

## The Golden Era of Indian Hindi Film Music

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### Abstract

During the fifties the triumvirate stars of Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand established themselves. They had their preferred team when it came to music. If it was Hasrat Jaipuri/Shailendra, Shankar Jaikishan and Mukesh for Raj Kapoor, for Dilip Kumar it was Shakeel Badayuni and Rafi. Dev Anand preferred S.D. Burman and Kishore Kumar.

Many socially relevant movies were also made during the fifties requiring the support of competent poets and lyricists to cater to the various moods and situations. As the movies of this decade and the decade that followed also had plenty of glamour and dance sequences featuring lead actresses like Madhu Bala, Vyjayanthi Mala, Nargis, Meena Kumari, Nutan, Waheeda Rehman etc, the movies were a treat for both the eyes and ears.

The talented singers of the era include Lata Mangeshkar, Manna Dey, Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh, Geeta Dutt, Hemant Kumar, Kishore Kumar, Shamshad Begum, Suraiya and Talat Mahmood. Many good poets such as Majrooh Sultanpuri, Shakeel Badayuni, Sahir Ludhianvi, Shailendra, Rajinder Krishan, Hasrat Jaipuri, Indivar and Kaifi Azmi wrote film lyrics and contributed immensely to the appeal of the songs.

### Keywords

Indian, films, music, Golden era

### The Golden Era of Indian Hindi Film Music

It is well known that song and dance are an inseparable part of Indian cinema. The very first full-length Indian talkie film “Alam Ara” made by **Ardeshir Irani** released on March 14, 1931 at the Majestic Cinema Bombay had 7 songs. The films that followed such as “Laila

Majnu” and “Shakuntala “also had plenty of songs. In the movie “Shirin Farhad”, there were as many as 17 songs sung by the lead pair Master Nissar and Jahan Ara Kajjan. With huge commercial success of these films, music became an integral part of the Indian cinema. This is not surprising considering the part played by song and dance in the cultural festivities and ethos of our country.

The studio system evolved in the country with the advent of the talkie, the prominent ones being New Theatres, Bombay Talkies, Prabhat Films, Sagar Movie tone and Ranjit Films, which provided huge entertainment to the masses laced with plenty of songs, dances, drama and action.

Under the studio system, talented technicians, actors and musicians were contracted on monthly stipend. It was actors who knew singing who could make a bigger mark during this period. The most successful was the acting, singing star, sensation Kundan Lal Saigal who continued to dominate the industry till his death on 18th January 1947. The pure and pristine songs of the 30s set the tone for the beginning of film music in India. It was marked by literary flourish and theatrical influence.

The playback system attempted in the movie “Dhoop Chaon” in 1935, gradually developed to high standards within a decade. The actors were happy to be relieved from the additional task of singing and the music directors had the opportunity to give their best with better technology and the use of talented singers, well versed in their trade.

The forties saw a disruption to the existing studio system with independent producers also entering the fray. It also saw composers using the folk content of their respective regions (Punjab, Bengal, Rajasthan). C. Ramachandra combined Eastern and western music and established his own identity and style.

If the 30s set the tone for the beginning for film music, the 40s was a period of consolidation. Many talented personalities in the areas of lyric writing, singing and music direction emerged, blossomed and put their stamp on Indian film music for the decades to come. As for example Naushad, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammed Rafi had their debut during this period.

The forties was also a period when female singers with heavy, rustic, robust voices such as Amir Bai, Rajkumari, Shamshad Begum, Khurshid, Suraiya and Zohrabai made a mark. Noorjehan the *Malika-e-Tarannum*, though also of this period had a voice, that was less heavy than the others. Lata Mangeshkar has acknowledged her as being a role model early in her career. After partition, when Noorjehan decided to move to Pakistan, Lata with her light melodious voice became the undisputed queen of Indian film music in the decades to follow.

Most experts agree that the fifties, sixties, and up to the early seventies comprise the golden era of Hindi film music. The main reason for this can be attributed to the collaboration of a number of creative personalities in the area of lyric writing, music, and acting whose contributions peaked during this period.

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As for music direction, the producers had the pick from a host of talented musicians in Naushad (*the Maestro with the Midas Touch*), Shankar Jaikishan, C. Ramachandra, S.D. Burman, Roshan, Madan Mohan, O.P. Nayyar, Hemant Kumar, Khayyam, Ravi, Salil

Chowdhury etc. In the sixties, the talented Kalyanji Anandji, Laxmikant Pyarelal and R.D Burman joined this elite group.

Although new heroes such as Rajendra Kumar, Dharmendra, Shammi Kapoor, Sunil Dutt, Joy Mukherji, Rajesh Khanna (fag end) emerged in the sixties and there were also changes in the content of movies that became more flamboyant in style, the music continued to be on a firm foundation of good poetry and melodious music.

The reign of the romantic hero and first Superstar of Hindi cinema, Rajesh Khanna continued till the early seventies during which period the music was still wholesome and melodious with beautiful lyrics. Subsequently, in the late seventies, the image of the hero changed to that of “Angry young man” in most films. The heroines who had meaty roles previously with scope for interesting song situations were reduced to singing a couple of duets. The quality of the lyrics also became crass and lacked the poetic qualities of the ‘golden era’. The music became loud replacing the soft melodies.

It is a fact that this dark trend continued for some time and it was only in the nineties that melody came back in a big way to Hindi cinema under the stewardship of a new crop of talented music directors such as Anu Malik, Jatin Lalit, Anand Milind, Nadeem Shravan and A. R. Rehman. Can we then call the nineties decade also as part of “the Golden Era”? This can be answered only if we appreciate the fact the single most factor that differentiated the ‘Golden era’ from the others was the quality of the lyrics. It was pure poetry then in most situations, be it romance, loneliness, excitement or sadness.

Appreciating the constraints on the length of our discussion, let us look at two romantic songs both super melodies, one from the 60s (Baharien phir bhi Ayengi 1966- Music OP Nayyar) and the other from the 90s (Kuch kuch hota Hai 1998 -Music: Jatin-Lalit).

The lyrics of the 1998 song written by Sameer and sung by Udit Narain and Alka Yagnik that starts with the line “*Tum paas aye, Yun muskaraye... Tum ne na jaane kya sapne dikhaye...*” is a very popular song with some lovely melodious music.

Now, let us examine the 1966 song written by Anjaan and sung by Mohammad Rafi. The song starts with the line “*Aap ki haseen rukh pe, aaj naya noor hai. Mera dil machal gaya toh mera kya kusoor hai?*” If one were to listen to the whole song, it would be clear that each line is sheer poetry and that the legendary Rafi has sung it with all the subtle nuances.

This then is what sets the ‘Golden era’ (Fifties, sixties to early seventies) apart from all other decades- Top class lyrics, music, and talented singers who went on to achieve cult status. It was a time when there was a bonding camaraderie and cohesiveness between lyricists, music directors, and singers who sat down together to co-create with everyone giving their best. The songs of the golden era have withstood the ravages of time and continue to be loved to this day!

### **About the Author**

Mr. Rajeev Moothedath is a former corporate executive who is also a writer and poet. He writes three blogs containing prose and poetry. His books include “straight from the heart – Thoughts and Experiences of an HR professional”, “Corporate Poems- Straight & Simple”, “Random Thoughts on Random words” and “20 verses and 20 Prose Notes on 20 Lofty Topics”. An interview featuring him has been included in the reputed publication "21st Century Critical Thought" - A dialogue with post-modern voices". Rajeev's poems have been published in a number of national and international anthologies.

