

***MOHAMMED AZIZ – THE VERSATILE SINGER IS NO MORE TO PLAY
BACK***

By Manzar Imam

Famous playback singer Mohammed Aziz died Tuesday 27 November, 2018 in Mumbai. He was 64 and is survived by wife Rubina Aziz, daughter Sana Aziz and son Jazib Waheed Aziz. The news of his death grieved lacs of his fans and followers who loved his singing. But sadly and surprisingly not many film actors for whom he rendered his melodious voice turned out at his final journey. This angered not only Aziz's fans, but many in the Indian film industry some of whom even expressed their displeasure over this disrespectful treatment to the departed soul. Some blame it to the glamorous world of cinema where only rising suns are worshipped stating that it adores you at your rise but ignores you as your stars dim and set.

Whatever be the truth, it is also true that this *Munna* of the Hindi cinema, as Syed Mohammed Aziz-un-Nabi was affectionately called by some, was a darling of the many. His singing was loved by people across India and abroad. Aziz's voice ruled the silver screen in the 1980s and 1990s. From street children to the club of the rich and refined, his songs were listened to everywhere.

He sang for the film industry's big names like Dilip Kumar, Raaj Kumar, Dev Anand, Shammi Kapoor, Bharat Bhushan, Rajesh Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, Jeetendra, Anil Kapoor, Sunny Deol, Govinda, Mithun Chakraborty, Rishi Kapoor, Salman Khan, Shahrukh Khan, Ajay Devgan, Akshay Kumar and, worked with top musicians of his period. His duets with the indomitable Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhonsle were instant hits. His songs with Kavita Krishnamurthy made music lovers go crazy. He also sang with Alka Yagnik and Anuradha Paudwal, the leading female young singers of the 80s and 90s. *Khat Likhna Hai*, *Patjhad Saawan Basant Bahaar* and *Baali Umar Ne Mera Haal Wo Kiya* with Lata Mangeshkar are timeless pieces. *Pyar Hamara Amr Rahega* with Asha Bhonsle and *Tu Na Ja Mere Badshah* with Alka Yagnik are wonderful examples of his soulful singing.

His pairing with famous musical genius duo Laxmikant-Pyarelal gave Indian cinema a number of evergreen songs. He also worked with Bappi Lahiri, R. D. Burman, Rajesh Roshan, Kalyanji-Anandji, Dileep Sen-Sameer Sen, Nadeem-Shravan.

An ardent lover of Mohammed Rafi (1924-1980), Aziz made his debut with Bengali film Jyoti and his first Hindi film was Ambar (1984), also by the maker of Jyoti. However, his first big break was Amitabh Bachchan starrer Mard (1985) in which he was offered by Anu Malik to sing the youthful number *Mard Tangewala* which became a super hit. There was no looking back then.

Some of my favourite songs of Mohammed Aziz are:

Aaj Kal Yaad Kuchh Aur Rehta Nahin

Har Karam Apna Kareng Aye Watan Tere Liye

Duniya Mein Kitna Gham Hai

Ek Andhera Lakh Sitaare

Kaghaz Qalam Dawaat La

Mai Se Meena Se Na Saqi Se

Na Fankar Tujhsa Tere Baad Aaya

Rab Ko Yaad Karun Ek Faryaad Karun

Saare Shikwe Gile Bhula Ke Kaho

Teri Bewafai Ka Shikwa Karun To

Besides Hindi songs Aziz also sang for Bengali, Bhojpuri, Gujrati, Maithli, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Telugu and other regional languages. Apart from film songs he also sang Ghazals, Guru Waani, *Manqabat*, *Na'at*, Qawwalis and some spiritual sufi songs which were equally liked by people. For example *Yeh Duniya Tujhe Kuchh Nahin Dene Wali/Muhammad Ke Dar Pe Chalaja Sawali* is a purely spiritual genre of Qawwali in praise of Prophet Muhammad.

Aziz told an interviewer that his great grandfather Sufi Syed Muhammad Aman Ali was a well-known spiritual figure. It was probably for his family background that he considered himself a *faqir* and never disputed or disrespected any of his producers and directors. His humbleness won him huge love and respect from people like Asha Bhonsle who insisted Pancham Da (R.D. Burman) to give him a chance.

Shocked at the news of his demise music director Anu Malik called him a tremendously hardworking singer who was always ready to learn, improvise and give his best. Lata Mangeshkar remembered him as a “very kind-hearted and soft-spoken man with a good mastery over the seven notes.” The 1992 critically acclaimed film Roja’s actor Madhoo Shah described his death as a big loss. Few days after his death Amitabh Bachchan Tweeted, “his sudden passing has left us in shock.”

Mohammad Aziz was born on 2 July 1954 in Guma, North 24 Parganas in West Bengal and lived in Kolkata in his ancestral home built over 150 years ago. His daughter Sana Aziz is said to have studied music at AR Rahman’s KM Music Conservatory and has even sung with Alka Yagnik.

As a child artiste Aziz started singing when in school. With growing popularity among friends and colleagues he was offered to sing in Kolkata’s Ghalib restaurant. Music director duo Sapan-Jagmohan and Usha Khanna gave him break and recognized his talent. After the chartbuster *Mard Tangewala* he rose to further prominence with *Allah Hoo Allah Hoo* recorded for Kala Dhanda Goray Log. According to a recent interview he has sung 19,000 songs.

Aziz received the prestigious BFJ Award thrice in Kolkata, Aashirwaad Award twice in Mumbai and, Mother Teresa International Award. The veteran singer also received an award from Ex-President of India Gyani Zail Singh for excellence in music.

Call it a bad luck or Aziz’s lack of hobnobbing with the bigwigs of the industry that despite singing nineteen thousand songs many of which were big hits, he did not win any Film Fare Award, although thrice nominated for it. But that does not make him any less than a legend who will be adored and missed for generations of music lovers.

Bio

Manzar Imam is a freelance journalist based in New Delhi. He divides his time between writing and research and follows his heart to celebrate India's diversity of art, culture and tradition.

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