Jamal-E-Begum Akhtar by Vidushi Rita Ganguly

The Play

Jamal-E-Begum Akhtar, a solo performance, is being presented by, Prof. Vidushi Rita Ganguly (Padmashree), the well-known theatre artist and vocalist. The presentation is based on the life and times of her own Guru Mallika-e-Ghazal, Begum Akhtar. The play has evolved over the years as a result of Prof. Ganguly's long association with Begum Akhtar as her pupil and her extensive research on the professional woman musicians of the country and the music that thrived in the royal courts of yesteryears. The present play is in Hindustani language and is an adaptation of a *Bangla* play of the same title, which was recently performed in Bangladesh with resounding success.

The play is designed in free story telling format, which necessarily precludes any fixed written text. With her gift as a storyteller, she takes recourse to improvising the text as the play develops. This is perhaps for the first time that an *ekal* is being staged on the life of a legendary artiste.

Begum-Akhtar

Begum Akhtar (7 October 1914 – 30 October 1974), was a well-known Indian singer of Ghazal, Dadra, and Thumri genres of Hindustani classical music. She received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for vocal music, and was awarded Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan (posthumously) by Govt. of India. She was given the title of *Mallika-e-Ghazal* (Queen of Ghazals).

Begum Akhtar was born in Bada Darwaza, Town Bhadarsa, Bharatkund, Faizabad District, Uttar Pradesh. Her father, Asghar Hussain, a young lawyer who fell in love with her mother Mushtari and made her his second wife, subsequently

disowned her and his twin daughters Zohra and Bibbi (Akhtar). Akhtar was barely seven when she was captivated by the music of Chandra Bai, an artist attached to a touring theatre group. At her uncle's insistence she was sent to train under Ustad Imdad Khan, the great sarangi exponent from Patna, and later under Ata Mohammed Khan of Patiala. Later, she travelled to Calcutta with her mother and learnt music from classical stalwarts like Mohammad Khan, Abdul Waheed Khan of Lahore, and finally she became the disciple of Ustad Jhande Khan.

The Director

Born and brought up in Lucknow, Professor Rita Ganguly was drawn to music since her childhood. The daughter of freedom fighter and founder of the National Herald, the eminent litterateur, Dr K L Ganguly, Rita was encouraged from an early age towards academic advancement as well as artistic excellence.

She regularly performs a two and a half hour solo play on her mentor, Begum Akhtar which has travelled throughout the world at all major theatre festivals. It is also her homage to the gurus of dance, music and theatre who have influenced her own life, and contributed to world culture through their commitment to truth. She pioneered a multimedia production on the 7 stages of Sufism, entitled Ruh-e-ishq, celebrating 50 yrs of India's independence.

For her outstanding contribution in the field of classical music, she has been the recipient of a slew of awards. These include the Padmashree, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Ghazal Gayakee, the Priyadarshi Award, the Rajiv Gandhi Shiromani award, Critics Circle of India award and most recently, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Broadcasters Association, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.

Concept, Research, Design & Script
Prof Rita Ganguly