

# Hindi Film Music. Oh, no!

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It was, and still is fashionable among the classical-wallahs to frown on Hindi film music! I was not allowed to see many movies. But human beings cannot close their ears (unlike donkeys etc!), and the air was always resounding with film songs. Radio Ceylon, Goa, 'our' radio-stations and, of course loudspeakers in all festivals ensured a compulsory diet of film music. Slowly I realised I was humming many songs - often with incorrect texts. Mostly, the meaning of the song was lost on me - but the melody was not. (Anyway, how many art-musicians care for the meaning of the songs even today? Very often, they do not know the full text. On the rare occasions they happen to know the text, they are hardly attentive to its literary value. And when they do try to 'see' literary significance, it is so clichéd that it is as if not there!) Hindi film songs, which virtually showered music, were melodious. The simplest definition of melody is - 'you feel you can hum it on listening to it.' Melody is greater than music because it needs no explanation!

So I heard them all - indiscriminately. intensely and somewhat jealously! In three-and-a-half minutes film songs could achieve what art-musicians took three-and-a-half hours! Appeal. A haunting quality, wide and easy reach, accessibility, variety of voices, tonal colour and what not. So began an admiration-phase in my life. I did not even feel the need to see a film to appreciate these songs - so self-contained were they. Yes, they created a parallel universe. The 'heard' universe and the 'heard-seen universe' were thus two options available to Hindi film audiences. Through necessity many like me opted for the first choice and they gained because singing was many a times truer than 'acting' in those films! Ramchandra Narhar Chitalkar (better known as C Ramchandra), Naushad, Khemchand Prakash, Madan Mohan, S D Burman, Hemant Kumar, Shankar-Jaikishan, N Dutta, Sajjad Hussain, and the list ran on... And, of course, Lata, Rafi, Mukesh, Talat Mehmood, Geeta Dutt, Kishore Kumar, Asha Bhosale...

On one occasion. the late Wamanrao Deshpande, the well-known musicologist, C Ramchandra and I were participating in a seminar on film music organised by the government of Maharashtra in Dhulia. C Ramchandra soon got tired of 'talking'! In the evening he took me aside. From his hip pocket he took out a handy bottle of absinthe, took a sip, offered me a share of that bliss, and regretted

my inability to do so! Then he began singing and humming and explaining how he composed his 'casual' sounding melodies. He told me how the famous *Yeh zindagi usiki hai* (from *Anarkali*) was based on an old Marathi stage song (*Moortimant bhiti*) from the play *Sharada* by G B Deval. He sang *Ai mere vatan ke logo* and demonstrated how he had composed every moving nuance of that song which made Pundit Nehru weep at the Brabourne Stadium! He claimed pioneering work in bringing western rhythms into Hindi film music. C Ramchandra argued that he used the ever-present *Khemta theka* in Hindi film songs more creatively than others. He elaborated how he thought of introducing the western 'rock' in Hindi songs and yet keeping music Indian in character. After a while, his tone turned a little bitter. He complained that writers on music never paid attention to film composers and their contributions. "We do so much creative work, we reach out to so many, we influence so many, we bring together India and Indians - and yet you people never take us seriously," he added in an accusing tone. I kept silent, for two reasons. Firstly, because the outburst took me by surprise. I never thought that fillamwallahs secretly cared so much for white-collared appreciation. And secondly, because there was some truth in his attack. Music-thinkers in India hardly appear to know that there is music beyond raga-tala-gharana-khayal!

We became friends then. He began calling me Ramadasa - ostensibly on account of my overt abstinence and I reciprocated by calling him Swami Ranganath! (The latter was Ramadasa's contemporary and a rajayogi, that is one who, in spite of his apparent luxurious life, was an ascetic). Once at a party C Ramchandra looked downcast. I asked him the reason for his uncharacteristic sad mien. He confided, "Doctors have prescribed a 'no drinks' regime for me." What could Ranade do but mumble some consoling words and express agreement with his view that "These doctors are often very unsympathetic!" After a few months we met again and he was his old smiling self. Without waiting for my question he said. "O Ramadasa, they have cleared beer!"