



OCTOBER 1972

When 'Stardust' first decided to lift the lid off the 'Mangeshkar Monopoly' it was like opening a Pandora's box. Out tumbled a multitude of "crimes" committed by the Singing Sisters. The music-people we approached for information and comments on the *modus operandi* of the two, were too terrified of the consequences, to offer any material that could nail them. Everyone connected with the Mangeshkars kept mum, afraid of the duo's wrath. This article launched a hundred other pieces, and even today a good six years after we published the expose, the controversy continues to rage.

# the mangeshkar monopoly:



## IS IT JUSTIFIED?

When Lata Mangeshkar arrived at the recording studio to break the traditional coconut before the song recording for Raj Kapoor's 'Bobby', many eyebrows were raised in surprise and wonderment. Strange it certainly was. The dispute between Raj Kapoor and Lata Mangeshkar which had ended by Lata refusing to sing (or was it by Raj Kapoor refusing to let her sing?) for R.K. films. It started, reports insist, when Lata began turning up late for her recordings or not turning up at all. Yet there are many who hold that there was no love lost between Lata and music director Shanker, and that it was because of this that Raj and Lata had drifted apart. But whatever that story, it has evidently come to an end. Speculation has it that the thaw started when Shanker was knocked out from the R.K. camp and LP brought in to provide music for 'Bobby'. And so Lata and R.K. have made their peace again.

What can you say about Lata Mangeshkar? Much more than merely that

chandra, Chitragupta) have found themselves isolated from the industry and eventually eclipsed. Even new singers like Suman Kalyanpur, Kamal Barot, and Sharda haven't made much headway in the face of the Lata-Asha monopoly. Of course why anyone should seek to put the blame on Lata and Asha is a mystery.

It's hardly a secret that Suman Kalyanpur's voice has a close resemblance to Lata's and in a comparison, the former loses. Lata's voice has that magical quality that entralls, Suman's is an imitation (undoubtedly unconscious) that most people are prone to believe is an effort to 'copy' Lata. If listeners have not accepted Suman's voice completely, it could very well be attributed to the fact that 'imitations' are not liked. It is Suman's misfortune that her voice should resemble Lata's. Even Asha's rise to songdom was greatly helped by Lata's refusal to sing western kind of numbers or songs with suggestive words. That made sure that

the richest women in the country. Producers, said a producer, have little choice but to put up with it and pay up silently over and above the amount (phenomenal) that is paid to the singer for each song. Listeners want Lata and Lata it has to be, and if not Lata, it should be Asha. Beyond that the producer reaches a dead-end. That's not all. Rumour also goes to the extent of changing tunes and lines from songs. Reports insist Padmini's famous rain song in 'Mera Naam Joker' didn't meet with Lata's approval since it contained a suggestive word. Lata refused to sing, it seems, until that objectionable word was removed. Music director Shanker was adamant about retaining it and Raj Kapoor backed him. That did it. Lata stormed off . . . and the storm took seven years to blow over . . . at the 'Bobby' recording.

**Is the Mangeshkar monopoly justified? Are the Mangeshkars taking advantage, as some allege, of their obvious superiority to keep other singers away?** To an-



Lata being presented with the gold disc by Mr. P. A. Duffell, Managing Director, EMI International Operations,



R. D. Burman with Lata.

she is a remarkable singer. In today's song world Lata and her sister, Asha Bhonsle, enjoy virtual monopoly. There aren't many who accept this without a murmur of protest but they constitute a small, disenchanted minority who cannot bear the overwhelming success of the Mangeshkars. "Can you name one singer who can come up to Lata Mangeshkar's level?" is Madan Mohan's question, and the answer to that isn't as easy as it might appear at first instance. Many are the complaints against the Mangeshkars, including the one that they have discouraged music directors from scouting for new voices under threats that they would refuse to sing for them. And there are any number of instances wherein music directors who fell out of Lata's good books (C. Ram-

Asha had enough songs to sing which might not have happened had Lata not been choosy.

But the time is fast approaching when Lata will possibly announce her retirement, as she had hinted some time ago. India's Melody Queen she most certainly is and the abdication is bound to help someone else. Yet the charges against Lata continue. It's almost as if negative criticism that is levelled against a person is a measuring rod of that person's success. Failures aren't considered criticizable material. Well, the latest charge against Lata (apart from her supposedly high-handed behaviour as not turning up for the recordings) is that she stings even on small things as petrol for her car, and this in spite of being rumoured about as one of

wer the second question first, it appears highly unlikely that the sisters can be so petty and/or so ambitious as to want to appropriate all assignments to themselves. And the answer to the first? It depends on each individual listener — on whether they think the Mangeshkars genuinely deserve this monopoly or whether they would like to patronize new voices. Other voices are waiting to break discs. Vani Jairam, Usha Timothy, and Sulakshana Pandit (her extra-professional relationship with Kishore Kumar as well as her desire to become an actress have been hindrances) are all at the moment living in Lata's shadow. But with the rumbling of Lata's retirement becoming louder and louder these singers are bound to come into their own. Everyone's waiting.

— DILEEP SURI