blue sky, but it was not there. He sorely missed those dark moonless nights or the sight of the new moon that he was so used to in Comilla. The city in the evening seemed to be always in “full moon” and the lights all around annoyed him. He wanted his solitude; to be at his retreat by the lake and with the flute. He missed his Comilla, his friends, his music.

Calcutta so, was a big jolt from his easy-going life in Comilla. But despite all these rather drastic adjustments, he also longed to meet the greats of Hindustani classical music. The pull of Comilla on one side, the fascination to be with those of Hindustani classical music on the other, the rough and tough life of Calcutta, took its toll and he was unable to concentrate on his studies. He was no more in the mood to continue and within a year he gave it up. Music was now his only consideration and Calcutta being its Mecca, he decided to fight it out against all odds.

Let us see how Calcutta was in those days, in the world of music. If one delves into such history, the period 1850-1950 was the most significant in the realm of modern Bengali music. It was when Bengali music giants like Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Roy, Rajanikanta Sen and Atul Prasad were all born within a span of only ten years. Nazrul Islam came two decades later, in 1899. By 1941 they were all gone, except for Nazrul Islam, who soon became disabled.

Sachin Kumar's entry into formal music and then becoming a "star" composer-singer (1925-35) was therefore at a time when modern Bengali music was at its best with various "brands" being created by the schools of Tagore, DL Roy, Rajanikanta Sen and Atul Prasad. Nazrul Islam then, was knocking at the door! *Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khayal, Thumri, Carnatic* and folk along with western music were torn apart then woven or integrated for a new kind of music. It was successful music alchemy. These music alchemists also penned the songs themselves. It will not be a digression if mention be made of some of these stalwarts.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the torch bearer of this music metamorphosis, was born in Calcutta in a family where music and literature ran parallel. As a young boy, he found all his elder brothers and other members of the family learning to compose music as well as involved in the cultivation of other forms of art. Tagore did not undertake any special training. He picked up from the environment of this home and from his association with eminent music personalities. His elder brother Jyotindranath, however, was instrumental in leading him into the intricacies of music and literature.

Tagore composed some 2,000-plus songs which could be segmented into three periods. The first from 1881 to 1900,

was the preparatory stage, when he was under the shadow of his brother, Jyotindranath, and under the influence of Hindustani and western music. The second phase, from 1900 to 1920, was his experimentation period, spinning from the Hindustani and western stock, his own songs using the *raaga* and the rich folk music of Bengal. The last phase, i.e. 1921 to 1941, many say was his creative best. Compositions are free from the influence of any preceding work and the blending of *raaga* and folk music of Bengal particularly *Baul*, constitutes its mystical tone.

Tagore categorised his songs into four major sections. *Puja* (Worship), *Swadesh* (Homeland), *Prem* (Love) and *Prakriti* (Nature). He also made two minor categories *Vichitra* (Variety) and *Anusthanik* (Ceremonial).

In the words of Dhurjyoti Prasad Mukherjee: “Hindustani classical music could survive the onslaught of time because at the time of crisis the blood from the folk musical genres was transfused into its body. We notice the transfusion of *Baul* and *Bhatiali* into the musical frame of Tagore. The *raaga* musical system was made to absorb the folk musical elements. I should very much like to say that the compositions of this period³ are Tagore’s most remarkable achievements. There is such a control in the composition, such a combination between the words and the melody, its frame is so enchanting, its appeal is so personal and impersonal at the same time that one cannot desist from deriving from it. The mature Tagore style does not have the rawness of folk music or the performing excesses of the music of the court while it retains all the virtues. It possesses the emotional content of the folk music and the excellence and sophistication of *raaga* musical modes.”⁴

³ The “period” referred to here is the last phase 1921-1941.

⁴ As stated in English in ‘*Bangla Gaaner Biborton*’ by Karunamoy Goswami, published by Bangla Academy, June 1993.

DWIJENDRALAL ROY

Popularly known as DL Roy, Dwijendralal Roy (1863-1913) was born in Krishnanagar, once a traditional centre of classical music, in the district of Nadia, now in West Bengal, India. Son of Dewan Kartik Chandra Roy, a renowned singer and composer, DL Roy got his early training in music from his father. A meritorious student, he passed his MA in English from the famous Presidency College; thereupon he went to England for higher education on a scholarship. In England, he learnt western music and acquired a taste for theatre. Upon his return, he was appointed Deputy Magistrate with a posting in Munger, Bihar. Here he learnt classical music in the *Khayal* and *Tappa* genres and soon he began composing Bengali songs in *Tappa-Khayal* flavours which he himself sang and popularised.

DL Roy's musical life spanned two phases. The first was when he composed and also sang humorous and *Tappa-Khayal* songs in 1887. With the death of his wife in 1903, he was devastated and a life of despair took over. At this point in life, he composed sentimental and patriotic songs, depicting the miseries of the motherland. The British did not take it lightly. They started harassing him through frequent transfers that ultimately affected his health and led to high blood pressure. He retired from government service in 1913 but passed away the next year. DL Roy's songs reflect love of nature, devotion to God, a sense of humour and patriotism. Perhaps his greatest achievement as a composer was in his chorus-style patriotic songs, which stem from the *raaga*, though the style and presentation are western. He thus brought in a fusion of the east and the west. Some of his love songs in the *Tappa-Khayal* genre are outstanding. Here also he fused Indian classical music with shades of western music. Even today, his humorous songs remain unparalleled

in the history of Bengali music. In fact, it was in this category that he first emerged as a composer.

RAJANIKANTA SEN

Rajanikanta Sen (1865-1910), a contemporary of Tagore and DL Roy, was born in Sirajganj, now in Bangladesh. He took his degree in Law from Calcutta. Son of a judge who was also a poet and a musician of repute, Rajanikanta was not into serious music in his early years, though he did compose some songs. It was after his return to Rajshahi as a practicing lawyer that he started taking active interest in music. When DL Roy visited Rajshahi around 1895, Rajanikanta Sen was inspired by his works, and he took to composing humorous and satirical songs. However, with the Bengal Partition of 1905, Rajanikanta's compositions took a new turn towards patriotism. Unfortunately, tragedy struck him. He first lost his son and then his daughter. Soon, he himself was afflicted with kidney complications and finally cancer. He accepted this painful existence as the will of God and composed sublime devotional songs, which he sang from his death bed. He composed around three hundred songs – humorous, patriotic and devotional – out of which about 100 are now available. His style bore a unique individuality that could be easily identified – simple, yet deeply mystical. *Raaga* music was the basis of his composition and he confined himself within *Tappa* and *Khayal*.

ATUL PRASAD

The great Bengali poet composer Atul Prasad (1871-1934) will be remembered for his *Thumri* used in the development of Bengali “city” music. A city boy from Dhaka, Bangladesh, he got his first musical inspiration from his father whom he lost

at an early age. He was then brought up by his grandfather Kali Narayan Gupta, who was a singer and composer of devotional songs. He studied at the Presidency College, Calcutta, and then proceeded to England to take his Bar-at-Law. He returned to practice in Calcutta and then in Rangpur (now Bangladesh). He finally settled in Lucknow where he was a successful lawyer and well respected as a poet-composer, singer and patron of the arts.

Lucknow has traditionally been a centre of Hindustani classical music particularly the *Thumri* and *Ghazal* and Atul Prasad's long stay in Lucknow had its influence. *Thumri* formed the basis of his music along with *Baul* and *Kirtan*. He composed around 210 songs and wrote outstanding love lyrics. Bengali songs are traditionally melancholic. But the love songs of Atul Prasad are something beyond that.

Atul Prasad also composed some Bengali *Ghazals* but as he was far from Calcutta and Dhaka, these did not receive much attention. He knew Urdu very well and as a regular visitor to the *mushairas* he found the link between urban Bangla music and *Thumri*. Unlike Tagore and DL Roy, he had no influence of western music in his creations. His favourite *raagas* were *Khambaj* (*Khamaaj*) and *Bhairavi*, which are found in many of his compositions.

Today, Atul Prasad's songs find a special place amongst the Bengalis. The city of Lucknow honoured him by naming after him the road where he lived.

So much for the readers to get an idea of Bengali music and its influence when Sachin Kumar arrived in Calcutta. Barring the *nautch* girls, there were some outstanding singers too – DL Roy himself, Dilip Kumar Roy, KC Dey, K Mullick aka Kasem Mullick, Kamala Jharia, Tulsi Lahiri, Kalipada Pathak, Angur Bala, Indu Bala and others. Pankaj Kumar Mullick joined soon.

In the genre of classical music, it was the period when *gharanas* like Agra, Kirana, Jaipur-Atrauli, Gwalior, Rampur-

Sahaswan etc., were sweeping the subcontinent. Calcutta was a market place for all these *gharanas*. The *babus* patronised good music, some knowingly, others unknowingly. But there were some *Maharajas* like the ones at Tripura, Natore, and Mymensingh who patronised classical music. Maestros like Badal Khan, Muizuddin Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Kale Khan, Faiyaz Khan, Alladiya Khan, Girija Shankar Chatterjee, Zamiruddin Khan to name a few, graced Calcutta's music culture. On the lighter side were Gauhar Jan, Malka Banu, Jaddanbai, to mention some. And at the centre of it all was Shyamlal Kshetri, a great promoter of classical music, an amazing harmonium and tabla player and a *Thumri guru*. It was a ritual those days for all visiting artists to stop by at Shyamlal Kshetri's "music centre".

Sachin Kumar looked for opportunities to carve a name for himself and for that he needed to create his own music that had to be original and appealing. Matching the above masters was a big challenge. He was realistic. To begin with, he needed sufficient knowledge of classical music and so he looked for the necessary resources. In 1925, one fine day he chanced to meet KC Dey, the famous blind singer. Also, known as *Kana Keshto*, KC Dey was already a great performer, both on and off stage.

KC DEY

Born in 1893, and son of Shibchandra Dey (and uncle of singer Manna Dey of Bollywood), this great performing artist lost his eyesight when he was a school boy. Since then, he took to singing as his career. At 16, he began taking *Khayal* tips from Shasibhushan Dey and then *Tappa* from Satishchandra Chattopadhyay. The ground work being over, he then took lessons from leading celebrities like Karamatullah Khan, Khalifa Badal Khan, Dani Babu, Amarnath Bhattacharya, Dabir Khan, Shivsevak Mishra, Zamiruddin Khan and Radharaman

End of the sample preview.

Enjoyed what you were reading?

Buy Now!