

**MAJROOH
SULTANPURI**
THE POET FOR ALL REASONS



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To Lata Jagtiani
My wife and inspiration
An author
And an unabashed admirer of Majrooh's poetry

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Preface

A fair-sized corpus of Majrooh Sultanpuri's non-film work is available in Hindi and Urdu, but very little of it can be found in English. When it comes to Majrooh's huge film opus, there's very little that you may find in *any* language. This seems so odd, considering that his published work has much fewer than 150 non-film poems while his film lyrics run into a whopping 1900 plus songs. In other words, over 90% of what he wrote was for cinema, and yet only about 10% of whatever is written about his work has to do with cinema. That's on the quantity front. It's very hard to compare for quality, because non-film poems generally have more difficult words and more complex imagery, meant as they are to cater to academics and sophisticates of higher appreciation. Even so, an open-minded person who understands more complex thought structures and vocabularies will, when all is said and done, respect the fact that the poet has to simplify his language to reach a wider base of people listening to film songs. The writer's job becomes more difficult if, denied of the words and syntax that first occur to him, he has to offer high imagery for a delicate thought in simple words. That can sometimes be hard. Hopefully many open-minded academics exist to endorse the above point.

However, millions of poetry-loving people, especially those born during the 1960s and later, cannot read Hindi or Urdu fluently, so even whatever little is available for them to read isn't helpful. Many such people feel saddened that since the primary language they write and read is English, some of the work of great Hindi and Urdu poets goes above their heads. Interestingly, many people can understand a lot of Hindi and Urdu words when they hear them. They also recognise that lyrics are quite often the blueprint of a song, the building block upon which the composer and singer construct their edifice. They do like Majrooh's poetry, since that is an inseparable part of the songs they love so much. But there is sometimes this gap between his words and what many music lovers understand of them. Not just words, many people also miss out on the imagery the poet is trying to offer. This book is mainly an attempt to list Majrooh's film work and bridge the gap between his poems and our understanding of the same. But there's much more than that here, as we will find when we journey through these pages. That includes getting to know him personally too. For that, we can start here with his own family, meaning himself, his wife, his children and their spouses.

Here are a few details: Majrooh Sultanpuri had five children, in this order: three daughters and two sons. The daughters were Naugul, Naubahaar and Saba. His sons were named Eram and Andalib. Naugul was married to Waqar Kazi, and

lives in Canada. She lost her husband to cancer of the oesophagus in May 2007. Naubahaar is married to Khurshid Haider, who is the son of Urdu poet and writer Zoe Ansari. Saba is married to Raju Naushad, the son of maestro Naushad Ali. Eram, lovingly called Ammu, passed away in the bloom of youth. This was on 7 May, 1993, when he was just 36. He had a cardiac arrest during his sleep. He was married to filmmaker SM Sagar's daughter Nikhat. Andalib, Majrooh's youngest child, is married to Nazima. Majrooh's wife Firdaus passed away on 14 July, 2012.

When I asked Andalib for some details about his mother and his parents' marriage, here's what he said, "*Jee, unka naam tha Firdaus Jahan aur wo Lucknow se thi. Abba ke ek dost the, Hakeem Ibban, unke saath unhone unani medicine padha tha to kaafi achhe qareebi dost ho gaye the. Wo Faizabad se the. Hum log unko Ibban chacha, Ibban chacha keh ke bulaate the. To unhone abba ka ye rishta lagaaya tha, aur unki dosti itni pakki thi ke jab abba ke oopar warrant nikla tha, Morarji Desai ka jab 50...49 mein, to jab abba underground hue the to inhi ke ghar mein ruke the Faizabad mein kuchh time ke liye. Waise Bambai mein bhi the lekin kuchh time ke*



Little Andalib on his father's lap, as mummy pours tea

liye Faizabad mein bhi ruke the, to inhi ke ghar pe the. To bahut qareebi rishta tha hum log ka. To unhone jab ye rishta lagaaya amma se, shaadi karne ke liye, to itni dosti pakki thi ki abba ne amma se mulaqaat bhi naheen ki. Hakeem chacha ne bola ki bhai Lucknow mein fala log hain, itne ameer naheen hain lekin ladki achhi hai. Tum shaadi karo aur apni zindagi aage badhao. To abba ne fauran haan keh diya aur shaadi kar ke, nikaah karne ke baad abba ne amma ka chehra dekha. But abba always loved her, always loved her till his last breath. Alhamdulillah."

A revealing interview with Andalib about Majrooh's personal life—and his own growing up—is featured in these pages, as is an interview with the bard's daughter Saba and her husband Raju.

Meantime, here a few more details about the personal life of this man who seems to have impacted millions of people. He loved to play cards and go on vacations with his family for their annual holidays during summer vacations. These summer trips were to Panchgani in a hotel that always reserved a couple of rooms for him. Even when he went to Delhi to receive the Dadasaheb Phalke award in September 1994, he took his family with him, he was that bonded. When he was needed to go for cultural meets abroad, he often took his wife Firdaus with him. She also accompanied him when filmmakers had the budgets to take them for shoots abroad. In spite of so much togetherness, he never created a filmi atmosphere at

home, nor discussed or read out his work. He did not teach his kids any poetry or the refinements of deep Urdu. Instead, he sent them to English-medium schools. Even with all his success, perhaps he thought such a struggle as his wasn't for everyone. In any case, he very likely knew that history hadn't shown many examples of poets' children becoming poets.

He usually had some woollens handy if he wasn't wearing them already, and almost always wore a cap, because he had this perennial cold, which would impact his head. He wore the cap from the mid-1950s and wore it with panache. He fussed over his clothes, and would get disturbed if his kurta or pyjama had any dirt or stain on it. He enjoyed fishing and hunting, exactly like his *samdhi* Naushad. He loved eating kababs and meat in general. He enjoyed his hookah and the occasional drink too. Many an enjoyable evening was spent thus with composer Pyarelal and Dr Rahi Masoom Raza, industry associates but also friends from Bandra near where he lived.

Whatever little we know of his personal story and poetry fascinates many of us. As such, I hope that you will join me in the following pages in a greater search of this man, to understand what his huge corpus was and why his admirable journey urges us to showcase it.

While it is impossible to cover all the work of this extraordinary man, we have tried to address some of it by way of chapters on specific areas that we thought his work could be highlighted in. For example, his ghazals have a separate chapter, his lullabies find an independent heading, his engagement with politicians is yet another heading and there are several chapters of his work with composers with whom he collaborated in over 100 songs. We have also included his filmography and discography with a disclaimer that has to do with his work from 1991 onwards. The disclaimer is that while we have logs of every song that was issued in Hindi films from the time songs started in films (i.e., 1931) till 1990, no record as such is available from 1991 onwards. So, while we have included the names of all the *films* Majrooh wrote in, we do not have a dependable list of all the *songs* he wrote from 1991 onwards.

There are some interesting photographs too, a few of which have never been published before. We need to thank the following for their use: the bard's son Andalib Sultanpuri, his son-in-law Raju Naushad, Shiraz Ali of Cine Society, and author Subhashchandra Jadhav.

So who are the 'we' that I speak of?

In the books and articles that I have written and the lectures I have given, in all those television interviews and symposia on music, I am usually the front man, receiving the applause. But much of the time I depend on many friends whom I respect for their knowledge that often fascinates me, even as it sometimes humbles. Not to forget that music is a huge subject, and you often end up thinking there's so little you know. In this book, I am hugely grateful to my wife Lata Jagtiani, a

gifted writer and diehard Majrooh fan, for helping me in many aspects that have to do with the concepts in this book. I am obliged to Monica Kar for editing this book, apart from adding invaluable suggestions. Hers has been incredible work, running into an year and dozens of exchanges between us, whether it's about the Hindustani lyrics or the choice of my English language. I thank Chandu Bardanwala who by way of DVDs and pen drives has furnished me with a treasure of audio-visual songs that have Majrooh's lyrics. Archana Patankar has been a great help in the thorny task of correcting Majrooh's song lists. There are other music-loving friends who have helped in this book in some way, furnishing information, translation, technology or advice, for example: Yogesh Kamdar, JP Obhan "Kakaji", Kamal Malhotra, Falguni Upadhyay and Meenu Gidwani (all from Mumbai), Kalpa Maniar-Shah from Houston, and that amazing music-lover and authority on various aspects of Hindi cinema, Sundeep Pahwa from Delhi. Sultan Arshad Khan of Karachi knew many people in Bombay, including Majrooh, when he was posted in the city as Regional Manager for Pakistan International Airlines for 9 years. He shared thoughts about his meetings with Majrooh and helped in a bit of translation from Urdu to Hindustani. Toronto's Farrukh Hasan, also ex-PIA, has been a huge help in translating and interpreting several of Majrooh's non-film ghazals. There's a dedicated chapter by him on the subject. Charu Upreti of Mumbai has helped in interpreting some of the bard's sizeable Bhojpuri work. Moreover, there are separate chapters that have to do with Majrooh's engagements with specific music composers; all these have been written by music-loving friends who understand those areas more than I do. These names are Antara Nanda Mondal, Deepa Buty, Madhur Trivedi, Vijay Kumar, Lata Jagtiani, Monica Kar, and Sundeep Pahwa, the last three names repeating because of the chapters they have written.

That's the 'we' I speak of.

On two occasions did Majrooh tell me that the irony of being judged for his poetry was that people who gave awards for writing had no idea of his work or that of other songwriters. That remained one of his pet regrets right up till the end. I wonder what he would have thought of this book if he were alive. No harm in imagining that he would have, at the very least, commended us for a worthy effort.

We'll never know about his thoughts of course, but I hope you will find something of value in these pages. I wish you happy, informative reading! If there's something that you'd like to tell us, please send me a mail. You can also connect with the other writers directly.

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Introduction

Majrooh Sultanpuri was born at Azamgarh on 1st October 1919 but was raised at Ganjehri village, 10 kilometres north-west of the city of Sultanpur where his parents lived. These used to be part of the United Provinces which were renamed Uttar Pradesh. They named him Asrar, which means secrets and is pronounced us-raar, meaning the 'As' and 'rar' are pronounced the way we pronounce the English words 'us' and 'car'. His full name was Asrar ul Hassan Khan. His father Mohammed Hussain was a constable in the police. Asrar's primary education was in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, and his father wanted his only son to become a teacher in Islamic studies.

Mohammed Hussain's other children were 3 daughters, two older than Asrar, and one younger. Like many others of his time, Mohammed Hussain was charged up with the Khilafat movement and Gandhiji's call for the boycott of all things western, which also meant education. To get Asrar started, in 1930 the young boy was sent 75 kilometers north-west to Tanda in Faizabad district. Here he started going to an institution to study the Arabic discipline called Dars-e-Nizami, which deals with subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence, the sayings of Prophet Mohammad, the Quran, Arabic texts, etc. He wasn't quite happy doing that here, only because it was going so slow. Thus, still wanting to pursue Islamic studies, in 1933 he went to Allahabad University to study and appear for the fast-track exams of *Maulvi*, *Aalim*, and *Faazil*, meaning the equivalent of Matric, Intermediate, and Graduate respectively. He reckoned that after clearing these exams, he would get a teacher's job. Asrar finished *Aalim*, but then he had to leave these studies too. As he shared with poet and radio host Ahmed Wasi in a radio interview, he was rusticated from thereⁱ. His romance with the idea of teaching was over.

Changing tracks, he decided he would become a *hakeem* (a doctor using herbs inspired from the Unani, or Greek practices). For this he went to Lucknow in 1935, joining the famous Takmeel-e-Tib college of Unani medicine to qualify as a physician. Amazingly, he also got into a school to learn classical music. According to writer Israr Ahmed, his father got to know of this and didn't lose any time getting the boy off the rolls from that schoolⁱⁱ. He finished his medical study in three years, after which he opened a clinic in that city. That clinic outing lasted a few months only because destiny pulled him away to become a poet instead. The thing is, Lucknow was a seat of culture too, and poetry was strongly in the air there. Asrar already had decent command over Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. Increasingly he had been visiting *mushairas* (poetry recital meets) and had got very excited about writing to showcase

his work too.

Here's how the change started happening. In 1935, the very year he started learning medicine, there was a conference arranged by Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu. At this meet, someone encouraged Majrooh to read a poem from his writings. His content and delivery were received well, so he started writing more. As such, the young man began sailing in two boats: studying Unani medicine followed by opening a clinic, but also thinking a lot about poetry and writing it feverishly. He was also reading up a lot on the thoughts of Marx and Lenin, who were the flavour of the era. In time, his poetry was getting much depth too, enough to impress established poet Jigar Moradabadi, who took the young man on as his shagird. In 1939, Jigar Moradabadi, with his shagird Majrooh in tow, reached Aligarh and introduced the young man to the poetic atmosphere in that city. Aligarh was the base of traditional writers (as against Progressive Writers whom we'll soon meet), so here Majrooh got to understand what this side was thinking. Here, too, he stayed a few years and got popular in literary circles.

In these his early years of writing, Majrooh was penning his thoughts on subjects like peacocks in the villages, life in the town of Awadh, the call of birds like the cuckoo, the colours of flowers, etc. Here is an example of what he wrote in those early days:

*Maghrib se ek taara chamka, shaam ka parcham lehraaya
Har ek phool se moti tapka, fitrat ne aanchal phailaaya
Engine ka dhuaan lehraaya, kya kahiye humen kya yaad aaya
(Maghrib=sunset, parcham=flag, fitrat=nature)*

Readers may be able to see that he used the above rhyme and meter and some vocabulary from it in the film song from Kala Pani (1958):

*Jab naam-e-muhabbat leke kisi naadaan ne daaman phailaaya
Pehlu mein ajab-sa dard uttha palkon pe ik aansoo tharraaya
Dil baitthe-baitthe bhar aaya kya kahiye humen kya yaad aaya*

Kurwar is a small town in Sultanpur district. In 1942 he was invited to a mushaira at the residence of the Rani of Kurwar. He recited this nazm, a fariyaad to the Almighty:

*Aye teri chashm-e-karam bazm-e-amaarat ke makeen
Zaalimon ke waaste phaili hui teri zameen
Tu ghareebon ka Khuda hargiz naheen, hargiz naheen
Tu naheen apna to ye deewaar wo dar kya karoon
Kya karoon aakhir teri duniya mein reh kar kya karoon
(Chashm-e-karam=favourable glance, bazm-e-amaarat=Lord of the assembly,
makeen-occupant)*

He was still not a member of PWA (Progressive Writers Association) which

had left leanings and which had started in 1936. He would join the body only in 1945, but as we can see from the above poem, he was already writing about oppressors and poor folks, two of PWA's many favourite engagements.

So now by 1942, his work was loved by many more people; encouraged, the young doctor moved away south-east to Sultanpur, which too was sizzling with poetry recitals and which was after all his home.

In Sultanpur too he wowed poetry lovers. This poem was hot property in 1944:

Ye chaand ye dariya rang-rang mein gunche-se khilaaye jaata hai

Naukhez ye peepal ye mandar phir koi mujhe yaad aata hai

Ek-ek sitaara paani mein hal ho ke raha-sa jaata hai

Aise mein papiha gaata hai

Gaaye ja papihe gaaye ja

(*Naukhez*=young)

By now he had started using a *takhallus* (pen name), Majrooh, meaning the wounded. This name came from his friends actually, which is unusual, because most often it is the writer himself who chooses his penname. It is said that earlier too he had adopted a name, Naseh, meaning advisor, but we cannot be sure since no poetry of his can be found with that signature.

Writes Kuldeep Kumarⁱⁱⁱ: "Asrar ul Hasan began writing poetry at an early age using the pen name 'Naseh' (religious preacher). As a young lad, he fell in love with a girl but failed to receive her affections. Soon, on the advice of his close friends, he became Majrooh (wounded) to the world and remained so until the end."

Bombay beckons

By 1944, a lot of respected writers were making a name for themselves in cinema. These include Dr Aah Sitapuri, Wali Sahab, Zia Sarhadi, and Josh Malihabadi. So, when next year Jigar Moradabadi invited Majrooh to go with him for a series of mushairas to Bombay, the young man was very happy about it. He didn't think too highly of films at the time, it was the Bombay mushaira platform that had him excited. But perhaps he would share a stage with some of the names mentioned above and see what they thought of cinema. As it turned out, it is towards Bombay and films that his destiny would draw him, and that's where his mind and body would substantially be for the remaining 55 years of his life.

What happened is, filmmaker AR Kardar and composer Naushad were at the time scouting for talented lyric-writers. As Majrooh informed Ahmed Wasi in the interview mentioned earlier, these gentlemen were looking for new talents only because the established poets were asking for a lot of money. (Naushad was more than a composer to Kardar. That's one reason that in the 1946 film *Shahjehan*, Naushad's name would appear in the credits just after Kardar's, getting rare priority ahead of the cast as the titles rolled). Kardar and Naushad heard Majrooh at a mushaira event and were impressed by his work. They approached him to write

songs for Shahjehan, a Mughal story in the planning stages at the time. Majrooh's first response was a no. It is only after his ustad Jigar saab influenced him that he agreed to write for the film.



Quite a parallel journey - With Khumar Barabankvi

Just as a point of interest, we need to pause Majrooh's professional journey briefly to spotlight it with that of another poet, Khumar Barabankvi. Both Majrooh and Khumar were born in United Provinces in 1919, less than a few months from each other. Khumar cleared his high school in Barabanki and then moved to Lucknow for higher studies. His father, uncle, and brother were all poets, so he was attracted to sher-o-shairi, which became his passion. Majrooh had also come to Lucknow around the same time, and as we saw earlier, he was studying and practising medicine, till he too realised he wanted to write poetry and be appreciated. Both Khumar and Majrooh were discovered by senior poet Jigar Moradabadi and substantially guided by the latter too. Both went to Bombay in 1945 for a series of mushairas. This filmmaker-composer search team of Kardar and Naushad discovered both the young poets reciting their work and signed them up within a few days of each other. Both writers started their film careers in 1946 in the above-mentioned film Shahjehan. So, if Khumar wrote for the legendary Saigal *Aye dil-e-beqaraar jhoom* and *Chaah barbaad karegi humen maaloom na tha*, Majrooh penned *Gham diye mustaqil* and *Jab dil hi toot gaya* for the singing actor. Next, Kardar and Naushad took poetry from both writers for Keemat, again in 1946. The two poets kept writing for decades and lived for about the same number of years too, with Khumar passing away in 1999 and Majrooh in 2000. Quite a parallel journey on many counts.

Yes, so Majrooh started up in films with Shahjehan, as we just saw. His first song for the film was the Shmshad Begum rendered *Ruhi, Ruhi, Ruhi... Jab usne gesu bikhraaye baadal aaya jhoom ke*. This was a remarkable ode to the heroine Ragini, playing Ruhi, supposed to be an extraordinary beauty in the story. Incidentally, Ragini's real name was Shmshad Begum, so it was one Shmshad Begum singing for another! Anyway, once that song was approved by Kardar and Naushad, Majrooh chased the praise up with another poetic praise for Ruhi, this time coming from Saigal, Rafi, and chorus in *Ruhi Ruhi Ruhi mere sapnon ki rani*. To Majrooh and Naushad goes the credit for putting together this last song as being the only one that had Saigal and Rafi in it, even if the latter was in a subsidiary role here.

With such a stellar start, you would imagine that loads of filmmakers would start reaching out to sign up this lyricist. That didn't happen. The next year, 1947,

was, in fact, the beginning of five turbulent years in Majrooh's life. The country was being partitioned and families were being torn apart amidst a lot of violence. Some of his friends were impacted by this, and many were leaving India for Pakistan. In fact, because of so much turbulence, the film industry had shut down for 6 months. That apart, India had been exhibiting glaring social and financial inequalities that were nauseating many sensitive people, Majrooh being one of them. He was getting very angry at the oppression, exploitation, and hunger that he saw in society. In 1947, the agitated poet got more deeply involved with the Progressive Writers Association, which was a communist-sympathizing outfit. From then on, Majrooh couldn't give films the time they needed, so his outings there all but dried up.

Audiences didn't know of course what was keeping Majrooh away from films, because there were no social media, not even television, in those times. But Majrooh wasn't chilling; he was feverishly writing for the left, he was giving speeches, he was meeting like-minded thinkers of the Association.

In 1947, he also had a Eureka moment.

That year had taken him for a mushaira to Hyderabad, where he met the poet Ali Sardar Jaffry. From there the two went to Ajanta and Ellora Caves in what was Bombay State. Writes Jaffry^{iv}: "At Ajanta he was overwhelmed by the art that defined the life of Gautam Buddha as well as the atmosphere of his times. At this point, he quietly admitted to me that without a social message it's not possible to create big art. Majrooh's poetry is an example of the high art of Ajanta because he has captured the soul of the times".

Personal and professional milestones—Marriage and *Andaz*

Next year, on 5 May 1948, the bard got married to a lady named Firdaus Jahan, about whom their son Andalib shared a few details mentioned in the Preface. And audiences were excited again when he burst upon the scene in *Andaz* (1949), one of the most significant films in the annals of Hindi cinema, backed as it was by sensational music. So, let's see how *Andaz* happened upon him.



We can do that by turning our attention towards another filmmaker, Mehboob Khan. This gentleman was Kardar's contemporary and like the latter had also made many films, including *Anmol Ghadi* (1946), *Elaan* (1947), and *Anokhi Ada* (1948), all three with Naushad's music and Faredoon Irani's cinematography. Surendra was the hero in all three, while the heroines changed from Noor Jahan in *Anmol Ghadi* to Munawwar Sultana in *Elaan* to Naseem Banu in *Anokhi Ada*. But *Elaan* and *Anokhi Ada* hadn't done well with audiences. A third failure in a row would be disastrous, both for Mehboob's reputation as also

for his wallet. He wanted a hit very badly. Many things in the narrative needed a makeover and much of the cast and crew needed to be changed. So, Mehboob, always impressed with Hollywood (never mind his famous Communist-inspired hammer-and-sickle logo), went abroad in 1948 and returned with the idea of making a multi-star cast film. He roped in Dilip Kumar, Nargis, and Raj Kapoor for a new venture that he called *Andaz*. For the lyricist, he took advice from his trusted associate Naushad, who recommended Majrooh. As we saw earlier, filmmaker Kardar had already worked happily with Majrooh in *Shahjehan* and *Keemat*. Kardar endorsed Naushad's suggestion. Kardar's opinion was important because he and Mehboob were buddies and also brothers-in-law. Kardar's wife, Akhtar Sultana, was the sister of Sardar Akhtar, Mehboob's wife. In 1947, the two couples had even migrated to Pakistan with an air of finality but had rushed back soon to quickly undo their folly.^v

Andaz was released in 1949 and was a hit any which way you see it, which means its songs were loved too. People just lapped up the four beautiful Mukesh-on-Dilip songs, famous even today: *Hum aaj kaheen dil kho baitthe, Tootte na dil toote na, Tu kahe agar jeevan bhar main geet sunaata jaoon, and Jhoom-jhoom ke naacho aaj*. Among the film's other wonderful songs was Lata's first-ever ghazal recording: *Utthaaye ja unke sitam aur jeeye ja, Yoon hi muskuraaye ja, aansoo peeye ja*. Naushad's music was loved, but now Majrooh too became nationally famous, so you would imagine that at least from this point onwards, things would get better for him, that his name would be more frequently seen in films' credits and on 78 rpm records.

But that didn't happen, again because Majrooh's attention continued to be distracted. He fretted about India's future. He detested politicians who promised long but delivered short. Even after the success of *Andaz*, the revolutionary writers' body was where the poet's excitement was. Majrooh kept writing against the backdrop of a dismembered nation which he also felt was in the wrong hands.

In early 1950, the law came looking for him for something he had written, so he went into hiding. He spent much of his time underground, speaking out his mind for exploited workers in factories. He wrote lots of poetry championing their revolutionary cause, but of course all of that was outside of films. The words associated with revolutionary ideology are *mazdoor, mehnat, paseena, kaarkhaana, hul, kheti, kisht, fasal*, and such industrial and agrarian terminologies. These are usually found aplenty in nazms because nazms are considered robust, perhaps being the poetic equivalent of farmers or factory workers. Nazms don't need to work under any delicate upper-class refinements of grammar or rhyme. Ghazals on the other hand are laboured over and written with constraints of rhyme and meter, while using arty imagery of *shama-parwaana, chaman-veeraana, bhanwraphool, bhanwar-safeena, husn-ishq, bulbul-saiyaad, maikhaana-paimaana* etc. In the narrow sense of construction, we can say that more often than not, ghazals are like white-collar workers and nazms are the blue-collar kind. That is the reason why, in earlier times, ghazals tended to be respected more than other forms of Urdu poetry.

But the spread and influence of communism, with its hammer and sickle emblems, changed all that. The nazm was in the driver's seat now. Majrooh was seized of the situation, so in 1945 when he entered the Progressive Writers' Association, he had decided to use the framework of the ghazal to extract juice from Marxist ideology and write on matters political and social but also romantic. He wanted the ghazal to reclaim its glory. He took words from the vocabulary of the revolutionary pool and included them in his ghazals. He wanted farmers and industrial workers to use fork-and-knife table manners while retaining their hammer and sickle identity.

Majrooh was daring in his reformist agenda. He took huge risks in his poetry, much like the airline that first put a woman to pilot an aircraft in a patriarchal sky. Metaphorically speaking, poets of the time were using the very tough ox to carry the load of Marxist ideology. Majrooh came in and, instead, started using the horse—powerful enough, but with added beauty and grace.

At this point it is well to consider how Majrooh was learning to become rebellious, shades of which spill over into arrogance, a charge some of his peers and later, journalists and film folks would slap on him. The late 1930s and much of the 1940s was when the world was in turmoil. World War II was on and after it ended, there were huge upheavals in the world order. India's own call for Independence was on the boil. Dr Sadiqa Nawab Seher was like a family member to Majrooh and she has translated and helped publish a few of the bard's books in Devnagri. "At this time traditional poets disliked members of the Progressive Writers Association" writes she in *Mere Chacha Majrooh Sultanpur*^{vi}. Majrooh handled that part smoothly. Moreover, as suggested earlier, it was fashionable to celebrate nazms and downgrade ghazals. It was believed that ghazals could not faithfully reflect the social realities of the time. It was generally thought that ghazals were about epicurean stuff that engaged with *zulf*, *shabaab* and *sharaab* and hardly looked beyond such imagery. The nazms of Altaf Hussain Hali and Sir Mohammed Iqbal were particularly in vogue. So were the nazms of Ehsan Danish and Josh Malihabadi. All the poets at Progressive Writers Association were writing nazms. No one was using the ghazal to express their thoughts. But Majrooh stuck to his guns. He chose the ghazal route to express his thoughts. That does remind you of his famous couplet that speaks about his walking alone:

*Main akela hi chala tha jaanib-e-manzil magar
Log saath aate gaye aur caarvaan banta gaya
(Jaanib-e-manzil=towards my destination)*

How was the above thought born? Let's hear it from Majrooh himself. The following is part of a letter he wrote 6 months before he passed away, in November 1999^{vii}: "I was a huge believer in socialism, and used to think that if Saadi and Hafiz, Mir and Ghalib could offer the issues of their time through the ghazal, why couldn't the ghazal address today's issues? But in the Progressive Writers Conference held at Bhimri, Bihar in 1949, Dr Abdul Aleem announced practically the death of the

ghazal, and while coming out of the conference hall told me ‘Buddy, forget about the ghazal, do something else’ (*Mian, ghazal-vazal ka chakkar chhodo, koi aur kaam karo*). I stayed put with the ghazal, but since at the time I had no polestar in such poetry, I took the hits alone and cautiously set out on my journey alone.”

Here’s an example of one of his ghazals that took the words which were often used in the nazms of the times:

*Ab zameen gaayegi hul ke saaz par naghmen
Waadiyon mein naachenge har taraf taraane se*

*Ahl-e-dil utthaayenge khaak se maah-o-anjum
Ab gauhar subak hoga jau ke daane se*

*Manchale banenge ab rang-o-buu ke pairahan
Ab sanwar ke niklega husn kaarkhaane se*
(*Hul*=plough, *waadiyon se*=from the valleys, *ahl-e-dil*=loving people, *maah-o-anjum*=the moon and stars, *gauhar*=pearl, *subak*=cheaper, *jau ka daana*=corn of barley, *manchale*=courageous, *rang-o-buu*=colour and fragrance, *pairahan*=clothes)

Yes, those are Majrooh’s revolutionary thoughts expressed in a ghazal. Writing a ghazal is always harder than writing say a nazm because as mentioned above, the ghazal has strict rules governing its rhyme and meter. Moreover, it also needs to be a collection of couplets. The nazm is free from such constraints, and even a novice can write one. That is not to say that everyone can write a good nazm; just that writing a nazm is easier because there really aren’t too many rules governing its form. That is why Majrooh chose the difficult route, the path not travelled. He wrote many ghazals espousing the communist thought. This is a couplet from what he scripted to salute the Soviets, something which he even recited when he visited Moscow much later, on 18 May 1969:

*Meri nigaah mein hai arz-e-Moscow Majrooh
Wo sarzameen ke sitaare jise salaam karen*

A couple of days before that, he was in Tashkent, which was then in USSR but is now the capital of Uzbekistan. This is a key couplet he had recited there:

*Tu bhi dekhe to ab ho na sakega maaloom
Mere seene mein hai dil ya watan-e-surkh tera*
(Surkh is red)

Meantime, was he delighted on his 30th birthday, on 1st October 1949, when China declared itself communist! Yes, the mission of communism was his mission, the world order he and Progressive Writers wanted to see.

So then, path taken, he went on writing and later brought out a compendium of his work, calling it Ghazal, which in one word represented his life’s poetic romance. Here is what legendary poet Ali Sardar Jaffry said in his introduction to

that anthology of Majrooh Sultanpuri^{viii}:

“Ek aur khususiyat jo Majrooh ko aam ghazal ko shairon se mumtaaz karti hai, ye hai ki usne samaaji aur siyaasi mauzuaat ko badi kaamyabi ke saath ghazal ke pairaaya mein dhaal liya hai. Aam taur par ghazal ko shair samaaji aur siyaasi mauzuaat ke bayaan mein pheeke-seethe ho jaate hain ya unka andaaz-e-bayaan aisa ho jaata hai ki nazm aur ghazal ka farq baaqi naheen reh jaata. Majrooh ke yahaan ye baat naheen hai”.

(One other speciality that has showcased Majrooh’s excellence from other ghazal writers is that he has taken social and political themes and successfully formed them into a ghazal. Generally, ghazal writers either turn pale when expressing their social and political style or then their style blurs the difference between nazms and ghazals. This is not so in Majrooh’s work).

It was just such a revolutionary ghazal that Majrooh wrote that got him into trouble with the law. That was so because the poem in question wasn’t a general one, it was specifically against Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s popular Prime Minister. And Nehru was compared with Hitler, which seemed as over-the-top then as it must seem today. Here’s what Sabrang says^{ix}:

“A workers’ agitation was on in Bombay in those days. In one such labour rally, Majrooh recited a poem and called Jawaharlal Nehru ‘a slave of the Commonwealth’ and ‘a Hitler.’ An arrest warrant was issued for Majrooh by the government of Bombay State. Majrooh went underground and eluded the police. But when a meeting of Progressive Writers was organised in 1951 to protest the incarceration of fellow communist writers Sajjad Zaheer and Faiz Ahmed Faiz in Pakistan’s Rawalpindi Conspiracy case, the fiery poet came out of hiding. His was a strong voice in the meeting, and he was arrested as soon as he descended from the stage. Majrooh was lodged in Bombay’s Arthur Road Jail for a year”.

The strong political tailwind of PWA had precipitated his entry into Arthur Road jail for well over a year. Arguably, it was this punishing time that Majrooh spent in jail that denied him a slew of work opportunities in Hindi cinema, which has always paid handsomely.

Majrooh was arrested in early 1951 and released in 1952. After his arrest, Morarji Desai, the then Home Minister of Bombay, had asked him to apologize so he could be forgiven. The poet had refused to do so. While in jail, Majrooh did write a few songs for films, but he wrote much more for the people’s cause. As a consequence of his being in jail for much of 1951 and part of 1952, you will not find more than a handful of his film songs in 1951 and 1952. He restarted his writing for films in 1952, which resulted in his increased appearance in film songs from 1953, which can be seen from his filmography later in this book. When he did come out of jail, he was almost immediately signed up by Kamaal Amrohi to write for Daera, and Zia Sarhadi for Footpath, both 1953 films.

So then let’s see what piece of literature sent Majrooh to jail. This is part of an article by Faizi Ahmed^x: “It was his adamant stance on the establishment that took

him to incarceration. During a labor rally organised as a part of workers' agitation being held in Bombay, Majrooh recited a poem criticizing Jawaharlal Nehru's decision to include India in the list of the Commonwealth of Nations.

"Aman ka jhanda is dharti pe, kisney kaha lahrane na paye

Ye bhi koi Hitler ka hai chela, maar le sathi, jane na paye!

Commonwealth ka daas hai Nehru, maar le sathi, jane na paye!

"(Such unease with our flag of peace! He is some protégé of Hitler

A mere slave of the Commonwealth is Nehru, Friends, take him by the collar lest he gets away)"

Such criticism of Nehru from a member of the Progressive Writers' Association flies in the face of conventional wisdom, because Nehru was in fact in favour of this body, of which Majrooh was a member as we saw. Here is what Rakhshanda Jalil writes about Nehru^{xi}:

"In India, he was among the first to extend support to the fledgling All India Progressive Writers' Association in April 1936. In November 1937, he addressed the PWA session in Allahabad. In an informal but heartfelt speech, he stressed the role of the progressive writer in society".

Writer-filmmaker KA Abbas was a strong member of the Progressive Writers Association. Much of his work endorsed the Association's mission, right from his first two films *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946) and *Neecha Nagar* (1946). He was also a strong admirer of Pandit Nehru and had famously called the latter "my long love affair." He was an unhesitant supporter of Nehru's Soviet-leaning collective model of a state-controlled economy, invested in building infrastructure like steel plants, dams, and roads. This does tell us that not everyone at PWA was upset with Nehru's approach or vision.

A little political background on why Majrooh was angry

But it wasn't Nehru's lack of encouragement to Progressive Writers that had Majrooh in anguish; it was the specific political issue about dominion status under the Commonwealth of Nations. It's like this. The whole country had fought for independence for decades, and finally we were going to be free. But the British weren't confident we would handle our affairs well, so they didn't want to give us *Purna Swaraj*, the complete independence that we wanted. They wanted us to first step up to dominion status in the Commonwealth of Nations, accepting King George VI as our monarch even after Independence. This in fact turned out to be the case; we were a dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations from 15th August 1947, when we became independent, until 26th January 1950, when we became a Republic. In this period, we were independent, with "equal status" but "with an allegiance to the Crown". Lord Mountbatten was independent India's first Governor-General, and it was under him that Nehru was sworn-in as the country's first Prime Minister. Many people, Majrooh included, thought this was a sell-out. After all, what

was the meaning of Independence if there was still a foreigner calling the shots here?

Earlier, Nehru had reiterated that there was no question of our becoming a member of the Commonwealth. He had said this even as late as in April 1947: “Under no conceivable circumstances is India going to remain in the British Commonwealth whatever the consequences. This is not a question for me to decide or for any few of us to decide. Any attempt to remain in the Commonwealth will sweep away those who propose it and might bring about major trouble in India.^{xii}”

However, from early May 1947, the transfer of power had created many severe headaches, one of them being the dozens of princely kingdoms which were taking time to sign up with India. The other issue was communal violence which, boosted by logistical nightmares and the uncertainty of the future geographical landscape, was threatening to spread like wildfire. To tame such uncertainty, the transfer of power was rushed through, with Nehru, Patel and Gandhi accepting the British plan of dominion status. This meant that a British Viceroy remained on our shores to assist in the integration of whoever was not yet aligned with India, as also to help keep tempers generally under control. Clearly, this compromise formula was a situational imperative. But Majrooh had felt cheated, so he singled out Nehru, which is why his harsh poem, and that’s why the harsh imprisonment.

Had Majrooh known the dominion status wasn’t going to be around forever, he may have saved his ink. We became independent on 15th August 1947, Majrooh wrote that poem in 1949 when we continued to be a dominion, and the British decided to soften the idea of the Commonwealth later the same year, to be effective in early 1950. This softening meant it was no longer going to be mutually-exclusive to be both a Republic and a member of the Commonwealth of Nations; the Commonwealth would soon become just a collection of states that had British influences strung together with a common language, English, along with shared values of human rights, democracy and due process of law. Britain was not going to be calling the shots from now on. The harsh status under which there was a British Governor-General who among other things decided who the judges of our courts would be was retired soon enough, and then we became a Republic on 26th January 1950. With this, Majrooh’s essential objective was achieved. Interestingly, Majrooh was arrested *after* we became a Republic and the dominion status was diluted. He was arrested and continued to remain in jail because he had hit Nehru in his poem. That is the quick story of how the bard went underground and later behind bars. After a year and something, they just opened the gates and let him fly away.

Freedom!

Once out of jail, Majrooh recommenced his writing for cinema. The year 1953 witnessed his blooming with extraordinary lyrics, for example in *Dard ki aye raat gumar ja* (Lata/Madan Mohan/Baghi), *Zara saamne aa zara aankh mila tera shukriya kar doon ada* (Geeta/OP Nayyar/Baaz), *Aansoo to naheen hain aankhon mein pehlu mein magar dil jalta hai* (Talat/Jamal Sen/Daera), *Shaam-e-gham ki qasam, aaj*

ghamgheen hain hum (Talat/Khayyam/Footpath. This was written jointly with Ali Sardar Jaffry), and *Husn bhi hai udaas-udaas ishq bhi gham se choor hai* (Kishore/Anil Biswas/Fareb). The next year, 1954, he became the rain on OP Nayyar's parched landscape, by furnishing the composer his first hit film, *Aar Paar*, with all the 8 songs loved till today, among them *Kabhi aar kabhi paar*, *Hoon abhi main jawaan aye dil*, *Babuji dheere chalna* and *Sun sun sun sun zaalima*. In the years to come, he would have a long association with OP Nayyar, and many a run-in too, because Nayyar was sometimes not happy with this word or that. It is because of this reason that Majrooh had changed the word *gesuon* to *zulfon* in the first line of *Ye hai reshmi zulfon ka andhera na ghabraiye*, *Jahaan tak mehek hai mere gesuon ki chale aiye* (Mere Sanam, 1965). Most of the time, he didn't change any word, nor did he apologize about anything he wrote. Even earlier, in jail, they promised to consider letting him out if only he apologized. But apology was not part of his DNA. That's the way he was, substantially defending whatever he had written, even in film songs, as we will see elsewhere in this book.

That doesn't mean he always remained adamant about his views or writings. He did relent when he found a middle ground could be reached. Says poet Devmani Pandey^{xiii}:

"The PWA used to meet every Sunday morning at a commune at Khetwadi, Bombay. Poets would read their work and others could fearlessly and brutally debate on what had been recited. Majrooh's very first recitation here was a ghazal that would make him famous. These were the opening words:

*"Main akela hi chala tha jaanib-e-manzil magar
Ghair saath aate gaye aur caarvaan banta gaya*

"When the assembled people were asked for their view, the young poet Zafar Gorakhpuri raised his hand immediately. He said the use of the word *ghair* was inappropriate. No one is a *ghair* for a poet. Ali Sardar Jaffry agreed with this view. He asked Majrooh to replace the word *Ghair* with the word *Log*. That's how the second line became *Log saath aate gaye aur caarvaan banta gaya*" (the rough translation is mine).

In his long, recorded interview with me, parts of which are transcribed in these pages, Majrooh recalled several instances where composers had objected to a certain word or phrase that didn't seem ok with them. He acceded to their request many times. But not always.

As for his non-film writing on the landscape of inequality and oppression,



In the early 1980s, Naushad, Ali Sardar Jaffry, Majrooh and sitting, Kaifi Azmi

he continued to use the ghazal as the form to best express his thoughts. And he kept getting thumbed down by many, not only in the Association that furnished him with the mission, but outside it. Says Professor Waris Kirmani in *Kulah Kaj Ka Baankpan*^{xiv} (the title means a hat worn stylishly): “If we take 1000 couplets after the time of Ghalib, and include names like Haali, Daagh, Iqbal and numberless high poets, there will be some couplet of Majrooh in it. And if you take 100 great ghazals from the writings of poets born in the 20th century, there will be many penned by Majrooh. And the most important thing is that if you collect couplets that are on the lips of people with taste, then the number of such couplets written by Majrooh will exceed that of his contemporaries. If these three observations are correct, or even roughly correct, then why is it that in magazines, among academia and literary circles, in educational syllabuses, in seminars and critical assessments, Majrooh has been mentioned less?” In a well-argued piece, Professor Kirmani offers the answers. He proposes that mob psychology is not found just in uneducated people, but also in cultural and academic areas. There have been countless injustices in these areas too, because very few people have the capability to turn away from conventional beliefs and think for themselves. The professor informs us that many centuries ago in Persia there was a ludicrous comparison between the great Sheikh Saadi and a minor poet called Majduddin Hamgar^{xv}. Zauq and his followers never allowed Ghalib to rise; they were able to impress poetry lovers that Ghalib was inferior. The reversal in public respect happened later. The story of Samuel Johnson and Thomas Gray, English poets of the eighteenth century, is not very different when it comes to the aspect we are scanning: Gray came to be rated higher only in later times. Professor Kirmani asserts that sadly, such hijacking was not done by readers but by literary critics, the very people who are supposed to be the custodians and defendants of culture.

Incidentally, the mob psychology that Professor Kirmani speaks of has in recent years been given a proper name, Groupthink, in which people try not to think for themselves, because they don't see any point in upsetting the beliefs of a set of people who have already thought enough about a subject.

Professor Kirmani adds that perhaps the first reason Majrooh is not rated high by academia is because his literary output is small, even if his film output is extraordinary. That may be worth something, because Majrooh wrote less than 150 poems in various formats outside cinema. Some were put into an anthology called Ghazal, as we saw earlier. Later on, an institution called Majrooh Sultanpuri Academy was initiated, which, among other things, brought out his anthology called Mashaal-e-Jaan, published as late as 1999. This book has the poems originally compiled in Ghazal, with many ghazals added over the years by Majrooh. He also wrote a series of about 50 ghazals, nazms and standalone couplets under the pseudonym Tamashai in Dainik Inquilab.

Professor Kirmani avers that the other reason Majrooh is not on the pedestal that he deserves is that unlike many of his contemporaries at Progressive Writers

Association, Majrooh did not get himself a university degree. He also wasn't so well-versed in English to wax eloquent in seminars and speak with felicity on Aristotle, Eliot and Karl Marx. Intellectuals speak expansively on socialism, feudalism, the changing world order, and they cite books and articles in symposiums and literary meets. Majrooh never did that. But in reality, his poetry contains much of that, and has a ring of truth combined with plenty of depth, thus it impacts both the head and the heart.

But of course, the good professor and similar others who critically assess the work of other poets consider only their non-film poetry. They ignore everyone's film work, which they call *tukbandi*, meaning poetry that lacks emotion and the beautiful use of language. It's poetry that needs music to prop it up. I think that's a pity, because there's a wealth of emotion and loads of imagery and beautiful language in Majrooh's film work. In fact, while Professor Kirmani himself rates Majrooh as a great poet, he does so *in spite of* Majrooh's film work, not *also because of* it. Perhaps that view also reflects something of the mob psychology he speaks of.

In 'My Brother in Poetry and Struggle'^{xvi}, poet Ali Sardar Jaffry's cogent analysis says this, "Majrooh has written about 50 ghazals...but he has also written about 2000 lyrics for films and has been honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award. The false sense of contempt for films in our hypocritical society gave a complex to Majrooh that he had wasted his talent for money. The dichotomy of the situation is that all those who consider film as an inferior art—calling it show business—run after film stars and crave for film songs...The creators of this highest art of modern times are not people of any inferior talent."

This is what poet and journalist Subhash Rai has said^{xvii}: "It has been a common practice among literary people not to take film lyricists seriously. I think that is not right. If the film poems of Shailendra, Sahir, Shakeel and Majrooh live in the hearts of tens of millions of people even today, then all of them were not *tukbandi*. Music does raise ordinary lyrics, but even if it can raise a lifeless poem, it can only do so for a short while, not on a permanent basis. If Majrooh's film songs are connected with us even today, they are so not just because of the music, but because of the strength of his lyrics...Hence, we must accept that those who write good lyrics for films are no less progressive than the others."

Of course, that's true. Think of these couplets from his ghazals in cinema:

*Mera to jo bhi qadam hai wo teri raah mein hai
Ke tu kaheen bhi rahe tu meri nigaah mein hai...*

With this astonishing thought:

*Khara hai dard ka rishta to phir judaayi kya
Juda to hote hain wo khot jinki chaah mein hai
(Dosti, 1964)*

Rehte the kabhi jinke dil mein hum jaan se bhi pyaaron ki tarah

Baitthe hain unhi ke kooche mein hum aaj gunehgaaron ki tarah

And that had a divinely-conceived couplet:

Barson ke sulagte tan-man par ashkon ke to chheente de na sake

Tapte hue dil ke zakhmon par barse bhi to angaaron ki tarah

(Mamta, 1966)

Mujhe pyaar mein tum na ilzaam dete agar jaante gham meri bebasi ka

Meri berukhi tumne dekhi hai lekin naheen tumne dekha tadapna kisi ka

Which had this gem:

*Mere dil ne chaaha tha kuchh tumse kehna magar pyaar kehta hai khaamosh
rehna*

Dikhaayen kise hum ye ashkon ka behna, sunaayen kise dard dil ki lagi ka

(Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon, 1963)

All these film ghazals can qualify to be among the top in literature. Just because they're not so difficult to understand doesn't rob them of their literary merit. As Dr Saleha Rashid says^{xviii}: "He could say deep things in simple words—that's why people value him so much."

Of course that's true. Pause to recall the depth in these simple words:

Aye dil kahaan teri manzil, na koi deepak hai na koi taara hai

Gum hai zameen door aasmaan

(Maya, 1961)

How about

Wo jo milte the kabhi humse deewaanon ki tarah

Aaj yoon milte hain jaise kabhi pehchaan na thi

(Akeli Mat Jaiyo, 1963)

And this

Hui shaam unka khayaal aa gaya

Wohi zindagi ka sawaal aa gaya

(Mere Humdum Mere Dost, 1968)

So let's say Majrooh were at a mushaira, reciting the abovementioned 6 poems. I'm sure he would sound as academic here as he would when reciting his non-film work. I'm equally convinced the audience would go ecstatic in delight hearing them. Perhaps then, if you scratch the surface, the problem with people who call film songs *tukbandi* is their aversion to the music, not to the poem, which becomes a convenient scapegoat. Incidentally, some of his poems like *Hum hain mata-e-koocha-o-baazaar ki tarah* were written outside films first, and only later set to music to be absorbed

into films. What about such poems, where do they fit, in literature or *tukbandi*?

How about concerns like deforestation, are they not serious issues, regardless of which platform they are addressed on? Majrooh said this in Chandi Sona (1977), much before the idea became the *cause celebre* for the world:

Tujhe bhoor ke maati ki putli par koi man ki khidki khol raha...
Tu ne jab duniya ye banaayi, dharti ki chaadar phailaayi
Chanda-suraj ki jyot jagaayi
Par jiske liye jag tu ne racha wo karke ise veeraan raha
Dharti ki chaadar chheen chuka
Ab chaand aur suraj maang raha ye tere bandon ke afsaane
Ho teri duniya kaisi tu jaane

One of the most important pieces of advice in the literary world is to be found in Hamlet written by William Shakespeare. The character Polonius advises his son in that play. Here are parts of it:

Give each man thine ear, but few thy voice:
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment...

And

Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan doth oft lose both itself and friend

Those are famous lines. They have been taught in schools and quoted for centuries. They don't even need any explanation; the language is quite simple to understand. Fair enough. But spare a thought for Majrooh too, who has offered the following incredible advice to us, in very simple language and all in a matter of minutes. In fact, with humour, something widely known to be very useful in delivering messages:

Babu samjho ishaare, horan pukaare pom pom pom
Yahaan chalti ko gaadi kehte hain pyaare pom pom pom...

Tooti-phooti sahi, chal jaaye theek hai, sachchi-jhoothi sahi chal jaaye theek hai
Aadi-tirchhi chala ke jhoom...

Itni-si baat na samjha zamaana, aadmi jo chalta rahe to mil jaaye har khazaana
Shohrat hai cheez kya chalne ka naam hai, izzat hai cheez kya chalne ka naam hai
Aadi-tirchhi chala ke jhoom...

In the above stanzas, Majrooh keeps pushing the 'keep moving' idea. That, he feels, is vital in life. Whatever your situation, whatever your *modus operandi*, keep moving!

He then proceeds to tell us in a nutshell the virtues of staying united, all within the umbrella of that *chalna*:

*Hil-mil ke chalna yoon hi saathi
 Are bandhi mutthi laakh ki aur khuli to pyaare khaak ki
 Mushkil jo aa pade tthokar se taal de
 Parbat bhi hon khade hil-mil ke taal de
 Jo samjha ye usi ki machi dhoom
 Babu samjho ishaare...
 (Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi, 1958)*

Now consider if this advice were not part of a comic film song, that it was used instead in a mushaira without musical instruments, and most of all, that it had difficult words sprinkled in it. I think then maybe, in the minds of academics, it may have qualified to become meaningful advice in a worthy piece of poetry.

Before we leave that keep moving thought, we need to emphasize that Majrooh was so obsessed with the metaphorical idea of walking that he used it several times, in and out of films. And the best part is, when in films, these songs were nodal points in the situation, i.e., lifting the burden of the narrative from time to time. In Akeli Mat Jaiyo (1963), Rajendra Kumar was a ventriloquist who owned a dummy he had named Jack. Brimming with optimism, he was seen heading towards another town in search of work, and who knows, love. The film's director thought it would be a great idea if the romantic hero could sing thoughts on the importance of love, but pepper his thoughts with cautionary words from the dummy. Thus went the hero:

*Chal chal chal mere dil, pyaar teri hai manzil
 Jahaan pyaar mile, dildaar mile, waheen chal chal chal...*

Warned Jack:

Pade na phir pachhtaana wahaan

Responded the hero:

*Jo bhi pade sab seh le, chal uski gali mein pehle
 Kehti hai duniya aaj agar to tujhko deewaana keh le
 Has ke pukaare hasne de pyaare, duniya to hai jaahil*

Jack:

Sambhal ke chalna buddhu miyaan

Hero:

*Dekh ke tujhko chalte, dil honge hazaaron jalte
 Phir tu bhi apni dhun mein nikal ja, girte aur sambhalte
 Dekh na darna, khauf na karna, kuchh bhi naheen mushkil*

The song proceeded with the hero offering advice on walking on in the path of love and his 'buddy' offering advice on being careful. This is a class act, with a

message in a song where the manzil is *pyaar*. Elsewhere Majrooh used love's other Hindustani synonym, *prem*, to give us a message: Urban or rural? First be a loving person.

Babam babam bam bam lehri, leher-leher nadiya gehri...

*Nafrat se man kyoon hai bhara, prem se mil insaan zara
Prem ne tujhko janam diya hai, prem to hai Bhagwaan tera
Prem ki bhakti kar le phir tu, ban dehaati ya shehri
(Ramu Dada, 1961)*

Hopefully the attitude of treating film songs as being ordinary poetry will change. Predicts poet Saif Kidwai^{xix}: "The shairi in Hindi film songs will become part of academic study very soon. It will reach such heights that people will read it, understand it and discuss it."

For the moment however it is true that Majrooh wrote very little outside films, and much of what he wrote in that area was in the 1944 to 1952 period. Apart from the few listed earlier, here are some couplets that are worthy of recall from his non-film writings:

- *Bacha liya mujhe toofaan ki mauj ne warna
Kinaare waale safeena mera dubo dete
(1944. Safeena is boat)*
- *Shama bhi ujaala bhi main hi apni mehfil ka
Main hi apni manzil ka rahbar bhi raahi bhi
(1945. Rahbar is guide)*
- *Dekh zindaan se pare rang-e-chaman josh-e-bahaar
Raqs karna hai to phir paon ki zanjeer na dekh
(1946. Zindaan means jail. Raqs is dance)*
- *Shab-e-intezaar ki kashmakash mein na poochh kaise seher hui
Kabhi ek chiraagh bujha diya kabhi ek chiraagh jala diya*
- *Deher mein Majrooh koi javedaan mazmoom kahaan
Main jise chhoota gaya wo javedaan banta gaya
(1947. Deher=the world, javedaan=eternal, mazmoon=essay)*
- *Mujhe sehel ho gayeen manzilen wo hawa ke rukh bhi badal gaye
Tera haath haath mein aa gaya ke chiraagh raah mein jal gaye
(1950)*

We have tried to examine Majrooh's ghazals, both from within cinema and outside it, in separate chapters in this book. Not just that, his extraordinary film corpus can be found in his discography among these pages, along with much focus on the key parts of dozens of his poems, sometimes with meanings of difficult words, at other times with interpretations of his expressions. His span of published

film work is the longest for any songwriter anywhere (from 1946 to 2008) and is unlikely to be bettered by anyone else. A good reason he lasted this long, apart from the relevance of his work, is that he could very easily write on meter, i.e., a tune that was ready. Writing such poetry-on-demand is never an easy job. But composers loved that about Majrooh, who was easily Numero Uno in this regard.

In his magnificent run, he had his lows and his highs, as is the case with all artists. That takes us to arguably the highest of the high times for him, the year 1958. Let's laser in.

Majrooh's 1958, what a year!



Naushad, Majrooh and Madan Mohan

*Tujhe kya sunaon main dilruba, tere saamne mera haal hai
Teri ik nigaaah ki baat hai, meri zindagi ka sawaal hai*

The above was the opening couplet of a Majrooh ghazal written for Aakhri Dao in 1958. That in fact was a wonderful year for this lyricist and so let's go meet him before the year is done.

It's the evening of 25th December 1958. Music composer Naushad is at Ashiana, his waterfront villa at Bandra, enjoying his birthday party with his family and visitors who keep pouring in. Among the latter, Rafi, Shakeel, Mahendra Kapoor, and Raja Nawathe, the director of the recently-released Sohni Mahiwal (1958), the film that has been receiving rave reviews. Among the 30-odd people, Shakeel and Naushad are reciting poetry and waxing eloquent. As many of us know, Naushad is also a fine poet, and one day he will bring out his anthology of poems called *Aatthwaan Sur*. In that anthology, poet Majrooh Sultanpuri will write

a beautiful introductory page, with this comment:

“Naushad saahab ne kya kaam kiya hai... (ye dekhiye):
‘Jaan deke bhi khareedo to duniya haath na aaye
Ye musht-e-khaak kehne ko sasti zaroor hai’”
(Musht-e-khaak=handful of dust)

As observed above, we are in 1958, and Majrooh doesn't stay far from Naushad's home in Bandra. The two have already collaborated beautifully in the films Shahjehan, Keemat and Andaz. Majrooh has spent every 25th December evening in the past few years here. But today he is conspicuously absent from the party. More than 20 years later, in January 1980, Naushad Ali's son Raju will get married to Majrooh Sultanpuri's daughter Saba, cementing their fathers' musical association with a family relationship. But that relationship will be in the future, which is one reason it isn't really so important for Majrooh to be here today. The other reason is, Majrooh is in demand everywhere. After all, right now he is at his zenith, producing printed gold in his poems.

Majrooh is on a career high these days because 1958 has been an exceptional year for him. As many as 19 films with his lyrics have been released this year, translating into critical and commercial success. As we will see when all the dust has settled down on his work, this is going to be his best year ever, both in the number of films and the number of songs. Many of his songs are on people's lips and in their hearts, and perhaps right at the top of the list is *Hum bekhudi mein tumko pukaare chale gaye* (SD Burman/Rafi/Kala Pani, 1958). The writer of that song arguably deserves the Best Lyricist award from Filmfare magazine, which is so high and mighty these days. But they will give that award to someone else and Majrooh will go ballistic about it. Meantime, where is he this evening?

There's a get-together underway at the Warden Road home of the Progressive Writers Association poet Ali Sardar Jaffry. They're partying here, writers and poets and friends who love the written word. Majrooh loves such a milieu and is here with his wife Firdaus. He is very close to Jaffry—they have even written lyrics together, which is something very rare, in *Footpath* (1953) and *Dhobi Doctor* (1954)—which also explains his presence.

This celebration is not focussed on Majrooh, but it will soon end up being influenced by him. Meantime, consider the heavyweights here: there's Sahir Ludhianvi, Jan Nissar Akhtar and Mulk Raj Anand. Vishwamitra Adil has come. Lyricist PL Santoshi is here. Present are the husband-wife team of Shahid Latif and Ismat Chughtai, delighted with the critical acclaim of their recent film *Sone Ki Chidiya* (1958). There's Nakhshab who will opt to go to Pakistan after a few years. But Kaifi Azmi hasn't come. He is close to Shahid and Ismat, but there's no way he will leave his home for a party; he has been working tirelessly for *Guru Dutt's Kaagaz Ke Phool*, which will release in a few months. It is sad that the great dialogue writer Rajinder Singh Bedi too has not come. Bedi will do some exceptional work with

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