

# Kummar Chatterjee: Using ragas to spread peace and harmony

BY BIDISHA ROY

Critics say he blends mastery in music and unflinching devotion through his mellifluous voice, projecting a picture of an immensely likable attitude and a calmness that overwhelms his personality. Over the last two decades, he has mastered a unique style of rendering Bhajans in Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali and Ghazals in Urdu.

Kummar Chatterjee with his Bhajans and Ghazals has enthralled audiences across the country from East to West and



North to South, from Mumbai to Kolkata, Gujarat, Cuttack and Delhi to Bangalore. His music is loved by all in India.

He has been repeatedly invited to perform in Middle East, Hong Kong, Europe and USA. He has performed at the US JAINA Convention to thousands in attendance. In 2009; he was invited by the Parliament of the World Religion Conference to perform in their musical concerts in Melbourne, Australia.

Chatterjee hails from the Hindustani classical gharana and was initiated to music from the early years under the guidance of renowned masters like Sri Acharya T.L.Rana (Dhrupad), Sri Amiya Chattyopadhyay, Srimati Sunanda Patnayak. He has derived his inspiration from none other than Pandit Jasraj and Sufi singer Abida Perveenji.

He recently visited Chicago to perform in a gathering of Jain Society in Naperville. In a conversation with Hi India, Kummar Chatterjee spoke about his "Divine" feeling about music.

Being a Bengali it would be normal for you to pick up Rabindrasangeet. Instead why did you choose Bhajan and Ghazal?

Born in very remote town in West Bengal, I started learning music at the age of 7 under the guidance of my uncle. In my life my mother carried a very big role; according to her any human being can reach to him by sangeet. So my

intention to learn music was not only for entertainment or earn money, I wanted to get some eternal peace out of it. When I sing, by thy grace I feel that peace. Rabindrasangeet could reach me to some section of audience, but I wanted to reach every section of religion. By sufi and gazal I get the Hindu as well as non Hindu audience. Indian bhajans please the senses and elevate the soul. A bhajan is a musical rendering of a composition in praise of the Almighty – set to a tune that is at once melodious and memorable. Each region in India is famous for its own style of music – each style is a blend of intense devotion, voice modulation and unwavering discipline. Indian music is replete with a variety of Bhajans that invoke the divine and make you forget the mundane. Traditionally sung in temples and religious gatherings, Indian Bhajans have enthralled the devotees for time immemorial. Meera, Kabir, Surdas and a lot of devotees had reached the pinnacle of divinity through their soul stirring bhajans, dohas and chaupayis. These timeless songs of great composers continue to invoke devotion and joy. Ghazals are couplets with extraordinary variety of expression around its central theme of love. Viewed in a spiritual context, ghazals are addressed to the Almighty – a metaphor for the beloved. Most

ghazal scholars today recognize that some ghazal couplets re exclusively about Divine love, others are about metaphorical love, but most of them can be interpreted in either context

*You are working on some non violence theme through classical music. Can you detail that?*

I had done lots of seminars and music sessions in different community and school colleges and even in jail. I saw when someone sings with me, either dhun or bhajan or listens to any song based on classical, that time their state of mind changes and you will be surprised the way they cry and try to confess and repent. On that particular time if you see their eyes, you or anybody can realize that the miracle or change happens. So I thought by music therapy I can inject the non violence into their body directly.

*Why are you interested in Jainism?*

I read Jainism and discovered that it is totally a combination of science and classical music and above all it's very compassionate as well as logical. Jainism is a tattva not a only religion.

*How is your experience in America?*

I liked America's openness for any religion. They really appreciate if something they find helpful in their life. They like music what ever it is, it can be jazz or devotional or classical but it must be based on rhythm.

*How was your Chicago trip?*

It was very nice to meet scholars like Dr Dipak Jain and other very high profile Jains, who believe in very simple living and high thinking and always compassionate for others. I learned a lot here in Chicago. It's a very cultural hub that



appreciates classical music from the soul. This time I was very glad to meet people who really appreciated my all classical base Jain sutras .which I have done. Recently my ashta prahar namutthunam stotra got very good appreciation there I'm very happy with my trip.

*You were invited by the Parliament of the World Religion Conference to perform in their musical concerts. What happens if you get an invitation from Chicago to celebrate Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary?*

I'll love to be there in 150th celebration of Swami. When I was performing in world parliament, I felt proud that from Bengal Swami Vivekananda, a great disciple of a great guru Ramakrishna, represented Hindu religion in first parliament on 1893.

Though maestros like Pandit Ravi Shankar popularized Indian music in the western world, but it seems after A R Rahaman's Oscar, westerns especially Americans have gone crazy about India/Bollywood. Your comment

I am very proud of A R Rahaman because he is an Indian but there can not be any comparison between him and Ravi Shankar. Though both are very great composers still if you see the originality, which is 100% in Ravi Shankar but not in Rahaman. Ravi Shankarji creates from original acoustic string instrument, where as Rahmaan creates from all computer programming. It's very easy to take partly any music those already had created earlier. This is my personal view; it might not be accepted by all.

*You stay in Mumbai. Any plan to join Bollywood as a singer?*

I don't know; somehow I did not try in Bollywood because I always try to do something which I feel from my heart. From the very beginning I decided to do something which can connect me with my soul. So I am very much enjoying my way of living as well as singing.