

Ghulam Haider



Memorable Films

- Gul-e-Bakavali (Punjabi) (1939)
- Yamla Jat (Punjabi) (1940)
- Khazanchi (1941)
- Khandaan (1942)
- Zamindar (1942)
- Poonji (1943)
- Phool (1944)
- Humayaun (1945)
- Majboor (1948)
- Shaheed (1948)
- Kaneez (1949)
- Gulnar (1953)

Ghulam Haider was born in 1908 in Hyderabad (Sind, Pakistan).

He studied dentistry and learnt music from Babu Ganeshlal. Giving up dentistry, he worked in the theatre in Calcutta as a harmonium player - first at the Alfred Theatrical Company and then the Alexandra Theatrical Company. He briefly worked with the Jenaphone recording company as composer and broke into films in Lahore with the father-son duo of Roshan Lal Shorey and Roop Kishore Shorey.

He got his big breakthrough film with D.M. Pancholi's Punjabi film *Gul-e-Bakavali* (1939) followed by *Yamla Jat* (1940), both starring Noorjehan.

His biggest hit came the following year with *Khazanchi* (1941). The music of *Khazanchi* caused a revolution. By then Music Directors of the 1930s, who had embellished films with their exquisite compositions set in classical ragas, were beginning to sound commonplace. *Khazanchi's* refreshingly free wheeling music not only took the audiences by storm but also made other music directors sit up and take notice. Combining popular ragas with the rich verve and rhythm of Punjabi music, Haider ensured that the Indian film song would never be the same again.

Khandaan the following year with Noorjehan was again a mega hit establishing Haider at the very top.

He moved to Bombay where he worked in films like *Chal Chal re Naujawaan* (1944), *Phool* (1944) and *Humayun* (1945). His best-known compositions were sung by Shamshad Begum and invoke Punjabi folk and extensively featured percussion instruments like the dholak.

According to Haider, much of the popularity of a song would depend on its lyrics as well as the skill and style of the singer. As soon as he heard the voice of a singer, he composed a tune suited to that voice. It was essential to him that the singer conveys emotion enough to create the situation the scene demanded.

It was Haider who gave Lata Mangeshkar her first major break in Hindi films with *Majboor* (1948) and took her to S. Mukherjee to sing in *Shaheed* (1948) but Mukherjee rejected her saying her voice was too thin! Haider warned him that this 'poor little thing' would soon put every other singer in the shade including Noorjehan! Other singers he introduced were Sudha Malhotra and Surinder Kaur.

Shaheed and *Kaneez* (1949) were among his last big hits in India. In the former, as patriotic songs go who can forget *Watan ki Raah Mein Watan ke Naujawan Shaheed ho?* The song was used twice in the film, the first at a brisk tempo to raise the moral of the revolutionaries and the second slowly and solemnly as the revolutionary's dead body is carried to the cremation ground.

Music aside, Ghulam Haider was also responsible for raising the status of Music Directors. In those days he demanded and got Rs 25,000 a film! It was a result of his efforts that musicians were given their due and paid better wages.

After partition, Haider returned to Lahore where he started Filmsaz with director S. Nazir Ajmeri and actor S.Gul. *Gulnar* (1953) and *Laila* reunited him with Noorjehan but he could never taste the kind of success that he had in India. He passed away in 1953 soon after the release of *Gulnar*.

Ghulam Haider's success encouraged other Punjabi music directors to enter films. These included Shyam Sunder, Husnlal-Bhagatram, Feroz Nizami and Hansraj Behl. Today Ghulam Haider's name is almost forgotten. What remain are remnants of his work and the works of others influenced by him.