PREFACE

As a performer of Modern Bengali songs and student of Linguistics, I have a keen interest in both music and Linguistics. So I wished to study the nature of correlation between these two and this inspired me to select this topic entitled “A Linguistic Analysis of Modern Bengali Songs From Forties Till Seventies”.

Modern Bengali Songs

The word ‘Modern’ is a relative term. The definition may vary from person to person. It covers a vast area. In the present treatise we have chosen important songs from forties till seventies and the analysis is mainly based upon the modern Bengali recorded songs, as preserved in notations.

Tagore and his contemporaries

If we trace the development of Modern Bengali songs, we have to admit that Tagore and his contemporaries have greatly contributed to this field. In fact, Tagore’s songs form the base of Modern Bengali songs. The structure, pronunciation, style, introduction of sanchari (the third part) and the free movement of tunes are the typical characteristics of Modern Bengali songs for which we owe to Rabindranath Tagore.

Further, sweet melodious tunes, lively words, impressive thoughts, free movement of the tunes and the freedom of singers are some other characteristics of Modern Bengali songs, which are considered to be the contributions of Kaji Nazrul Islam.

Thus, it is Tagore and later his contemporaries viz., Dwijendralal, Rajanikanta, Atul Prasad and then Nazrul too, who added new dimensions viz., new poetic patterns, foreign tunes and many other qualities to their songs and thus enriched the field of Bengali songs paving the way for the modern stage. Even they contravened the conventional Rag-Ragini daringly and mixed them together in their songs. They brought a revolutionary change in the themes and tunes of Bengali songs as well. Thus they made the songs in nature quite different from the earlier Bengali songs.
Later Development of Modern Bengali Songs

After Nazrul, there again took place a very big change in the field of Modern Bengali songs. It was the beginning of a new era when we got separate lyricists, music composers and singers for Modern Bengali songs as opposed to the earlier songs for which the same person acted as the lyricist, music composer and singer, thus playing the role of three-in-one. Incidentally, we may mention that the term “Adhunik Bangla Gaan” was first introduced when Dhaka Radio Station was first installed.

During the period from forties to seventies, Modern Bengali songs were mainly based upon romanticism, imaginary thoughts and the material world surrounded by illusory thoughts, worries of love and imaginary sorrows and miseries of life. But the lyricists had not only created a dreamland, they were aware of the practical world too. Their realizations and their way of expressing the reality of the materialistic world through songs distinguished their songs from Tagore’s.

During Independence and the first and second world wars the reality of life was expressed in Modern Bengali songs. But after 1950, romanticism got the predominance. Modern Bengali songs reached the highest peak of popularity with its romanticism, during this period. Lyricists, music composers and singers, having a very good understanding among them did their work marvellously and thus this period was marked as the golden period of Modern Bengali songs.

Music and Society

As we know, songs can influence the society and can be influenced by the society itself. Thus songs act as the mirror of the society. It is through songs that human beings can express their thoughts and feelings in the best possible way. The main aim and purpose of songs is to bring out the thoughts and feelings of humans from their hearts. Thus, the present study which aims at describing (from the linguistic point of view) the nature of some aspects of Modern Bengali songs which constitute the part of Bengali culture, is expected to highlight the nature of the same culture too, though indirectly.
Earlier Literature


Among all the works of these writers, Sudhir Chakraborty’s works are the marvellous ones in tracing the development of Modern Bengali songs and in drawing out their characteristics too. Rajyeswar Mitra has presented a valuable discussion regarding the composers of Modern Bengali songs. The lists of Modern Bengali songs chronologically, have been given by Arun Sen and Gopal Krishna Mukherjee. Gita Mukhopaddhay’s valuable theories regarding the Bengali patriotic songs prove to be very interesting. Dhurjati Prasad Mukhopaddhay has enriched the field of Modern Bengali songs with the ideas regarding the tunes and words of the songs. Dr. Arun Kumar Basu draws a clear picture of the earlier songs, Tagore’s songs and Modern Bengali songs.

But none of these writers have discussed Modern Bengali songs from the linguistic point of view, which is the main objective of the present research work.

Collection and selection of data

We have collected our data from different sources, mainly from the cassettes of ‘His Master’s Voice’ (the ‘Gramophone Company of India). Out of thousands of songs, we have selected nearly four hundred songs for the present study. The selection is based on the popularity of the songs from forties till seventies.
Further, the selection of the songs is based upon their language, tune, style and composition. The songs of the famous singers have obviously got importance in our selection as their songs have crossed the barrier of age and are still popular. While selecting the songs, we have mainly taken into account the songs of “All Time Greats” and “Chayanika” which are said to be the best sold cassettes containing the most famous songs. We have also gone through the cover pages of the super-hit cassettes of ‘His Master’s Voice’ and have selected the songs very minutely. The selection also needed meetings with eminent lyricists, music composers and singers or other eminent persons in the field of Modern Bengali songs. Views of ordinary people who really love songs and are somehow involved in the musical field or who are good listeners only, have also been considered.

The important personalities whom we interviewed for this purpose are as follows:

i) Dr. Ashoke Majumdar (Lyricist and Music Composer)
ii) Mrs. Arati Mukherjee (Singer)
iii) Mrs. Banasree Sengupta (Singer)
iv) Smt. Deepali Nag (Classical Singer)
v) Ms. Haimanti Sukla (Singer)
vi) Dr. (Mrs.) Indrani Sen (Singer)
vii) Mr. Jatileswar Mukherjee (Lyricist, Singer and Music Composer)
viii) Mr. Kankan Bhattacharya (Folk Song - Singer)
ix) Padmasree Manna Dey (Singer)
x) Mr. Mrinal Banerjee (Music Composer)
xi) Mr. Mrinal Chakraborty (Lyricist, Music Composer and Singer)
xii) Mr. Naren Mukherjee (Mass Song - Singer)
xiii) Mr. Nirendranath Chakraborty (Poet)
xiv) Mr. Prasanta Chowdhury (Music Composer)
xv) Dr. Pradip Ghosh (Musicologist)
xvi) Mr. Ramkumar Chatterjee (Classical Singer)
xvii) Mr. Ranjit Basu Roy (Music Composer)
xviii) Geetasree Sandhya Mukherjee (Singer)
In this connection we must mention that a questionnaire was developed for taking the interviews and it is given below:

**Questionnaire**

Q1. What are the characteristics of Modern Bengali songs?
Q2. How do the Modern Bengali songs differ from Tagore’s although their origin lies in Tagore’s songs?
Q3. Which theme has got importance in Modern Bengali songs, throughout the period concerned?
Q4. Say on what basis the popularity of a song can be defined?
Q5. Say whether human feelings and emotions get reflected in Modern Bengali songs or not?
Q6. How do Modern Bengali songs differ from religious songs and folk songs?
Q7. To what extent does Bengali culture get reflected in Modern Bengali songs?
Q8. Name some of the famous songs of Forties.
Q9. Who were the famous lyricists, music composers and singers of Modern Bengali songs in Forties?
Q10. Say something about the tune, words and way of presentation of Modern Bengali songs.
Q11. Say whether it is good to have a separate lyricist, music composer and singer for a song.
Q12. Say whether the lyricists, music composers and singers got proper dignity or respect in their field.
Now we present in a nutshell, the views of the above-mentioned important personalities regarding the characteristics of Modern Bengali songs,

(i) The range of popularity is based upon the rate of sale of records and cassettes, the public demand of artists in cultural programmes and their remuneration too.

(ii) The future of a song depends upon the unity of words, tune and style of presentation. When the public realizes this unity or harmony, the songs become popular. The real popularity is manifested, when a song exists crossing the barrier of time.

(iii) To be a good singer, good voice is very necessary. A lyricist or a tuner can only become a good singer, if he or she has a good voice.

(iv) With regard to the composition of the tunes of Modern Bengali songs there is no hard and fast rule. They have a mixture of indigenous and foreign tunes. Thus the tunes of Modern Bengali songs show a great variation. Modern Bengali songs are composed, keeping pace with age.

(v) Although the songs composed just before and after independence bear the impact of war and Independence but after Fifty, we see that most of the popular songs are romantic. But these songs deal with the human feelings, thoughts and ideas too.

(vi) The good song composers must keep in their mind that, non-film songs should be composed in such a way that after hearing these songs, one can visualise the picture in mind. On the other hand, film songs are obviously supported by the visual situations.

(vii) If the meaning or the content of the song is largely extended, then the songs become highly popular. Thus a song may become polysemous. For example, a love song can be thought of as the song of Almighty.

(viii) The media of publicity influence the society and affect the mentality of the people very much. Thus societal phenomenon is often reflected in a special class of songs.

(ix) A good song must have balance between its tune and words. As time changes, way of presentation of songs also changes. Musical arrangement and style of presentation of songs play very important roles in Modern Bengali songs.
The most important characteristic of Modern Bengali songs is to break the traditional norms and to follow a new path. At the beginning of modernity itself, modern songs came into existence.

Modern songs are creative in nature. They do not follow the rigid rules of Raga-Raginis but sometimes they are the mixture of them.

Modern songs are full of emotions and feelings of human beings. In Modern songs, some like words, some the tunes, some the musical arrangement and some like the whole of it. So in Modern songs each of these parts can get separate appreciation of the audience.

Melodious tune was one of the special characteristics of popular Modern Bengali songs of the period concerned.

Modern songs differ from religious songs in the way that religious songs are full of devotional thoughts and feelings with a special kind of musical arrangement. But in Modern songs, musical arrangement is totally of different type.

Modern songs differ from folk songs in the way that, in folk songs we come in contact with the soil, the village people, their life and their rusticity. The folk tunes help us to perceive the simple workmanship of the rural people. On the contrary, modern songs do not bring us in direct contact with the soil.

While doing this great task of selection, we got much help from the authority of the Gramophone Company of India- 'His Master’s Voice'. We searched out their thousands of catalogues and found out the songs, the names of the lyricists, music composers and singers as well as their years of composition.

The first lines of some selected songs of the date, along with their translation, are presented in the Appendix.