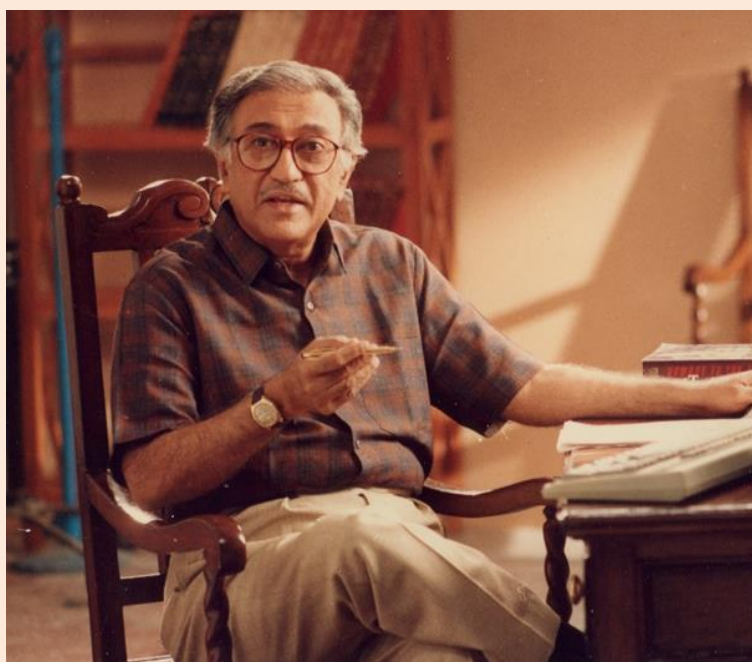


Article

Siraj Syed

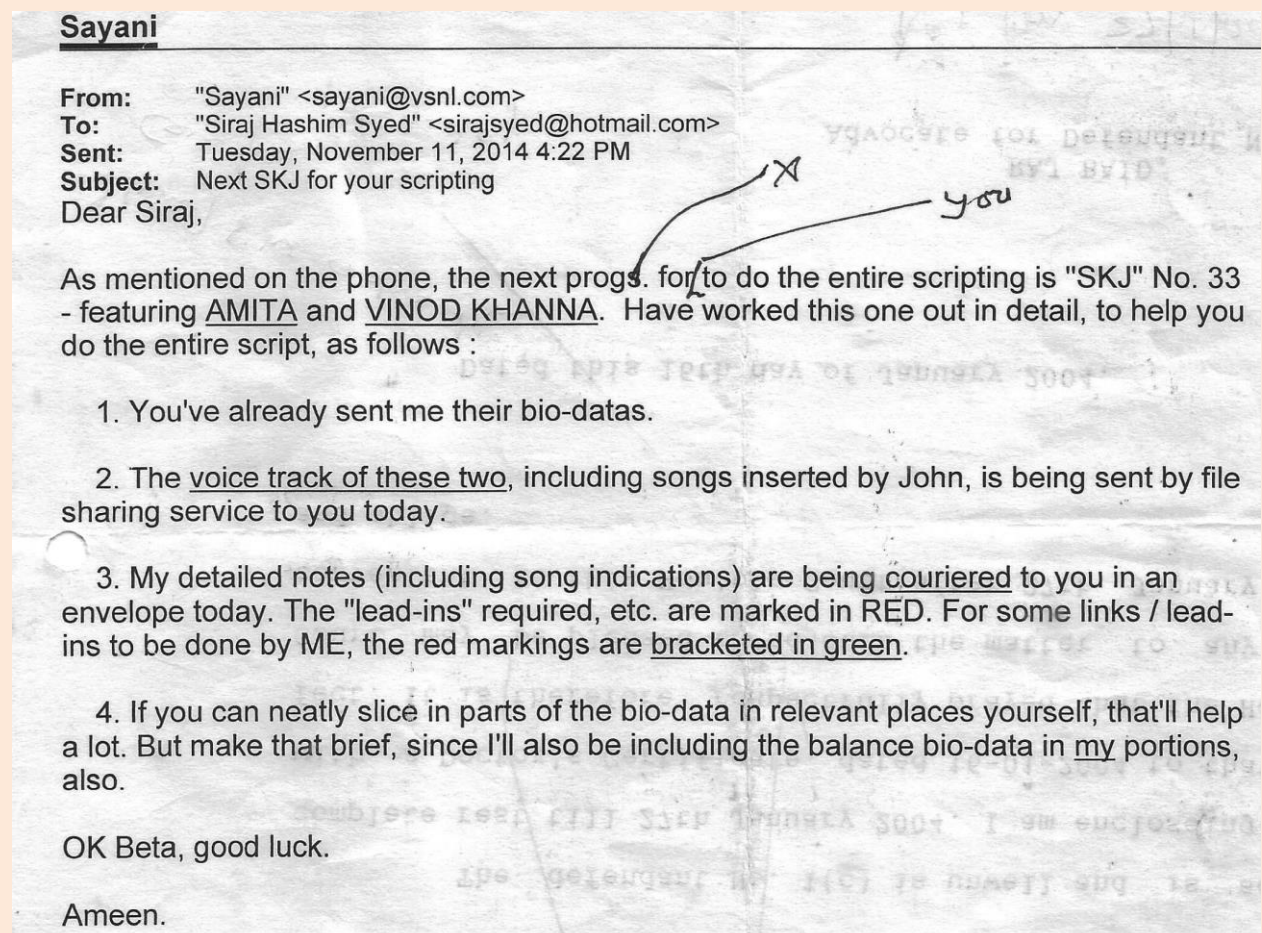
Ameen Sayani: Voice of Three Generations The King, The Master and his Deferential Disciple



His was the first voice that I identified with the medium of radio. He remains the best voice that promoted film music, films and consumer brands, with a visual touch, on a medium that offered only audio. I have known this voice very intimately since 1958, when, as a six year-old, I got hooked to Binaca Geetmala. And the man behind this spell-binding voice, Ameen Sayani has been my *ustaad*, my *guru*, my mentor, since 1970. I started doing radio programmes with him and co-compèred several stage shows, before branching off on my own, while my association with him remains intact, till today.

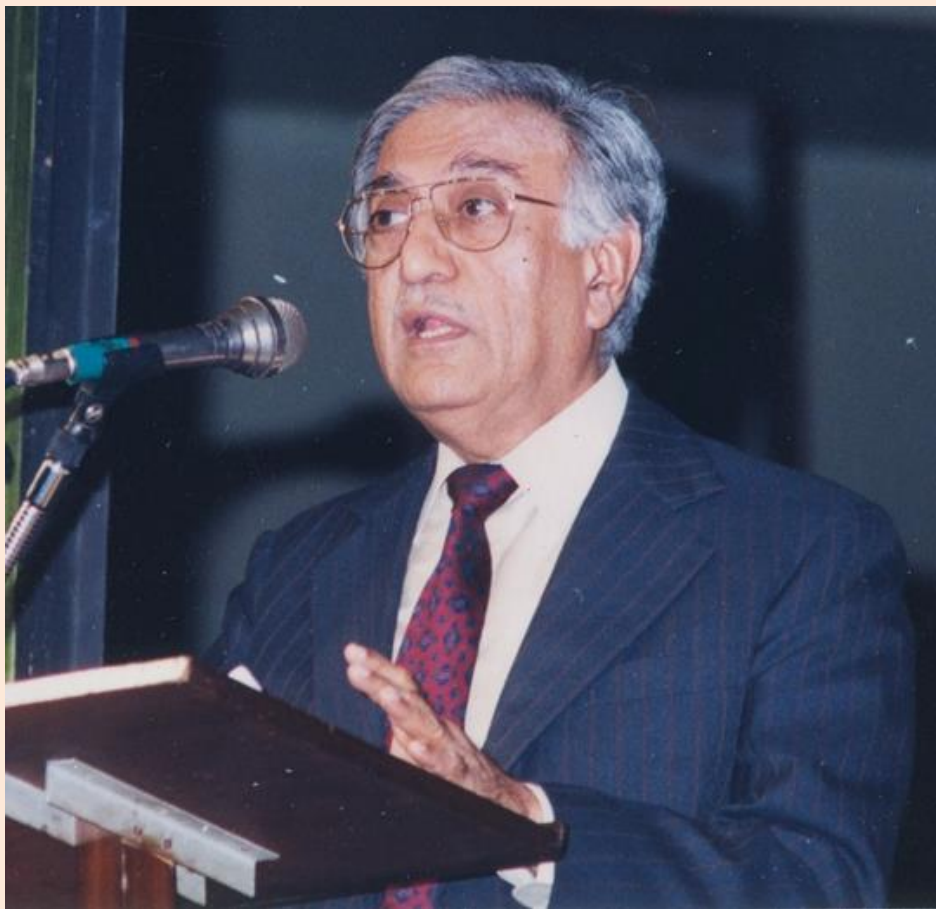
Ameen Sayani was 19 when he started commercial broadcasting over Radio Ceylon (later SriLanka Broadcasting Corporation-SLBC). I

was 19 when I took part in the first Yuva Vani programme in Hindi at Akashwani (All India Radio), where Mr. Sayani had done many programmes as a young boy. I joined his own commercial broadcasting team shortly afterwards, though I had studied science and wanted to become a medical representative. This December 21, AmeenSaahab will turn 87. I am 19 years his junior, both in age and experience. And even now, half a century later, the association continues. Of course, there is very, very little work these days, for both him and me, but whenever something comes up at his office-cum-studio, in Colaba, South Mumbai, I am always a phone call or email away.



At his age, Ameen Saahab is not in the best of physical shape. Who is? Yet he attends office for about 8 hours every day, and records the occasional spot or Chritralok trailer (an AIR format to promote films

through songs).But he ruled the world of Hindi film music appreciation during days when there was no TV, no hard disk, no USB, and nobody had even dreamt of mobile phones. Unlike now, looks and physique did not matter at all to a broadcaster (you never saw them) till the late 1990s; and so long as it was 8 p.m. on a Wednesday, and the announcer on duty at Radio Ceylon's Colombo studios confirmed that it was indeed 8 p.m., it was time for Binaca Geetmala (BGM), with its star-presenter Ameen Sayani. The first and only film song popularity countdown show, it was sponsored by Ciba-Geigy of India Ltd., makers of the Binaca range of tooth-pastes. BGM was a weekly, one-hour (initially half-hour), hit-parade that rode air-waves in India, SriLanka and many other parts of Asia and Africa, for 41 years+ and a half-hour weekly show on Doordarshan's Metro TV channel, for 31 weeks, in 1994.



SAYANI VIDEO PROMOTIONS



Perviz Mansion, Cumballa Hill Road, Bombay-400 036.
Phone: 3865641, 3886398. Gram: Sayvideo, Bombay 36. Fax: 3852648
Cecil Court, 2nd Floor, Mahakavi Bhushan Marg,
Colaba, Bombay-400 039. Phone: 2047583

15.02.94

Dear friend,

After celebrating its 41st. Anniversary on radio,
CIBACA GEET MALA is now going to be on Television, too!

Every Sunday, at 8 p.m., from 20th. February, on Doordarshan's
Metro Channels.

The TV format is quite different from the radio programme. It
is embellished with memorable songs and interesting interviews
with leading film and music personalities.

To herald the event, preview the first episode and meet some
of the people behind the show, we'd like to invite you for
Cocktails and Dinner, on Friday, 18th. February, at the
'AAINAKHANA', Ritz Hotel, Churchgate--7 p.m. onwards.

Do please confirm that you're coming--AND COME!

All the best.

(AMEEN SAYANI)

R.S.V.P. SIRAJ SYED
642 7110

Millions of listeners, among them a budding musician called Laxmikant (-Pyarelal), remained glued from 8 to 9 pm, when the top 16 songs of the week were played, in ascending order of popularity, with characteristic and magnetic lead-ins and lead-outs in AmeenSaahab's mesmerising voice, and very, very interesting answers to listeners' queries, sent to him at a Post Box number in Bombay. Like the all-time-great Laxmikant (who left us in 1998) confessed in a clip from the thousands of hours of recordings carefully archived by Mrs. Rama Sayani (now no more) and Rajil (their son, who takes care of his Dad's matters, for many years now): "We (L-P) became music directors solely because we wanted see the day when our songs were played in the prestigious Binaca Geetmala."



Of the 100,000+ sponsored programmes and spots that Mr. Sayani has produced/lent his voice to, from 1951 to 2018, Binaca (later renamed Cibaca Geetmala, following the change in name of the toothpastes brand that it promoted), Geetmala was closest to his heart. A retinue of some 100 writers, sometimes 10 of them working concurrently, helped him shape every commercial recording, with nuggets of Gandhian wisdom (inherited from his primary school values and his staunch Gandhian mother) and humour, use of simple Hindi and Urdu, an occasional dash of English, Urdu/Hindi poetry and twist of phrase. But when it came to Binaca, he took very little help from any of his pen-pushers and wrote the scripts himself. One golden rule was that no two BGMs should have similar openings and closings, and even if it was not possible to conjure up new phrases continuously, a long time should elapse between using similar language or style again. This rule was rigorously applied to other programmes as well. Repetition was anathema to an effective opening and closing of any programme.

My brother, late Riaz (died 2007), who started as an assistant editor of a film fortnightly that Mr. Sayani co-owned and edited for a few years, graduated to a radio writer around 1969 and rose to become and remain his Chief Copywriter for 35 years, (1972-2007), wrote a few thousand of the spots and sponsored programmes he recorded, many of which received awards. Not a prolific writer myself, I was honoured when AmeenSaahab asked me to write a few of the last Cibaca Sangeetmalas (the second name change; its last run was on All India Radio's Vividh Bharati service, as a shortened, half-hour show, in the early 1990s). Doing Public Relations for the Television version of the show was another privilege, though, sadly, the show did not run for too long.

Cibaca Geetmala

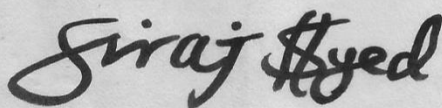
Programme No.31

On the Metro Channels (DD2) of Doordarshan

Scheduled for telecast on Sunday, 2nd October, 1994, at 8 p.m.

This programme, the 31st in the series, is the last. For 41 years, Ameen Sayani regularly reached millions of radio listeners through his extremely popular radio programme, 'Binaca Geetmala' (later called 'Cibaca Geetmala'). This year, even as the programme went off the air from the radio medium, he came on to Doordarshan. The 31st programme on DD Metro, however, marks the end of a pulsating, exciting and nostalgic look at the best in Hindustani film music.

When you switch on your TV sets at 8 p.m. on Sunday, on October 2, you will be treated to a compilation of as many as 20 top-notchers. In alteration, Ameen Sayani will play to you songs from the following super hit musicals: 'Sangam' (1964), 'Saheli' (1965), 'Suraj' (1966), 'Milan' (1967), 'Shaagird' (1968), 'Inteqaam' (1969), 'Do Raaste' (1970), 'Andaaz' (1971), 'Hare Rama Hare Krishna' (1972), 'Zanjeer' (1973), 'Hero' (1984), 'Ram Teri Ganga Maili' (1985), 'Sanjog' (1986), 'Naam' (1987), 'Qayaamat Se Qayaamat Tak' (1988), 'Raam-Lakhan' (1989), 'Aaj Ka Arjun' (1990), 'Saajan' (1991), 'Phool Aur Kaante' (1992) & 'Khalnaayak' (1993). Though the series has ended, Ameen Sayani eagerly looks forward to a constant and renewed association with music lovers across the length and breadth of the country and thanks everybody who has made 'Binaca Geetmala', 'Cibaca Geetmala' (on radio) and 'Cibaca Geetmala' on TV such wonderful experiences and memories to cherish.

**SIRAJ SYED**

Public Relations Consultant

Flash: A galaxy of film-stars and music personalities to appear in the last episode of 'Cibaca Geetmala' (October 2, '94, at 8 p.m.): Aamir Khan, Anil Kapoor, Naushad, Lata Mangeshkar, Manna Dey, Pran and Jayaprada!

Ref : CGM/31
Dated : 12.09.94
SIRAJ SYED
B.Sc., LLB, Dip. : Advtg. Mktg., Film-Making, French, Persian
Phone : 642 7110
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Live compering Live entertainment
Copywriting English/Hindi/Urdu
TV/Radio advertising Spots, jingles, programmes
Film, TV, Music reviews News features
Workshop courses in Advertising, Journalism, Communication
Public Relations Press Conferences

Back in 1958, Riaz and his friends used to frequent a small, hole-in-the-wall café, at Gamdevi, south Mumbai, where they would religiously listen to BGM. There were five or six of them, all in the

age-group of 18-20. Among them, one six year-old stood out, incongruously! What was he, a Standard II school student, doing there, at that hour? Well, he was addicted to BGM too, plus he had the uncanny knack of predicting which film song would top the 16-slot weekly chart that week, getting it right nine times out of ten. The ‘elders’ would often bet on the songs, based on information gathered surreptitiously from me, while I was nibbling on my samosa, the ‘incentive’ for sharing my prediction, and make a packet of money. How could I do that? Beats me! Guess I had, and still have, the knack of picking the musical and poetic merit in songs.



I could never have imagined that I would be part of AmeenSaahab's team one day, and would live to see the silver jubilee of BGM. In the end of 1977, to mark BGM's 25th anniversary, it was decided to obtain film reels of all the 25 chart-toppers since 1952, from the time the show began, and to project them to an audience of over 3,000, at Bombay's Shanmukhananda Hall. It was a logistic marathon, for two reasons. Firstly, thousands of film and film-music personalities were to be invited personally, and not by telephone, post or courier. Of

course, Mr. Sayani could not undertake this mammoth task himself, so his representatives would divide the number of hand-deliveries and go to offices, studios, laboratories and homes, to add the personal touch. Also, messages were recorded for the occasion, and I had the privilege of recording C. Ramchandra and Sajjad Hussain's greetings. Thirdly, getting prints of the film songs was not an easy task, especially if the copies had either been destroyed or lost. But we were up to the challenge. I made hundreds of deliveries, and also chased two sources of song reels for days on end to obtain prints of rare films that had chart-topper songs, particularly Janam Janam Ke Fere and Saheli.

The exercise started some two months before the event, and went on almost till the eleventh hour. A packed house, in which were seated film-industry and film-music's who's who, gave thunderous applause as Ameen Saahab took the microphone. Although the previous years' chart-toppers were known to all, everybody was waiting for 1977's winner, with bated breath, and the suspense kept mounting. Yes, the latest *Numero Uno* was announced at the venue and projected live, 'Koi patthar se na mare mere diwane ko,' from Laila Majnu.

As this final song started rolling on to the screen, I was back-stage, with AmeenSaahab, grateful to destiny at having been part of history. He patted my back and said, "Bete, you worked really very hard to help put all this together." There were tears in my eyes. As he moved away to attend to something, I collapsed in a heap. Accumulated fatigue had gotten the better of me, and I had fainted. Among my proud possessions are the two LP vinyl records of BGM Silver Jubilee, autographed by my *ustaad*, priceless mementoes. Though BGM is not on the air now, and did not manage to celebrate a golden jubilee, 2019 marks the golden jubilee of my association with him. No one from his large creative team is around anymore, as there is no team in place (many of them are alive and active, though), except this pupil, the only person in the world to have been so blessed.

A note from the broadcaster who has produced, scripted and composed "Binaca Geet Mala" since its inception.

Friends,

The songs included in this disc and in its counterpart ("Binaca Geet Mala" Vol. 2) are not just 25 popular Indian film songs. They represent the light music milestones of a quarter of a century.

Each song was the most popular hit of its year, as reflected in the only consistent, week-to-week barometer of popularity that Indian film music has ever known: BINACA GEET MALA.

Perhaps the only sponsored radio show in the world to have celebrated its Silver Jubilee Binaca Geet Mala is a 60-minute hit-parade of Indian film songs broadcast every Wednesday night over the All-Asia Hindi Commercial Service of Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (still fondly remembered by its earlier name: Radio Ceylon).

But it was not always a 60-minute show. It began as a half-hour pop-music experiment suggested by Radio Advertising Services (agents for Radio Ceylon) towards the end of 1952, and the developments were phenomenal. The first programme drew a mail response

of 3,000 letters. Within a year, the mail swelled up to 35,000 a week for a hundred rupee adpost, and Ciba (the sponsor) decided to scrap the adpost and turn the programme into a 95-minute hit-parade.

It took the hit-parade format—then a novelty for Indian pop-music fans—just a few weeks to click, and the programme's popularity began to sky-rocket at an unbelievable pace. Wednesday came to be known as "Binaca Geet Mala Day". Fans all over Asia (and Africa, too) eagerly looked forward to each programme, cancelled everything else to listen to it, maintained weekly song charts and laid side-bets for future ratings. Parks, where community sets and loudspeakers were put up, filled to capacity, overflowed, and caused traffic jams. Paan-bidi shops and roadside restaurants with radios did a roaring business on Wednesday nights. Newspapers quoted Binaca Geet Mala in all matters concerning pop-music, novels mentioned it when commenting on home entertainment habits, feature films referred to it as a synonym for success, every single

STRAJ - All the best



Courtesy: CIBA-GEIGY OF INDIA LIMITED



LONG PLAY 33 1/3 R.P.M. RECORD
Manufactured & Controlled by
THE GRAMOPHONE COMPANY OF INDIA LIMITED
A member of the EMI Group of Companies
International leaders in music, electronics and leisure
SUNG, SING & INDIA

© 1977 THE GRAMOPHONE CO. OF INDIA LTD.

Titles	Film	Artists
Side One		
Too Ganga Ki Mauj—1953	Baiju Bawra	Mohd.
Man Dole Mera Tan Dole—1954	Nagin	Lata M
Mera Joota Hai Japani—1955	Shree 420	Mukesh
Yeh Hai Bombai Meri Jaan—1956	C.I.D.	Mohd. Geeta
Zara Samne To Aao Chhaliye—1957	Janam Janam Ke Fere	Lata M & Mohd
Hai Apna Dil To Awara—1958	Solva Saal	Hemant
Side Two		
Hal Kaisa Hai Janab Ka—1959	Chalti Ka Naam Gadi	Asha B Kishore
Zindagi Bhar Nahin Bhulegi Woh Barsat Ki Rat—1960	Barsat Ki Rat	Mohd.
Teri Pyari Pyari—1961	Sesural	Mohd.
Ehsan Tera Hoga Mujh Par—1962	Junglee	Mohd.
Jo Wada Kiya—1963	Taj Mahal	Mohd. Lata M
Bol Radha Bol—1964	Sangam	Mukesh

I must mention another milestone that was established in 1986, when I became the Founding Managing Editor of India's first music monthly, PLABACK AND FAST FORWARD. We covered everything about music and audio products, including reviews of all

genres of music. Since it is not a good idea to let the same byline appear across writings on different genres of music, I reviewed Western music as 'Steve Savage', ghazals and light Indian classical under the *nom de plume* of 'Parvez Rizvi' and Hindi film music as Siraj Syed.

In spite of wide coverage, I felt something was missing in the magazine. And then I realised what could be added to our contents that would make PLAYBACK a household name among music listeners and music sellers alike: a popularity chart. What better chart could we hope to include than Cibaca Geetmala? Permission was obtained from both, the owners of the brand, now called Hindustan Ciba-Geigy, and AmeenSaahab, and we were ready to go with the double-spread pull-out that every music store would display on its wall for its clientele to refer to while deciding what music to buy.

There was one problem, though. CGM was a weekly show, while we were a monthly, so how could the charts match? Applying our minds, we decided to calculate average positions over the preceding four weeks, have 25 songs and not 16, and we were done. AmeenSaahab's Geetmala helped us become the most prestigious and unique publication covering Hindi music, offering to our readers a popularity chart indicating the top 25 film and non-film Hindi-Urdu songs of the current/preceding month. Take a look at the music scene of December 1986, in the scan from an issue of PLAYBACK.



Some five years into producing programmes sponsored by consumer brands, Ameen Sayani produced his first film promotion sponsored programme, a longish, song-studded radio trailer of the film Hatim Tai (1956). You might recall the famous Hatim Tai song, 'Parvardigar-e-aalam', written by Sayani's college buddy, Akhtar Romani. Film publicity, in the shape of spots (15/30/60 second advertisements) and 15-minute musical sponsored programmes, often including dialogue from the film or interviews of personalities associated with the film, ran parallel to his regular, long-running

shows, like Binaca Geetmala (60 minutes) and Maratha Darbar (*agarbatti*/incense stick) Ki Mahekti Baaten (a jokes compilation, with actress/jokester/poetess Tabassum as joint anchor, and, rarely, yours truly in place of Mr. Sayani when he was busy or indisposed—30 minutes).

When All India Radio/Akashwani finally relented and allowed advertising on its Vividh Bharati service (it was banned for about ten years by the then Information and Broadcasting Minister of India's central government, B.V. Keskar, who considered it a threat to Indian values and culture), the first programme to be aired was AmeenSaahab's Saridon Ke Saathi (1970), Saridon being a headache pill marketed by the Swiss pharma giant, Hoffman Là Roche.

Some other outstanding shows that he produced and presented for Radio Enterprises Private Limited (REPL) were BournVita Quiz Contest (which he took over after the passing away of its first host, AmeenSaahab's elder brother and mentor, Hamid Sayani), Modi (clothing and thread-makers) Sangeet Kahani, Nescafé Sangeet Paheli (quiz), Paragon (suiting makers) Sangeet Khazana, Shalimar (paint company) Superlac Jodi, Geep (torches and batteries brand) Sitaron Ke Saathi and the phenomenal block-buster, S. Kumars (suiting, shirting and saree makers) Ka Filmi Muqaddama-SKFM, some episodes of which could take up to two years to complete, if the concerned 'accused' was evasive or terribly busy), which was the forerunner of Aap Ki Adalat, the Rajat Sharma show on India TV. I wrote about 42 SKFMs and was also the production co-ordinator for the series that ran for about a decade, on both SLBC and Vividh Bharati. The stars who I had to chase for over two years included Amjad Khan, Tanuja, Parikshat Sahni and Reena Roy (who did not record at all, even after years of chasing).

PUARKIYA HAI PUARKARENGE

ASHOK KUMAR, ANIL KAPOOR, PADMINI KOLHAPURE ANITA RAJ
, SUSHMA SETH, WITH SATYEN KAPOOR, RAMESH DEO, SEEMA DEO, RAJESH VAKIL
 VIJAY KUMAR, UMESH MISHRA BHARAT BHATT, NAVAL KISHORE, RAMESH, BABY GUDOC
 SP. APP. **DEEPAK PARASHAR**

Produced by :	SURESH BOKADIA	Music by :	LAXMIKANT PYARELAL
Directed by :	VIJAY REDDY	Lyrics :	S.H. BIHARI
Story, Screenplay :	K.C. BOKADIA	Executive	GAUTAMCHAND BOKADIA
Dialogue :	ANIRUDHA TIWARI	Producers :	MAHAVIRCHAND BOKADIA
Cinematography :	R. CHITTIBABU	Prod. Controller :	UMESH MISHRA
Editor :	GOVIND DALWADI	Prod. Executive :	J.K. BIHARI (B'BAY)
Dances :	KAMAL		V.C. GANESHAN (MADRAS)
Audiography :	RANJIT BISWAS	Production Manager :	NATARAJAN, HUSSAINY
Playbacks :	LATA MANGESHKAR, SHABIR KUMAR, KAVITA KRISHNAMURTY,	Chief Accountant :	BHIKAMJI
Records & Cassettes :	MOHD. AZIZ SUPER CASSETTES IND. PVT. LTD. "T" SERIES	Pub. Designer :	RAVI
Makeup :	CHARAN	Pub. Printer :	DESIGN CENTER
Action :	SURENDRA SHETTY	Still :	DESIGN CENTER
Art Director :	RAJARAM	Press Relations :	R.R. PATHAK
Dressman :	PANNA	Radio Pub. :	AMEEN SAYANI SAYANI RADIOTEL ADVT
Off. Incharge :	BALKRISHNA	Song Recording :	MEHBOOB
Costume	KACHINS, SABIHA DESIGN. RIKU.	Produced at :	FILMISTAN, NATARAJ, VIJAY/ VAUHINI (MADRAS), PRASAD (MADRAS) & CHANDIVALI
Designed by :	MADHAV MEN'S MODE	Special Effects :	KRISHAN MALIK, BALDEV MALIK
Travel Agent :	NEELI TRAVELS	Titles :	K. K. MATHUR,

ASSOCIATES

Ass. Director : **RAJESH VAKIL** Chief Asst. Editors : **RAVI DESAI, KAKA MALIK** Cameraman : **MAHENDRA**

ASSISTANTS	Direction :	VICKY RANAWAT, VIJAY KUMAR	Art :	RANGACHARI, PRAKASH
	Editing :	NEELKANTH	Music :	SHASHIKANT, GORAKH
	DANCE :	SUJATA ACTION BABA MISTRY	Productions :	RAMESH, R.C. BABU

To promote Hindi films, he would work out a format in consultation with a writer. The series would start its run on radio, a month or two before the film was released, and continue while the film ran in cinema-halls, often until several weeks or months after the release, if it was a hit. One technique he employed was to create radio characters parallel to those in the film, at least the main two or three, and sort of serialise the story on the lines of the film's plot. For Junglee(1961), he

had a Brij Bhushan doing a Shammi Kapoor and a Varsha Lall playing Saira Banu. The idea worked rather well.

Some eleven years after Junglee, when Raj Kapoor asked him to create the radio campaign for Bobby* (1973), he chose me and Ashima Singh (from New Delhi), as the radio counterparts of the screen characters Raju and Bobby, whom I named Debu and Vicky in their radio *avatars*. A senior writer wrote the basic script, which I would then adapt to the youth idiom and insert humour, and mimicry of the star cast (I was a professional mimic). Vicky and Debu had a mock romance on air, à la the screen narrative of Raju and Bobby, as



the weekly programmes progressed, and the idea captured the imagination of millions of listeners. I even got my first fan mails thanks to Bobby. But would you believe it? I could see Bobby

only after the programmes went off air. AmeenSaahab had seen the film at a special show organised by Raj Kapoor months before its release, while I saw it in its 20th week or so, in a cinema hall, when tickets could finally be bought without queueing up for hours at the advance booking window.

Other notable film campaigns that I did with him as a voice were for Zehreela Insaan, Hum Kiseese Kum Naheen, Hera Pheri, Chor Machaye Shor (one episode, that had had about seven minutes of spoken word content, took 12 hours to record, mainly due to constant interruptions but also because he wanted me to sound just right)

Khooon Pasina, Satte Pe Satta and Ek Se Badhkar Ek. Listeners might still recall the spots and sponsored programmes for classics like Guide, Roti Kapada Aur Makaan, and Sholay, each having the magic touch of Ameen Sayani, some of them running on radio for around a year each. Some other memorable film advertising campaigns over the years were for Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon, Gumnaam, Sunghursh, Upkar, Aradhana, Achanak, Jaise Ko Taisa, Spots for the film Rustom** (2016), TV serial Bikhri Aas Nikhri Preet (2017), Badrinath Ki Dulhaniya (2017), which carried a small audio clip from the BGM Silver Jubilee record, and the 2019 release, Phir Ussi Mod Par-Talaq.

Here, I must mention Bombay to Goa (released March 1972). AmeenSaahab was very close to actor-producer Mahmood. Mahmood brought a tall, lanky man to his studio one day, around the end of the year 1971, and introduced him as a “Derby racehorse”, meaning a horse that would run marathons comfortably, and keep winning the races (Mahmood was a race-horse owner). I was recording in the studio then with AmeenSaahab, and met Amitabh Bachchan for the first time that day. Over the next few months, Mahmood would bring Amitabh to the studio very often, and he would sulk in a corner. I tried to cheer him up, but he said he had little to cheer because so many of his films had flopped in a row (1969-71). In fact, a couple of years earlier, Amitabh had come to audition for AmeenSaahab, unannounced, seeking work as a commercial radio voice, but Mr. Sayani was too busy to audition him, and he went away, unheard and untried.

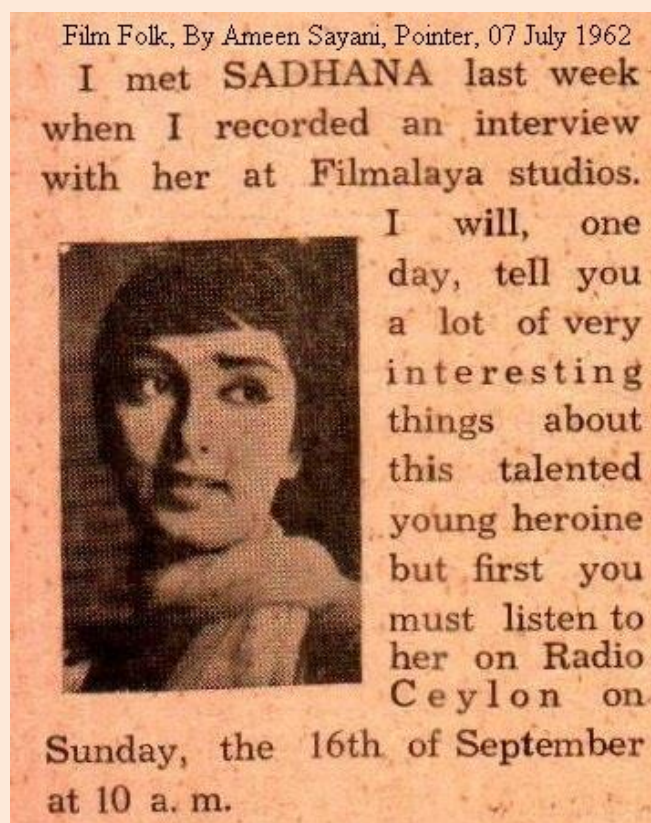


The writing for Bombay to Goa's radio programmes was entrusted to Riaz and me, one of my first film campaigns for AmeenSaahab. Since Mahmood wanted to promote Amitabh in all possible ways, we got him on air every week, as part of the sponsored radio programmes, something that kept him busy, and distracted from his blue moods. Done in an entertaining, swashbuckling, comedy style, the programmes got extremely popular, and the film proved a minor hit, the first 'success' that Amitabh tasted. One day in the studio, he suddenly touched my feet and bestowed upon me the title "Panditjee Maharaj", for my efforts to keep him in good spirits, and for my prediction, based on a book of Western astrology that I was then reading, that he would become a huge star, within a year or two. With Zanjeer (1973), and all that followed, that prophesy came true. And some years later, it was Amitabh, as Chief Guest, who handed over the best radio spot/programme of the year prizes to AmeenSaahab and

Riaz at the annual Radio and Television Advertising Practitioners' Association (RAPA) awards.

1951 to 2018 is a staggering 67 years. In terms of generations, mine is the second generation of his devotees. The third generation, those who were born in the 60s and 70s, would be the last ones to have enjoyed Ameen Sayani's glorious work on radio. And yet, I continue to be surprised when I am introduced to some RJ, born in the late 80s, who confesses that AmeenSaahab is the legend, or role model, for

him. Many of them touch his feet, in reverence. And many imitate him till date, on radio, on TV, and on the stage. In the 90s, I wrote a programme for Indian national TV (Doordarshan-DD Metro) called SuperHit Muqabla, a one-hour weekly show film song popularity count-down show, largely inspired by Binaca Geetmala (I did not devise the format), but with a new anchor every week. It became a rage and broke all existing viewership records.



My learning at Sayani RadioTel Advertising, his own company, set-up after REPL and he parted ways, under the Indian radioman of the century, had stood me in good stead.

'GOLDEN NITE'

PROGRAMME

MANNA DEY

HEMANTA KUMAR

TALAT MAHMOOD

GEETA DUTT

USHA MANGESHKAR

SUSHMA SHRESHTHA

Orchestra — Babla & Party

Skit — Mehmood Jr.

Mimicry — Rajendra Butala

Ventriloquism — Ramdas Padhye

Transicord — Charanjit Singh

Record Dance — Loly Pop.

Omar Khayyam (Ballet) — Manohar Deepak, Madhumati & Troupe
Sculptor's Dream (Ballet)

Special attraction : "INTERVIEW WITH THE STARS"

Songs by — MALA SINHA & MANHAR to accompaniment of
KALYANJI-ANANDJI'S famed ORCHESTRA

Meet your favourites

Chand Usmani, Shatrughana Sinha, Bindu, Kamini Kaushal, Kum Kum,
Snehlata, R. D. Burman, Dheeraj, Subhash Ghai, Anil Dhawan, Jaya Bhaduri,
Prem Chopra, Sujit Kumar, Amitabh Bachan, Sitara Devi,

MEHMOOD and I. S. JOHAR.

and

RAJESH KHANNA

Compered by :

AMEEN SAYANI

and

SIRAJ SYED

A staunch proponent of the *guru-shishya parampara*, he believed that announcing, broadcasting, and compering could never be taught in a class-room, though he did conduct occasional workshops/master-classes of 2-3 hours, along the lines of other venerable, contemporary practitioners of the art Partap Sharma and Sam Berkeley Hill. Then Sam passed away, and Sharma and AmeenSaahab became too busy to continue these sessions. I used to assist AmeenSaahab in these workshops, handling mikes, cueing tapes, etc. It was sad to see that there was no major professional figure conducting workshops or training sessions in radio any more.



One eventful evening, Father Gerry Rosario, Director of the Xavier Institute of Communications (XIC), Mumbai, part of the St. Xavier's College, where most of these sessions were held, asked me to see him. He knew of my association with AmeenSaahab as well as my individual standing. Moreover, I was right then doing a part-time course at XIC, in Advertising and

Marketing. He wondered aloud: Could I devise a course for applied communications skills and run it as a one-man show? I felt I was too junior to take on such a responsibility, but Rosario showed full confidence in me, and insisted. After some reflection, about giving back to the profession what I had got from it, and making things easier for newcomers, who would not be lucky enough, like me, to have spent 24 years with a maestro, I agreed. During the first batch, I was both student (of Advertising and Marketing) and teacher (of

Radio Broadcasting), in the same Institute! Quite an eerie feeling that was!

AmeenSaahab was still not convinced it would work, and told me so, but a course called Announcing Broadcasting and Compering was launched, in



1984, at XIC. A couple of years later, Dubbing was added, so it was now known as ABCD of Communication. It ran it till 1996, when I had to leave for Singapore, to set up ESPN Hindi. When I returned in 2004, I discovered that XIC had hijacked the course and had been running it without my knowledge for eight years, using some of my students as teachers. Yet, the then Director (Rosario had since passed away) requested me to conduct two batches, during 2004-06, which I did. But then XIC started playing games, so I stopped. The 14 years that I spent, sharing tips and practicals, on applied communication skills, with hundreds of men and women, in the age groups of 16-65, from all walks of life, in batches of 20-30, were most fulfilling. Many of the students achieved great success in radio, films, TV, and the stage, proving my conviction, that if you have a spark, communication skills can be taught in a class-room. After all, besides me, nobody had learned hands-on from Ameen Sayani, for 50 years!

"Every stage singer is a mimic," said Ameen Sayani's 'clone' Sagar Sayani to me, one day, "and imitates legendary film-song singers-- Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Manna Dey, Mukesh, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle or Geeta Dutt. So what's wrong if I imitate the compère, the very man who introduced us to these original singers, on radio and on stage, for half-a-century?" He has a point. I also know of a food-stall in suburban Mumbai has been playing ads in the voice of an Ameen Sayani mimic for decades. Fans of Ameen Sayani, and fans of his fans, continue to imitate his style, till date.

Ameen Saahab himself jokes, “Sudesh Bhosle is such a good mimic that had he taken to imitating me, I would have been out of work long ago.” Truth is, there was, and is, only one Ameen Sayani--constantly imitated by three (four?) generations of compères, radio voices and TV anchors, and yet standing tall above them all.

This might sound incredible, but the one man who could imitate him best, having heard him regularly from 1958 and seen him from such close quarters since 1970, was me. But I have never done it. Why? In my first full campaign, during the recording of the first Bobby episode, he admonished me for sounding like him (completely unintentionally), and since then I have made conscious efforts not to sound anything like him. His point was that as long as he was around, why would anybody want to listen to a clone? And, in Bobby, he wanted me to sound like the college student I really was, not like an anchor, which was his role in the script.

Sadly for me, a hundred clones filled in the vacuum, whenever anybody came looking for him, and he was either unavailable or unwilling to accept those assignments, while I, the reluctant disciple, would refuse to imitate his *ustaad*, to get work. My guess is I would have bagged ten times more work had I become the official Junior Ameen Sayani. But respect and regard for my father figure forbade me from running after lucre. In the evening of his life, he is frank enough to say that though he lived comfortably all his life, he did not amass great wealth, and that is not because he did not charge high fees, but because he had a large set-up, and everybody was paid well, even when his own payments were delayed or denied. And as his pupil, I have survived and lived a decent life, but not reached anywhere near the Fortune 500,000,000.

It was only at his 80th birthday celebration that his family and a few close family friends asked me to do an impression of Ameen Sayani, in front of a select audience, as if I was on a live broadcast, presenting

Binaca Geetmala. I just had to do it, albeit with high anxiety. After all, this was the first, and most likely, the only time, I would be seeing him walk into a hall on my announcements, and, then, I would continue to address him and the others, as ‘Ameen Sayani would’, interspersing the trade-mark household phrase, “Behno aor Bhaiyo” (sisters and brothers). Mercifully, my act was appreciated and nobody ripped me apart for what could be perceived as misplaced bravado, not even the master.

Among the team-members he misses the most are his wife Rama and his Chief Copywriter Riaz. BhaiSaahab (Riaz) and I were part of a meeting held in Aamir Khan’s office, in late 2000 or early 2001. We were discussing the promotion of Lagaan on radio, and Aamir confessed that he really loved the old style of 15-minute sponsored programmes to promote films. AmeenSaahab informed him that for some strange reason, Vividh Bharati had stopped that format. Nevertheless, AmeenSaahab’s radio ads for Lagaan were a class apart, as were those for another milestone film, Swades (2004). In the present decade, I have often written programmes for him in his series called Sitaron Ki Jawaniyan and Sangeet Ke Sitaron Ki Mehfil, on various FM stations, which dig into the staggering Sayani archives of songs and personality recordings, and re-introduce stars of yesteryear to audiences of the new millennium. I also worked for him on the 5-CD set series called Geetmala Ki Chhaon Men, about the songs that were very good but lost out in the popularity race, released by the music marketing company, SaReGaMa, successor to HMV/The Gramophone Company of India Limited.

When BhaiSaahab (Riaz), my only sibling, passed away, and I had lost both my parents as well, I had no family of my own left. Since 2007, AmeenSaahab is my only real link to an elder or father-figure. He came to Nair Hospital, where I was waiting to claim BhaiSaahab’s body, after he had suddenly passed away in a running local train, near Mumbai Central. In his office on 28 May, we remembered that

accursed day, and shed a tear each. It's been 12 long years, and yet...So long as AmeenSaahab is around, I will not feel orphaned.

The nation has honoured him with a Padma Shri. While any honour is an honour and welcome, I strongly feel that he richly deserves the higher title of Padma Vibhushan. May the Government of India acknowledge his immense contributions and confer upon him the coveted decoration. And may God give him a healthy life, way beyond the 86 summers that he has seen.

The King is alive! Long live the King

*Listen to the 15-minute sponsored programme for the film Bobby,



Episode No. 3, here: Bobby, 1973, Episode 04.mp3

**Listen to the Rustom trailer here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWbVMMdOb_4

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