

## The Music of Ghulam Haider

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I was once intently watching an old Tamil film, *Parashakti*, made around 1953, which was famous for its powerful dialogues by M. Karunanidhi, the DMK leader of Tamil Nadu. The film's music by B. Sudarsanam, in general, was hybrid one, a rehash of the melodies of popular Hindi film songs of the corresponding period: 'Maine dekhi jag ki rit' by Mukesh and Shamshad in *Sunehre Din* (1949); 'Sanwaria tohe koi pukare' by Noorjehan in *Dopatta* (1951), and 'Milte hi ankhen dil hua' by Talat Mahmood and Shamshad in *Babul* (1950). The song in *Parashakti* that really caught my attention was a very lively and arresting number, which also seemed to be a familiar one. Trying hard to remember the original Hindi version, I finally traced it to an Urdu film produced by Caravan Pictures.

आए खुशी के ज़माने आए सपने सुहाने  
गाए दिले ये तराने पियाजी,  
इस घर में आज—मेरा—अपना भी—रात  
कोई माने के ना माने कोई जी...

The song was from the film *Akeli*, made in Lahore in 1952. Written by Qateel Shifai, this jaunty number set in *drut laya* was very effectively composed by Master Ghulam Haider and rendered with gusto in the mellow voice of Munawar Sultana. The trumpet parts of the song not only enhanced the melodic effect but also gave it an orchestral dimension. However, equally pleasing was the Tamil number, though slightly faster in tempo, but with complete orchestral back-up. Very intriguing was the manner in which Lahore could inspire Madras with such a vivacious number. Absorbed in contemplation of this novel style of composition, my thoughts were full of admiration for Ghulam Haider, who passed away in October 1954 in Pakistan.

If an attempt were made to study the music of Ghulam Haider in depth and detail, one would learn to appreciate the aesthetics of music in films and other media, understand the origins and development of his particular



Khazanchi, 1941: a song booklet. Courtesy: Narayan Mulani

style—and, above all, learn to distinguish between genius and talent. Genius creates, while talent repeats. Creative minds produce unique works of art, which are so appealing that the urge to imitate them occurs. When this process goes on for a fairly long time, a school reflecting the original style becomes accepted. Something like this happened in the case of Ghulam Haider. His compositions, in a career spanning about 25 films (including Pubjabi films), were marked by a style indubitably his own. And all through the years, his work was a perennial source of inspiration to his disciples and contemporaries.

I can recall a very early number, a non-film song, that Ghulam Haider composed during the latter part of the 1930s (1937–38). The song, '*Ravi ke us par sajanwa*', expressing the anxiety and patience of a lover, was rendered with great feeling by Ghulam Haider's wife Umrazia Begum:

रवी के उस पार सजनवा,  
रवी के उसपार  
प्रेम का दरिया, प्रेम की नैया,  
प्रेमी से कहूँ तू प्रेम खेवैया,  
आना करके पार सजनवा,  
रवी के उसपार.

बूढ़े जागे, बालक जागे, मेरे  
भाग ना अब तक जागे,  
जाग उठा सब संसार सजनवा,  
रवी के उस पार...

It was a very popular number that used to be broadcast from Radio Lahore in those years. The veteran music director, Keshavrao Bhole, has also acknowledged and extolled this song by Ghulam Haider in his autobiography, as well as in an article in *Screen* years ago. A decade or so later, the tune was reborn in Naushad Ali's song '*Dharti ko akash pukare*', sung by Mukesh and Shamshad in the film *Mela* (1948). The lyric was by Shakeel Badayuni:

धरती को आकाश पुकारे,  
आजा आजा प्रेम तू आ रे,  
आना ही होगा.  
इस दुनिया को छोड़के प्यारे,  
झूठे बंधन, तोड़के सारे,  
आना ही होगा...

If one were to compare the two songs, '*Ravi ke uspar sajanwa*' would score for its sheer originality. The two clarinet pieces, in particular, played in the lower octave, give the song an enchanting aura. Of course, Naushad's presentation too is praiseworthy, though the lyrical concept is the same. The haunting effect of the lover's call is brilliantly created in Shamshad's echoing voice, coupled with heavy orchestration.

Ghulam Haider hailed from a professional community of Muslim musicians called Mirasis who had a comprehensive repertoire of traditional songs sung at various festivities. They also had a good base in the ragas, so that many of them excelled in classical music. Their main occupation was music, and since they married within their own caste, a community with an evolved sense of music grew up in time. Some of the Mirasis specialized in singing Quawwalis. Others, playing the Rabab, used to accompany the Sikh singers known as Ragis who sang devotional Shabads in the Gurudwaras. Shabad Kirtan too was based on ragas prescribed in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The Ragi as well as the Rababi used to be addressed as 'Bhai' or spiritual brother. Many of the Rababis gained proficiency in singing Shabads as well and endeared themselves to Sikh congregations with their excellent performances. From the start of the 20th century, some of these Rababis drew away from their traditional occupation of devotional music and began performing in public concerts for the sake of a larger income.

The producer Dalsukh Pancholi, who was then launching a Punjabi film, spotted the musical potential of young Ghulam Haider in one such concert and signed him on to sing for *Yamla Jat* (1938). The film was an instant musical success, followed by further hits: *Sehti Murad* and *Chowdhary*. The famous signing star Noorjehan, who had made her debut in the latter film, rose to fame together with Ghulam Haider. To boost his image in films, Pancholi was seriously contemplating a Hindi venture. In Hindi films, those were the days when New Theatres of Calcutta, Prabhat of Poona, and Bombay Talkies reigned supreme in terms of production quality, music, and stars.

While discussing Ghulam Haider's contribution to film music in Punjab, one must mention the brilliant young composer, Shyam Sunder, who has given us some of the most unforgettable melodies of all times in *Lahore* (1949), *Bazar* (1949), *Char Din* (1948), *Dholak* (1950), and *Alif Laila* (1952). Shyam Sunder started out as a violinist, giving private tuitions until he managed to join Ghulam Haider's troupe as a musician. He later took to composing music and in Lahore itself made a name for himself with his scintillating music in the Punjabi film *Sohni Mahiwal* (1939), whose songs were a rage. A film with a similar theme, *Sohni Kumaran* (1939), produced in Calcutta in the same period, flopped miserably. Lahore was now vibrant

with music—with new Ghazals, Geets and Nats gaining wide acclaim, and new singers and composers emerging on the scene.

Dalsukh Pancholi had immense faith in the potential of Ghulam Haider. In fact, Ghulam Haider was his trump card. At the same time, pursuing his Hindi venture, Pancholi felt he was risking his reputation for good music with Ghulam Haider pitted against stiff adversaries—at New Theatres in particular. He even sent Ghulam Haider on a short tour of Calcutta to survey and study the Calcutta style of film music. On return, when Ghulam Haider reported his inability to compose in the New Theatres style, Pancholi, disappointed but with infallible faith in his composer, gave him the green signal to proceed according to his lights.

*Khazanchi* (1941) was released in 1941 with an ordinary script and cast. The music of Ghulam Haider was unprecedented—it created history in film music from Lahore. The songs became a craze everywhere. A new voice, Shamshad Begum, was presented to the music world. 'Sawan ke nazare hain', a duet by Shamshad and Ghulam Haider, 'Diwali phir a gayi sajni', 'Laut gayi papan adhiari', 'Man dhire dhire rona' were all riotous hits. Ghulam Haider became the first composer to use the Dholak in his captivating numbers. The soft *bols* on this drum provide cross-rhythmic accompaniment to his wonderful tunes.

A salient feature of the composition style of Ghulam Haider was his manner of splitting a word or a group of words in a line of lyric; alternatively, the syllables in a word would be split, stressed, or elongated with consummate artistry. The rich folk music of Punjab with all its enchanting turns and trills producing a peculiar swell and squeeze were cleverly blended in his tunes. He used the devices of folk songs because folk songs endure for their sheer melody and appeal to the heart.

Two classic illustrations can be cited in this context from the Shanta Apte solo 'Chhota sa sansar hamara' in *Zamindar* and the Shamshad Begum solo 'A gaya mere bagh ka mali' in *Khandan*, both produced in 1942. The elongated syllable 'khe' in the word 'kheton ki' and 're' in 'bhanwre' adorn the respective numbers. In addition, the quavers implanted by Shanta Apte in the 'hai' of 'bahti hai' are judiciously employed; and the beautiful orchestral parts in a rapidly oscillating pattern between the *antaras* are breathtakingly melodious. The lyrics in *Zamindar* and *Khandan* were by Qamar Jalalabadi and Walli Saheb respectively (see facing page).

His melancholy numbers were also superb. The *Bairam Khan* (1946) and *Patjhad* (1948) numbers, sung by Shamshad Begum and Munawar Sultana respectively, are two fine examples of this repertoire. The lyrics are by Walli Saheb and D.N. Madhok (see facing page).

छोटा सा संसार हमारा, छोटा सा संसार।  
 सुंदर नगरी सादा गांव  
 ठंडी ठंडी नीम की छांव,  
 बैल सांवरे सुंदर छकड़ा  
 खट खट खट खट चलता  
 सादा सादा प्यार प्यार, छोटा सा...  
 देखो खेतों की हरियाली,  
 पते नाचे झूमे डाली डाली,  
 रहट चले और चक्कर खाये,  
 छल छल पानी आए, बहती है,  
 है; अमृत की धारा; छोटा सा...

*Zamindar*

अशकों पे हुआ खत्म मेरे राम का फसाना  
 रोते हुए अंजाम पे हंसता है ज़माना  
*Bairam Khan*

आ हा हा, मेरे बाग का माली आ गया  
 झूम रही है डाली डाली...  
 आया है मेरे बाग का माली...

देखो, कलियों ने मुंह खोले,  
 भंवरे, गूज गूजकर बोले,  
 छाई है हरसू हरियाली,  
 आया है मेरे बाग का माली...

*Khandan*

दिल लूटनेवाले, याद ना करना,  
 याद ना करना, भूल दिया, सारी  
 दुनिया को भुला दी हमने मगर,  
 तेरी याद को दिल से भूला न सके,  
 सारी दुनिया...

*Patjhad*

In films, conventionally, it is lyrical poetry which is set to music. A 'lyric', however, without *sthayi* and *antara* poses an artistic challenge to any music director. The task requires a perceptive mind and imagination, together with tremendous composing skill. Ghulam Haider demonstrates his ability in this genre in the Shamshad Begum solo from *Khazanchi* (1941): '*Ek kali nazon ki pali*', written by Walli Saheb. On scrutiny, the lyric is found devoid of any *sthayi* or *antara*. Musically speaking, it is plain prose. Here Ghulam Haider employed a wonderfully imaginative set of musical variations in accordance with the sense of the song.

एक कली नाजों की पत्नी, रहती थी सदा गुलज़ारों में,  
 चर्चा था उसके यौवन का, नीले आकाश के तारों में।  
 एक दिन हंस-हंस खेल रही थी, रंग बिरंगे फूलों में,  
 झूल रही झूला डाले, पुष्प लता के फूलों में।  
 इतने में एक भंवरे ने, उस कली से नयन मिलाये,  
 नयनों की भाषा में जाने, क्या-क्या भेद बताये।  
 कली जो हंसकर फूल बनी, तब भंवरा आ गया पास,  
 क्षण भर में फिर छीन लिया रूप रंग और बास॥



The ascents and descents in the variations are projected according to textual meaning, and with excellent orchestration. Such a pleasing composition in this genre is rare in Hindi film songs. I remember a non-film number, though, that preceded Ghulam Haider's effort, sung by Sandhya Rani: '*Ek bans ki patli si nali, jangal men phooli jangal mein pali*'. The song was composed by R.C. Borah and in the New Theatres film *Vidyapati* (1937) it was sung by Pahadi Sanyal. Similar compositions by G. Ramanathan were also very common in Tamil films of the 1940s.

I vividly remember a photograph published in *Screen* after Ghulam Haider's death in 1954. The picture shows a group of music directors—Anil Biswas, K. Datta, Mohammad Rafi, Roshan, C. Ramchandra, Madan Mohan, and S.D. Burman—standing in a group behind Lata Mangeshkar, who is garlanding a portrait of Ghulam Haider during a condolence meeting in Bombay soon after his death in Pakistan. Rich tributes were paid by Naushad Ali, but what K. Datta said on the occasion brings home Ghulam Haider's influence on his peers: "There is not a single music director who has not, some time or the other, borrowed [from]... Ghulam Haider". Several instances of such 'borrowings' come to mind:

a. Let us begin with Shyam Sunder, the favourite disciple of Ghulam Haider. In his very first assignment, Prabhat's *Nai Kahani* (1942), the young composer gave an exemplary display of his guru's style in the song '*Aja a-a-a aja*' sung by G.M. Durrani. The concept of this superb melody was drawn from the *Khandan* (1942) duet sung by Noorjehan and Ghulam Haider: '*Ud ja panchhi*'. The most significant aspect of this song are the ornamental graces or *gamaks* employed in the elongated '*panchhi*', which serve both to strengthen and embellish the melody, and give it a peculiar charm in the mellifluous voice of Noorjehan. This was clearly a device learnt from Ghulam Haider. In the G.M. Durrani solo from *Nai Kahani*, Shyam Sunder also gave similar evidence of devices learnt from his master.

b. Other contemporary music directors like Khemchand Prakash, Jnan Dutt, Feroze Nizami, and C. Ramchandra were bitten by the Ghulam Haider bug—particularly the lilting *Khandan* (1942) duet by Noorjehan and himself. Khemchand Prakash incorporated the melodic idea in the chorus led by Khurshid in *Babar* (1944): '*Bulbul a tu bhi ga, pyar ke gane main gaun tu bhi ga*'. Jnan Dutt did the same with Akhtaribai Faizabadi's solo in *Pannadai* (1945): '*Main raja ko apne bithake rahungi, jawani ke jalwe dikhake rahungi*'; Feroze Nizami tried out the idea in the Noorjehan solo from *Jugnu* (1947): '*Umangen dil ki machli muskurai zindagi*'; and C. Ramchandra in the G.M. Durrani/Amirbai duet from *Samrat Chandragupta* (1945): '*Badla hai zamana, mera badla hai zamana*'.

c. The *Humayun* (1946) chorus of Shamshad Begum composed by Ghulam Haider provided yet another model for contemporaries: '*Husn kaisa ja raha hai badshahi kuchh nahi*'. The slow variations in the poignant chorus accentuates the entire melody. In his last film *Alif Laila* (1952), Shyam Sunder has cleverly expounded the 'stillness of the stars' using the same slow chorus in the fascinating duet of Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammad Rafi: '*Khamosh kyun, kyun ho taron*'.

d. V. Balsara, the well known pianist and a former assistant to Ghulam Haider, also deserves special mention for conceiving an improvisation with a 'modern orchestra', as it was then considered (1944/45) to go with a song by Rajkumari based on the *Humayun* chorus.

Ghulam Haider was gifted with profound percipience and intuition in spotting a new lyricist or singer. Noorjehan and Shamshad Begum were his discoveries. In 1970 or 1971, I had the opportunity to attend a unique programme, the first ever public performance by Shamshad Begum, presented at Shanmukhananda Hall, Bombay, in the presence of luminaries like Nargis, Naushad Ali, etc. Shamshad Begum began by paying her tributes to her mentor, Ghulam Haider, and surprised the avid audience with a moving number from *Humayun* sung in his memory: '*Naina bhar aye neer, mere hathile raja aja aja*'. Incidentally, that was the first time I heard this touching number. Noorjehan was Ghulam Haider's second discovery, first presented to Hindi filmgoers in *Khandan* (1942), a film which had some superb melodies: '*Ankh micholi khelenge*', '*Tu kaunsi badli mein mere chand hai aja*', '*Udja panchhi*', etc. However, Ghulam Haider's most sensational find in 1948 was a girl called Lata Mangeshkar. Though by then Lata had already made her singing debut as a juvenile in Master Vinayak's *Badi Ma* (1945), followed by *Subhadra* (1946) and *Ap ki Sewa Mein* (1947), one must remember that none of the composers concerned—K. Datta, Vasant Desai, Datta Davjekar—with all their proficiency, had been able to create an impact with her voice. It was left to Ghulam Haider to successfully mould Lata's then childish, immature voice to produce some light, breezy numbers in *Majboor* (1948): '*Dil mera toda*', '*Daman hai*', '*Angrezi chhora chala gaya*', etc. But it was in her second assignment with Ghulam Haider, for the film *Padmini* (1948), that Lata Mangeshkar gave a mature, moving rendering of a song: '*Bedard tere dard ko seene se lagake*'. This song clearly reflects the initial grooming from Ghulam Haider. The rich voice of Surinder Kaur was again introduced by Ghulam Haider in *Shaheed* (1948) and *Kaneez* (1949). The lilting songs from these films once more proved Ghulam Haider's class and calibre: '*Badnam na ho jaye muhabbat ka sahara*', '*Hum kahan aur tum kahan*', '*Ana hai to a jao*', '*Ummeedon par*



*udasi chha gayi*, etc. There were also those well established and talented singers of Lahore—Zeenat Begum, Munawar Sultana, Naseem Akhtar, Dilshad Begum, Umrazia Begum, etc.—in whose voice Ghulam Haider and some of his followers have given us some memorable melodies to cherish.

Ghulam Haider was the most popular and highly paid composer in Hindi films during the 1940s—the golden period of Hindi film music. He truly had a Midas touch—anything he composed was a success. *Khazanchi* (1941), *Khandan* (1942), *Zamindar* (1942), *Poonji* (1943), *Chal Chal re Naujawan* (1944), *Humayun* (1945), *Shama* (1946), *Shaheed* (1948) and *Majboor* (1948) were all smash hits.

The 1940s were a turbulent period in the history of modern India, when the country struggled for freedom. The spirit of this era was reflected in the compositions of Gulam Haider, for instance in the chorus led by Zeenat Begum in the film *Bhai*. The lyric was by Shatir Ghaznavi:

जागो, भारत के रहनेवालो,  
जागो हुआ सवेरा,  
सूरज ने आंख खोली,  
और हट गया अंधेरा, जागो...  
दुश्मनों को ठोकर से तुम उड़ा दो,  
मदती के है खिलौने, मदती में मिला दो,  
दुनिया को यह बता दो, ललकार सुना दो,  
हम पीस देंगे जिसने हिंदूस्तान को घेरा,  
जागो...

This stirring song infuses a spirit of awakening in the listener. A similar chorus led by Khan Mastana and Mohammad Rafi in *Shaheed* (1948) also showed Ghulam Haider's ability in composing patriotic songs: '*Vatan ki rah mein vatan ke naujawan shahid ho*'. It also proved to be extremely popular.

Ghulam Haider's musical concepts and ideas were imbibed by some of his leading associates in perfect *guru-shishya* fashion. Shyam Sunder, Pandit Amarnath, Gobindram, Lachiram, Ustad Fateh Ali Khan, Lal Mohammed, and Amir Ali all gained recognition as composers of merit.

Ghulam Haider is no more, but his contribution to film music lives on. But for him and some of his successors, Hindi film music would have been rather poor and lacklustre. Who can think of film songs without the familiar voices of Noorjehan, Shamshad Begum, or Lata Mangeshkar? Except for New Theatres and Ranjit Movietone, all the other major film companies discarded their code of music in favour of the 'new wave' music from



Discs from Khazanchi (above) and Dassi (below), with music by Ghulam Haider and Pandit Amar Nath. Courtesy: Society of Indian Record Collectors.



Lahore. In that era, talented instrumentalists from the 'school' of Ghulam Haider began gaining reputation as music directors on the basis of their association with Ghulam Haider. Musicians Like Shaukat Dehlavi (or Naushad), who was a Sarangi player, Jamal Sen, a Dholak player, Ram Prasad, a fine trumpet player, and others all acknowledged their debt to Ghulam Haider. His memory shall always be in the hearts of his many admirers, and music lovers all over the subcontinent. Thirty-seven years after his death, could there be a tribute more appropriate than this:

हां, याद तुम्हारी याद रही,  
और सारी दुनिया भूल गये...