

Tribute to Rajesh Khanna through film memorabilia

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Rajesh Khanna (Facebook)

Three years after Bollywood's first superstar Rajesh Khanna passed away, a collection of memorabilia comprising film posters, lobby cards featuring films he starred in are being put together in a grand show that pays tribute to the late hero.

"He was a superstar who ruled over the hearts of the people. He was Bollywood's first superstar. From him the craze of super stardom arrived in the industry," says Sumant Batra, a museum curator and philanthropist who has put together the collection.

The showcase at the India Habitat Centre here tomorrow portrays the many shades of Khanna as a Bollywood actor, film producer and politician who starred in 15 consecutive solo hit films in the period 1969 to 1971.

"During that period a lot of effort was put into promoting a movie. Since it was not the digital age film posters used to be hand painted by eminent artists like M F Husain and Babu Lal. Lobby cards and show cards with spectacular art work have been displayed in lobby of cinema halls and film song booklets sold outside the movie hall as memorabilia," says Batra.

Iconic yesteryear film posters, lobby cards, show cards besides song booklets and some long play vinyl records feature in the exhibition.

The event 'Remembering Rajesh Khanna' is being co-organized by HarperCollins publishers of the actor's biography - "Dark Star: The Loneliness of being Rajesh Khanna by Gautam Chintamani" that was brought out in 2014.

At a time when film stars were truly larger than life, Khanna was even more: the one for whom the term 'superstar' was coined. Born Jatin Khanna to middle-class parents, the actor was adopted by rich relatives who brought him up like a prince. By the time he won the Filmfare United Producers Combine Talent Hunt, he was already famous for being the struggler who drove an imported sports car.

On April 30, 2013, the actor was officially bestowed with the title - 'The First Superstar of Indian Cinema' at Dadasaheb Phalke Academy Awards.

A postage stamp, bearing his face, was released by India Post to honour him on May 3, 2013. On his first death anniversary, a bronze statue of Rajesh Khanna was unveiled at Bandra Bandstand in Mumbai.

"The exhibition will consists of about eighteen of the "original superstar's" film posters, two dozen lobby and show cards, two dozen song booklets and two dozen of vinyl records," says Batra.

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New Delhi: Three years after Bollywood's first superstar Rajesh Khanna passed away, a collection of memorabilia comprising film posters, lobby cards featuring films he starred in are being put together in a grand show that pays tribute to the late hero. "He was a superstar who ruled over the hearts of the people. He was Bollywood's first superstar. From him the craze of super stardom arrived in the industry," says Sumant Batra a museum curator and philanthropist who has put together the collection.,

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An actor, a film producer and a politician, Rajesh Khanna starred in as many as 163 feature films and 17 short films. He was the solo lead hero in 106 films. With 17 blockbuster hits in succession and mass adulation rarely seen before or since, the world was at Khanna's feet. The hysteria he generated - women writing him letters in blood, marrying his photograph and donning white when he married Dimple Kapadia, people bringing sick children for his 'healing' touch after Haathi Mere Saathi - was unparalleled. Then, in a matter of months, it all changed. The actor's career hit a downward spiral as spectacular as his meteoric rise just three years after Aradhana (1969) and never really recovered.

"I will also be showcasing the poster of his first film-'Aakhri Khat', which people have hardly heard of along with the posters of his iconic hits like 'Anand', 'Aradhana', and 'Safar'. One to watch out for is the 'Anand' poster which according to me is a collector's item," says Batra. Batra, an eminent lawyer and senior consultant to International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank Group says the exhibition not only pays tribute the late actor but also showcases the art of the hand painted poster. Besides being his fan I am also a collector of rare vintage graphics be it cinema or any other genre. This exhibit is from my personal collection from my museum 'Chitrashala' in Te Aroha (Uttarakhand)," says Batra.

Dating from the turn of the 19th century through the 20th century, on display in the galleries of the museum are hundreds of masterpieces of visual art heritage from the personal collection of Batra. "The art of hand painted film posters are practically non-existent today. There are a few such families who were into this business of film poster making but now have shifted into other fields. I sometimes get the posters from such families for my collection," says Batra. A rare vintage poster price range may vary between Rs 1000 and can go upto a minimum of Rs 8000. Batra says such film posters are in massive demand overseas and are also often auctioned. "Indian restaurants and outlets in foreign lands often put up such posters as they play an important part of India's art history and its bustling film industry. These business ventures often buy these posters here in India," says Batra.

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