

From Lahore to Indian cinema

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EACH geographic region in the subcontinent is known for its distinctively recognizable culture and the peculiar traits and customs of its people, which differentiate them from the residents of other areas. The contributions made by the people of these regions towards the flowering of such creative arts as sculptors, paintings, dances, music and cinema, have been recognized by social historians.

To cite one example, the Punjabis, especially the vivacious residents of Lahore, in addition to their fondness for martial arts like wrestling and tent pegging, are also known for their abrasive interest in performing arts such as literature, theatre, film-making and music. During the 20th century, this city has groomed renowned actors, actresses, producers, directors, playwrights, composers and playback singers, whose contributors to the evolution and promotion of cinematic arts have become legendary.

From the era of silent films in the 1920s to the exhibition of the first sound motion picture *Alam Ara*, in March 1931, and to the political division of India, a whole lot of Punjabi or Lahore-based artistes worked for the continued refinement of the cinematic arts in the subcontinent. There was a time during the decade of the 1940s, when several departments of Bombay film industry were dominated by technicians, actors, actresses, directors, composers and singers who originally hailed from Lahore, or had received their education and groomed in this city.

Lahore has a history which dates back to the period of Mahabarat. The city has witnessed the clash and later fusion of different civilizations, which has contributed much to the chiselling of its cultural personality. The culturally vivacious citizens of Lahore, over the centuries, have inherited much from the

who worked in Kolkata studios included Pirthiviraj Kapoor, K.L. Saigal, Jagdish Sehi, A.R. Kardar, and Sharma. Iqbal Begum alias Balo, the mother of Sabiha Khanum, and Mukhtar Begum, the older sister of vocalist Fareeda Khanum, also had their earlier stints in that city.

Lahore also provided a number of artistes to the Bombay film industry, and they later became stars of the Indian silver screen. Actors Najamul Hasan, Om Parkash, Hira Lal, Moti Lal, Majnu, Pran, Kiran Dewan, Madan Puri, Nazir, M. Ismail, Dev Anand and actresses Khursheed Bano, Kamini Kaushal, Geeta Bali, Surriya, Nur Jehan, Sardar Akhter, Meena (Sohri), Veena, Meena Khmari and Shayyama are shining examples.

Among the Punjabi produc-



ers and directors who later became the moguls of Indian cinema were A.R. Kardar, W.Z. Ahmed, Wali Sahib, M. Sadiq, J.K. Nanda, K.D. Mehra, A.S. Rawail, Kedar Sharma, K. Asif, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Nazir. Among the Punjabi contributors to the music department of Indian cinema were Rafique Ghazanvi, Khurshid Anwar, Feroze Nizami, master Ghulam Haider, Shyam Sunder, Pundit Amar Nath, Ameer Ali, Husunlal Bhagatram, Gobind Ram, Master Inayat Husain, G. A. Chishti, O.P. Nayyar, Hansraj Behi, (composers) and Muhammad Rafi, Shamshad Begum, Zohrabai Ambalewali,

fusion of different civilisations, which has contributed much to the chiselling of its cultural personality. The culturally vivacious citizens of Lahore, over the centuries, have inherited much from the historical fusion of different civilizations and interactions among the followers of different faiths.

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The contributions of the people of Punjab, especially Lahore, to the flowering of cinematic arts in the subcontinent have had tremendous impact on this domain of creative human endeavours. The growth of cinema in India owes much to the contributions of talented artistes originating from this region of the subcontinent, irrespective of their religious beliefs. It was because of the hard work and creative ingenuity of these people that Indian cinema ascended to such great heights in which it finds itself today.

When Kolkata was the centre of film production, many artistes from Punjab went to join the studios set up in that city. They sought and got employment with the Maiden Theatre and New Theatres. Surprising as it may sound to many, the first ever Punjabi film, *Sheela* alias *Pind di kurri*, was produced from Kolkata, in 1935. The cast of the film included, among others, (then) *Baby Nur Jehan*, her sister *Shushpa Rani* and other Punjabi artistes.

Husunlal-Bhagatram, Gobind Ram, Master Inayat Husain, G. A. Chishti, O.P. Nayyar, Hansraj Behi, (composers) and Muhammad Rafi, Shamshad Begum, Zohrabai Ambalewali, Hameeda Bano, Surrender Kaur and Zeenat Begum (playback singers). The list containing the names of lyricists from Punjab, who have contributed wholesomely to the flowering of film songs in Indian cinema, is long but the ones which immediately come to one's mind are Akhter Chughtai (New Theatre), Tanvir Naqvi, D.N. Madhok, Nazim Panipati, Sahir Ludhanvi, Rajender Krishen and Qateel Shifai.

One big name whose immense contributions to the art of film-making in India earned him a place among the founding fathers of Indian cinema was that of late Mian Abdur Rashid Kardar. He was from Lahore, where he started his career as actor, producer and director of several silent films in the decade of 1920s before joining the Kolkata-based film industry.

The Punjabis are known for their love for different sports and martial arts, and have been equally prolific and proficient in performing arts. They have made enduring impact on the cultural ethos of the subcontinent, causing a metamorphosis in different arts by providing them a secular ambience.