

*Tribute to Raj Khosla: Article*

**Milind Damle**

**A Birth Centenary Tribute  
The True Disciple of a True Master: Raj Khosla**



*Raj Khosla with Dilip Kumar and others*

This year holds a special significance for admirers of Hindi cinema — a festive season in its own right, especially for those who revel in the splendour of its golden era. As we celebrate the birth centenary of two of Indian cinema’s towering visionaries, it is not merely a moment of nostalgia but of deep artistic reflection. Both filmmakers were lauded for their distinctive cinematic voices, and yet they were bound together by a relationship far more profound than professional camaraderie.

The first thread that bound them was their exquisite understanding of music — not merely as background ornamentation, but as a living, breathing soul of their films. Both crafted songs that transcended melody and became enduring visual poetry. These two masters were Guru Dutt and Raj Khosla.

Between them existed yet another vital link — Dev Anand — the charismatic bridge between the two, as well as several artistic and emotional connections that enriched their creative journeys. Guru Dutt was born on 9th

July 1925, and Raj Khosla on 31st May 1925 — just a few weeks apart. Technically, Khosla was the elder by age, but destiny inverted the natural order: Guru Dutt became the Guru, and Raj Khosla, his devoted disciple.

This cinematic reflection, written on the occasion of their birth centenaries, seeks to revisit that unique relationship — not merely that as a master and a pupil, but that of two artistic souls bound by music, cinema, and mutual reverence. It is a celebration not just of their individual genius, but of the creative lineage that shaped Hindi cinema's most lyrical and luminous age.



*Baazi*

### **Year 1950... Bombay... Cadell Road, Coffee House**

It was the Bombay of the early fifties — restless, ambitious, and brimming with cinematic dreams. Every evening, Dev Anand and his circle of friends would gather at the famous Coffee House on Cadell Road. It was a vibrant hub, a meeting ground for countless hopefuls who had come from Punjab in search of work, recognition, and a foothold in the Hindi film industry. For Punjabis, the word “*Pind*” — meaning *village* — holds a deep emotional resonance. And so, these young

men, far away from their own *pinds*, would sit together over endless cups of coffee, sharing memories of home, of the fields and lanes they had left behind, and of the uncertain future they were determined to conquer.

It was on one such evening that Raj Khosla met Dev Anand. In that casual, smoky atmosphere filled with conversation and ambition, Raj narrated the story of his life thus far — his struggles, his dreams, and his quiet yearning for music and cinema.

*Cut to...*

### **Flashback... approximately 20 years...**

#### **Punjab**

Raj Khosla hailed from a large, traditional Punjabi family. His father, who worked for the Indian Railways, was transferred to Bombay, and thus the family moved from their native village, Rahon, in Punjab to the bustling city of dreams. They eventually settled near Matunga, where they bought a small plot and built a modest home — a place that still stands today, known as “Khosla House.”

There is a common belief that Raj Khosla came to Bombay to struggle as a singer. In truth, this is only half the story. He had in fact arrived in the city as a child with his family and had grown up entirely within its rhythm and pulse. His father was deeply fond of music, especially the songs of K.L. Saigal, whose voice filled their home on many an evening. Inevitably, young Raj absorbed these musical influences; melodies became part of his earliest education.

Once the family had settled in Matunga, something almost magical began to unfold in Raj's life. His father, sensing the boy's innate musicality, decided to nurture it

properly. He sent Raj to train in classical music under the guidance of the great Pandit Jagannathbua Purohit. It was an apprenticeship that refined not only his voice but also his ear — sharpening his sense of *sur* and *taal*, discipline and devotion.

And then, as though destiny had been quietly composing its own tune, a remarkable event occurred — one that would change the course of Raj Khosla's life forever.

Raj soon discovered, much to his wonder, that just a little further down the very street on which his family's home in Matunga stood, lived none other than his father's favourite singer — and the man who was now quietly becoming his own idol — Kundan Lal Saigal.

Every evening, Saigal would sit on the terrace of his home with his harmonium, immersed in his *riyaz*, his voice drifting through the twilight air like a benediction. From that day on, young Raj made it a ritual to walk to the front of Saigal's house and stand there silently, listening in awe. He wasn't alone — every evening, a small crowd would gather on the opposite side of the street, waiting to catch that magical hour when Saigal's resonant voice would rise and fill the neighbourhood with melody.

For Raj, what had begun as curiosity slowly transformed into devotion. He was enchanted — by Saigal's voice, his tone, his graceful phrasing, and the deep emotion that seemed to spring effortlessly from his songs. Gradually, Raj too became one of his ardent admirers, attending these impromptu concerts with religious punctuality.

At home, Raj's father would often listen to his son sing and feel a deepening pride. Day by day, he began to notice

something uncanny — a timbre, a tone, an echo of Saigal himself emerging in his young son's voice.



*Baazi*

Meanwhile, the great singer had also taken note of this little boy who came faithfully every evening, standing quietly beneath his terrace to listen. One day, Saigal called out to him and invited him inside. He asked Raj to sing. Taken completely by surprise, the boy was nervous, trembling even — but gathering all his courage, he began.

As Saigal listened, he was moved to silence. It was as though he was hearing his own voice flow from the throat of this small boy. His eyes filled with emotion. Placing his hand affectionately on Raj's head, Saigal blessed him, saying: “Bachche, tu jab bhi gāyegā, merī āwāz meñ gāyegā!” (*My child, whenever you sing, you shall sing in my voice.*)

It was a blessing beyond measure — a benediction from a legend, sealing the bond between a master and a young dreamer whose destiny was already beginning to hum with music.

Raj was growing up fast. Music was his world, but along with it, another dream had begun to take root — the dream of becoming an actor. And as fate would have it, that dream

soon found its first expression. In 1947, Raj made his debut on the silver screen with the film *Rain Basera* — appropriately enough, as a singer on screen. The film was produced by Chand Lal Dhir and Jaswant, and it offered Raj ample opportunities to sing. Yet, fortune was not on his side. The production got delayed, and when it finally released, it failed to make any impact. The Partition that followed buried the film completely; it vanished from public memory, unseen by most. The first taste of cinema had come, but success had not.

Then, in 1949, another small opportunity presented itself — this time purely as a singer. “If nothing else,” Raj told himself, “singing is something I can do — and perhaps, through it, I’ll make new connections and open doors to more work.”

The song he got was a light-hearted, catchy tune from the film *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* (1949), composed by Bulo C. Rani with lyrics by B. R. Sharma — “*Madhur suron mein suno Jhamela, ek tha Majnu, ek thi Laila.*” It was a fun, whimsical number, charming but short-lived — it came and went without much notice.

Around this time, Bombay was witnessing something akin to today’s cover albums — a trend initiated under the banner of “Young India Series”, with support from the legendary V. Shantaram. The idea was to re-record popular songs in the voices of fresh, upcoming singers. Through this project, Raj got another chance — a reinterpretation of the famous Mukesh song “*Toote na dil, toote na*” from Mehboob Khan’s 1949 classic *Andaz*. In the film, the song was picturised on Dilip Kumar playing the organ, with Raj Kapoor and Nargis listening intently — a scene

etched in cinematic history. Raj’s version of the song turned out beautifully, and it remains preserved even today in that rare *Young India* recording. His singing had a certain sweetness, a distinct charm, an emotional pull that made listeners pause.

Among those captivated by his voice was a young and promising music director — Madan Mohan. Impressed by Raj’s tonal finesse, he offered him a song in his very first film as a composer, *Aankhen* (1950), alongside stalwarts like Shamshad Begum, Mukesh, and Mohammed Rafi. The song, “*Rail mein jiya mora sananana hoye re*”, though seemingly simple and playful, ended with a beautifully rendered alaap that revealed Raj’s classical training and vocal depth. Listeners took note — this was no ordinary newcomer.

Raj’s journey — his struggle, his search for identity — had begun in earnest.

Cut to...



## Year 1945 — Prabhat Film Company, Pune

Elsewhere, another young man was quietly finding his footing in the world of cinema — Guru Dutt. After his initial stint with Uday Shankar’s dance troupe in Almora, followed by a difficult phase of unemployment, Guru Dutt eventually found work at the Prabhat Film Company in Pune — first as an assistant, and later as a dance director. He was still learning, still seeking his place in the world of film.

During the shooting of *Hum Ek Hain* (1946) in Pune, destiny arranged an encounter that would go on to shape the future of Indian cinema. On that set, Guru Dutt met another young newcomer — Dev Anand. The cause of their meeting was delightfully accidental: an exchange of kurtas!

Dev Anand had come to Pune on the recommendation of Baburao Pai, who had spotted his potential and sent him to Prabhat for a role in *Hum Ek Hain*, directed by P. L. Santoshi. Having recently quit his job in postal censorship to pursue acting, Dev had landed his first film relatively quickly.

One day, quite by chance, their laundry got mixed up. Guru Dutt ended up wearing Dev Anand’s freshly pressed kurta, and Dev, Guru’s. When they met and realized the mix-up, both broke into laughter — and in that lighthearted moment, a lifelong friendship was born.

This seemingly trivial incident would turn out to be one of the most consequential encounters in the history of Hindi cinema. Their friendship was not just genuine but creatively fateful. In the warmth of that new bond, the two young men made promises to

each other — promises that would change both their lives.

Dev Anand told Guru Dutt, “*If I ever become a producer, I’ll give you your first chance as a director.*”

To which Guru Dutt replied, “*And if I ever become a director, I’ll cast you as my leading man.*”

Both kept their word.

Soon after his first film (*Hum Ek Hain*, 1946), Dev Anand founded his own banner, Navketan Films, in 1949. And true to his promise, in 1951, he offered Guru Dutt his first opportunity to direct a film — “*Baazi.*”

Cut to...



*Raj Khosla, Md Rafi and Madan Mohan*

## Year 1950 — Bombay, Cadell Road, Coffee House...

Raj Khosla was still struggling. Small singing assignments came and went, but his first film had failed, leaving him adrift in the vast ocean of Bombay’s film world. One evening, at the bustling Coffee House on Cadell Road, fate intervened once more — this time in the form of Dev Anand.

By now, Dev Anand was no longer just a rising actor; he had turned producer, though still nursing the sting of failure from his first home production, *Afsar* (1950), directed by

Chetan Anand. Determined to rise again, Dev was planning his next film and seeking new collaborators — old friends he could trust from his Prabhat Film Company days.

Over steaming cups of coffee, Raj narrated his journey so far — the unfulfilled beginnings, the endless auditions, the music, the struggle. Dev listened keenly, and then asked a question that would change Raj's destiny:

“Why don't you try your hand at direction? You seem made for it.”

Raj was already desperate for steady work. Seeing potential in him, Dev wrote a note of recommendation and sent him to Guru Dutt, who was preparing for his directorial debut under the Navketan banner. “Take this young man as your assistant,” Dev instructed.

And so, in 1951, with *Baazi*, Guru Dutt officially became Raj Khosla's Guru — both in spirit and in title.

From then on, a deep mutual respect and creative trust began to grow between them. In his debut film, *Baazi*, both Guru Dutt and Raj Khosla even indulged their shared desire to act. The very first shot of the film — the very first frame — features Guru Dutt himself. But, amusingly, he made a small continuity mistake in doing so. Guru cast Raj Khosla in two separate roles — as a doctor and as a police superintendent! While his brief appearance as the doctor passes quickly, his performance as the police officer is substantial, commanding an entire scene.

From the preparations of *Baazi* until the very last breath of his life, Raj Khosla never once referred to Guru Dutt by name alone. With deep affection and reverence, he always called him — “*Mera Guru.*”

Cut to...

## **Year 1951 — Bombay... Production... Theatres... Audience...**

*Bazi* released — and it was as if fortune itself had smiled upon Navketan Films. The film not only drew full houses and brisk box-office business, but its songs became the talk of the town. It gave Dev Anand, the young producer still reeling from his debut setback, the confidence and credibility he needed — and it announced to the world that a new director, Guru Dutt, had arrived.

*Bazi* was remarkable for its setting: the dark, neon-lit underbelly of the city, the smoky dens of gambling, the intrigue of the black market. Its protagonist, played by Dev Anand, was neither hero nor villain — he embodied both virtue and vice, the sinner and the dreamer in one.

In 1952, Guru Dutt directed *Jaal*, produced by T. R. Fatehchand under the Film Art banner. Though entirely fictional, the story was set against the Portuguese colonial backdrop of coastal Goa — a world of smuggling, sea winds, and moral ambiguity. Dev Anand's character, a smuggler by profession yet vulnerable at heart, stood out as one of his most intriguing early portrayals. Gita Bali was his luminous co-star, and S. D. Burman's haunting melodies gave the film its soul.

A year later came *Baaz* (1953). It failed at the box office, despite its sweeping historical setting and elaborate production. Only one song — “*Har Zubaan Ruki Ruki, Har Nazar Jhuki Jhuki*” — lingers in memory today, masterfully filmed by Guru Dutt, who daringly began it from the interlude rather than the opening refrain.

Failure, however, became his teacher. In 1954, he returned with *Aar-Paar* — a sharp, urban film rooted in Bombay's restless post-Partition reality. Having dissolved his earlier banner, H. G. Films, and separated professionally from Geeta Bali, Guru Dutt now produced *Aar-Paar* under his own name. The film depicted the city's migrant influx, its working-class neighbourhoods, and the moral greys of survival.

Shyama starred as the spirited heroine; the music by O. P. Nayyar with lyrics by Majrooh Sultanpuri created a sensation. *Aar-Paar* not only erased the sting of *Baaz*'s failure but re-established Guru Dutt as a filmmaker of flair and confidence.

From 1951 to 1955, he directed one film each year. Except for *Baaz*, every one of them proved both critically admired and commercially sound. And through each of these journeys, Raj Khosla, his quiet, observant assistant, remained by his side — learning, absorbing, and slowly becoming one of the master's strongest creative pillars.

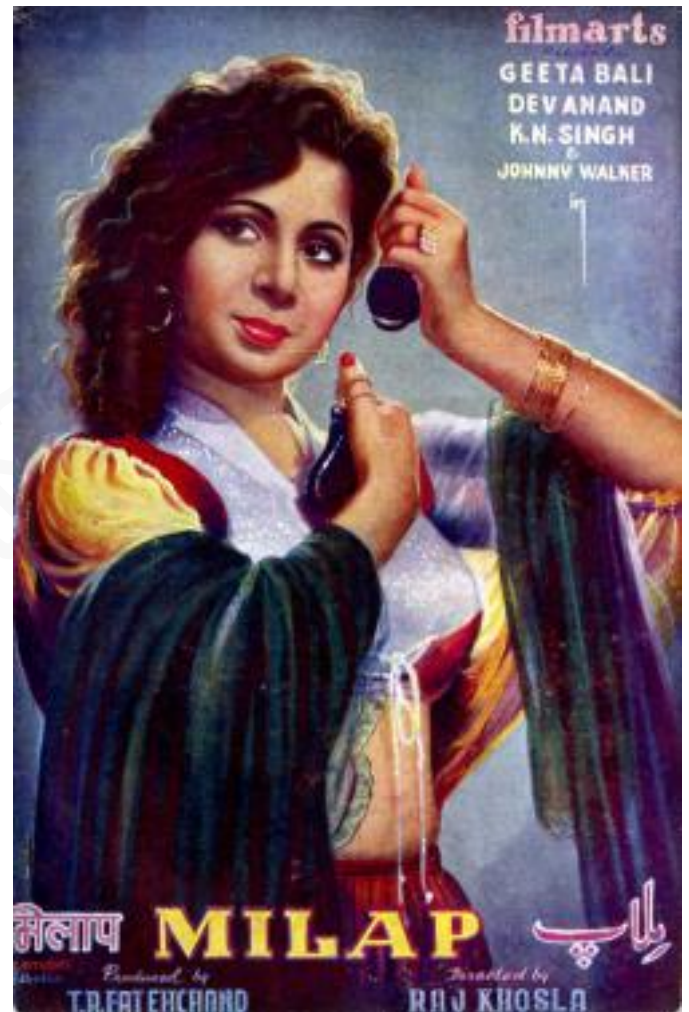
From Guru Dutt, Raj Khosla learned his first and most enduring lesson: *“Innovation is the breath of cinema; repetition is its death.”*

Cut to...

### **Year 1954 — Bombay: The Grand Door to Direction Opens**

While *Jaal* was being filmed, producer T. R. Fatehchand, along with Dev Anand and Geeta Bali, had been quietly observing the young and capable Raj Khosla at work. Impressed by his keen eye and composure on set, Fatehchand decided, in 1954, to entrust Khosla with an independent directorial venture under his banner *Film Art*. Thus, in 1955, Raj Khosla made his directorial debut

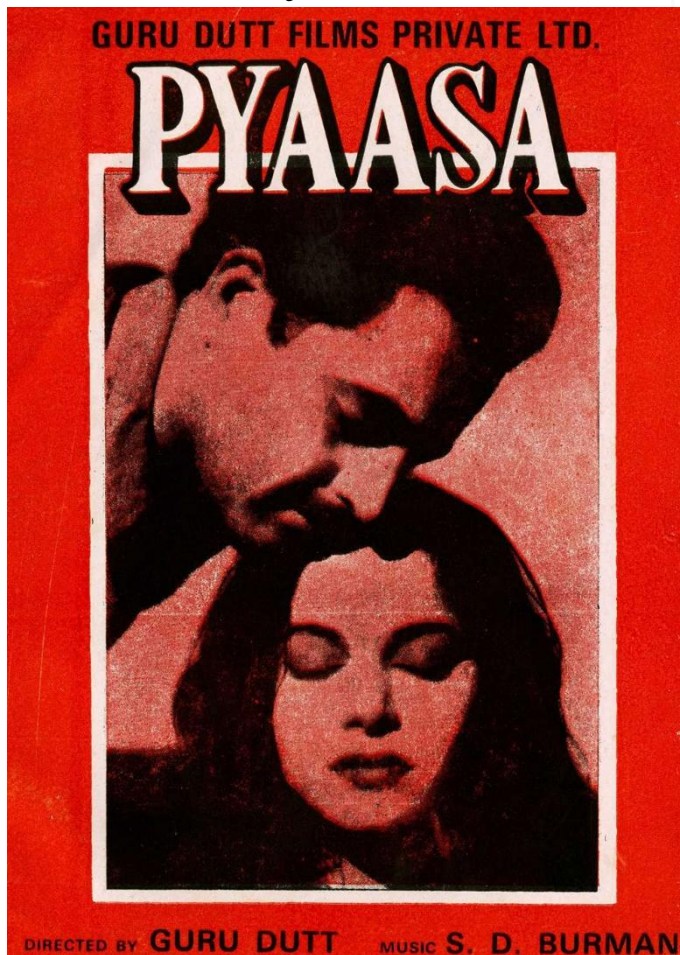
with *Milap*, starring Dev Anand and Geeta Bali in the leading roles. (It was, in a way, much like when Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol agreed to act in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* for Aditya Chopra — who had once been an assistant himself. A curious connection here: when Yash Johar founded Dharma Productions in 1980, the company's very first film, *Dostana*, was directed by none other than Raj Khosla himself.)



During the making of *Milap*, Khosla grew slightly distant from Guru Dutt, though the bond never truly loosened. Their conversations — about films, life, and aesthetics — continued daily. Raj was not merely an assistant to Guru Dutt; he had become a trusted confidant. He had witnessed, up close, the tender evolution of Guru Dutt and Geeta Roy's romance, its

transformation into marriage, and the emotional storms along the way. Guru trusted him implicitly — so much so that Raj often found himself driving the couple around Bombay on quiet evenings.

After completing *Mr. & Mrs. 55* (1955), a breezy, Western-influenced comedy of manners that satirized urban notions of marriage, Guru Dutt's mind turned again toward his long-cherished dream project — *Kashmakash*. For years, the film had been shelved, hindered by circumstance and disagreement. Now, he decided the time had come. He renamed it *Pyaasa*, reimagining its protagonist not as a painter (as in *Kashmakash*), but as a poet. The legendary partnership of Sahir Ludhianvi and S. D. Burman reunited, and from their collaboration was born a masterpiece — a film that would come to define not just an era, but an emotion.



Another of Guru Dutt's old *Prabhat Film Company* friends joined him for *Pyaasa* — the elegant Rehman. (In *Jaal*, too, the veteran Prabhat actor Ram Singh had played a major role.) From Guru, Raj Khosla learned the importance of cultivating not just a production team, but a *creative family*. He began to form his own close-knit circle of collaborators, guided by that same philosophy.

By this time, Dev Anand, Guru Dutt, and Raj Khosla had come to function almost as a family unit — bound not by blood, but by shared passion, struggle, and vision. Having watched Guru Dutt's journey from up close, Raj was deeply involved in the making of *Pyaasa*. Yet, Guru Dutt, determined that his banner should remain active while he worked on his dream, decided to entrust another major project entirely to Raj.

The film was *C.I.D.* (1956).

With its taut screenplay, unforgettable songs, and slick pacing, *C.I.D.* became a resounding success. Dev Anand, naturally, stood firmly behind Raj, both as friend and star. Through *C.I.D.*, Guru Dutt fulfilled the promise he had once made at Prabhat — to give Dev Anand a leading role in his own production — and, in a way, repaid the artistic debt of gratitude for being given his first chance as a director years earlier.

Had Guru Dutt himself directed *C.I.D.*, it might have earned an even greater historical stature — but in truth, the film's success already spoke volumes. It marked the arrival of a new name, one the industry would soon revere: Raj Khosla, the director.

Cut to...

## Year 1956 — Bombay: The Journey After *Milap*

After *C.I.D.*, Raj Khosla's cinematic journey took flight — swift, sure, and unstoppable. From his directorial debut *Milap* (1955) to his final film *Naqaab* (1989), Khosla carved a towering career that spanned more than three decades. He came to be regarded as one of Hindi cinema's most dependable, sophisticated, and commercially astute directors — a man whose craftsmanship balanced artistry with audience appeal. Leading producers approached him with confidence, and major stars trusted him implicitly — so much so that when they wanted to launch their sons in cinema, they turned instinctively to Raj Khosla.

Two striking examples stand out: Sanjay Dutt's debut film *Rocky* (1981), and Sunny Deol's launch vehicle *Sunny* (1984). For *Rocky*, Sunil Dutt sought Khosla's creative guidance; for *Sunny*, Dharmendra went a step further and placed the directorial reins entirely in his hands. (*Sunny* also marked the return of Waheeda Rehman, after many years, to act once again under Raj Khosla's direction.) A delightful coincidence links these two films — both were produced by Amarjeet, Dev Anand's longtime associate and the director of *Hum Dono* (1960).

Over a span of about 35 years, Khosla directed 27 films, produced one (*Do Chor*, 1972), and assisted Sunil Dutt in the making of another. His production of *Do Chor* for his assistant Padmanabh was, in spirit, a repayment of the debt he owed to his own mentor Guru Dutt — for giving him *C.I.D.*. Later, he would pass on that same cinematic inheritance to another talented protégé —

Mahesh Bhatt, who learned the grammar of emotional storytelling at Khosla's side.

Throughout his prolific career, Raj Khosla never forgot the first lesson his Guru had taught him — the importance of novelty and experimentation. Whether in subject, tone, or style, he sought freshness in every frame. This tireless pursuit of reinvention earned him the admiration of future filmmakers. The acclaimed director Sriram Raghavan, speaking with reverence, once said, "I've watched Raj Khosla's films seven or eight times each — they're intoxicating. If you want to see the Indian expression of the American film noir tradition, you have to look at Khosla's work."



*CID*

Indeed, his range as a director remains extraordinary. His filmography traverses an astonishing variety of moods and genres: *C.I.D.* (1956) — a taut crime thriller, *Woh Kaun Thi?* (1964), *Mera Saaya* (1966), and *Anita* (1967) — a haunting trilogy with Sadhana, exploring the enigma of feminine identity, *Do Raaste* (1969) — a deeply emotional family melodrama, *Do Badan* (1966) — a lushly romantic tragedy, *Mera Gaon Mera Desh* (1971) and *Kachche*

*Dhaage* (1973) — Indian westerns steeped in dacoit lore, *Main Tulsi Tere Aangan Ki* (1978) — a sensitive tale of two women, featuring Vijay Anand in a rare acting role, *Solva Saal* (1958) and *Bombai Ka Babu* (1960) — bold, unconventional films that challenged the commercial grammar of their time.

Even at fifty, Dev Anand returned as a charming rogue in Khosla's *Shareef Badmaash* (1973), proving how easily the director could adapt to new eras and changing stars.



To this illustrious list one must add *Kala Pani* (1958), *Dostana* (1980), *Prem Kahani* (1975), *Chirag* (1969), and the musically delightful *Ek Musafir Ek Haseena* (1962), in which the hero literally sings his way through life with a harmonium in hand.

When commercial challenges later arose, Khosla turned once again to the genre he had mastered — the mystery thriller. The result was *Naqaab* (1989), a film that bore the unmistakable echoes of *Woh Kaun Thi?* and drew inspiration from Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.

Interestingly, the timeless masterpiece *Guide* (1965) had, at one stage, come to Raj Khosla as a project. But due to a personal rift with Waheeda Rehman, it eventually passed on to Vijay Anand — and the rest, of course, is cinematic history.

Cut to...

### Year 1989 — Bombay: *In Search of Guru Dutt*

In Nasreen Munni Kabir's feature-length documentary on Guru Dutt, there exists a brief but luminous interview with Raj Khosla. In it, Khosla, with characteristic humility, remarks:

“People often say that I film songs beautifully — that the songs in my films have a distinctive quality, and that much of my work is remembered for them. But if there is any credit to be given for that, it belongs entirely to my Guru. Everything I know about music in cinema, and about how to film a song — I learnt from Guru Dutt.”

Indeed, the second great lesson Khosla imbibed from Guru Dutt — after the art of thematic innovation — was the visual and emotional language of the film song. From childhood, Khosla possessed a keen musical sensibility, but under Guru Dutt's mentorship, that instinct was refined into cinematic poetry. He learnt not just how to place a song in the narrative, but how to make it breathe, move, and reveal character. It is no surprise,

then, that nearly every film he made is adorned with songs that are both musically exquisite and dramatically essential — each advancing the story rather than interrupting it.



The actor-producer Shatrughan Sinha, who collaborated with Khosla on four films, once recalled:

“Raj Khosla was a craftsman — a master of his medium. His sets were always cheerful, filled with energy. Whenever there was a song sequence, it became a celebration! His understanding of music was phenomenal. I still remember how the song *Bane Chahe Dushman Zamana Hamara, Salamat Rahe Dostana Hamara* was shot — finished in just two days, and we didn’t even realise how effortlessly it happened.”

Khosla’s songs were never ornamental. They were woven with purpose — visualised as emotional turning points. Consider just one example: in *Mera Gaon Mera Desh* (1971), a lively number performed by Laxmi Chhaya transforms into a subtle act of espionage. Through the playful rhythm of the song, she signals to the police the very description and whereabouts of the dacoit they are hunting — his clothes, his turban, the tree he stands beneath. A seemingly simple song becomes a moment of brilliant narrative ingenuity.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum lie songs like the ethereal *Lag Ja Gale Ke Phir Ye Haseen Raat Ho Na Ho* —

where a whisper of melody conveys an ache that words cannot — and the vibrant, teasing *Bindiya Chamkegi*, which turns flirtation into a bold statement of feminine confidence. Perhaps it was this empathy — this instinctive understanding of the female psyche — that made Raj Khosla the director so deeply trusted by his leading ladies. He was, after all, remembered as *the women’s director* — one who could make the camera fall in love with his heroine.

Khosla worked with a dazzling variety of music directors, each collaboration leaving its own mark on Hindi film music. *C.I.D.* (1956) and *Ek Musafir Ek Haseena* (1962) — scored by O. P. Nayyar, whose pulsating rhythms Khosla visualised with unmatched flair. *Bombai Ka Babu* (1960) — composed by the legendary S. D. Burman, blending lyricism with melancholy. *Sunny* (1984) — in the later years, R. D. Burman’s dynamic score brought youthful freshness to Khosla’s mature vision. *Woh Kaun Thi?*, *Mera Saaya*, and *Chirag* — where his deep collaboration with Madan Mohan, who had once given Khosla a chance to sing, produced songs of haunting beauty and timeless grace. Each melody, each frame, and each glance of his heroines carried an echo of the master he never stopped seeking — Guru Dutt.

Even While directing, the Artist Within Never Slept

Even as Raj Khosla built his shining reputation as one of India’s most sophisticated film directors, the performer and musician within him never faded. Whenever opportunity allowed, he gently wove his first loves — acting and singing — into his cinematic tapestry. I have already mentioned his brief appearance in *Baazi*; yet,

years later, in *Solva Saal* (1958), a film he himself directed, Khosla appeared once more before the camera. It was not a vanity cameo but a scene crucial to the film's emotional rhythm — quiet, unforced, and deeply effective.

Similarly, his voice — warm, resonant, and unmistakably sincere — found its way into several of his works. In *Kaala Pani* (1958), just before the immortal Mohammed Rafi number “*Nazar Lagi Raja Tore Bangale Par,*” we hear a few lines of shayari:

“*Kashti palat ke halke tufaan mein aa gayi,  
Maujon ke saath saath, kinare chale gaye...  
Hum...*”

Those murmured words belong to Raj Khosla himself — a brief prelude of haunting poetry that flows seamlessly into Rafi Saab's immortal song “*Hum Bekhudi Mein Tumko Pukare Chale Gaye.*” The fragment, sung in Khosla's own voice, is achingly melodious, a moment of quiet self-expression tucked within the grandeur of a classic. Years later, in *Prem Kahani* (1975), starring Rajesh Khanna, Khosla lent his voice again — this time to a tender ghazal:

“*Yoon to humne dil ke safar mein dekhe hain  
dil-daar bahut...*”

On screen, it is Rajesh Khanna who appears to sing, but the voice that carries the ache of love and longing belongs to Raj Khosla. Both these songs share one striking quality: in Khosla's singing, one hears a clear, affectionate echo of K. L. Saigal, the great master whose influence he carried like a blessing from his childhood.

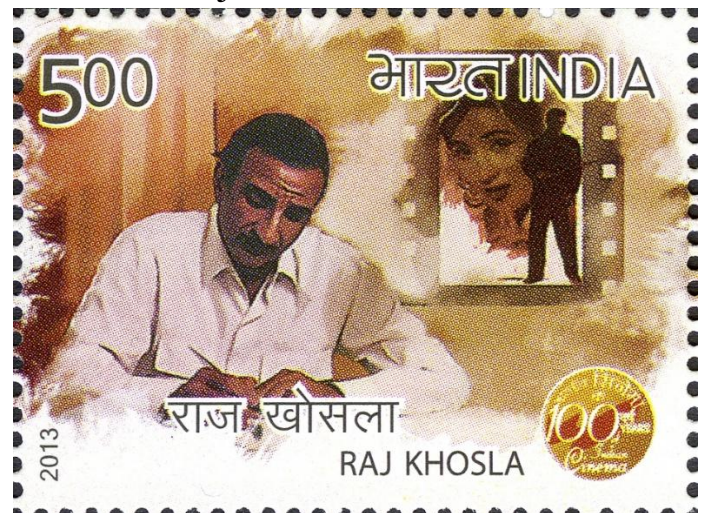
So deep was this reverence that whenever the opportunity arose, Khosla paid tribute to Saigal on screen. In *Do Raaste* (1969), for

instance, Balraj Sahni's character speaks the line:

“*Is gaane mein mere pitaji ke sapne the — aur aisa lagta hai ke shayad ab woh sachche ho rahe hain...*”

As the line fades, Saigal's immortal “*Ek Bangla Bane Nyara*” rises softly in the background — a tender homage woven not with grand gestures but with quiet sincerity. In that moment, Raj Khosla acknowledged the debt he felt to the man whose voice had first taught him what emotion in melody truly means.

In the history of Indian cinema — and especially during the golden era of Hindi films — there were a few visionaries who elevated the film song beyond its musical charm, turning it into an essential storytelling tool, a visual poem that deepened emotion and meaning. Among those illustrious names — Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, and Vijay Anand — stands another artist who deserves equal reverence: Raj Khosla.



And yet, tragically, Raj Khosla has too often been remembered merely as a “*commercial director.*” Critics, scholars, and even passionate film lovers have seldom paused to recognize that behind the discipline of the professional filmmaker stood a

profoundly *sensitive, musical, and visually inventive artist*. He was a man who understood not just melody, but the very soul of music — the words behind the tune, the emotion beneath the rhythm — and who translated that understanding into unforgettable cinematic moments.

His command over the language of cinema was born of an intimate bond with the language of music. Whether the scene demanded grace, passion, melancholy, or mystery, Khosla could summon imagery that sang — sometimes beautiful, sometimes deliberately unadorned, but always truthfully.. As he grew in stature, his films bore the unmistakable imprint of his guru's

influence — the lessons of Guru Dutt — whom he revered not just as a mentor but as a moral compass. And true to that devotion, he remained indebted to his *Guru* all his life, acknowledging that debt whenever the opportunity arose, not through words alone but through his art.

On the centenary of Raj Khosla's birth, this tribute celebrates not just the director of memorable hits, but the *singer, musician, actor, producer*, and, above all, the *poet of images and sound* — a man whose work continues to remind us that cinema, at its heart, is music made visible.

**Dr Milind Damle is a faculty at Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, he also writes films, articles, research papers and books.**