

Majrooh: The poet who captured the times.

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<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/watch/majrooh-sultanpuri-wrote-songs-for-more-than-250-films-in-his-five-decade-long-stint-in-bollywood/article34099511.ece>

Few people would have heard what can possibly be classified as the first pseudo-rap song in Hindi films- the song "*Dekhiye, Sahibo, Who koi, Aur thi*", from the 1966 musical suspense thriller "*Teesri Manzil*". All the other songs of this film are heard on the radio even now. All, except this one. And yet, this is an amazingly creative composition with words and phrases sung in a staccato fashion, which could easily pass for what later became the rap style.

The song, sung brilliantly by Rafi and Asha and composed by R.D. Burman was written by the eminently versatile Majrooh Sultanpuri. R.D. Burman was a young, unknown composer then. Majrooh of course knew him well as S.D. Burman's son and assistant. After all Majrooh had worked with S.D. Burman in many of Dev Anand films from the 1950s and the duo had given us hit songs like "*Hum hain Rahi pyaar ke hum se kuch na boliye*" and "*Chal ri sajni ab kya soche*" among many others.

The story goes that Majrooh recommended him to Shammi Kapoor who was very picky about his songs. Shammi Kapoor agreed to listen to this young upstart. The first composition that R.D. Burman played was the one which ultimately became "*Deewana mujh sa nahin*" - Kapoor immediately recognized it as based on a Nepali folk song which he had heard in Darjeeling! And the rest was history- *Teesri Manzil* was Burman's first major hit.

Majrooh was not a novice in the Bombay film industry. He had started his career as a lyricist with the 1946 *Shahjahan* which included the pathos-ridden "*Jab dil hi toot gaya*". Born in 1919, his real name was Asrar ul-Hassan Khan and he adopted the pen name Majrooh (wounded) when he started writing. A trained Unani physician, he realized fairly early that his calling was poetry. He moved to Bombay and as with most artists, was drawn towards the Progressive Writer's movement.

After coming out of prison (he had been arrested in the anti-communist crackdown in 1949), he went on to write the lyrics for many films in the 1950s. Of course, his first love, as he always said, was Urdu poetry and not writing to a tune which is how film songs were mostly composed. Soon, he was being counted among the leading lyricists of his time- right there along with Sahir, Shailendra, Shakeel and Hasrat Jaipuri.

However, what made Majrooh different was his versatility- he could compose, with equal ease the soulful masterpiece "*Chal ri sajni ab kya soche*" as well as the playful "*Dekhne mine bhola hai dil ka chinona*", both from the 1960 film "*Bambai ka Babu*". Or "*Main hun Jhum Jhum Jhumroo*" and "*Koi hamdam na raha, koi sahara na raha*" from the 1961 comedy "*Jhumroo*". Interestingly, unlike his contemporaries from the Progressive Writer's movement, he rarely, if ever wrote any "explicitly political" film songs though his other writings continued to be inspired by a progressive ideal.

His mastery over the "ghazal" form of Urdu poetry was widely acknowledged among the connoisseurs of Urdu poetry. And whenever he got a chance, he wrote some of the finest ones for films also. "*Kahin bekhayal ho kar*" for Teen Deviyani, "*Ham hai mat-aaye koocha-e-bazaar*" for Dastak and "*Bekhudi mien tum ko pukare chale gaye*" for Kala Pani are among the masterpieces of ghazals in Hindi film music.

The other thing which Majrooh excelled in was changing with the times and audience tastes. The fifties with more serious and socially oriented films demanded a different vocabulary than the playful and light musicals of the sixties. And he adapted wonderfully well. "*Teen Deviyani*", "*Teesri Manzil*" and "*Jewel Thief*" among many others testify to this. Nevertheless, when the situation demanded, he could come out with gems like "*Chahoonga main tujhe saanjh savere*" in *Dosti* or the ever so hopeful "*Kahin to milegi, kabhi to milegi*" from *Aarti*.

As the sixties gave way to the seventies and audience tastes changed again, Majrooh was there to give them what they wanted in "*Yaadon ki Baraat*" and "*Hum kissi se kam nahin*" for instance. The song "*Aap ke kamre mien koi rahta hai*" from *Yaadon ki Baraat* brought out another of Majrooh's forte- the weaving of ordinary conversational language and idiom. Thus, "... *padaa tha table par chasma voh kis ka janaab*" in the song.

This conversational style was evident in many of his later songs. "*Papa kahte hain bada kaam karega*" from the 1987 cult film "*Qayamat se Qayamat tak*" became a youth anthem of its time. Incidentally, this song was composed by the music director duo Anand-

Milind, who were sons of Chitragupt, one of the finest music directors of his time and a long-time friend and collaborator of Majrooh. Chitragupt and Majrooh gave us many memorable songs like *“Dil ka diya jala ke gaya”* and *“Jaag dil-e-diwana”*.

Majrooh wrote songs for more than 250 films in his over five decade long stint in Bollywood. And as expected, some of his songs were forgettable- but his craftsmanship was still evident in all his songs. It was in recognition of his contribution to the Hindi film industry that he became the first and to date the only lyricist to have received the Dada Saheb Phalke award in 1993.

Three decades after Teesri Manzil, this master craftsman gave us another unusual song where he broke all conventions. The 1996 film, *“Khamoshi: A musical”* had a song where Majrooh brazenly asks *“Tell me O Khuda, ab main kya karun”*. Only a person of Majrooh’s confidence and capability could get away with this kind of juxtaposition. They don’t make them like that anymore.

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