

## Legendary playback singer Yesudas turns 70

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Mangalore (Karnataka), Jan 10 (IANS) "Gori tera gaon bada pyara, Mein toh gaya maara, Aake yaahan re&hellip;&rdquo; The voice that has enthralled generations and soothed a million souls, including Oscar winner A.R. Rahman, belongs to the legendary K.J. Yesudas, who turned 70 Sunday. Rahman, in a tribute to the veteran playback singer who is fondly called "Gana Gandharvan", once said: "The most beautiful voice in the world is that of Yesudas."

With more than 40,000 film songs in several languages, including Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, Gujarati, Oriya, Marathi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tulu, Malay, Russian, Arabic, Latin and English, in his kitty, Yesudas' journey in the world of music continues.

As has been a practice on every birthday of his, the versatile singer, who is always dressed in a flowing white kurta and a white dhoti, paid obeisance with his family at the Kollur Mookambika temple near here Sunday.

In a singing career that began in 1961, he is the only singer who has bagged seven National Film Awards for best singer in the Indian film industry, a record no singer has equalled, let alone surpassed. While five of the national awards come for singing in Malayalam films, in 1977 he won the award for the song "Gori tera gaon bada pyara&hellip;&rdquo; from the Hindi film "Chitchor"; and in 1983 for a song in the Telegu film "Meghasandesham".

In 2006, Yesudas sang 16 film songs in four South Indian languages on a single day at a studio in Chennai. The veteran singer has also played the role of a cultural ambassador. In 1965, he was invited by the Soviet Union government to perform at music concerts in various cities in the USSR and also sang a Russian song over Radio Kazakhstan.

His home state Kerala has bestowed upon him the status of "official singer of the state". Yesudas is perhaps the only singer whose father Augustine Joseph and son Vijay Yesudas complete three generations of successful singers.

Despite all the glory now, he found the going tough when he came from Kochi to study music in the capital city of Kerala. He used to regularly have his food at a small hotel near Swathi Thirunal Music College. One day, when he sat down to have his lunch there, the owner of the hotel told him that he can have his food only after he pays his dues that came to around Rs.35.

This left Yesudas deeply hurt but many years later when he came to know that the hotel owner was admitted to a hospital, he went there and gave him a lot of money. He, however, told him that "I will not repay the Rs.35 that I owe you. Let that remain a debt so that the relation between us continues".

Another incident which left Yesudas deeply hurt was when just before his singing career started, the All India Radio refused an audition test for him, saying his voice was not good. That has, however, changed now.

Endowed with a "divine" voice and a penchant for hard work, it was a triumphant journey for Yesudas, winning scores of accolades, including the coveted Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan. On Nov 14, 1999, Yesudas was presented with an honorary award by UNESCO for "Outstanding Achievements in Music and Peace"; at the "Music for Peace" event in Paris.

Eminent blind music composer Ravindra Jain, who introduced Yesudas in Hindi films, had once said that if ever he got back his vision, the first person he would wish to see is Yesudas - the man with the golden voice.