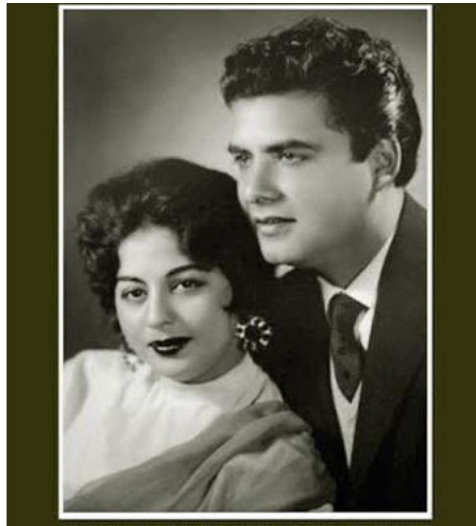


Tribute
Aijaz Gul

A Tribute to Iconic Sabiha Khanum (1935-2020)



First lady of Silver Screen of Pakistan Sabiha Khanum passed away in the United States on June 13 at the age of eighty-five.

Born as Mukhtar Begum, she spent her childhood in Gujrat. She began her career as stage artist in Butt Shikhan in Lahore. She moved into films with debut in *Beli* (1950), directed by Masood Pervaiz in 1950 with Santosh Kumar and Shahina. Director Anwar Kemal Pasha, notable director from the fifties and sixties, found out the real talent in her. Her teaming with Santosh Kumar under Anwar Kamal Pasha, resulted in some of the most memorable films: *Ghulam* (1953), *Gumnam* (1954), *Qatil* (1955) and *Sarfarosh* (1956). In Late-fifties, she got married to Santosh Kumar (this was Santosh Kumar's second marriage.

His first wife, Jamila Begum, was a housewife). Sabiha and Santosh, together became the most likeable, romantic and bankable couple of film trade. Their casting together was a sure bet for ringing box office cash register. She was now teaming only with Santosh. Sabiha also produced successful Punjabi film *Naji* (1959) in which she repeated the role of mentally unstable woman, played earlier by her in *Gumnam*. She won tremendous appreciation for both these roles.

Since, songs are an integral part of our films (at times even when they don't belong there), Sabiha Khanum holds the credit of over a dozen memorable melodies filmed on her. It was first Iqbal 'Bano' and Munawar Sultana who gave playback for her in films like *Gumnam*,

Qatil, *Dulla Bhatti* and *Ishq-e Laila* ('Payal mein geet hain cham cham key', 'Ulfat ki nai manzil ko challa', 'Wasta ae rab da', and 'Sitaro tum to so jao'). Zubaida Khanum and finally Noorjehan also rendered many songs filmed on Sabiha Khanum: 'Gai gey duniya geet merey' (Noorjehan-Mosiqar), 'Latt uljhi' (Noorjehan-Sawal), 'Dil-a -tehar ja' (Zubaida Khanum-Mukhra), 'Na chura sako gey daman' (Noorjehan-Daaman) and many others which are still remembered from the past seventy years. This was the spell created by Sabiha Khanum with talented singers, composers and lyricists. Nobody but nobody has been able to do what Sabiha Khanum achieved in the past seven decades. Her acting, accent (both in Urdu and Pnjabi), expressions and body language were excellent beyond description.



Moving on with late sixties, Shamim Ara, Nayyar Sultana, Zeba and others stepped in. Sabiha finding passage of years behind her, and mostly joined by Santosh Kumar, decided to go for supporting roles. Their popularity remained intact here as well in titles like *Shikwa*, *Kaneez*, *Sawal*, *Devar Bhabi* and *Anjuman*. In *Daman*, produced by Santosh Kumar with Sabiha and Santosh in leads, two youngsters

Waheed Murad and Neelo were cast in supporting roles and their dance (twist) became quite popular. Come 1975 when Director Hassan Tariq made 'Eik Gunah Aur Sahai' with basic plot idea from Manto and cast Sabhia as 'Madame'. For this, she won several awards here and in Tashkent. With advancing years, Sabiha was now playing a grandmother in selected films.



Santosh Kumar passed away but Sabiha continued to work in good and by now several mediocre films to run the household. She also made appearances on state run television and also sang two national songs 'Sohni dharti' and 'Jug jug jeeye'. It was quiet retired life in the United States with her children and grandchildren around her. She appeared in some stage shows in the United States for which she credits Moeen Akhar. She by now was inclined towards religion. With the children well settled, she once again wanted to return to her homeland.

Sabiha Khanum in one of her interviews was

reminiscent about Santosh Kumar. “We not just liked each other but had lot of mutual respect,” she said.



Sabiha Khanum went through long treatment for her eyes. And when the time came, she quietly and peacefully passed away on Saturday June 13. This brings an end to the glori-

ous chapter of our films history which began naively with innocence in 1950 with film *Beli* and brought us dozens of memorable cinematic jewels and ending on June 13.

Notable Films and Awards include *Beli*-1950, *Ghulam* -1953, *Gunnam*-1954, *Sassi*-1954, *Qatil*-1955, *Saat Lakh*-1955 (Nigar Award), *Hameeda*-1956, *Sarfrosh*-1956, *Ishq-e-Laila*-1957, *Mukhra*-1958, *Naji*-1959, *Mosiqar*-1962, *Daaman* -1963, *Shikwa*-1963 (Nigar Award), *Kaneez*-1965, *Sawal*-1966, *Dewar Bhabi*-1967 (Nigar Award), *Sangdil*-1981/82 (Nigar Award), *Eik Gunah Aur Sahi*-1975 (Nigar Award) Pride of Performance by the Government of Pakistan.

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