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A son remembers

``I REMEMBER him telling me that his biggest hit song, Naina barse, was composed by him in the early 1950s. But no producer ever liked it or thought it worth using. He had to wait almost ten years for Raj Khosla to find it apt for a haunting situation. There are so many more such tunes that died with him some I have had the fortune of finding on some rare tapes...

``Whenever my father would ask us to sing at a small family get together, even we would end up singing a Baharon Phool Barsao or Kaun Hain Jo Sapnon Mein Aaya - not realising his songs weren't the easiest to sing and also that we were so worried that we had to sing a popular song to get the attention of those present. My father would feel let down. I feel it now, because he would jokingly tease us...

``He used to take us kids for swimming on weekends and would leave us to swim in the shallow while he swam across to the deep. I remember one day when we were 8 or 10, one of our friends in the pool telling us that our father was badly behaved as he was busy singing aloud to himself in the pool. It is only now that I understand that some tunes were striking him and he was itching to get to his harmonium to complete them...I think it was one of the songs in the early 60s...possibly a Woh Kaun Thi or Mera Saaya number.

``It was only when we matured that we realised that our father had made a difference to the lives of people on my first day at work, at Polydor, (now Universal), I was asked to establish contact with Mohd. Rafi to persuade him to cross over from HMV. I tried various calls to fix an appointment, but naturally never got Rafi Saheb on the line. I finally decided to become adventurous and landed up at Film Centre where he was recording, hoping to meet him face-to-face. I was accosted, rightly so, by his secretary, who berated me for daring to land up without an appointment.

``Very dejected, I just stood in a corner, and as I was ready to leave, out came the composer of the day, R. D. Burman, very delighted to see me. I was surprised he even recognised me since it had been four years since my father had died. Pancham took me into the control room, introduced me to the recordist, Kaushik, who told me my father was his favourite music director, to Raj Kapoor, the producer of that film, Biwi o Biwi, and to Rafi Saheb's secretary, who when he realised who I was apologised, profusely and took me to meet him. The way Rafi Saheb greeted me! And the reason was not that I represented Polydor but that I was Madan Mohan's son...

``On July 30, 1980, the day before he passed away, I spent over

five hours at Rafi Saheb's residence for a photo shoot. Whenever we asked him to pose with the harmonium for a photograph, he would play and sing the song Tumhari zulf key saaye mein from Naunihal and keep telling me that this was his favourite and why it was such a brilliant composition. It was my first encounter at being told by somebody I worshipped, that my father was way above the others. He also told me that MM had given him a new lease of life with Laila Majnu.

``At the time, everybody, including the hero of the film, wanted Kishore Kumar to be the male lead singer for the film. Rafi Saheb was not at the peak of his performing career, yet my father put his foot down, adamant that only Rafi should sing the songs or he would leave the film.. Of course, after Laila Majnu, Rafi became Rishi Kapoor's voice in films like Karz., Amar Akbar Antony, etc., etc.

``And yet it was Madan Mohan who fought for Talat over Rafi in Jahanara. Talat sang four songs in the film, Rafi two less important ones. My dad strongly felt he had conceived the tunes for the three solos with Talat's timbre in mind. Secondly, Rafi in those days was singing everywhere, specially the frivolous hits and my father wanted more attention, more rehearsal and exclusivity for the songs like Phir wohi shaam, Teri aankh ke aansoo, Main teri nazar ka suroor and so stuck to his guns - possibly upsetting Rafi in the bargain... In my earlier years at HMV, having conditioned myself to believe that my dad was a class composer I would exclude his songs, till a lot of hate mail came HMV's way because of this. In fact R. P. Goenka, once called me to Calcutta to tell me that we were doing a lot of injustice to the Lata Mangeshkar compilations in particular by not putting many of Madan Mohan songs in them.

``Mohan Kumar, director of Anpadh, remembers that a song, the most important part of the film, had been rehearsed for almost a month. Everybody assembled for the recording including Lata Mangeshkar when my father heard a chance remark from Mohan Kumar that ``woh baat nahin ban rahi hai''. He asked everybody to give him 10 minutes, went to a quiet corner and along with Raja Mehdi Ali Khan, came up with completely new lyrics, new tune and new music arrangements. An aghast singer waited silently to be told that the song was being redone completely and it was recorded within two hours from scratch... no wonder Aapki nazron ne samjha had to become a big hit!

The song, Nainon mein badra chhaye almost never got recorded. The entire unit of Mera Saaya was at the Lake Palace, Udaipur, waiting to shoot this song which was delayed by a few months because of no dates from Lata Mangeshkar. My father was upset with the delay and his inability to deliver the song on time. So, he went to her house one day before and got her assurance that she would record the next day.

``It was a very musician based song as the santoor and the sitar were predominant and Shivkumar Sharma and Rais Khan had to literally compete with each other.

``Added to this was the fact that in those days no recording

could take place without the singer also singing simultaneously.

Everything was ready at 11 a.m when the ever-punctual Lata Mangeshkar did not arrive and sent a message that she was not feeling too well. My father sent back a message (though some people tell me he drove to her house) that he would drop the song if she did not record it that day. She reached and though she was not well a masterpiece was created...

- R. R.

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