

# ASHA BHOSLE AT NINETY



Evergreen Asha Bhosle when she was younger

First Published in THE AIDEM (theaidem.com)

Asha Bhosle, the most charismatic female exponent of the Hindi film song (from the late 1940s to the early 1980s) when it became an independent art form, turned Ninety on 8th September, 2023. She has sung thousands of songs in good, bad and indifferent films, principally in Hindi, where her singing has been the leading attraction. This is indeed high compliment as she has always been compared to her elder sister Lata Mangeshkar, who, in her prime years between the late 1940s to, the early 1980s, was the most tuneful or 'Sureela' of all woman singers in Hindi films, or films from any other part of India. Asha, however won out because of her versatility and the ability to conjure up a wide range of feelings and experiences that belonged to this flesh and blood world.

Her singing at first was not so different from that of her elder sister, a style she adopted or was made to adopt by certain music directors in order to sound like her thin-voiced but extremely mellifluous elder sister Lata. Not until O.P. Nayyar (1926–2007) came along, was she able to find her musical self. He reportedly told Asha, "Tum apni awaaz main gao (sing in your own voice)". Nayyar saw to it that she did her riyaz (practise) every morning in her natural voice which was distinctly darker than her sister Lata's and intrinsically sensual. But before O.P. Nayyar came along she had sung two non-film songs that still linger in the memory: "Geet kitni gaa chuki hun is sukhi jag ke liye" and "Ambua ki dari bole...", both composed by the brilliant, mercurial table maestro Nikhil Ghosh.

Strangely enough in 1953, when Lata her elder sister was already famous, Asha was offered three solo songs by a gifted, young composer, Mohammad Zahoor Khan 'Khayyam' for Footpath, a film directed by Zia Sarhadi and Starring two powerful young performers, Dilip Kumar and Meena Kumari. It was said that Lata wanted to sing those three solos but young Khayyam stood

firm backed by his director. 'Piya aaja re', 'Kaise jadoo dala re' and 'So jaa mere pyare' sung by Asha Bhosle are still remembered along with Talat Mahmood's immortal "Sham-e-gham ki qasam".

Soon after the brilliant composer Madan Mohan, a Great Lata fan, got Asha to sing a ghazal written by Jalal Malihabadi, "Saba se ye keh do" for the film, Bank Manager. Asha's rendering had both empathy and romance. As a singer she had arrived. But the contracts for solo songs were not that many. Earlier in Sangdil, 1952, a Dilip Kumar–Madhubala starrer, a composer of genuine originality, Sajjad Hussain, had got Asha to sing a duet with Geeta Dutt, an unusual talent. "Dharti se dur gore badalon ke paar aaja". It was a haunting duet with Asha showing both vocal range and a timbre that could be called tactile. It was a voice destined to stay in the memory of the listener.

It took Asha a fairly long time to establish her identity as a truly fine soloist, despite earning respectable sums of money. Lata held sway over the film music world as a soloist, with her obviously formidable musicality and by sounding like a 'virgin'. A musical approach that seemed to fit the image of all the leading ladies who were there to shore up the moral quotient of Hindi films and were thus curtailed emotionally, leaving the male leads to indulge in their peccadillos!

It was Nayyar, whose career was in the ascendant who worked hard to project Asha as a solid, reliable soloist. In Shakti Samanta's Howrah Bridge (1957) he promoted her as the voice of Madhubala, the reigning Queen of Hindi films and its only comedian. In "Aaye meherban", Asha's sensual singing picturised on Madhubala in a Cabaret sequence, made her sparkle. Then was the snappy, melodious solo, "Ye kya ker dala tuney" that made the most recalcitrant of cynics respond to the romance in the words and the music. In the same year Nayyar repeated his success with Asha in Nazir Hussain's Tumsa Nahi Dekha. Her two duets with Mohammad Rafi were instant

hits, namely, "Aye hain dur se....", "Dekho kasam se kasam se". Around that time, Sachin Dev Burman, created a moving solo for Asha in Bimal Roy's Sujata, "Kali ghata chaye mora jiya ghabrae" mirroring the longings of an Untouchable orphan girl played by Nutan.

S.D. Burman had a falling out with Lata Mangeshkar, but ego forbade him to give in. Kala Bazar produced by Navketan and directed by Vijay Anand, had Asha singing "Sach hue sapne mere". No female singer had sung with such abandon in Hindi films before, perhaps because the Heroines, with the notable exception of Madhubala, and Geeta Bali, who died well before their time, the only two who got roles to also express the sunny side of their personalities.

S.D. Burman got Asha to sing four solos in Narendra Suri's, Lajwanti "Kuchh Din pehle...", "Chanda re chup rehna", "Gaa mere mun tu gaa" and "Koi aaya dhadkan kehti hai", are all sung with depth and feeling and picturised on Nargis, an exceptional actress. They continue to be played on the Radio and on YouTube, surprising those young listeners are who responsive to the beauty of Indian melodies that enunciate and augment the lyrics that are set to them.

Two other solos recorded almost a decade apart come to mind : "Main jab bhi akeli hoti hun" from Dharamputra (1962) composed with elegance and poise by N Dutta, and, "Mein shayad tumhare liye ajnabi hun", a haunting melody composed by O P Nayyar for Ye Raat Phir Na Ayegi.

Contemporary composers, to be sure, had been aware of Asha's potential and the expressive quality of her voice. However, they were not going to challenge the preference of film producers and financiers who were completely taken in by the virginal sweetness of Lata Mangeshkar's voice and her unassailable technique. Asha would have to prove herself in duets (and did she!) She sang with Kishore Kumar in the Dev Anand-Nutan starrer, Paying Guest. "O deewana Mastana" and

“Chod do aanchal zamana kya kahega” spring to mind after all these years with all their freshness and zing.

O.P. Nayyar had an unusual sense of melody, part Punjabi folk and part raga-based in its inspiration: this coupled with his pulsating rhythm section of tabla, dholak and occasionally, western drums, gave to many of his compositions a distinctive personality. Even when he copped melodies from the West, eg., “Hun abhi mein jawan” sung by Geeta Dutt from Aar Paar that got its mukhda or introduction from “Put the blame on me” from Gilda, a Rita Hayworth hit from Hollywood directed by Charles Vidor. The Antara clearly had Nayyar’s distinctive touch.

Asha Bhosle, and before her Geeta Dutt, had voices most suitable to his work. Much as he had admired Lata Mangeshkar’s artistry, he found her voice to be too thin for his kind of music. Asha’s voice was very flexible, had a dark, sensual colour and was responsive to lyrics to express many moods and experiences. Nayyar understood perceptively both Asha Bhosle the woman, as well as the singer who brought his compositions to life. Until they parted in amidst much acrimony, they had literally been a perfect pair of lovers for twelve years.

Asha Bhosle, a mother of three, had been unhappily married to a man of uncertain profession, Ganpatrao Bhosle, from 1949 to ’60. He died in 1966, supposedly in a taxi. O.P. Nayyar, had married Saroj Mohini when he was seventeen and she, fifteen. They had four children together. He shot to fame with “Preetam aan milo” that he composed as a teenager and was first recorded by C.H. Atma as a non-film song. On discovering Asha Bhosle, he found his muse, and the perfect female voice for his songs. Their problematic marital status as separate individuals did not prevent them from living together in a beautifully furnished flat on Worli sea-face in Bombay.

When they parted in 1972, they had recorded for the film Pran Jaye Per Vachan Na Jaye, “Chaen se humko kabhi aap ne jeene na diya”. It was a masterly composition rendered by Asha with

unfettered emotion, which, in effect, also summed up the cause of their parting. O.P. Nayyar could not find another female voice to replace her and his career faded away rapidly. He observed ruefully later, "I put all my eggs in one basket."

He regretted having side-lined a singular talent like Geeta Dutt. Asha went from success to success over the next three decades and married Rahul Dev Burman, the gifted composer son of S.D. Burman.

This digression was necessary while discussing the life of Asha Bhosle, an unusually gifted singer and a feisty woman who has navigated with unusual grit and skill through all the ups and downs in her turbulent life. For the record her depressive daughter Varsha committed suicide in 2012 and son Hemant, a composer, died of Cancer in 2015 in Scotland. Asha continues to fight on with every fibre of her being.

As late as 2001, when she sang, "Radha kaise na jaley" for A.R. Rehman in Amir Khan's, Lagaan, Asha had retained the spring, and melody in her voice, which by then had become ever so slightly girlish. She could render fast taans (there are a couple of instances in this song) with ease and accuracy. No mean achievement for a singer in her late sixties.

She is believed to have sung Ten thousand songs in eight hundred films. One can only talk of one's favourites and there are very many. There are the three from the Ashok Kumar starrer, Kalpana, (composer O.P. Nayyar), namely, "Phir bhi dil heye beqaraar", "O ji sawan mein bhi...", "Beqasi hudh se jab guzar jaye". Completely different from each other, revealing the amazing malleability of her voice, its unique melody and the sure grasp of evanescent emotion. There is the other haunting song, from Raagini, also composed by O.P. Nayyar, "Chota saa baalma" in Raga Tilang. There are a host of other Nayyar compositions as well.

"Jaaiye aap kahan jaayengi" (Film: Mera Sanam), "Meri nazrein

haseen" (Ek Musafir Ek Haseena); "'Aaj meiney jana mera dil heye diwani'" (Farishta), "Aaj koi pyaar se" (Sawan ki Ghata); "Yehi wo jaga heye" (Ye Raat Phir Na Ayegi); "Puchho na hamein hum unke liye", (Mitti Main Sona), "'Aao huzoor tumko sitaron mein le chalun'" (Kismat), and a song picturised on the 'bad girl' in a given film, "Ye heye reshmi zulfon ka andhera na ghabraeye ...." (Mere Sanam).

The duets that she sang for S.D. Burman with Kishore Kumar in Nau Do Gyaara, "Aankhon mein kya jee", her own solo, "Dhalki jae chunariya..." and the two duets with Mohammad Rafi, "aaja panchi akela heye" and "Kali ke roop mein chali ho dhoop main..." certainly are memorable as are the three from Ek Musafir Ek Haseena: "Main pyaar ka rahi hoon"; "aap yun hi agar humse milte rahe"; "Jawani yaar man turki", and two others from Kashmir ki Kali—"Isharon isharon mein" and "Deewana hua badal", both composed by O.P. Nayyar and yet another duet with the marvellous Mohhamad Rafi , "'Phir milogi kabhi..." from Ye Raat Phir Na Ayegi, and, much earlier a mesmerising duet from Phagun, "'Main soya akhiya meechey'".

Khayyam is the other composer who brought the best in Asha's multifarious musical personality. Two duets from Ramesh Sehgal's Phir Subah Hogi: "Who subah kabhi to aayegi", and "Yun na keeje meri gustakh nighahi ka gila", both with Mukesh, have attained immortality. Her solos in Muzzafar Ali's Umrao Jaan bring out her astonishing vocal range, the flexibility and soz (poignance) in her voice. Her songs for the tawaif (singing courtesan) Umrao in this period piece set in mid-19th century Lucknow, stay in the memory. "Dil cheez kya heye aap meri jaan lijiye"; "justu jiski thi", "Ye kya jagah heye doston" are amongst the finest songs composed in the annals of the Golden Age of Hindi film music. Asha's singing fitted Rekha's vulnerable screen-personality perfectly, just as her elder sister Lata's did on Meena Kumari playing Sahib Jaan in Kamal Amrohi's, Pakeeza.

If this article is a shade too subjective, well... it is. While

having enormous respect for Lata Mangeshkar's peerless tonal quality at her peak that lasted for thirty or so years, one could never understand her well-nigh 'abstract' handling of emotion in her songs, as if any hint of sensuality in them would disqualify her from being a great artiste. Asha Bhosle's singing was uninhibited, earthy, intrinsically musical and very much to be felt with one's entire being. That is why one remains enamoured of Asha Bhosle's singing.

Somehow, she continues to be in the limelight not just for her delectable music. At the recently concluded World Cup Final played at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, India was pitted against Australia in the 50-over Cricket tournament. India lost, after giving great hope to an enormous, completely partisan home crowd. Asha Bhosle, a die-hard cricket fan, like her late sister, Lata, was seated between BCCI President Jay Shah and Sharukh Khan, the superstar of Hindi cinema. An ND TV video, shows Sharukh take Ashaji's empty coffee cup, despite her reluctance, and hand it over to one of the cleaning staff. A viewer remarked, "It was the only heart-warming gesture in the whole match." Asha Bhosle's charisma cuts through generations and inspires them to acts of gallantry.

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For me, the program primarily effaced the Hindu Muslim divide as the singer so poetically inculcated the true feelings of divine invocation irrespective of class, caste distinction; a classic paradigm of the SUFIYANS who sing in praise of the lord. This ethereal composition he rendered " chaap tilak" was not only one of the sweetest sufi chants of the eve but also indoctrinated me and my folks(parents) with the message of "ISHWAR ALLAH TERO NAAM"- Am sure it might have made the recipients rethink the concept of caste and class differences often acting as a hindrance in matters of spiritual escalation.

Sangari's uniqueness lay in his profound explorations of the renditions he chose. Each musical composition preceded a explanation admirably detailed to entrench the specialty of the song chosen. This reflected the erudition of the artist; a mandate with regards to a performance that's meant to be an IBADAT – A PRAYER to the almighty.

The open air theater of Darpana – NATRANI became the most adequate purveyor of the tools that assist such a presentation resounding the features of FOLK CULTURE. It was heartwarming to see people once again.having gathered in an open space ( independent of covid fears fortunately) to listen.and get one glimpse of the talented artist. It replicated the village folk artistic tradition very well; of course the audiences were English speaking urban elite with.modern.western.attires – a stark reality of the urban.India today) I must admit that the organizers were pretty particular in their choices of apparels – Mallika Sarabhaiji in her traditional Indian dress and her accompanied trio too dressed similarly well; obviously one does expect the consciousness from.someone as distinguished as them.

I got the privilege the second time to be at Natrani. The first time I went was some 10

Years back when I saw,Rajit Kapoor performing Girish Karnad's

monologue Flowers at the open air auditorium. It was an indelible experience and this one I had yesterday night revitalized my spirits and invigorated my soul to acknowledge the superiority of sufiyana art that's no less than a means to elevate our material consciousness towards the possibility of experiencing BRAHMANANDA – spiritual delight which crosses the boundaries of transient earthly living and becomes an eternally pleasurable ethereal experience. A heavenly feeling that Natyashastra speaks about so rightfully when it endorses natya as a blissful process meant for redeeming the world from sins. As Sangri rendered CHAP TILAK sab cheen li re mose naira milake – the feelings of respectful admiration arose in my heart for an artist who chose a sublime melody of SUFIYANA sangeet which gives us a moment of realization " We love our lord too" not just worship him. Meerabai reverentially merged the feelings of adoration and invocation in her worship of Krishna. In the rendition I felt the same mood restored in me – self surrender to the lord I love and revere at the same time. Yes, it could be for someone close to us in fact anyone who we feel is inseparably in us – why only God? It was this intersection of divinity and earthly feeling of love that made the presentation so special, so heavenly.

I drank the elixir of sufiyana art sumptuously and though pressed for time wherein I couldn't listen to more than two melodious songs, I acknowledge my heart grew fonder.

Overall, I loved the performance and the night was indeed memorable with fine white lamps shining in the midst of the open air auditorium giving it the feel of a traditional Indian setting with oil lamps and lanterns adorning the environment making it look no less than a paradise. Natrani is a must visit and I would recommend it to one and all that desire to relish classic art.

Last but not the least, its discipline is praiseworthy and noteworthy. We reached a bit late, gates were shut. Nonetheless, I must recognize their waiving of the stringent

rule for us and letting us enter which was indeed an insignia of an organization that is both adequately strict and endearingly loving.

Thank you Natrani for an unforgettable event that is sure to remain perpetually etched in my memory as an experience beyond the fleeting worldly domains of earthly concerns.

Review by –

Dr. Payal Trivedi

[For comments if any post below the article on the website.]



# **Folk Music of India: Baul**

There is an inherent contrast in the composition of the Baul music, it describes and celebrates the celestial in a very earthly tone and manner. Due to this very liberal and open-ended interpretation of love, it is within the nature of the Baul music to be devotional in its spirit and soul.

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## **Ruchi Kishore's : DIRTY CHAI, a hip hop Bollywood musical**

Chai is a messy concoction of two very different cultures, two conflicting identities, and two opposing desires, just like the dirty chai she orders each morning- a perfect brew of espresso and chai (tea).

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## **Resonances of the Past – a review by Manohar Khushalani**

Ruth is best known for her pioneering work integrating sacred texts into contemporary voice/body theatre. Her pioneering approach to the transcendental aspect of voice is founded solidly in sacred cantorial Jewish traditions. In Mirror Sky in a backdrop of dimly lit scenes Ruth, swirling, moaning, producing guttural sound explains the origin of her techniques:

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# Folk Dances of India: Ghoomar

Rajasthan is well famous for its vibrant traditions, enthusiastic dance forms and elegant culture. Ghoomar is just another spectacle of this diversity and culture that started with the Bhil tribe to worship Goddess Sarasvati and is now embraced by other Rajasthani communities. Typically performed by women, Ghoomar gained popularity during the reign of Rajputanas, who ruled Jaipur after defeating the Bhils. It showcases the rich culture of Rajasthan through aesthetically pleasing movement and traditional attire. Tourism in Rajasthan has boosted due to the peculiarities of regions, their manner of dressing, traditions, and folk dances. Ghoomar was a tribal dance that graduated to a folk routine that has now assumed international proportions thanks to a vibrant culture and its recognition as a pride of India.

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# Folk Dances of India: Raas Leela

Raas Leela, commonly referred to as Krishna dance, is a folk dance form that predates ancient history and is part of the traditional stories of Krishna in which he dances with his lover, Radha. Raas means aesthetics, and Leela means to act or play, which translates to “play of aesthetics”.

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# Folk Theatre Forms of India: Tamasha

Tamasha is considered a major traditional dance form of the Marathi theatre, which includes celebration filled with dancing and singing and is performed mainly by nomadic theatre groups throughout the Maharashtra region. Marathi theatre marked its journey at the beginning of 1843.☐3☐ In the following years, Tamasha primarily consisted of singing and dancing, expanded its range.