

Legacy of Lucknow: A Study of Four Famous Personalities of Cinema, Born and Raised in or Near the City

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Abstract: When inquired about the cultivation of maximalism by the City of Nawabs, Lucknow, Muzaffar Ali, the Indian maker, poet, artist, fashion designer, and cultural revivalist, replied, "It (Lucknow) has a deeper sense of understanding and feeling situations. The deeper the feeling the greater the sense of the maximal. Here one thing leads to another, till you create an anjuman, a congregation of people and ideas. These feelings are getting eroded by consumerism and film can be one way of recreating them for everybody." (Shriti Das) Lucknow's culture is marked by tolerance, courtesy and artistic refinement. The city is renowned for storytelling tradition popularly known as *kissa goi*, *mushaira*, *kathak* dance, poetry, theatre, literature, and is associated with the traditions of *ghazals*, and classical music. Lucknow, thus, provides quite a conducive environment for artistic growth and space for everything that constitutes the core components of cinema. Through Muzaffar Ali's words a clear insight into the romantic sophistication of Lucknow city can be perceived in a subtler way: "The rational, historical, humanistic outlook of my father, and the compassionate, culturally-oriented life of my mother, Rani Kaniz Hyder, both were mirrors to the timeless types that existed in Awadh. Through them, these types found their way to the outer world and to the inner world of the sensitive, feminine feudal culture of *Umrao Jaan*" (Meera Ali). Some of the prominent cinema personalities from Uttar Pradesh are Kaifi Azmi, Shakeel Badayuni, Muzaffar Ali and Naushad Ali. Kaifi Azmi, a noted lyricist of Bollywood, was from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh. Shakeel Ahmad was born in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, while Naushad Ali and Muzaffar Ali both hailed from the City of Nawabs, Lucknow. The purpose of this study is to bring together the above mentioned four famous personalities of Hindi cinema born and raised in or near Lucknow, and study the impact that Uttar Pradesh, and Lucknow in particular, had on these eminent personalities so much that it shaped their lives to help them reach the heights and skies of fame and stardom.

Keywords: Lucknow, Culture, Cinema, Music, Poetry, Theatre, Literature, Naushad Ali, Muzaffar Ali, Kaifi Azmi, And Shakeel Badayuni.

1. Introduction

Kaifi Azmi, the famous Indian Urdu poet who is credited for initiating Urdu literature to the Indian cinema, was born Athar Husain Rizvi, in the Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, from where he got the title 'Azmi'. A well-known name in Mushaira gatherings, Kaifi Azmi has worked in Indian films as a lyricist, writer and actor. He received his formal education in Allahabad and Lucknow. The famous song "*Kar chale hum fida jaan-o-tan saathiyon, ab tumhare hawale watan saathiyon*" has been penned down by Kaifi Azmi. The song is a part of Chetan Anand's film *Haqeeqat* (1964). It was composed after the 1962 India-China war as a tribute to soldiers who sacrificed their lives in Ladakh. The song has a timelessness about it, and echoes across India in all national festivals, on all occasions of celebrations of patriotism. Kaifi Azmi is regarded as one of those pioneer writers who brought about a fresh new wave in Hindi film lyrics and changed the tenor and vocabulary of Hindi film songs.

Padma Shri awardee in 1974, the Sahitya Akademi Award winner and winner of National Award, among several others, he is well-known for films like *Kaagaz ke Phool*, *Haqeeqat*, *Garam Hawa*, and *Heer Ranjha*. Subhash K. Jha in *The Statesman* writes, "Kaifi Azmi's lyrics for Hindi cinema endowed depth and beauty to a medium which had been progressively trifled and trivialized by pedestrian motivations."

Peeyush Sharma states, "When one thinks of lyricist, poet, shayar, Shakeel Badayuni in reference to the Hindi Film Song, what comes to mind is his large variety of songs that he composed for various film situations and with many

different music composers. One rare feat (for those times) that gets associated with Shakeel is his hat-trick of Filmfare Best Lyricist Awards in the years 1961, 1962 and 1963... three in a row! The first Filmfare Award in 1961 was for Guru Dutt's *Chaudhvin Ka Chand...*."

Faisal Fareed in his article "Remembering Shakeel Badauni – The Poet Who Immortalised Romantic Shayari" writes, "He got instant success in movies, starting with his very first movie Dard (1947). Shakeel, even today, remains a poet whose name still reverberates whenever we discuss romanticism in poetry. A poet who carved a niche for himself in Mumbai and ruled the masses for several decades. Shakeel Badayuni, as the name suggests, hailed from Badaun, a mofussil town of Uttar Pradesh though famous for many more Urdu litterateurs and eminent poets. Perhaps, it was his native soil that gifted Shakeel with such extraordinary talent." It goes without saying that the place of the artist lends a unique flavour to the sensibility of the artist and therefore the place from where the artist hails is believed to leave an indelible mark on his/her art.

Shakeel Badayuni's talent as a writer and poet came into prominence through his ghazal that he recited in a mushaira. Musician Naushad suggested that Shakeel should come to Mumbai, and that changed his destiny. He teamed up with Naushad to create memorable songs for several superhit movies. Talking about and translating the famous ghazal *Ai mohabbat tere anjaam pe rona aayaa...* Vijay Kumar writes, "This ghazal of Shakeel Badayuni, that has failed love for its central idea, acquired, in the *gaayaki* of Begum Akhtar, an impact that extended beyond the connoisseurs, turned it reasonably popular. The reason: the innate sadness in Begum's *gaayaki* finding an obvious affinity for the sentiments in this ghazal. This was a creative confluence of the highest order."

The lines from the ghazal are:

kabhī taqdīr kā mātām kabhī duniyā kā gila
manzil-e-ishq meñ har gaam pe ronā aayā
yuuñ to har shaam umīdoñ meñ guzar jaatī hai
aaj kuchh baat hai jo shaam pe ronā aayā
mujh pe hī khatm huā silsila-e-nauhagarī
is qadar gardish-e-ayyām pe ronā aayā
jab huā zikr zamāne meñ mohabbat kā 'shakīl'
mujh ko apne dil-e-nākām pe ronā aayā
ai mohabbat tire anzaam par rona aayaa...
jaane kyuuñ aaj tire naam pe ronā aayā

In the Indian film industry Shakeel Badayuni got established as a famous lyricist and worked in association with Naushad Ali, Ravi Sharma, Hemant Kumar, S.D. Burman and many others.

Born in Lucknow, Naushad is celebrated for weaving the rich Indian classical music into the fabric of Indian cinema. Naushad Ali's contribution to Indian cinema is immense. He was a composer as well as one of the greatest music directors of the Hindi film industry. Remembered as 'Moseeqar-e-azam', his compositions for groundbreaking and timeless films like *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Baiju Bawra* have not just made these films immortal but have also immortalized Naushad as a lyricist and writer. Mohita Tewari states that when Naushad Ali composed "Ae shehr-e-lakhnau, tujhe mera salaam hai", the song touched the hearts of every Lakhnavi. She further writes, "Written as an ode to the city of Lucknow and its renowned culture, the song was penned by Shakeel Badayuni with music by Naushad and sung by Mohammed Rafi for the 1967 film 'Palki'. The story of the film was credited to Naushad. The song that plays in the titles salutes the cultural splendour etiquette (adab), and unique identity (like shayari, tehzeeb) of Lucknow since the time of nawabs."

A student of Lucknow's Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, one of the most famous universities that boasts of musical excellence and proudly upholds Naushad Ali as its most reputed and world-famous alumni, Naushad Ali has deep roots in Lucknow. Other notable alumni from Lucknow's Bhatkhande University of world-wide acclaim are Talat Mahmood, Anup Jalota, and Malini Awasthi, to name a few.

Muzaffar Ali was born in Lucknow of the erstwhile United Provinces, British India in 1944. Son of Raja Syed Sajid Husain Ali, Muzaffar Ali, then ruling prince of the principality of Kotwara in Gola Gokaran Nath, and student of La Martiniere, Lucknow, he graduated from Aligarh Muslim University. His initial films *Gaman* (1978) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981) established him as a film maker of repute.

Describing the range and versatility of Muzaffar Ali a web portal, <https://www.muzaffar-ali.com/about>, establishes, ...essentially a painter and filmmaker deeply inspired by Sufism has developed a discerning eye and vision for aesthetics and humanity. He has established an in-depth admiration for his creativity all over the world and follows his creative pursuits without compromise - music, painting, fashion, craft, design - culminating in his passion for making films.

In an interview, Muzaffar Ali speaks of Lucknow "as a sensibility, cinema as composition, and refinement as a form of cultural intelligence." Shriti Das writes,

In Lucknow, refinement is culture, built slowly, transmitted through language, music, dance, poetry, demeanour and craft. Muzaffar Ali's work carries that inheritance. His maximalism is not the maximalism of scale. It is the maximalism of depth: a world where poetry, costume, choreography, light and silence speak to each other, and where a pause can hold as much power as a flourish. If maximalism today is routinely reduced to surface, Ali reminds us that India's richest form of more has always been made from meaning.

In the interview to Shriti Das, Muzaffar Ali discloses the idea of maximalism as employed in *Umrao Jaan* shaped by intellect, culture, and restraint, all that speaks about Lucknow as the cultural hub of India,

Umrao Jaan (1981) was a cerebral film driven by nostalgia, layered with poetry, music wrapped in authentic textiles and fragrant with memories, bathed in light of bygone days. There were no layers left untouched; hence it could be defined as maximal. Everything had a language that spoke to each other.

Meera Ali writes about *Umrao Jaan*, Lucknow and Muzaffar Ali's craft, "As the film progresses, the city begins to fracture. The British arrive not as inheritors of culture but as plunderers of wealth, driven by greed and power. The gentle cadences of Urdu poetry give way to gunfire and dispossession. What was once a centre of civilisation becoming a wounded city. Muzaffar Ali captures this transition with rare sensitivity, never turning history into spectacle, but allowing its violence to quietly dismantle beauty. *Umrao Jaan* is thus not only the story of a courtesan, but it is also the elegy of a culture."

Quite beautifully, Meera Ali, describes how the film *Umrao Jaan* has been successful in preserving the city of Lucknow in the hearts and memories of viewers forever, by mentioning especially about the 'Kotwara House' of Lucknow and how the film has immortalized it into a contemplative space that preserves art, poetry and aesthetics in every sense:

Yet many viewers, having watched *Umrao Jaan*, feel an irresistible pull to the city itself. They come searching for that culture, that poetry, that grace, that elusive refinement. And often, their journey leads them to Kotwara House in Qaiserbagh, Ali's ancestral 1850s home. More than a residence, Kotwara House is a contemplative space, where *Umrao Jaan* was first born in the filmmaker's heart. Today, it has become a living archive, quietly preserving the aesthetics and values the film immortalised. Here, culture is not curated; it is practiced. In the end, *Umrao Jaan* remains what it has always been: not just a film, but an inheritance. A reminder that beauty can survive loss, that poetry can outlast empires, and that a city, once loved deeply enough, never truly disappears.

The article "Celebrating 250 years of Lucknow's Legacy: Icons who Shaped India's Arts & Culture" in *The Times of India* celebrates the legacy of Lucknow, "Lucknow has nurtured a constellation of luminaries who have significantly shaped India's cultural landscape. From Begum Akhtar's soulful ghazals to Naushad Ali's iconic film scores, the city has been a cradle for artistic expression. Talat Mahmood's velvety voice: Javed Akhtar's impactful screenplays, and Amitabh

Bhattacharya and Juhi Chaturvedi's contemporary contributions further enrich Lucknow's legacy in music, film, and literature." Unquestionably, these stalwarts were proud of their associations with the city of Nawabs and so is Lucknow and the state of Uttar Pradesh proud of them.

2. References

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