

## 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.

### **Dev Anand (September 26, 1923 – December 3, 2011)**

For several decades, Dev Anand's smile lit up screens, gladdening the hearts of fans, especially the women, while his style – the Ivy cap, scarves, and bold colours, made him the heartthrob of millions. At the heart of this admiration was his prowess as a filmmaker – not only was he a brilliant actor but also a producer, writer and director. His films *Taxi Driver*, *C.I.D.*, *Baazi*, *Johny Mera Naam*, *Tere Ghar Ke Samne*, and *Jewel Thief* are classics of Hindi cinema.

Navketan Films, the production house he co-founded with his brother Chetan Anand, was synonymous with quality cinema, producing a string of successful films that explored unconventional narratives, addressed social issues, and also made mainstream content. *Guide*, based on R.K. Narayan's novel and produced by Navketan, became a defining film by the actor as the transformation of his character Raju Guide, showed his ability to convey nuance and depth through his acting.

Dev Anand's work in the Indian film industry was recognised by numerous awards, such as the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2002, honouring his lifetime achievement; Dev Anand has been an evergreen actor and filmmaker for over six decades in the film industry, as he swiftly adapted to the times while taking risks as an artiste. He will always be remembered for his deep impact on Indian cinema through his talent, as well as his endearing charm and personal style. Dev Anand's life is an inspiration and a celebration of creativity and commitment to storytelling.

### **Mukesh (July 22, 1923 – August 27, 1976)**

The two decades from the 1950s to the 1970s witnessed the soulful, melodious voice of Mukesh Chand Mathur, who was monomously known as Mukesh. Even today, his songs close to [2,000](#) songs find fans among the old and the young! Mukesh's songs are still performed with much love in orchestras, reality shows and stage shows.

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 in 1976, that he suffered a heart attack, and the world lost a soulful and emotive voice at the early age of 53.

### **Mrinal Sen (May 14, 1923 – December 2018)**

Mrinal Sen was one of the leading lights of the Indian New Wave cinema of the 1950s and 60s. His films addressed socio-economic and political issues, touching on the common man's struggles. Sen's films were critical of inequality and exploitation and spoke about systemic injustices. He highlighted the class divide, corruption and poverty through his films. His work has deeply [influenced](#) filmmaking.

Some of Mrinal Sen's notable works, among his 27 feature films, four documentaries and 14 shorts, are [Bhuvan Shome](#) and Calcutta 71, examples of his engagement with political themes and social realism. Bhuvan Shome is credited with having sparked the "Indian New Wave". As the world around him entered political turmoil, Mrinal Sen's films began reflecting the political upheavals, especially in the Calcutta trilogy – Interview, Calcutta 71 and The Guerrilla Fighter. In his later films, Sen shifted his view from the collective to the personal, with films such as Ek Din Pratidin, Kharij and Ek Din Achanak.

Over the years, Mrinal Sen won a number of National Film Awards, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, and India honoured him with the Padma Bhushan in 1983. Along with Regional Film Awards and Filmfare Awards, he was recognised internationally for his work at numerous Film Festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Cairo, and more. Mrinal Sen was also an honorary Member of the Indian Parliament from 1998 to 2003. Along with Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, Sen put Indian cinema on the world stage.

### **NTR (May 28, 1923 – January 18, 1996)**

NTR – Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao popularly known as N.T. Rama Rao, a larger-than-life, multi-faceted personality, influenced South Indian cinema and played a pivotal role in politics, leaving an indelible mark on society.

NTR transitioned from a stage artist in the 1940s to a cinema actor in 1949 with the film Mana Desam. His portrayal of numerous divine characters, such as Ram and Krishna, with conviction and authenticity earned him immense popularity and endeared him to millions. He had a magnetic screen presence, and also portrayed roles in a variety of genres like action, social dramas and family-centric stories. His contribution to cinema was not restricted to being an actor and superstar – he established the production company National Art Theater, which went on to set high standards for production quality, and took on direction and production. NTR starred in over 300 films during his cinema career, mostly in Telugu! His work was honoured with several awards, including the Padma Shri.

In a radical step, NTR entered politics in 1982 with the formation of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), through which he intended to better the common man's life. He went on to serve as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for seven years over three terms. NTR is an icon in the world of cinema as well as politics, and an inspiration for what a single person can achieve in their lifetime.

### **Salil Chowdhury (November 19, 1923 – September 5, 1995)**

A legendary musician, Salil Chowdhury has produced some of the finest songs in the Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu films, in over a 100 films. He was a composer and music director, and also a writer, lyricist and poet, creating compositions across various genres. Additionally, he was also accomplished on the flute, piano, harmonium, esraj and violin.

Some of his timeless compositions [include](#) Kahin door jab din dhal jaaye, Ae mere pyare watan, Na jaane kyon, Dil tadap tadap ke keh raha hai, and Dharti kahe pukaar ke. Salil

Chowdhury began his tryst with Hindi cinema as the story writer of *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953), for which he also created the music. This was followed by a slew of other Hindi films.

While Salil Chowdhury is credited with bringing folk music to the forefront and experimenting with Western classical elements, he began his journey as a musician and writer in political movements such as the [Peasant Movement](#) of 1945. It is thus not surprising that a key element of his music was the infusion of social consciousness, like in the song *Mera joota hai Japani*. Several decades after it was released, we can still return to Salil Chowdhury's compositions and still thoroughly enjoy the music.

### **Shailendra (August 30, 1923 – December 14, 1966)**

Shailendra's life is very like a film. After his family moved to Uttar Pradesh after the turmoil of Partition, he took up work as a welding apprentice in the Central Railways, when often, he would take solace in his poetry. From attending *mushairas* and *kavi sammelans*, Shailendra eventually became a part of the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). It was at an IPTA function that Raj Kapoor heard Shailendra reciting a poem, which he offered to buy. This became Shailendra's door into Bollywood, which was later followed by very successful collaborations with Kapoor himself, and with other stalwarts such as Dev Anand, Dilip Kumar, Kishore Kumar, Nargis and Waheeda Rahman, and composers Shankar Jaikishan, Manna Dey and S.D. Burman.

A "people's poet", Shailendra has written beautiful songs such as *Pyaar hua ikraar hua*, *Khoya khoya chaand*, *Suhaana safar aur yeh mausam haseen*, *Sajan re jhooth mat bolo*, *Wahan kaun hai tera musafir*, and *Allah megh de paani de re*. In addition to Hindi, he was well-versed with Urdu and Bhojpuri too, which influenced songs such as "Paan khaye saiyyan hamaro" and "Chalat musafir moh liya pinjray waali munia. In his career of 17 years, Shailendra wrote numerous soul-stirring songs, which are etched in people's memory.