



# Kishore Kumar, 58, Is Dead; a Genius Of Music and Film

By MOHAN PISHAROTY

Special to India Abroad  
**NEW DELHI** — Kishore Kumar, whose haunting songs and yodeling thrilled the wage-earner, the unemployed youth, the rickshaw-puller and the housewife for four decades, died at his home in Juhu, Bombay on Oct. 13 after a heart attack. His age was 58.

The singer was known not only as a genius of music, but also as an actor, a film-maker, screenplay writer, editor, music director and lyricist. He was cremated on Oct. 16 at his hometown in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh. Kishore had said he wanted to farm his ancestral fields in Khandwa — a wish that sadly could not be fulfilled.

### Married Four Times

He is survived by his fourth wife, the actress, Leena Chandavarkar, and two sons, Sumet whom he had with Chandavarkar, and Amit whom he had with his first wife, Ruma Guba Thakurta. After the marriage with Ruma broke-up he married the actress Madhubala and many years after her death another actress, Yoggeeta Balli.

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# Actor Whose Voice Was His Own

By ARTHUR PAIS

He entered the film industry through the door marked "Actors" though he had no interest in becoming one. His brother Ashok Kumar was the biggest star in Hindi films then, and his word went a long way not only with producers but also with family members. But Ashok Kumar wanted his brother to be an actor and he sent feeders to the biggest producers of the time.

"I came to sing and they caught me by the scruff of my neck and tangle me into a hero," Kishore recalled about a year before he died. "God, how I hated it."

Kishore Kumar began his acting career in 1947 with such films as "Ziddi," but his determination soon convinced composers that he could sing his own songs, and there was no need to "borrow" the voices of other singers.

Dev Anand, one of the top stars of the time, also liked Kishore's soft, deep voice, and began recommending him to composers. Soon most of the songs Dev Anand enacted on the screen also came

Most of these works, including "Door Gagan Ki Chhaon Mein" and "Door Ka Rahi," mirrored the aspirations of the real Kishore Kumar. They were essentially tales of lonely souls who wanted to brighten the world for a moment or two. None of these films was a masterpiece, and none won a major award or made it to the Cannes or Venice Film

### Reminiscences

*Kishore Kumar, who died on Oct. 13 at the age of 58, was undoubtedly the most colorful and successful figure of Indian cinema. For 40 years he entertained millions with his singing, acting and film production.*

*As far as the entertainment he provided, Kishore was second to none. The films he wrote and directed, "Door Gagan Ki Chhaon Mein" and "Door Ka Rahi," reflected his sentiments — and his desire to make films that were different from the glittering type liked out by many others.*

Festivals. But they indicated clearly that had he devoted himself exclusively to producing and directing, he might have joined the ranks of India's finest.

Kishore Kumar's eccentricities and contempt for material goods were partly owing to his anti-establishment personality. Often he displayed a courage

funny characters. Kishore also excelled in films with serious contents. These include the third episode of "Mussafir," in which he played an unemployed youth constantly haunted by his family, and Bimal Roy's "Nautanki."

But the 60s saw Kishore Kumar run out of luck, and he was reduced to playing lead roles in what the Bombay film industry calls C class films — low-budget projects that end up in vermin-ridden theaters and vanish after three or four weeks. While these films, including "Mr. X in Bombay," did poorly at the box-office, many of their songs in Kishore's own voice became very popular — "Mere Mehboob Kayamat Hogi," for instance.

### Sharp Upturn in 69

Kishore's career, however, took a dramatic upturn in 1969 when he was contracted to sing for a medium-budget film, "Aradhana."

Until the opening of that film, Kishore had sung for only two on-screen characters — himself and Dev Anand. In fact, he was known as Dev's "voice."

Sumanta hesitated for a day or two, for he had not forgotten the trouble he had with Kishore Kumar while making "Ek Raaz." Kishore was also the hero of the film and his habitual latecomer had further created headaches for Sumanta.

However, since he was keen on casting Ashok Kumar, Sumanta decided to let Kishore sing in "Aradhana," and the composer S.D. Burmali, a longtime friend and supporter of Kishore, heartily endorsed the idea.

### One of Only a Handful

"Aradhana" became a phenomenal hit. It enjoyed the kind of a run that only a handful of Indian films such as "Mughal E Azam" and "Sangam" had achieved till then. It made Rajesh Khanna a star overnight and let people forget that he had seven flops in a row till then.

Though "Aradhana" also had hit songs by Mohammad Rafi, then the reigning Hindi film singer, the popularity of Kishore Kumar songs were far greater.

Thereafter all the leading men in Bombay would ask their producers to have songs recorded by Kishore's voice. Rafi received a further blow when the song "Tum Binu Jawoon Kahun" in



with his career on the decline and faced with income-tax arrears, Kishore Kumar took to staging musical shows in the

... years after her death another actress, Yogeeta Bali. He was born into the family of a successful barrister, and followed his elder brother, Ashok Kumar, already an established film actor, to Bombay in the mid-40s. In 1948 his career as a layback singer began with "Marne Ki Hua," composed by his mentor, Khemchand Prakash for the film "Ziddi."

#### Prominence in 1969

Kishore Kumar's fame took a leap in 1969 with the release of "Aradhana" and the meteoric rise of Rajesh Khanna. The runaway success of the song "Roop Tera Mastana" and "Mere Sapno Ki Rani" sent Kumar to the top of the popularity chart and led to the temporary eclipse of Rafi, a singer whom Kishore had great respect for. For the next 18 years, he dominated the scene. As news of his death spread, film personalities went to his house to pay their last respects. The first to arrive was his brother, Ashok, who was celebrating his birthday. Also at the residence was composer R. D. Burman, who was weeping inconsolably, and his father, S. D. Burman, who was also Kishore's mentor.

#### Recording the Day He Died

"Kishore Kumar's death is a great loss to all music directors," said Bepko Ahiri. He said Kishore had encouraged him to take up singing. Kishore had recorded his last song, a duet with Ashu Bhosle, at the Mehboob studio on the day he died.

On Oct. 14 a huge procession accompanied Kumar's body from his home to the R. K. Studio at Chembur, where it lay in state. Then, accompanied by many film personalities and his son, Amit, who had returned immediately from a singing tour in Canada, it was taken to Khundwa.

#### He was 'The Greatest'

"The greatest entertainer" was how Kishore Kumar was described by everybody. "A genius is born," the singer Manna Dey had said when he first heard Kumar sing 40 years ago. On Oct. 13 a stunned Manna Dey said, "A genius is no more."

The film-maker and actor Raj Kapoor, in a moving speech, said: "The likes of a genius like Kishore Kumar will never be seen again. Even the gods do not have the mold with which such geniuses can be made again."



to be sung by Kishore Kumar.

During the next four decades Kishore wore many hats with distinction — actor, singer, composer, story and screenplay writer, producer and director. Some time in the 1960s he even wanted to be the cinematographer on a film he was producing, but the union concerned vetoed the attempt.

In doing all this, Kishore emerged as the most colorful and resourceful personality in the Indian entertainment world.

#### Reputation as an Eccentric

With each passing year his personal and public life created interesting, and at times sensational, stories in the national press. His reputation as an eccentric often overshadowed his achievements. It is true that he often set his dogs on unwelcome visitors at his bungalow, especially on producers who had refused to take no from him over the phone. He once reportedly turned up on the set with the right side of his head shaved and his left moustache removed to embarrass the producer, who hadn't paid him his salary.

He was married four times — to Ruma Guba, Madhubala, Yogeeta Bati and Leena Chandavarkar. Yogeeta walked out on him within a year of their marriage, complaining he was tightfisted.

And yet this "miser," whose alleged stinginess was the subject of numerous articles, did not stint when it came to producing and directing his own films. These held very little box-office promise, and they indeed failed commercially but all this did not deter him from making more such films.

With his career on the decline and faced with income-tax arrears, Kishore Kumar took to staging musical shows in the late 1960's. They were huge hits, not only were the songs terrific, but Kishore's acrobatics thrilled audiences, too. Above, an advertisement for the show. Seen there is Kishore's ten-year son, Amit. Other photos show the singer in New York. City performances. At left is Kishore with another legend, Lata Mangeshkar, during a North American singing tour.

that was totally lacking in many of his colleagues. For instance, he refused to oblige Sanjay Gandhi, the upstart strongman of Indian politics, at the height of the Emergency, and would not sing in a fund-raising event organized by the Youth Congress leader in 1975.

Irked, Gandhi contrived to get the state-owned All-India Radio to ban all Kishore Kumar songs, but he did not succeed in stopping Kishore's movies from being exhibited. As a result, the lines for Kishore films grew longer at revival theaters, and restaurants with juke boxes did great business with Kishore songs.

The man who accepted the actor's grease paint reluctantly went on to become one of the highest paid stars of the 1950s and early 60s. Though far removed from the conventional mold of Indian movie stars, Kishore endeared himself to the masses, often because of his hilarious performances in such films as "Dilli Ka Thug" and "Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi."

#### Appeared With Top Stars

He performed opposite practically every top star in Bombay. Meena Kumari was his heroine in "Shararat" and many others. Among the films he worked on with Vyjayanthimala was "New Delhi," while Madhubala, arguably the most beautiful star of Indian movies, was his leading lady in half a dozen hits including "Half Ticket." Nutan and Kishore made a terrific team in "Dilli Ka Thug," and Mala Sinha had many entertaining scenes with him in another hit, "Bombai Ka Chor."

But apart from clowning and playing



Even though the voices of Mohammad Rafi and Hemant Kumar were dubbed for Dev in many films, it was to Kishore Kumar he went time after time. Thus except for "Guide," the best songs in Dev Anand's movies, particularly in "Funtoosh," "Nau Do Gyarah," "Prom Pujari" and "Heera Panna" were in Kishore's voice.

However, following the success of "Aradhana," his songs came to be heard on the lips of practically every screen hero, some of them half his age. From Amitabh Bachchan to Rajesh Khanna, Vinod Khanna to Rishi Kapoor, Dharmendra to Sanjeev Kumar, Kishore's voice was almost everyone's favorite — sometimes he belted out fast-moving, gusty numbers that often incorporated his inimitable yodeling. And often there were sad, lingering songs many of which have become milestones of popular Indian music.

#### A Rebirth in the '70s

The story of Kishore Kumar's rebirth as a singer in the early '70s and his continuing success in the 80s cannot be appraised without understanding the "Aradhana" phenomenon — and how he got an opportunity to sing for the film.

The producer, Shakti Samanta was keen on Ashok Kumar's playing an important role in "Aradhana," and he agreed to do so on the condition that his younger brother Kishore would sing for it two or three songs.

Kishore's acting career had practically come to an end by then, even though he had excelled himself in the genuinely funny film "Padmasan," and the income-tax authorities were after him, claiming a huge amount.

The entertainer appeared regularly in stage shows to pay his back taxes.

"Pyar Ka Mausam" came to be recorded in two versions and the Kishore number turned out to be a far bigger hit.

"Pyar Ka Mausam," a 1970 film, has music by Rahul Dev Burman, son of veteran S. D. Burman; the son was just making a name for himself then. He soon proved that he could compose as fine a melody as his father, and many of these memorable songs were sung by Kishore.

#### Longtime Acquaintances

Kishore and R. D. Burman had known each other for many years, since the latter was a regular visitor to his father's recording sessions. Besides, Kishore and R. D. Burman had collaborated for "Padmasan," a film released a few years before "Aradhana." Kishore was one of the heroes of "Padmasan" and the songs "Mere Saamnevale Kidki Mein," "Kahana Hain, Kahana Hain" and "Bindu Re Bindu" had turned out to be smash hits.

Discussing Kishore's superior abilities, R. D. Burman told *Filmfare* three years ago: "Kishore is unbeatable if you send the tape of the tune to him at least 24 hours in advance. Kishore insists on that much, so that he can work on the tune and get its vocal feel. If you fulfill his 24-hour condition, his voice quality is superior to every other singer's."

"Yes, there's been no singer like Kishore," the composer replied. "There was no scope for any innovation once you taught Rafi the song in a particular way. Not so with Kishore, and once he'd got the feel of the number you were free to innovate within the fabric of the tune you had set for him. With Rafi, it wasn't like that."