

A Centenary of Talent and Charisma

Since the first full-length Bollywood movie *Raja Harishchandra*, a silent film made in 1913, India has been blessed with extremely talented artistes on and behind the silver screen, who have influenced cinema itself, and the lives of millions of people. The year 2023 was the birth centenary of six particularly fabulous men – Mukesh, Dev Anand, Mrinal Sen, NTR, Salil Chowdhury and Shailendra.

Mukesh

The two decades from the 1950s to the 1970s witnessed the the soulful, melodious voice of Mukesh Chand Mathur, who was monomously known as Mukesh (July 22, 1923). Even today, his songs find fans among the old and the young, for instance, the iconic “Jeena yahan marna yahan” from *Mera Naam Joker*, the romantic title song “Kabhi kabhie mere dil mein”, the melancholic “Kahin door jab din dhal jaaye”, the lilting “Sawan ka mahina” and “Maine tere liye”, and the poetic “Suhana safar”, to name just a few of his close to [2,000](#) songs! Mukesh’s songs are still performed with much love in orchestras, reality shows and stage shows, and even amateur bathroom singers.

Interestingly, Mukesh didn’t receive formal singing training in his early years. While his older sister was being trained at home, young Mukesh was a keen listener and student. A few years later, when he started working as an employee of the Public Works Department in Delhi, Mukesh dedicatedly visited city studios to get his voice noticed by established musicians. The actor Motilal noticed his natural talent, and took him along to Mumbai, where his first celluloid break was in front of the camera in a small part in the film *Nirdosh*. Finally, four years later in 1945, Mukesh got the opportunity to sing the song “Dil jalta hai to jalne de” for Motilal’s character in the film *Pehli Nazar*. This proved to be a turning point for his singing career, and the offers started rolling in!

Mukesh was acclaimed for bringing deep sorrow and pathos to all his songs, immortalising the lyrics and the heroes he sang for. This won him the moniker “[tragedy king](#)” of the film industry. However, he sang in various genres, including devotional, romantic, and peppy numbers. Mukesh was among the first artists to record ‘Sampoorna Ramayana’ for HMV. He was most popular for being the playback voice of stalwarts such as Raj Kapoor, Manoj Kumar, Dilip Kumar, Sunil Dutt and Feroz Khan, contributing to the success of their films.

In 1973, Mukesh won the National Film Award for Best Male Playback Singer for the song “Kai baar yuhi dekha hai” from the 1974 film *Rajnigandha*. He was nominated for several Filmfare Awards, and he won [four](#) for the songs “Sab kuch seekha humne” (1960), “Sabse bada naadan” (1970), “Jai bolo beimaan ki” (1973), “Kabhi kabhie mere dil mein” (1977, posthumously). Mukesh also performed abroad several times, and it was during one such trip to Detroit, Michigan, USA on August 27, 1976, that he suffered a heart attack, and the world lost a soulful and emotive voice at the early age of 53. His prowess is evident from the fact that several of his songs were released close to 20 years after his death. His legacy has been carried forward by his family, as his son Nitin Mukesh continues bringing life to his songs, and his grandson Neil Nitin Mukesh shines as an actor. Mukesh's songs are an integral part of Hindi cinema, and his voice still evokes deep emotions, rendering him timeless and golden.