

'Queen of Melody' turns 78

India's top female singer 'Lata Mangeshkar,' has lent her voice to thousands of songs as a playback singer from the 1950's to today. In the last 60 years she has sung around 50,000 songs in many Indian languages in the form of ghazals, classical songs, bhajans, film songs and even pop. In a career spanning more than six decades, Lataji has been the number one vocalist and has won numerous awards.

Lataji was born on 28th September 1929 in a lower middle class Maharashtrian family. Dinanath Mangeshkar (her father) was a reputed classical singer and owned a theatrical company. He gave Lataji singing lessons from when she was at the tender age of five. She was there after trained in classical music by Aman Ali Khan Sahib and later by Amanat Khan.

After her father's death, Lataji was forced to become an actress in order to make ends meet. She moved to Mumbai in 1945 where Vinayak Damodar Karnataki (who was a close friend and mentor to the Mangeshkar family) offered Lataji a film role. She appeared in various films in Hindi and Marathi.

When Lataji tried to make an impression on the Hindi film industry with her vocals, she was rejected. This was during the period of when Shamshad Begum and Zohrabai Ambalewali ruled the music industry. She even made her debut vocal performance for a Marathi film but this was later edited out. No music director was willing to give Lataji an opportunity. She was also rejected by producer S Mukherjee who complained that her voice was 'too thin.' Lata struggled for years and did not let knock downs affect her determination.

In 1948, Ghulam Haider took note of Lataji's talent and gave her a big break in singing for the film 'Majboor' where she sang 'Dil Mera Toda,' which turned out to be a huge hit in the Bollywood industry. Following this in 1949, four movies that she had sung for were declared musical hits. This made Lataji the latest rising star of the Indian music industry.

Lata Mangeshkar enjoyed her newly found success and was quick to promote her younger sister Asha. In 1962, Lataji sang the patriotic song 'Aae Mere Watan Ke Logo' at a performance, which brought tears to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru eyes.

For 40 years, Lataji ruled the Hindi music scene until 1983. It was her decision to step down and give opportunities to new singers. She started to refuse awards as a gesture to promote new talent. She carried on working for Yashraj productions such as 'Dil to Pagal Hai' and 'Veer-Zaara.' Lataji has sung for actresses from yesterday's Nargis, Nutan, Maadhubala and Meena Kumari to today's Kajol, Madhuri and more recently Preity Zinta.

Age has not affected the magic in Lataji's Voice as her songs are mesmerising as ever and she is quite rightly known as the 'Nightingale.' Paying homage to the melody queen Lata Mangeshkar on her 78th birthday, top Bollywood lyricist Javed Akhtar, said 'Normally artists strive for perfection. Only Lata Mangeshkar has achieved it. Perfection suits Lataji.' The Indian Idol judge 2007 went on to add 'She has proved perfection is possible in this imperfect world.'

By Rajvi Rajani