

Don't today's singers have anything new to offer? Lata Mangeshkar Mumbai - Legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar, who had refused to sing 'Mujhe buddha mil gaya' for Raj Kapoor's 'Sangam' as she considered it vulgar, laments the lack of originality in new singers. 'The upcoming girls and boys who dance to vulgar tunes and words and sing them, what is their identity?' asked Lata in an interview with IANS here. Lata, who was two years old when sound came to Indian cinema and just 12 when she began singing for movies, asked: 'If people are looking for genuine talent, why are they singing our songs and compositions? Don't they have anything new to offer?' To the usual reasoning of 'public demand', she retorted: 'If they are giving what the public wants, why aren't their songs lasting for more than two months? Don't blame the public for your trash creativity.' Born as Hema Hardikar, Lata, now 77, has been the unbroken string spanning several decades of Bollywood music and continues to lend her voice to actresses young enough to be her great-granddaughters. 'Even as children, our interest was never much in film music. We were more into classical and folk music. It was purely because we had to earn a living that I opted for film singing,' Lata said in the interview that ran for over 20 minutes. 'My family was already into moviemaking. So film singing became a natural and obvious choice for a career.' Indeed, the phenomenon of Lata Mangeshkar is purely happy fate. Destiny may have led this nightingale elsewhere if her father Dinanath Mangeshkar had not died when she was just 13, or if she was not the eldest in the family, who took it upon herself to earn the daily bread. Interestingly, according to Lata, her father forbade the listening to or singing of film songs, except those of K.L. Saigal. Lata's voice first created a stir when she won the Khazanchi Trophy in 1941 in Pune for singing composer Ghulam Haider's songs originally sung by Noorjehan. 'In those days, Saigal sahab's voice used to turn our knees to jelly,' Lata reminisced. 'Of course, there were so many other artistes, including great ones like K.C. Dey (uncle of legendary singer Manna Dey), Zohrabai and Noorjehan.' 'Badi Maa' (1945) saw Lata and her sister Asha Bhosle acting alongside Noorjehan, with Lata singing for both - herself and Asha - in it. 'That was a time when I also used to act in movies - again only to earn a living. It was only after the end of the 1940s that I took up singing fulltime,' a nostalgic Lata reminisced. Her first film song was for the Marathi movie 'Kiti Hasaal' (1942). In Hindi it was for 'Aap Ki Seva Mein' (1947) in which she sang compositions by Datta Davjekar. However, her first impact came with 'Majboor' (1948) in which she sang her first duet with Mukesh - 'Ab darne ki kya baat', which had a faint resemblance to 'Tu cheez badi hai mast mast' (Mohra, 1994). Legend has it that Ghulam Haider locked horns with his employer Filmistan after a song recorded in Lata's voice for 'Shaheed' (1948) was deleted and worked with a vengeance on 'Majboor' for Bombay Talkies. However, Lata made Bollywood music history by haunting Indian audiences with her 'Ayega anewala' composed by Khemchand Prakash for Kamal Amrohi's 'Mahal' (1949). Ironically the film's credits named the singer as 'Kamini', the character played by the ethereal Madhubala who sings the song, Lata wiped out any competition overnight after 'Mahal'. After reigning supreme for more than five decades and being honoured with the Bharat Ratna in 2001, Lata has slowed down but keeps tabs on contemporary quality. Expressing irritation with the current crop of film songs and composers, she said: 'Earlier even if the film was a bad one, the film's music used to see to it that it was a hit. 'Even people used to like variety in emotions - sad, romantic, comedy, patriotic. Show me one example of even one good sad song in recent times.'

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