

# The discoverer of many movie stars

AH DAWA 12.5.03

**N**AZIM Panipati, who was associated with the production of over 300 films from Lahore and Bombay from 1939 to 1953, achieved a number of distinctions during his long career. The Lahore-born poet and script writer discovered and introduced actors Pran and Johnny Walker, and helped in the grooming of Indian dancer Helen. Another landmark in his career was that his song, *Dil Mera Torra* was the first Urdu song Lata Mangeshkar recorded for Bombay Talkies' film *Majboor* in 1948.

A frequent visitor to my house, Mohammed Ismail Khan Lodhi alias Nazim Panipati, was the younger brother of well-known lyricist and producer-director Wali Saheb, who had a number of successful films to his credit. "My older brother, Wali Saheb, who wrote songs for Pancholi Art Pictures' Punjabi film *Yamla Jat*", disclosed Panipati in a conversation before his death, "asked me to assist director Moti B Gidwani (the director of first talking movie *Alam Ara*) in comprehending the meaning of Punjabi dialogue. Gidwani had been called from Bombay by Seth Pancholi to direct his Punjabi film".

The success of *Yamla Jat* spawned a production boom in Lahore film studios, which resulted in the production of a number of equally successful movies, including *Khazanchi*, *Mangti* (Punjabi), *Khandaan*, *Dulla Bhatti*, *Chaudhry* (Punjabi), *Zamindar and Daasi*, (Urdu). Panipati, in one capacity or the other, was associated with the production of all these films (from 1939 and 1945), before he shifted to Bombay along with his brother Wali Saheb.

By the mid-40s, Lahore had convincingly established its credentials as the third largest film production centre of India. It was then that a large number of talented artistes of Lahore shifted to Bombay in search of greener pastures. Actors M Ismail, Ghulam Mohammed, Hira Lal, Jayant (Zakiria Khan), Noor Jehan, Munawwar Sultana and Ragini; composers Master Ghulam Haider, Rashid Attrey, Feroze Nizami and Khurshid Anwar; playback singers

Shamshad Begum, GM Durrani and Mohammed Rafi; and lyricists Asiz Kashmiri, Tanweer Naqvi, Wali Sahib and Nazim Panipati were among those who said goodbye to Lahore.

Close association with director Moti B Gidwani and other film makers in Lahore provided poet Nazim Panipati enough confidence and expertise to rub shoulders with senior producer-directors in Bombay, where he wrote songs for films directed by leading directors like Sohrab Modi, Najam Naqvi and Nazir Ajmeri. Nazim also wrote dialogues for scores of films in Bombay.

Nazim Panipati introduced and groomed a number of superstars of the Indian silver screen. "Indian actor Pran (original name Pran Krishna) was my discovery," he once told me with pride. "It was in the year 1939", he went to say, "that I spotted a young man working for a photographer at Laxmi Chowk near a cigarette shop, where most film offices were located in Lahore then. His face looked photogenic to me and my brother Wali Saheb. Both of us inquired if he would like to work for films. He was wonderstruck but after some contemplation, he replied in the affirmative. I trained Pran in the proper delivery of Punjabi and Urdu dialogue after which he was employed by Pancholi Studios at a salary of Rs60 per month. A year later, he played the leading role against (then) Baby Noor Jehan in the film *Khandaan*, music for which was scored by Master Ghulam Haider and the megaphone was wielded by Syed Shaukat Husain Rizvi."

It was the same Pran, who came to the rescue of Nazim Panipati in Bombay. "Not only did Pran give some cash to me", reminisced Nazim Panipati, "but also introduced me to actor Ashok Kumar, who then managed the affairs of Bombay Talkies. It was close to the end of 1947 when Ashok asked me to write as many popular songs as had earlier been written by Tanvir Naqvi for Mehboob's super hit movie *Anmol Ghadi*. Providing me with a rough sketch of the plot of the under-production film *Majboor*, Ashok Kumar

commanded me to return to him after two days. Starring Shyayam and Munawwar Sultana, the film was directed by Nazir Ajmeri and Master Ghulam Haider scored music for it."

Nazim Panipati was not sure whether he would succeed in coming up to Ashok's expectations. However, he called on Ashok two days later and presented him a song *Abb Darney ki Baat Naheen, Angrez Chhora Chala Gaya*, a love duet, which was to be shot on the film's romantic pair. Ashok reluctantly accepted the song and I thought my fate had been sealed. But Master Ghulam Haider liked it and agreed to provide melodic raiment for my song. When *Majboor* was released in 1948, it became one of the most popular of songs of the year".

Other popular songs of the movie were *Dil Mera Torra*, *Mujhey Kaheen Ka Naa Chhora Teray Peyyar Nain* and *Mein to Reh Gayee Aaj Akeli Ray*, which were recorded in the voice of Lata Mangeshkar, then a debutante.

In Bombay, Panipati introduced actor Johnny Walker in the films. While narrating the incident, he recalled: "It was sometime in the late 1951 or early 1952 when I used to while away spare time in the evening in the company of musician Gulshan Soofi and actor Aziz Hindi, the younger brother of playback singer Khan Mastana, in a public park in Bandra. A young man by the name of Badaruddin, in his early twenties, and who knew all about me, my profession and connections with film people, tried to befriend us by going minor chores for us, including fetching tea, and sometimes, massaging our heads. He seemed to be doing these favours on purpose. A good imitator, Badaruddin tried to impress me by mimicking the acting of several popular Urdu, Gujarati and Marahatti actors. Soon it became clear to me that he was hankering after an opportunity to get a minor role in a film. "After some pestering and cajoling on his part, I took him to my brother Wali Saheb for an audition. One evening, he joined me in a local studio, where a scene, depicting a jail barrack,

was being shot. On my request, the director of the film (*Baazee*) engaged Badaruddin there and then, and asked him to enact the role of a drunkard inmate. Badaruddin performed it impressively. Thereafter, luck shone on him and he climbed up the ladder of success rapidly. However, he adopted the name of Johnny Walker, perhaps, to ever remain mindful of his breakthrough in the film industry by playing the role of a drunkard carrying a bottle of Johnny Walker of whisky in his hand."

In 1950, Nazim Panipati was asked by the management of AVM Studios (Madras) to teach Urdu to actress Vijayanti Mala, who had been signed for AVM's first Urdu film, *Bahar*. "The company engaged me on contract and arranged for my one-year stay in Madras where I taught Urdu and corrected her pronunciation of certain words, including delivery of Urdu dialogue," he said with a glint of pride in his eyes."

Nazim Panipati also contributed much to the grooming of Helen, the famous Indian dancer. It was during the stay of his wife in a hospital in Bombay that he was approached by a Christian nurse, who sought his help in earning some extra money to meet her growing domestic expense. She had an eight-year-old daughter, whom she wanted to groom as a dancer. Nazim took the girl to a friend, who ran a dance school. He accepted Helen as a pupil. It was in that school that the young girl learnt the art of dancing, which Panipati visited frequently to monitor her progress. After some time, with Nazim's help and recommendations Helen was introduced to the film world.

On his return to Lahore in 1953, poet Nazim Panipati joined the Pakistan film industry. Here, too, he wrote a large number of songs for successful movies, including *Lakht-Jigar*, *Inteqaam* and *Insaniyat*. He also wrote many popular jingles, including *Hum To Jaanain Seedhi Baat Saaban Ho to Saat Saat*. Nazim Panipati died in Lahore on June 16, 1998, after a brief illness, but his songs continue to provide pleasure to millions of film fans. —SAEED MALIK