

# THE GHAZAL IN INDIAN FILMS

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By now almost everybody knows what a *Ghazal* is — so let us not begin with the definition and origin — of *Ghazal* — the usual prologue of an article of this kind. Let us stick to the *Ghazal* and its contribution to film literature and film music.

It is difficult to pinpoint as to how and when the *Ghazal* first found its place in film music. Historically speaking the *Ghazal* was a recognised form of applied and popular music — used on the Parsi theatrical stage and the journey from the stage to film should provide a fascinating study. *Ghazals* were not only used as songs but even the dialogue was studded with rhymed couplets of the *Ghazal*. At the advent of talkies — such couplets were transplanted almost verbatim from the stage to the Hindi film — particularly when the story depicted a Muslim theme. An example will at once illustrate the point, heard both on the stage, as well as on the screen :

*“Ai chhuri, Meri acchi chhuri—De De gar tu sath hai  
Main Bhi Aurat Zat hu—Aur Tu Bhi Aurat Zat Hai”*

used on the stage by Agah Hashr Kashmiri, and by Abdul Rehman Kabli on the screen — when the heroine wanted to commit suicide.

In the early talkies, the heroes and heroines were selected for their ability to sing. Other factors like acting talent etc. played a subordinate role in their selection. Master Nissar was one such example, Bibbo was another.

The names of the poets and their *Ghazals* used in films are not within the scope of this article. So the examples will be only representative and not exhaustive.

As the film industry matured, all the components started finding as it were, their own personalities. Film music started to come into its own, breaking away from stage music. This was the period of New Theatres, Bombay Talkies, Sagar Movitones, Ranjit and many other Contemporary

but lesser known companies. But the use of the *Ghazal* continued — mostly using old masters. e.g. In Ranjeet Films, Waheedan Bai sang this *ghazal* by Ghalib:

*Unke aane se jo aajati hai muhn pe raunaq  
Voh samajhte hain ke beemar ka haal achcha hai.*

The first spark of revolt came from the late Zia Sarhady in the mid thirties :

*Agar Deni thi humko Hoor-o-Jannat to eha'  
Detey Nahin to Masti-E-Ahed-E-Jawani bhi ohan Detey.*

(The influence of Iqbal is obvious).

With the advent of play-back singing, film music underwent a revolutionary change. The choice of heroes and heroines became wider. Barring Saigal — and Surendar to a much lesser degree, there was hardly a good 'singing' hero. Amongst the heroines — The names of Kanan in Bengal and Khurshid in Bombay were very popular.

I particularly remember two *Ghazals* that discovered two famous play-back singers in the mid-forties for the films :

1. *Dil Jalta Hai to Jalne De*, : the singer, Mukesh, the film *Pehli Nazar*, the Poet : "Ah Sitapuri"
2. *Ai Dil Mujhe Aisi Jagha le chal* : the singer, Talat-Mehmood in Film *Arzoo*, the Poet : Majrooh Sultanpuri.

Probably the word 'light music' also entered the field of musical parlance during this period.

With playback singing and the role of lyric writers firmly established, the *Ghazal* entered a new phase in the forties.

In all humility, I can claim to have had the privilege of utilising the voice of Begum Akhtar for the first and probably the only Hindi Film *Roti* (later she sang for Satyajit's *Jalsaghar*). The unforgettable tune of her *Ghazal* "*Diwana banana hai to Diwana bana de*" (not sung for a film) had a resounding success. The tune was so haunting, and meant for ready-made popularity, that we could not check the temptation of utilising it in *Roti* with words provided by the late Arzoo Lucknowvi — who composed beautiful lyrics for many New Theatres pictures and later for many Bombay films. The words were :

*"Rahne laga hai Dil me Andhera Tere Baghair"  
Be-Noor Ho gai Meri Dunya Tere Baghair"*

This was also the time of great political upheavals in the country, and the *Ghazal* too had acquired political undertones. Lyric writers (progressive) were conscious of the new thought-content in the Urdu poetry of Dr. Iqbal and Hasrat Mohani. Hence *Ghazals* like :

*Daro oos waqt se jab Rang badlega Zamane ka  
Ye tumse lenge Badle jiska Aj Apman karte ho*

by 'Ah Sitapuri' in *Roti* (The film was banned for sometime for its political undertones).

With independence, the progressive lyric writers found new thought-content for their *Ghazal* compositions. The fire of pre-independence days was not required any more. So themes of hunger, poverty, social injustice etc. found expression in the writings of these progressive writers — who could utilise the forms of *geet* or for that matter *Bhajan* with equal ease, side by side with *Ghazals*. Most of the songs of these writers had a social purpose, which at once outshone the lyrics of mere versifiers. In this context, compositions like "*Kahan hai, Kahan hai, Kahan hai*" in '*Pyasa*' depicting the fate of prostitutes, and again "*Kuch Tumhe Chahiye—Kuch humey Chahiye*" in "*Char dil char Rahen*" of Abbas — penned by Sahir Ludhianvi, are unique. In *Dastak*, Majrooh adds another tear-drop in his *Ghazal* — "*Hum Hain Mata-e-Kucha'-o Bazar Ki Tarha.*"

Although Kaifi Azmi joined the band of progressive lyric writers much later, the stamp of his poetic genius immediately gave him a place of distinction. For example, take his composition : "*Mile Na Phool To Kanton se Dosti Karli*" in *Akhri Raat*.

Along with these, all the other different aspects of *Ghazal*, that is Romance, Devotion etc. played an equally important part in Indian film music. They were not bound by the old definition of "*Ba Zahan Guftagu Kardan*" (Persian) meaning "whispering sweet nothings" in the ears of the beloved — or just amatory poetry. Although when the situation demanded (films being fundamentally based on love-stories) lyric-writers did not lag behind in this aspect of love-poems. Remember the beautiful lyrical *Ghazals* full of romance in *Mere Mehboob* by Shakeel—to mention just an example.

Ranging from pre-independent days the *Ghazal* has risen to the needs of the hour and provided the emotional content required. The simplicity and directness of expression of the *Ghazal* in Hindi films has made it one of the most popular forms of the film song. As a matter of fact the place of importance enjoyed by *Ghazals* in film music is a reflection of the popularity of *Ghazals* in the field of Indian music. What was confined to the initiated was thrown open to the masses through the medium of films. Thanks

to films, even a south Indian hums a *Ghazal* in moments of abandon, for whom both the language and music are almost alien.

The horizon is becoming dim for *Ghazals* in films due to the present type and character of pictures made today, the bulk of which mostly depict sex and violence. But even then, if and when there is a *Ghazal* — it shines the brightest.

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*ANIL BISWAS* belongs to Barisal (now Bangladesh). He learnt to sing at an early age, inspired by his mother who had been trained by the famous Kirtan singer, Sury Chandra Chand. In Calcutta Shri Biswas worked with Rangmahal Theatres and with Hindustan Record Co. as a trainee and composer. He went to Bombay and became famous as a Film Music Director, distinguished for his unique folk music bias. He joined AIR in 1963 as Conductor of AIR's Vadya Vrind and later took over as Director of Light Music. At present he is attached to Jawaharlal Nehru University as Hony Director of Cultural Activities.