

## **Tribute to Kishore Kumar**

As a child, I used to listen to a lot of Hindi film songs. As a middle aged man, I still do.

The difference however, is that when I was a child I had no idea which song was sung by Mukesh, which song by Rafi, by Kishore and so on unlike these days when I can listen to a Kishore song I have never heard before and roughly pinpoint the year when he may have sung it as well as the actor who may have appeared on screen. On 13th October 1987, I heard that Kishore Kumar had passed away. In the evening there was a tribute to him on TV which was when I discovered that 85% of my favourite songs were sung by him.

Like thousands of casual music lovers in our country, I used to be under the delusion that Kishore sang mostly funny songs, while Rafi sang romantic numbers, Mukesh, sad songs...and Manna Dey, classical songs. During the past twenty years, I have journeyed a lot, both in music as well as in life. And many of my childhood heroes have diminished in stature over the years. But a few.....a precious few....have grown..... steadily....and continue to grow, each time I am exposed to their brilliance. M.D.Ramanathan, Martina Navratilova, Bruce Lee, Swami Vivekananda, Kunchan Nambiar, to name a few.....and Kishore Kumar.

I have had the privilege of studying classical music for more than two and a half decades from some truly phenomenal Gurus and I go around giving lecture demonstrations about how important it is for a singer to know an instrument and vice versa. And all the while I hold a guilty secret within. Kishore Kumar, who never studied any instrument....or for that matter, singing....yet who sang more perfectly than most classical trained musicians ever did. I once read the following quote on women by someone...Oscar Wilde probably.... "Don't try to understand them. Just love them." With Kishore, I have spent twenty years trying to understand him. And a lifetime loving him. The more I familiarize myself with his singing, his voice, his poetry, his acting, his live performances, his humour, his dark side, the more I accept the fact that this man defies labels and definitions. Rather like God, he takes the form we give him.

He is as much the clown who yodelled his way into our hearts around half a century ago with songs like "Surma Mera Nirala" as he is the romantic who melted us with songs like "Jeevan Se Bhari Teri Ankhen Majboor Karein Jeene Ke Liye." On the one hand he is the philosopher who ponders "Zindagi Ka Safar Hai Yeh Kaisa Safar ? Koi Samjha Nahin, Koi Jaana Nahin." and on the other hand he is youth itself, with it's explosive energy, belting out disco numbers like "Om Shanti Om." He is the kind teacher cheering up children who are sad to see him go, with "Achche Bachche Nahin Rote Hain, Aanso Burey Hote Hain, Ke Baagon Me Phool Phir Khilenge, Kahin Hum Phir Milenge" as he is the broken hearted brother trying

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to win back his sister who has succumbed to drug addiction with a heart rending "Phoolon Ka Taaron Ka Sabka Kehna Hai. Ek Hazaaron Me Meri Behna Hai, Saari Umar Humen Sang Rehna Hai."

When we listen to Kishore Da singing a funny song, we feel "THIS is the kind of song that suits him best !" The title song from the film Jhumroo which he produced, directed, starred in, scored the music and wrote the lyrics of several songs for, for example. The virtuoso yodeling, the verve and the pep, the simple, direct melody that sets one's feet tapping instantly, the sheer Energy that hits one directly in the solar plexus, the explosion of joy that can pull one out of the deepest depression, the maniacal laughter.....Vintage Kishore indeed.

But then comes another Kishore, as though emerging from the mists. The Kishore who scored the music for songs like "Jin Raaton Ki Bhor Nahin Hai, Aaj Aisi Raat Aayi" in pure K.L.Saigal style and "Bequaraar e Dil Tu Gaaye Ja."

Could the same poet who wrote a sensitive and lyrical song like "Akela Hun Me Is Jahaan Mein, Akeli Meri Daastan, Na Manzil Koi, Na Saadhi Koi, Jaane Kya Yeh Neela Aasmaan.

Kya Khabar Kya Pata ? Ja Raha Hoon, Me Kahan ?" (As the title song for his own film Neela Aasmaan, which never got released.) have written the following ditty on Paan ?

### **PAAN MAHIMA**

Paan so padaarath sab jahaan ko sudhaarath  
Gaayan ko badhaawat jaam-e-choonaa chauksaaee hai  
Supaarin ke saath saath masaal milein bhaant bhaant  
Jaam-e-katthey kee ratteebhar thodee see lalaaee hai

Baithe hain sabhaa maanhi baat karein bhaant bhaant  
Thookan jaat baar baar jaane kaa badhaaee hai  
Kahein Kavi Kisordaas chaturan kee chaturaee saath  
Paan mein tamakhoo kisee Moorakh ne chalaee hai.

(Pandit Kisordaas Khandwa Vaasee.

Address : Bambai Bazaar Road,

Gaanjaa Godaam Ke Saamne,

Library Ke Nikat Waalaa Bijalee Ka KhambaaJispe Likhaa Hai "Dongre Kaa Baalaamrit.")

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Pandit Kisordaas, Kishorilal Katmandu, Kishoria, Guru, Kishore Da.....The man, born as Abhas Kumar Gangopadhyay (Abbreviated to Ganguly) in Khandwa on August 4th, 1929 was known almost by as many names as he had faces and voices. Yet the very essence of the man remains as deeply shrouded in mystery 20 years after his demise in 1987 as it did during his lifetime. Even the people closest to him like Kumar Sachin Dev Burman, Rahul Dev Burman, the Mangeshkar Sisters, Danny Denzongpa and others could never claim to have really "Known" the man the way many of us can claim to know our closest friends.

Many people who enter a field (Especially) like music without the guiding force and balancing presence of a Guru develop distinctly eccentric personalities. Some have others believe that they must be something special because of their eccentricities, idiosyncrasies, unchecked megalomania and so on. But it is only a blessed handful with whom their genius exceeds their eccentricities by far. Kishore Kumar was one of those chosen few. Though he never literally sat at the feet of a Master and studied music, he considered the great Kundan Lal Saigal his Guru. And modeled himself on Saigal's way of singing, to start with. As a child, Kishore would entertain friends of his parents, Kunjolal and Gouri (After whom he named his house Gouri Kunj), by singing songs. But they had to pay him 25 paise to get him to sing a song by his celebrity brother Ashok Kumar, 50 paise to sing a song by Manna Dey and a full Rupee to sing a Saigal song. But this man who blatantly loved money all his life, refused to record a single Saigal song himself despite the huge amounts of money he was offered during his reign as a superstar during the 1970s and 80s because he believed the originals had to be preserved in Saigal's voice and that it would be a sin to rerecord them.

Apart from Saigal, he had the greatest respect and reverence for Khemchand Prakash (Who scored the music for the lovely song "Jagmag Jagmag Karta Nikla Chaand Poonam Ka Pyaara"), and S.D.Burman. Three of his other heroes were singer/dancer/actor/comedian/entertainer Danny Kaye, (He sang a copy of Danny Kaye's "O By Jingo" in the Bengali comedy Lukochuri as "Shing Nei Tobu Naam Taar Shingo" which remains a mega super hit among Bengali speakers of all ages even now, more than four decades after it's release.) Marlon Brando and Topol. (Once when Kishore Da was in London, he came to know that there was a stage production of Fiddler On The Roof playing in town, with Topol himself as the lead. He was thrilled. He sat through four shows, met Topol like a star struck teenager and gifted him some of his records and cassettes. Lucky Topol. What else can we say ?) His inspiration in yodeling were singers Tex Norton and Jimmy Rogers. The influence of these various artists is palpable in his earlier recordings.

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Being the youngest brother of Ashok Kumar, who was a super star even before Saigal came on the scene, young Kishore was offered more jobs as an actor than as a singer. But his heart was set on singing. He would tell Ashok Kumar “Acting is not real. Music comes from the heart. Only that which emanates from the heart can reach the hearts of others.” But he ended up acting in 102 films, 98 of them in Hindi and 4 in Bengali which was his mother tongue. Much of the Kishore repertoire that is popular today is the work he did in Hindi from Rajesh Khanna’s super hit film Aradhana onwards. The songs from a few Dev Anand films and a few comedies starring Kishore Kumar himself like Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi and Padosan have become and remained hugely popular over the years. But many treasures that he sang during the 1950s and early 60s remain undiscovered and/or forgotten by the general public.

The sterling work he did in the Bengali language in particular, also remains largely undiscovered by the majority of non Bengali Kishore fans. In fact the Bengali versions of many of his Hindi film hits are even more melodious than the Hindi originals. (“Ae Ki Holo ?” for instance, which is the Bengali version of the song from Amar Prem “Yeh Kya Hua ? Kaise Hua ? Kab Hua ?”) Speaking of Bengali, though Kishore Kumar’s relationship with the Burmans is well known, his relationship with Hemant Kumar Mukherjee is less talked about. Hemant Kumar was in fact one musician who understood and explored the various facets of Kishore’s genius like few other artists did. The same Hemant Kumar who made Kishore sing exquisitely melodious songs like “Woh Shaam Kuch Ajeeb Dhi” and the duet “Aaj Mujhe Kuch Kehna Hai” on the one hand also got him to sing utterly mad songs like “Gaana Na Aaya, Bajaana Na Aaya” and “Vaidy Ke Palle Pade”(Lamenting about quack doctors bumping off their patients, set partially to the tune of “Aum Jai Jagadish Harey”) on the other. Kishore Kumar in turn, made Hemant Kumar sing the title songs for two of his own most celebrated and poignant movies, “Door Gagan Ki Chaaon Mein” and “Door Ka Rahi.” Hemant Kumar also gently guided Kishore by the hand in recording two discs of Tagore songs, which bring out an altogether different side of the maestro’s personality. Many so called intellectuals who write Kishore off as a clown are not aware that people like Bimal Roy and Satyajit Ray had the greatest respect for him. Apart from the many songs he sang for Bimal Roy’s pictures, he sang the Tagore song “Ami Chinigochini Tomarey Ogo Bideshini” for Satyajit Ray’s “Charulata.”

Since he had the greatest respect for Ray, he recorded the song totally free of cost, though he insisted that the recording be done in Bombay as opposed to Calcutta. Ray obliged.

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Kishore Kumar truly epitomized Hindi film music during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the way few others did. From his first solo “Marne Ki Duaayen Kyon Maangoon ?” which he sang for Dev Anand, (Where he had to sing one version for the movie itself and one more inside the studio for the 78 RPM record) till his swan song in 1987, there was little he hadn’t done. He sang together with more than 90 male voices including Rafi, Mukesh, Hemant Kumar, Manna Dey, Mahendra Kapoor, Talat Mehmood, Yesudas, S.P.Balasubramaniam, Hariharan and others to Amitabh Bachchan, Johnny Walker, Danny Denzongpa, Dev Anand and others. He sang duets with more than 80 female voices though the market gets incessantly flooded with mostly Kishore/Lata and Kishore/Asha CDs ad nauseam. He also had the unique distinction of having people like Rafi, Mahendra Kapoor and Asha Bhosle sing playback for him, not to mention, singing a duet with himself as both the male and female voices in the hilarious film Half Ticket. (“Aake Seedhi Lagi.”) He sang under the direction of more than 130 music directors and lyrics by more than 165 poets.

Tales about his various eccentricities abound. How he married four of the most glamorous women in the film industry despite having sung “Kuvon Me Kood Ke Mar Jaana ! Yaar Tum Shaadi Mat Karna !”, how he had names for all the trees in his garden (Janardhan, Raghunandan, Gangaram, Jhatpatjhatpat and so on) and would converse with them at length, how he hoarded thousands of video cassettes from all over the world, (With a distinct penchant for horror films), how he would refuse to record a song correctly till he was paid his due in full, how he used to set his dogs on income tax officers and was imprisoned, how his voice was banned from All India Radio because he offended the powers that be at the time by refusing to sing free of cost for one of their shows, how Hrishikesh Mukherjee was denied admission in his house (Because of a sad misunderstanding. Kishore was expecting another man altogether and had asked his Man Friday not to let “That Bengali” in.) because of which the title role of the film Anand.....which was scripted specifically for Kishore Kumar...went to Rajesh Khanna, how he spent hours and hours locked up in his room practicing music and counting money.....there is no end really.

There is so much that one is forced to leave unsaid because of the restriction of the space available. Kishore’s ironic and Saigal like laugh in songs like “Yeh Laal Rang,” how Kishore would Live each word of the songs he sang rather than consciously give the appropriate inflections with the voice (One subtle example being in the last line of the song “Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas” where there is the slightest hesitation when he croons “Dar Dar Ke Kehta Hoon”), how he sat up all night with his brother Ashok Kumar when the latter’s wife passed away and sang “Yeh Jeevan Hai” again and again.....and again....and again at the behest of Ashok Kumar who wept till he had no more tears left, how his version of so many songs

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became more popular when the same song had been sung by others in the same film, how he took on a morbid song like "Tomar Barir Shamne Diye Amar Maron Jatra Jedin Hobe" ("The day my funeral procession passes by your house") despite having suffered a massive heart attack and despite the song being turned down by Manna Dey and how he took it to great heights, how he effortlessly handled classical Raagas like Bhairavi, Pahadi, Lathangi, Bhopali, Chayanat, Shivranjini, Mishr Khamaj, Mishr Piloo and others, how he would change his voice to suit actors ranging from Amitabh Bachchan to Rajesh Khanna to Dev Anand to Deven Verma, how he could sing the same song with explosive joy and with devastating sadness ("Yeh Dosti" and "Jeevan Ke Safar Me Rahi" for example.), how Sunil Dutt coaxed him to give his very first public concert (When Kishore was so scared that he made Dutt stand in front facing the audience while he stood behind and sang with his eyes closed... like they did in the film Padosan, though for different reasons .....till Dutt quietly moved away and the audience burst out into thunderous applause.... ....an event which gave birth to one of the most entertaining live performers the world has ever seen)....Perhaps one should write a book on him rather than an article like this.

Many books have in fact, been written on him. Notable among them are the biography by Kishore Valicha and the book of articles on him and information about his work, painstakingly compiled by three wonderful gentlemen, Shri Vishwas Nerurkar, Shri Bishwanath Chatterjee and The Late Shri Vinod Sonthalia where they have listed the details about 2905 of Kishore Kumar's songs. (2648 in Hindi, 1 each in Assamese, Bhojpuri, English, Kannada, Punjabi and Malayalam....the Malayalam one being A B C D, Chettan Kedi.....154 in Bengali, 8 in Gujarati, 3 each in Oriya and Marathi, 67 non filmy Bengali songs and 13 non filmy Hindi songs.) The internet has become a treasure house of information on Kishore Kumar as well as audio and video recordings of his. Two major sites are <http://www.yoodleeyoo.com/> which has articles, lyrics of songs, photos and so on and <http://songs.kishorekumar.org/> which contains audio and video recordings of his from various periods of his rich and eventful life. Youtube.com has several videos not only of his film songs but some rare footage from his live performances too. Orkut.com, an internet site mainly for youngsters, hosts several communities for Kishore Kumar fans, admirers and devotees. In fact twenty years after his departure, one feels his presence more than his absence in many ways. Yet one misses him...and wonders how a man...and a voice...with so much life within could ever be stilled. The line from the song "Dil Aaj Shaair Hai Gham Aaj Nagma Hai" seems to be prophetic when he sings "Jab Hum Na Hote To Ro Ro Ke Duniya Dhoondegi Meri Nishaan."

Rama Varma, October 13th, 2007.

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Here are some songs from <http://songs.kishorekumar.org/> that you may enjoy looking up and listening to. DO listen to them to get an idea about his range and brilliance. These obviously aren't a selection of his Best songs but songs picked out to give you glimpses of the man's genius and variety. (You can't download them from this site but if your computer has a Realplayer, you can play them if you just click on each track).

### **Funny**

- 1) A B Hakka
- 2) Chana Zor Garam
- 3) Dil Hogaya Senti
- 4) Mein Paagal Hoon
- 5) Jaadu Daal Gayo Re
- 6) Kooven Me Kud Ke
- 7) Surma Mera Nirala
- 8) Gaana Na Aaya
- 9) Shing Nei Tobu (Bengali.)
- 10) Is Duniya Me Pyaare

### **Sad**

- 1) Aaj Rona Pada To Samjhey
- 2) Akela Hoon Main
- 3) Jagmag Jagmag
- 4) Aye Khuda Har Faisla
- 5) Sapnon Ke Sheher
- 6) Panthi Hoon Mein
- 7) Ki Ashay (Bengali)
- 8) Amar Deep Nebhano Raat (Bengali)
- 9) Chalti Ka Naam Zindagi (Sad)
- 10) Chalte Chalte (Sad)