



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Date:07-02-22

The Voice Of India

In an ever-changing country, Lata Mangeshkar seamlessly knitted our past with our present

TOI Editorials

Since Independence, Lata Mangeshkar has been inseparable from the soundtrack of our everyday lives. At kasbah roundabouts, in village fairs, at paan shops, in middle-class drawing rooms, her democratising voice was ever-present like the air we breathe. Like the Ganga and the Himalaya, she was always there. In antaksharis, college fests, home celebrations – rakhi, kirtan, ladies sangeet – there was a song by her for every occasion, season and reason; and in almost every Indian language. She transcended generations. At 60, she sang ‘Dil deewana’ for heroine Bhagyashree, then 20, in *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989). Even at 92, she had nearly 15 million followers on Twitter. In an everchanging country, Lata seamlessly knitted our past with our present.

In its core, every voice carries a code we must decipher to understand what it culturally represents. Lata’s voice encapsulated sweetness, purity and simplicity – traits matching the mood and predilections of the times when she rose to prominence. It didn’t convey power and muscle. Much like her persona, her voice embodied quiet strength and resolve. No surprise, she fought and succeeded in the male-dominated film industry on her own terms. The singer also represented, like film director Satyajit Ray and actor Dilip Kumar, an unwavering dedication towards attaining excellence. Uncompromising work ethic, devotion to meticulousness and unmatched talent combined to ensure that even the most demanding of songs was perfected and delivered with care. For decades, every aspiring singer wanted to sing like her; aptly reflected in the number of clones that subsequently emerged.

Lata was a cultural icon like few others were or will be and a global ambassador for India. Her listener-base extended way beyond the diaspora. Her voice was the courier and the carrier of Hindi cinema’s “soft power” in large swathes of Africa and Asia, way before the term, Bollywood, was coined. In 1974, Michael Foot, the British Labour Party leader, introduced her as “the voice of India” before her famous Royal Albert Hall performance in London. For many, India and Lata were synonymous.

It is well known that Lata’s rendition of ‘Ae mere watan ke logon’, made Nehru weep. Not many remember she often sang at charity shows for the jawans, the World Cup winning cricket team in 1983, and the film industry workers after the major strike in 1986. In an interview to the TOI back in 2009, director Shyam Benegal had said that with the possible exception of Egypt’s Umm Kulthum, no other singer represented the singing voice of her country like Lata. He was right. The songs of India and Lata will forever be intertwined as the country marches towards its 75th year of Independence. The singer passed away on Sunday but she will come alive every time we hear her song somewhere.

Date:07-02-22

Tere Bina Zindagi Se

Without Lata Mangeshkar, Indian film music wouldn't have sounded the same, actresses wouldn't have looked so beautiful on screen and the stories would have been insipid

Vishal Bhardwaj, [Composer and filmmaker]

When I first came to Mumbai, I had two dreams: The first was to do a song with Gulzar Saab and the second was to have Lata ji sing a composition of mine. The first dream was realised in 1992 when I composed a song that was penned by Gulzar Saab – the Jungle Book song 'Chaddi Pehen Ke Phool Khila Hai'.

To realise my second dream, I had to wait for some time as Lata ji had become particular about the songs she chose. On one occasion, Gulzar Saab spoke to her on my behalf about a song that I had composed and she asked him to send the song on tape to her. After listening, she called me personally to tell me that the song was beautiful and that she would sing it. Although the film was eventually shelved and the song remained unreleased, this was the beginning of my relationship with her.

I had worked with almost all the big singers of the time except Lata ji and I was amazed at our first recording session. For this first song of mine, she was so well prepared – she had learnt and prepared the entire song and had it written by hand. Her homework was excellent and this was something rare.

By that time, the multitrack recording system had come into play and singers would sing maybe 1-2 lines at a time but never the full song in one go as they would not be prepared. (Today, the singers sometimes do 1 word at a time.) However, Lata ji came fully prepared and did the full song in one go.

In our first recording session, I was overwhelmed by her and very nervous. So she called me to the recording booth and asked me to relax and treat her like a newcomer. This was the greatness of Lata Mangeshkar. To give confidence to a newcomer, she became one herself.

In a recording session, first she would sing a little away from the mic and when she came to the mic to sing, it was pure magic. She even had a very unique way of appreciating the composer and his composition. Every song has a special section which makes it unique. Lata ji instinctively recognised this section and when that section would arrive, she would smile so subtly that only the composer would understand that gesture.

She was a very precise artist, totally dedicated to her craft. Every syllable and word was well-measured before being delivered. So once she had sung the song, and you asked for one more take, she would bring her reading glasses down to the tip of her nose, stare penetratingly at you and ask "Why?", a stare that would rattle even stalwarts. After I had gotten to know her better, I asked her about her infamous stare. She explained that once she had delivered her best, she needed to know what was missing in order to do another take.

I came to know her better as a person as I continued working with her and soon came to know that she had a great and sharp sense of humour. We used to look forward to her recordings because she would always come with two great jokes every time. One joke before the recording and one joke after the recording, both of which would crack us up for half an hour at least.

Another signature of hers was the keychain, the chaabi ka guchcha, that would hang on hers and would chime with the slightest movement of her hand. Initially, in mixing the song, we would filter it out but later, I realised how musical and mysterious it made the song sound so we stopped filtering it out from the song.

What separated her from all the rest was that she was not just a playback singer there to do a day's job. She had an acute understanding of the drama of the song, the mental state of the character. This allowed her to contribute beautifully to the music.

A year back, I chanced upon a goldmine where I found the long-lost tape of a recording of Lata ji, which was done 26 years ago. The film was shelved and the song remained unreleased. It was a multitrack recording and we were able to retrieve her voice. I rearranged the song and planned to release it on her 92nd birthday in 2021. Before doing so I had to get her approval and in the process, I had a chance to speak to her after a very long time.

She heard the song, titled 'Theek Nahi Lagta' and immediately called me. She started by saying that the song was very good but the lyrics were wrong. I was baffled as I had no way of altering her voice or the lyrics. I asked her what was wrong in it. And she replied – "The song is very nice so why am I repeatedly saying 'Theek Nahi Lagta'?" I cracked up, But she didn't stop at that. She had a bouquet of jokes ready for me.

Her sense of humour had gotten even sharper with age. She was going to be 92 a few days later but she sounded like a 9-year-old. There was a child in her that never lost her innocence. And that's why she remained so full of life till the end.

She remains with us every day on all occasions – no matter whether we are sad or happy. Recently, I discovered another dimension of the Nightingale. On shoots, when things are chaotic and everything is going crazy, I put on my headphones and listen to one of her songs. I am immediately transported to another world and even though I am physically in the chaos, I am still completely disconnected.

For us, Lata ji is a goddess. Without her, Indian film music wouldn't have sounded the same, the actresses wouldn't have looked so beautiful on screen and the stories would have remained insipid. And that's not just because of her voice or training or the craft but because of her soul, which she poured into the song along with her technique.

Science says that there are billions of suns in our galaxy, but our Earth witnesses only one. Many singers may come and go but this Earth will only witness one Lata Mangeshkar.

I feel so fortunate that I lived in the times in which Lata Mangeshkar lived. And I know I can be with her whenever I want, through her songs. And that makes me say today, "Tere bina zindagi se koi, shikwa, to nahi ... tere bina zindagi bhi lekin, zindagi, to nahi. "

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Date:07-02-22

Counting On Digital Currency

RBI, prepare a CBDC roll-out blueprint

ET Editorials



Now that India has announced the launch of a central bank digital currency (CBDC) in the coming fiscal, RBI must swiftly prepare a blueprint for its phased roll-out. A CBDC could provide households and businesses a convenient electronic form of central bank money with the safety and liquidity that it would entail, give entrepreneurs a platform on which to create new financial products and services, support faster and cheaper cross-border payments across jurisdictions. Already, RBI is examining whether CBDCs should be used in retail or wholesale payments, what the underlying technology (distributed or centralised ledger) and validation mechanism (token or account-based) should be.

Technical clarity must be ensured to decide on the underlying technologies that can be trusted to be safe and stable. Given the pace of innovation, that may not be easy. The pros and cons of underlying technologies are yet to be scrutinised for large-scale rollout, given the energy consumption constraints reported so far. The next step is to build a comprehensive CBDC ecosystem, with its operation mechanisms, institutions and rules that coexist with the current currency, through whatever means. The two will coexist for a long time. As India wants to leverage its fintech startup space and reap the benefits of a digital currency — even as it seems to have decided to recognise CBDC as the only digital currency — it would do well to exercise the same degree of caution while moving forward to roll out a CBDC.


THE HINDU

Date:07-02-22

India's 'return' to Central Asia

While the gains from engaging Central Asia may be minimal, non-engagement could be costly

Happymon Jacob is Associate Professor, Centre for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi



The inaugural India-Central Asia Summit, the India-Central Asia Dialogue, and the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in New Delhi — all held over the past four months — collectively indicate a renewed enthusiasm in New Delhi to engage the Central Asian region. India has limited economic and other stakes in the region, primarily due to lack of physical access. And yet, the region appears to have gained a great deal of significance in India’s strategic thinking over the years, particularly in the recent past. India’s mission Central Asia today reflects, and is responsive to, the new geopolitical, if not the geo-economic, realities in the region. More so, India’s renewed engagement of Central Asia is in the right

direction for the simple reason that while the gains from an engagement of Central Asia may be minimal, the disadvantages of non-engagement could be costly in the longer run.

Great power dynamics

One of the factors driving this engagement and shaping it is the great power dynamics there. The decline of American presence and power in the broader region (due primarily to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan) has led to a reassertion by China and Russia seeking to fill the power vacuum. While China dominates the geo-economic landscape, Russia is the dominant politico-military power in the region. But in the end, geo-economics might gain more traction. A somewhat anxious Moscow considers India to be a useful partner in the region: it helps it to not only win back New Delhi, which is moving towards the U.S., but also to subtly checkmate the rising Chinese influence in its backyard.

For the U.S., while growing India-Russia relations is not a welcome development, it recognises the utility of Moscow-New Delhi relations in Central Asia to offset Beijing’s ever-growing influence there.

As for China, India’s engagement of the region and the growing warmth in India-Russia relations are not a cause for concern yet, but they could be eventually.

For New Delhi, it’s about breaking out of a continental nutcracker situation it finds itself in. In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, New Delhi faces a major dilemma in the wider region, not just in the pre-existing theatres like the Line of Control and the Line of Actual Control. There are growing and legitimate concerns within the Indian strategic community that India in the region might get further hemmed in due to the combined efforts by China, Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan. If so, it must

ensure that there is no China-led strategic gang up with Pakistan and the Taliban against India in the region, which, if it becomes a reality, would severely damage Indian interests.

Focus on Afghanistan

India's engagement of Central Asia would also help it to consolidate its post-American Afghan policy. U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has landed India in a major dilemma – it has very limited space to engage Taliban 2.0 despite the current relationship whose future depends on a number of variables. During the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani governments, given their proximity to India and the presence of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, India was able to engage Kabul without too much hardship, despite Pakistani resistance. Now that the Taliban have returned to Kabul, New Delhi is forced to devise new ways of engaging Afghanistan. That's where the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Russia could be helpful. For instance, given its location bordering Afghanistan as well as its close geographical proximity to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Tajikistan holds immense geopolitical significance for India (incidentally, India helps maintain an airbase in the country). One has to wait and see how far India will innovate to engage CARs in pursuit of its interests in Afghanistan. The announcement of a Joint Working Group on Afghanistan during the summit between India and the CARs is surely indicative of such interest.

In India's current vision for a regional security architecture, Russia appears prominent. President Vladimir Putin's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the earlier meeting between Russian National Security Adviser General Nikolai Patrushev and Mr. Modi are indications of the growing relationship. A cursory glance at the various issues being discussed between the two sides also indicates a new joint thinking on regional security. Of course, New Delhi expects the U.S. to understand that in the wake of the latter's withdrawal from the region leaving India in the lurch, New Delhi has no choice but to work with the Russians.

By courting Russia — its traditional partner, also close to China and getting closer to Pakistan — to help it re-establish its presence in the Central Asian region, India is seeking to work with one of the region's strongest powers and also potentially create a rift between China and Russia, to the extent possible. The two countries recently exchanged a 'non-paper' on how to increase their joint engagement in Central Asia. Both India and the CARs use Russian defence equipment, and the non-paper has reportedly explored the possibility of joint Indo-Russian defence production in some of the existing Soviet-era defence facilities in the CARs to meet local and Indian demands. The non-paper also reportedly discusses potential trilateral defence exercises among India, Russia and the CARs. In any case, joint defence production by India and Russia has been on the rise and the CARs could play a key role in it. This growing India-Russia partnership also explains India's non-critical stance on the developments in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Challenges

That said, India's 'return' to Central Asia is not going to be easy. For one, China, which shares a land border with the region, is already a major investor there. China is the region's most important economic partner, a reality that worries Russia and sharpens India's relative irrelevance in the region.

An even bigger challenge for India may be Iran. India's best shot at reaching the CARs is by using a hybrid model – via sea to Chabahar and then by road/rail through Iran (and Afghanistan) to the CARs. So, for New Delhi, the ongoing re-negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (or the Iran nuclear deal) are of crucial importance. If there is a deal, it would bring Tehran back into the Western fold and

away from China (and Russia), which will be favourable to India. While Iran getting close to the West is not preferred by Russia (but preferred by India), if and when it becomes a reality, India would be able to use it to its advantage and join Russia in engaging the CARs. India's ongoing outreach to Iran and the now-postponed visit of the Iranian foreign minister to New Delhi help repair some of the damage done to the relationship over the years.

But finally, perhaps most importantly, will India walk the talk on its commitments to Central Asia? Does it have the political will, material capability and diplomatic wherewithal to stay the course in the region?

Live
हिन्दुस्तान
.com

Date:07-02-22

उनको सुनकर जी उठते थे

यतींद्र मिश्र , (कला समीक्षक)

देश के लिए कल का दिन सबसे बेसुरा रहा। हम सबकी अपनी और बेहद आदरणीय पार्श्व गायिका लता मंगेशकर का निधन भारतीय जनमानस के लिए उन सबसे कष्टप्रद क्षणों में एक है, जिसकी कल्पना कोई शायद ही कभी करना चाहता था। भारतीय उप-महाद्वीप की सबसे सुरीली उपस्थिति का लोप, एक ऐसी कलात्मक विपन्नता है, जो इस शताब्दी में शायद ही पूरी हो सके।

लता मंगेशकर सिर्फ एक आवाज, एक किरदार, एक कलाकार का नाम नहीं है, बल्कि यह आजाद भारत की सांस्कृतिक विकास-यात्रा के समानांतर चलने वाला वह प्रतीक भी है, जिसके होने से संगीत और सिनेमा की दुनिया में तब उजाला फैलना शुरू हुआ, जब सन 1947 में फिल्म आपकी सेवा में उनकी आमद हुई थी। क्या संयोग है कि इस देश को आजाद हुए जितना समय बीता है, उतने ही लंबे कालखंड में लता दीनानाथ मंगेशकर की जीवंत आवाज की सुरीली यात्रा जारी रही है।

हिंदी फिल्म संगीत के इतिहास पर निगाह डालते हुए कुछ ऐसे गाने याद आते हैं, जिनको आज दशकों बाद याद करते हुए आंखों में आंसू आते हैं। मदन मोहन के संगीत में बागी (1953) के लिए उनका गाया हमारे बाद अब महफिल में अफसाने बयां होंगे, हेमंत कुमार की कंपोजीशन में दुर्गेशनंदिनी (1956) का कहां ले चले हो बता दो मुसाफिर, सितारों से आगे ये कैसा जहां है और रोशन की संगीतबद्ध ममता (1966) में रहें न रहें हम महका करेंगे तो आज भी जितने प्रासंगिक हुए जाते हैं, उनकी कालातीत अभिव्यक्ति प्रसन्न करने की जगह इस वक्त दुख दे रही है। यह हममें से किसी भी संगीतप्रेमी ने कभी न सोचा होगा कि एक ऐसा समय भी आएगा, जिसमें हम लता जी की अनुपस्थिति की चर्चा करेंगे, जबकि हम यह जानते हैं कि जीवन के साथ मृत्यु एक ऐसा सत्य है, जिसे गरिमा और आदर के साथ हर किसी को स्वीकारना ही पड़ता है। संयत रहते हुए और लता जी के विराट जीवन को संपूर्णता से देखने के बावजूद कबीर की यह सूक्ति झुठलाने का मन करता है- हम न मरब मरिहें संसारा/ हमको मिला जियावनहारा!

लता जी की गायिकी और उनकी सहेजी हुई सांगीतिक थाती उसी जियावनहारा की तरह है, जो एक आम व्यक्ति को उसके सबसे नाजुक और तकलीफ भरे क्षणों में राहत के पल मुहैया कराती है। इस बात से कौन इतिहास नहीं रखेगा कि उसके जीवन में लता मंगेशकर का गाया हुआ कोई न कोई ऐसा गीत जरूर रहा है, जिसने उसे प्रभावित किया, तकलीफ के मौकों पर संबल प्रदान किया या किसी आत्मीय और उल्लास वाले समय में उसके आनंद में वृद्धि की। लता मंगेशकर एक ऐसा करिश्मा रही हैं, जिनको भारतीय जनमानस ने बड़े स्तर पर जाति, पंथ, मजहब व सरोकारों से ऊपर उठकर सराहा और प्यार किया। एक पारंपरिक मराठी ब्राह्मण परिवार की बेटी की आवाज में खुदा की इबादत का सलाम बेकस पे करम कीजिए सरकारे-मदीना गाते हुए किसकी आंखें नहीं भीगी होंगी? मीराबाई की करुण पुकार का पद सखी री लाज बैरन भई हो या मराठी फिल्म अमर भूपाली की प्रार्थना घनश्याम सुंदरा श्रीधरा अरुणोदय झाला, लता जी हर जगह अप्रतिम थीं, उनका भाव अपूर्व था, आवाज अतुलनीय रही।

लता मंगेशकर की उपस्थिति का अवदान अब व्यापक अर्थों में शोध का भी विषय है। जैसे, उनके होने में दक्षिण एशियाई स्त्री की गरिमा और पहचान, उसकी उन्मुक्त आकांक्षा का स्वप्न और संघर्ष, पारंपरिक ढंग से जीवन जीते हुए अपनी कला में शिखर अर्जित करने का मुकाम, सभी कुछ प्रेरणा की तरह भविष्य में देखे-समझे जाएंगे। उन्होंने सिनेमा जैसे माध्यम में रहते हुए ढेरों मानक तय किए। जब आवाज की दुनिया को बहुत सम्मान नहीं दिया जाता था, उस दौर में भी उन्होंने यह सुनिश्चित किया कि रेडियो पर फिल्मी गीतों को बजाने से पूर्व पार्श्व गायकों-गायिकाओं के नाम भी प्रसारित किए जाएं। खान मस्ताना जैसे गायक की आर्थिक दशा से विचलित होकर उन्होंने यह लड़ाई लड़ी कि गायकों को भी अन्य लोगों की तरह फिल्म और रेकॉर्ड कंपनियों उचित लाभांश (रॉयल्टी) प्रदान करें। इसके साथ उन्होंने यह भी अपनी जिद पर संभव किया कि सिनेमा में अश्लील और द्विअर्थी बोलों वाले गीतों को कभी नहीं गाएंगी।

उन्हीं के इसरार पर यह एक परिपाटी सी बनी कि लता जी की रिकॉर्डिंग के दौरान दिग्गज साहिर लुधियानवी, मजरूह सुल्तानपुरी और शैलेंद्र जैसे गीतकार भी स्टूडियो में मौजूद रहते थे, ताकि किसी गीत को रिकॉर्ड करते समय लता जी को कोई परेशानी आड़े आती है, तो शब्द वहीं दुरुस्त किए जा सकें। फिल्मफेयर पुरस्कारों में उनके मना करने पर कि सर्वश्रेष्ठ संगीत के लिए दिए जाने वाले पुरस्कार में वह अपनी आवाज नहीं देंगी, क्योंकि यह सम्मान गायकी के लिए नहीं है, संगीतकार अपनी धुन बजा दें, फिल्मफेयर को पार्श्व गायन के लिए एक नई श्रेणी आरंभ करनी पड़ी, जिसका फायदा लता मंगेशकर को ही नहीं, बाद की पीढ़ी को भी मिला। ऐसी ढेरों मिसालें हैं, जिनसे लता मंगेशकर की जिजीविषा, उनकी सैद्धांतिकी और संघर्ष की आंच को कुंदन बनते देखा जा सकता है।

यह लता ही थीं, जिनके कारण तीन मिनट के गीतों में हम रागदारी की शुद्धता, मीड़ और गमक का असाधारण काम और शब्दों के बीच ध्वनित होने वाले अर्थों को उसकी शुद्ध साहित्यिक आभा के कारण सुन सकते हैं। पंडित कुमार गंधर्व ने उन पर एक लेख लिखा और यह स्थापित करने की पहल की कि लता का स्थानापन्न शास्त्रीय गायिकी में भी संभव नहीं। पंडित जसराज का यह कहना कि भला हुआ, लता फिल्म संगीत में हैं, नहीं तो हम लोगों का क्या होता, दरअसल ये अतिरंजित कथन नहीं हैं, बल्कि एक करिश्माई किरदार के प्रति वह आभार और कृतज्ञता ज्ञापन हैं, जो पिछली शताब्दी में इस सुरीली गंधर्व-सेविता को हासिल हुए हैं।

मेरा पक्का विश्वास है कि गंधर्व-सेविताएं मरती नहीं, बल्कि अपने लोक को छोड़कर दूसरे लोक को सुरीला करने जाती हैं। अब पृथ्वी पर मौजूद यह स्वर देवलोक चला गया है, जहां से ढेरों राग-रागिनियां अपनी सबसे उदात्त अभिव्यक्ति में सुर का एक प्रतिसंसार रच रही होंगी। हम यहां उनके न रहने पर उन्हीं की आवाज में तड़पते रह जाएंगे, जो आज से

बरसों पहले उन्होंने गाकर अभिव्यक्त किया था- खुदा निगहबान हो तुम्हारा/ धड़कते दिल का पयाम ले लो/ तुम्हारी दुनिया से जा रहे हैं/ उठो हमारा सलाम ले लो!
