

Legend Of Raj Begum

There have been many excellent Kashmiri singers before Raj Begum and there will come many excellent singers after her, but her unique singing style will remain legendary and continue to warm our hearts forever.

The following songs of Raj Begum have entered the folklore of Kashmir:

1. Subh phul bulbulav tul shore-googa
2. Vyasiye gulan aavuy bahar
3. Rum ghyam sheeshas byegur gav bane myon
4. Wal az vyasiye dokh sukh mashrith sheraw loluk bagh
5. Kyo roze purdan chaaye chaaye soze-jigar myon
6. Wola wav wanay soz
7. Kya kya wanay aye dost chey

The reason why these songs have become part of the folk-lore is not only due to the quality of their lyrics but also quite a bit due to the way they were sung. Raj Begum has a deep haunting voice, which pierces the heart of sorrow. And sorrow is the heart of human condition: sad songs are more remembered than the happy songs.

Raj Begum was born at Magarbal Bagh in Srinagar on March 27, 1927. Her father was Ghulam Rasool Sheikh. Like most of the great singers she started singing in her childhood. As she grew up she sang in weddings. But as Naya Kashmir movement took root in Kashmir, for the first time in their long history common Kashmiri people started tasting freedom. With the freedom came the chance to express their pent-up emotions suppressed for so long. Radio Kashmir began to broadcast Kashmiri musical programs. In 1954, introduced by the well known folk singer Ghulam Qadir Langoo, Raj Begum started singing at Radio Kashmir. She attracted immediate attention because of the way she rendered songs in Gulrez.

She went on to sing with Radio Kashmir until 1986.

Raj Begum has sung in many different genres: folk, religious, light, romantic, ghazals, etc. No one knows exactly how many songs she has sung, as in the beginning days of Radio Kashmir, there were no recordings made of the songs sung by singers, as it had no recording equipment. Singers sang live. Often no paper records were kept of the songs sung. Some people believe she has sung a few thousand songs.

Raj Begum, along with Naseem Akhtar, broke the cultural barrier of women singing publicly. Until when she joined Radio Kashmir in 1954, female singers would sing in a guarded manner, similar to their expected behavior in society. But Raj Begum's uninhibited, high-pitch, sonorous voice changed that. She sang from her heart, unmindful of cultural constraints. So, she ushered a new freedom for women in Kashmir.

It is the opinion of many professional singers and music watchers in Kashmir that Raj Begum is the greatest modern Kashmiri singer. What is most joyous to the music lovers is that she is still alive. Last year she sang 10 songs for me in an album called Songs From The Corners Of My Heart.

Like Dal Lake Raj Begum is a legendary symbol of Kashmir.

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