



Lata's voice was a godsend for a composer of Naushad's calibre. Now he no longer had to worry about a singer's vocal range to compose a tune. To quote his own words: "Her voice moved as naturally in a song as a duckling moves in water!"

If we carefully analyse Naushad's career, we realize the growing influence Lata had on his musical thought-process. While he composed more than 100 songs for Lata in his next 30-odd films, Naushad conceived hardly 15 songs for Asha Bhosle and only one for Geeta Dutt. More significantly, after Lata's emergence, Naushad's earlier regulars - Zohrabai, Amirbai and Rajkumari - practically disappeared from his music and even his old favourite Shmshad Begum - was relegated to being the voice for character artistes and side heroines.

Naushad did not do this out of favouritism. In one of his interviews, he explained that Lata's voice gave the impression of a homely innocent young girl as opposed to the 'Pukhta Gaayaki of Kothewalis' ('Heavy singing style of courtesans') represented by earlier singers and according to him, that made the heroine's character more appealing to the hearts of the audience.

What Naushad thought of Lata's voice clearly comes through in his poetic tribute to her:

***'Raahon mein tere naghme, mehfil mein sadaa teree
Kartee hai sabhee duniyaa taareef Lata teree
Deewaane tere fan ke insaan to phir insaan hain
Had hai ki suntaa hai aawaaz khudaa teree!'***

('Your songs are heard on streets
Your voice echoes through concerts,
Everyone in this world has nothing but praise for you Lata,
The fascination for your art in people's minds is well understandable
But isn't it amazing that even God keeps listening to your voice!')

In kick-starting Lata's relentless march to the top in 1949, Naushad's *Andaz* and *Dulari* soundtracks played as important a role as Shankar-Jaikishan's *Barsaat*. For giving Lata the *Andaz* songs, Naushad had to even overrule the doyen of film-makers, Mehboob Khan, who still wasn't sure of the new girl's capability. But the way Lata rendered those songs - a warmly maternal 'O Meree Laadlee', an exuberantly youthful 'Koe Mere Dil Mein Khushee Banke Aayaa', a dipped in pathos 'Tod Diyaa Dil Meraa' and