

Chapter – IX

The under mentioned text of my interview was published in the Film Magazine “STAR AND STYLE” in its issue , May-30, June, 12, 1980 on the occasion of 16th. Death Anniversary. of late Mehboob Khan. Mr. Zaheer Nasir and Jalees Abidi, Journalists, had interviewed me.



Mehboob Khan
Joined the industry as
an extra...
departed as its leader.

Mr. Khan Mohammad Sadiq Khan, General Manager of Rajshri Pictures Pvt. Ltde., and a one time close associate of the great Mehboob Khan re-calls how his life with Mehboob Khan began:

On 24th September, 1960, I started work as an assistant accountant with Mehboob Khan's distribution office in Bombay. In June 1962 the Manager of the office Mr. Lalit Kumar Gandhi told me that Mehboob Khan wanted to see me at his house. The next morning I went to Shalimar Building at Marine Drive, Mehboob Khan summoned me to his bedroom. After a few minutes of casual conversation he informed me that, I was being sent to his Calcutta office as an Assistant Manager. It was the month of June. Barely 20 days after, I reached Calcutta in the first week of July. I was hardly able to adjust myself in Calcutta when suddenly I received a call from Mehboob Khan from Delhi, as at that time he was in Delhi, and asked me to come to Delhi to take charge of his newly started office as Manager. Within about 2 ½ months of my stay in Calcutta I packed and reached in Delhi on 22nd. of September 1962. I took charge in Delhi and released independently the film “Son of India” on 22nd. of December, 1962 at a very critical time when China had attacked at our country. Though the film failed commercially but at least its business from this office was in no way less than other circuits of India. The failure of the film Son of India placed Mehboob Khan in a very tight financial constraint. However, Mehboob Khan, was a powerful man and a great cinematic genius, who rose from the ranks of faceless extra to become one of the greatest directors, India has ever produced, as well as the most indefatigable leader and spokesman to emerge on behalf of the Film Industry of India until his untimely death between the nights of 27th and 28th of May, 1964 just few hours after the death of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, did not lost his faith in himself and started working on the script of ‘Habba Khatoon’ which he wanted to make to make with the title of “Mera Watan”.

The script was being discussed with Mr. Ali Raza and Sardar Jafri. Mehboob Khan was not in favour of entrusting the script making with only one person but simultaneously two or three writers used to be entrusted the job and finally it used to be finalized by him. It is because of this reason most of his films flashed the credit line, Story by Mehboob Productions' Story Department.

Habba Khatoon had caught his fancy because the then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (Late) G.M. Sadiq wanted him to make an enchanting film with Kashmir as its background and promised him all facilities for this project. After the finalization of the script the Mahurat ceremony was performed, Saira Banu was to portray the role of Habba Khatoon.

Mehboob Khan used to make films with confidence in himself. Mere mention of his name against any film Produced and Directed by him, the audiences flocked to see it. Superstars deemed it an honour to work with him. He never wished to encash the popularity of any star. Keeping in mind the suitability of artist for the particular subject when he selected Saira Banu he decided to co-star Rajendra Kumar in the male lead against Saira. However, Rajendra Kumar being in his top popularity at that time was probably reluctant to accept Mehboob's terms. Mehboob had never learnt to bow before any star so the project kept delayed. It is reported that on the day of his death i.e. on 27th. May 1964 Mehboob had a long and un-conclusive discussion with Rajendra Kumar since 11 a.m. till about 1 or 1.30 p.m. which discussion got discontinued; when the news about Pandit Nehru's death was flashed on Radio; to be resumed later which occasion never came as even Mehboob Khan also died same night.

Mehboob Khan was not ashamed of his humble beginnings. When "Mother India" was released in 1957, Mehboob Khan brought out a lavishly and artistically produced brochure. Normally, the people who rise from rags to riches try to conceal their poverty-ridden past. But not Mehmoob Khan, who always looked back proudly on his days of struggle. The brochure reminisced:

"Young Mehboob was haunted by a dream. He scraped together some money and landed in Bombay in 1927, with only Rs.3/- in his pocket. With great difficulty he passed through the gates of the Imperial Film Company and was taken into the presence of its boss, Khan Bahadur Ardeshir Irani.

One look at young Mehboob and Khan Bahadur Irani roared, 'Another star struck lad! Why don't you go back and do some honest work on your father's farm?' Before Mehboob could fumble out a reply, he heard the muezzin's call to prayer from adjoining mosque. Mehboob folded his hands and said ' Seth I'll just say my prayers and come back. Please excuse me. Mehboob rushed to the Pathan watchman's guardhouse and prayed by his side'".

Mehboob was courageous enough to carry dossier of his period of struggle, to Hollywood, when "Mother India" was nominated for an Oscar.

Mehboob Khan had planned to produce a Historical movie after Dilip Kumar, Nimmi starrer "Amar". However due to the failure of Amar he deferred its production and started Mother India. After completing Mother India Mehboob Khan once again started working on the above project. The script of the said proposed movie, tentatively titled "Mumtaz Mahal"

was complete. Even sketches for the sets and designs for costumes had been finalized. Because the said project was likely to cost over two crores which was considered a very big budget hence pending arrangement for finance he started a small budget film, Son of India which also commercially failed, which came in the way as obstruction for Mehboob Khan from venturing on "Mumtaz Mahal". His dream could not be materialized, immediately after the release of "Son of India". The script of "Mumtaz Mahal" with the title of "Who Built the Taj" was actually finalized while Mehboob Khan was in U.S.A. in connection with his treatment as he was suffering from heart ailment. Had Mumtaz Mahal ever appeared on celluloid, it would have been India's first 70mm film, for which he had got constructed a special stage in his studios.

Mehboob Khan had visualized the cast of "Mumtaz Mahal" with a keenness of perception that was his exclusive forte. According to his perception he had decided Raajkuma to play the lead role of the Architect of Taj Mahal named, Issa Shirazi. Dilip Kumar was portray the role of Shah Jahan, Elizabeth Taylor as the Arjumand Bano i.e. Mumtaz Mahal. Saira Bano as a Hindu young girl Radhika, to associate with another Hindu character named Mohan for which he intended to have Rajendra Kumar or Sunil Dutt. In fact Mehboob had planned to do the said film with some prominent Hollywood producer in collaboration and both in Hindustani and English. This was his initial idea but finding lot of restrictions and formalities in getting clearance from the Government he decided to make the film on his own.

Mehboob Khan has been President of IMPPA, Guild and FFI on various occasions and successfully lead the Industry. On several occasions I accompanied Mehboob Khan when he visited ministers at the Centre. In 1962-63 there was an uproar in the press and Parliament about the proliferation of black money within the film Industry. Morarji Desai was Minister for Finance in those days. Manubhai Shah was Minister of state of Industries. In one of the meetings, I was also present with Mehboob Khan, Manubhai Shah pleaded with Mehboob Khan, "You are an honest man. You are also an accepted leader of the film Industry by providing us a list of all those who deal in black money."

Mehboob Khan calmly digested the above remark of Manubhai Shah and after few seconds retorted, "We are film people, and do not profess to be angels like politicians and big business houses of the country. We do not claim that the film industry has washed its hands clean of black money. But I am sure of one thing; the whole country is under the shadow of black money and it is a parallel economy; but our own Industries' participation or share would hardly touch not even 5 to 7% mark. The Government focuses its attention on us simply because film people, being in show business, appear to live lavishly since they are expected to appear like that. If an actor does not show off, producers do not sign him/her because they feel he/she is unpopular. If a producer does not maintain an air-conditioned office and a magnificent limousine, the distributor brand him pauper and does not by his film fearing that he may not be able to complete the film. To add to our misery, banks and other financial institutions do not give us credit because as Industry Minister you are not willing to recognize this Industry as an Industry. The producers are forced to seek finance from private money-lending agencies at back-breaking rates of interest. Thus the main source of finance for films is black money pumped by the politicians to these private money lenders. So the whole process keeps on spiraling. It is a vicious circle with no let-up."

"There is yet another side to the story. The swanky cars and lavish bungalows which we maintain are most of the time are mortgaged to the hilt. We exude grandeur, but are rust eaten from within. It is the big business houses who own the Media, in order to divert the

attention of the Government from there side to film Industry they see to it that adverse publicity is pumped daily.”

At another similar meeting Morarji Desai burst forth angrily, “I can not provide any relief to Film people. They are a horrible lot,. They live on black money. But for you I am prepared to do anything. Tell me, what do you want for yourself. Mehboob Khan modestly replied “Nothing, God has given me enough for my own needs. I have come to you as a representative of Film Industry. All that I ask from you for the Film Industry which is one of the largest employment generating Industry, but is an orphan, and there is no godfather for the Film Industry.”

These were not just empty words. Whenever Mehboob Khan rushed to Delhi to represent the Film Industry, he bore the traveling and accommodation expenses himself.

Mehboob Khan was an indefatigable worker when it came to the weaker sections of the Film Industry. When director Biren Nag was making his first Hindi Film “Bees Saal Baad” the Industry was hit by a severe shortage of raw stock. The Producers had unanimously decided to curtail the length of all films to be produced to 13500 feet. Raw stock was released in accordance with this self-imposed restriction. A committee was established to supervise the release of raw stock, with Mehboob Khan as its Chairman. One day Biren Nag came to Mehboob Khan and told him, “This is my first Hindi Film. Despite my best efforts, I have been unable to cut the film to a length less than 15000 feet. Further cuts will definitely ruin the film at the box office and put an end to my carrier.” The problem was really serious. A release date had already been fixed and announced. Summoning a meeting of the committee would have taken some time. Moreover, there was every likelihood that the committee would not grant the relief. Mehboob Khan appreciated the efforts of this talented young director, so on his own, responsibility he issued the N.O.C. for release of the required Raw Stock for “Bees Saal Baad” with its length of 15000 feet.

After the release of the film when other members of the committee came to know of the N.O.C. issued by Mehboob Khan they got very furious and an emergency meeting of the committee was called, at which several members had decided to indict and adopt a vote of censure against Mehboob Khan. Mehboob Khan maintained his cool and quietly digested the anger of those members who wanted to censure him. After every one had expressed their feelings Mehboob Khan got up and replied, “I appreciate your feelings. I have committed grave infraction of the rules, but it was done to help a talented man whose future was at stake. It was not done to over reach the Committees prerogative. All the same, I apologize to the Members. I am ready to accept any penalty that you decide to impose.” These words pacified the members immediately and a formal permission was issued forthwith for the step already taken by Mehboob Khan. Mehboob’s compassion and foresight were fully justified. Bees Saal Baad clicked at the box office.



On 26th January, 1963, Mehboob Khan was honoured with Padma Shri Award. But in November same year, he received a blow at the hands of the same Government from which he never recovered. For alleged, ‘anti-national activities’, his house his office and his studios were all raided by the authorities. The allegation came as a bolt from the blue for Mehboob Khan. He

was terribly shaken by the indignity. And yet he desisted from taking advantage of his contacts with the political high-ups.

He was on very close and good terms with Jawarhar Lal Nehru the then Prime Minister, Krishna Menon and Morarji Desai, but he did not attempt to find out from any one of them as to why the whole thing happened.

The raid took place early in the morning. Mehboob Khan was already scheduled to reach Delhi on the same evening to attend some meeting with the I & B ministry officials. Accordingly he arrived in Delhi same evening. Dilip Kumar another victim of a similar raid also arrived by the same flight. Dilip Kumar was visibly agitated, and asked Mehboob Khan to accompany him so that they could seek explanation from the high-ups as to why such a terrifying joke had been tried upon them?

Mehboob Khan serenely replied, "I would advise you not to act upon the whim of the moment. I do not want to create an impression that we are keen on hushing-up the matter through our contacts with these august leaders. We are patriots through and through. Let the authorities proceed with their investigations. We shall definitely emerge from this ordeal totally vindicated, our reputation untarnished."

I had to receive Mehboob Khan at the Palam Airport. In answer to my anxious queries, he calmly replied, "Nothing to worry about. When the raiding party stormed Mehboob Studios, I was in the midst of reciting the ' Holy Quran. I told Sardar Akhtar (his second wife) to give them the keys of the Almiras, so that they could continue with their mission without disturbing me and I could remain engrossed in my prayers in peace."

Mehboob Khan had two wives, Fatima Bibi the first one who stayed with his children at Sonawala building Marine Drive. Mehboob Khan lived with his second wife Sardar Akhtar at the flat in Mehboob Studios, 100 Hill Road, Bandra. He however used to spend every Sunday at his Marine Drive Flat in Sonawala Building. Prior to shifting to his flat at Mehboob Studios he lived in Shalimar Building of Marine Drive.

To Mehboob his words were his guarantee, he was obsessed about honouring his word, regardless of whether the other party stuck to their commitment or not. For instance his film "Son of India" was due for release in December, 1962. He was on very good terms with the late Shanker B.C. of Deluxe Pictures, Bombay who controlled two very prominent cinemas in Ahmedabad.

Generally all the films held by Mehboob Khan's distribution office, which was operating from his original Production office situated at Central Studios, Tardeo Road, Bombay, used to be screened only at Shanker B.C's cinemas in Ahmedabad. Although there was no written contract between the two parties as regards the release of "Son of India" Mehboob Khan was keen on keeping up the tradition. Therefore, when a rival cinema in Ahmedabad offered to screen the film for a Minimum Guarantee of Rupees two lakhs, Mehboob Khan unhesitatingly turned it down. Mr. Lalit Gandhi and I hinted to him that the offer was very good to be rejected, as there was no guarantee that Shanker B.C. will run our picture because he had obtained the distribution rights of Rakhee which will be released by him before the release of our film and the other cinema belonging to him will not be free for release of our film. But Mehboob Khan was adamant. He said, "Money is not important, I know that he may not keep his words but come what may, Shanker might go back on his commitment; but I will not." Our apprehensions turned out to be fully justified, ultimately Shanker expressed his inability to run "Son of India" in his cinemas

and the picture had to be screened in another cinema only on an advance basis, in process incurring a loss of more than Rs.11/2 lakhs. But Mehboob Khan was not unhappy, for he had kept his promise, irrespective of whether the other party backed out or not.

Mehboob Khan was not a businessman but a creative artist and noble human-being always desisted inflicting loss to others. His films have eternal, timeless, classic dimensions---they possess a unique universal appeal that cuts across the barriers of a generation to touch the hearts of today's audiences with the same heart tugging with the same heart tugging romance and excitement they; possessed when they; were first screened. His clarity; of vision in films like, *Andaz* (1949), "*Amar*"(1954), "*Mother India*"(1957) and "*Son of India*"(1962) hold good even today.

Mehboob Khan never made any film with Dev Anand. Yet ironically enough, Dev Anand was the only outsider as Producer whom he permitted to shoot in Mehboob Studios. He always said, "I have constructed the studio to make my films, and not to turn it into a Bazar."

It was the Dev's method of work, discipline, orderliness and dedication impressed him so much that he not only allowed him shooting facilities at Mehboob Studios, but allotted him an exclusive well-equipped, air-conditioned make-up room at his own cost and also free of any charge.

Still he was a sad man as he was shure that none out of his three sons. Ayub Khan, Iqbal Khan and Shaukat Khan can replace him after his departure to Al-Mighty. I can not forget the afternoon of February, 1964 when I had gone to see Mehboob Khan off to Bombay at Palam Airport. It was for the first time in my carrier with him, I found him very depressed. I thought then, that it was due to his health being at low ebb. For the first time I saw tears in his eyes, when he placed his hand on my shoulder and said, Khan (as he used to call me), " I am tired, Khan, really tired, My heart is not giving me faithful company . Who knows when it may stop beating? Please take care of my children, they can not make-out between friend and foe." Before I could react to his words he traced his steps slowly towards the plane leaving me wondering as to what he expected of me?.

That was the last time I saw him. His heart did choose to stop beating suddenly at an untimely hour, between the nights of 27th of May and 28th, of May 1964, and a glorious era in Indian film-dom came to an abrupt and untimely end.



I do not know why? But I always felt that he reposed maximum faith in me and always insisted that I accompany him in all his meetings with the high-up in the Government.

When I look back to the past 45 years since Mehboob Khan's departure to heaven. It pains me find that the Thankless Film fraternity has forgotten the selfless leader of the Industry, nor his children did any thing to keep his legacy alive. Mehboob a great director

turn every obstacle to climb to eminence as an artiss of International fame and came to be called the, **Cecil-B-De Mellow** of India.