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Lata Mangeshkar: The Nightingale of India

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Lata Mangeshkar: The Nightingale of India

In January 1963 a 33-year-old singer performed a new patriotic song before the Prime Minister. That evening is still remembered as a high point of independent India's cultural life. This article covers her life, her songs, her honours and the exam traps.

At a glance

Four key facts on this topic

01 **Indore** Her birthplace.

02 **1949** Mahal breakthrough.

03 **27 Jan 1963** Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon.

04 **2001** Bharat Ratna.

Life and training

1 Who was Lata Mangeshkar?

1.1 Why is she called the Nightingale of India?

Lata Mangeshkar was India's most celebrated playback singer. A playback singer records songs that actors then mouth on screen. Her sweet, clear voice earned her the nickname Nightingale of India.

She was born on 28 September 1929 in Indore. She died on 6 February 2022 in Mumbai, aged 92.



Lata Mangeshkar. Photo: Bollywood Hungama, Wikimedia Commons (“Lata Mangeshkar – still 29065 crop.jpg”), CC BY 3.0.

1.2 How long was her career?

She recorded her first song in 1942. Her career lasted more than seven decades. She sang for more than 1,000 films, in Hindi and in regional languages.

> 13. **Think it through:** Where was Lata Mangeshkar born? See answer ↓

Quick check 1. True or false: Lata Mangeshkar was born in Mumbai. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 2. True or false: A playback singer records songs that actors mouth on screen. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: bfi.org.uk; aljazeera.com; pbs.org

2 Family and early life

2.1 How did she get her name?

She was first named Hema. Her family renamed her Lata after a character in her father's play Bhav Bandhan.

Her father, Deenanath Mangeshkar, was a Marathi theatre actor and Hindustani classical singer.

2.2 What changed when she was 13?

Her father died in 1942, when she was 13. She became the sole breadwinner of the family. Singing and acting were her way to earn money.

2.3 Were her siblings musicians too?

Yes. She was the eldest of five children. Her sisters Meena, Asha and Usha, and her brother Hridaynath, all became musicians and singers.

14. **Think it through:** Who was the eldest of the five Mangeshkar children? See answer ↓

Quick check 3. True or false: Lata was the youngest of five children. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: tbsnews.net

3 The breakthrough years

3.1 How did she start?

Master Vinayak, a family friend, gave her a role and a song in the Marathi film Pahili Mangalagaur (1942). Her first recording was for the Marathi film Kiti Hasaal, also in 1942. That song was later cut from the film.

Her first Hindi film song came in 1946, for Aap Ki Seva Mein.

3.2 Who trained her?

She trained in Hindustani classical music under Ustad Aman Ali Khan. After Master Vinayak died in 1948, the composer Ghulam Haider guided her.

A composer writes the tune of a film song. A lyricist writes the words.

3.3 Which songs made her a star?

“Dil Mera Toda” from Majboor (1948) was an early hit. Her real breakthrough was “Aayega Aanewala” from Mahal (1949). Khemchand Prakash composed it.

Later she sang for Naushad, Shankar-Jaikishan, S.D. Burman, R.D. Burman and Madan Mohan. She recorded over 700 songs for Laxmikant-Pyarelal.

15. **Think it through:** Which 1949 film gave her the breakthrough song? See answer ↓

Quick check 4. True or false: “Aayega Aanewala” is from the film Mahal (1949). *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: tbsnews.net

4 The 1963 song

4.1 What is Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon?

It is a patriotic song written by the poet Kavi Pradeep. C. Ramchandra composed the tune. Pradeep wrote it as a tribute to soldiers who died in the 1962 war with China.

A tribute is a mark of respect for people who have died.

4.2 When did Lata first sing it?

She first sang it in public on 27 January 1963. The place was the National Stadium in New Delhi. Several sources give this date, not 26 January.

The event was a fund-raiser for the National Defence Fund. The producer Mehboob Khan organised it. Jawaharlal Nehru was in the audience.

4.3 Did Nehru really weep?

Many reports say the song moved Nehru to tears. Treat this as a well-known story, not an official record.

16. **Think it through:** Who wrote the words of the song? See answer ↓

Quick check 5. True or false: Lata Mangeshkar first sang the song on 27 January 1963. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 6. True or false: C. Ramchandra wrote the words of the song. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: gulfnews.com; dailyo.in; thebetterindia.com

Fame, honours and records

5 Her voice abroad

5.1 Did she perform live overseas?

Yes. In 1974 she sang at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Reports describe it as her first live show outside India. They also call her the first Indian artist to perform there.

Treat “first Indian” as a press claim, not a proven record.

5.2 Who introduced her?

The actor Dilip Kumar introduced the concert. The show raised money for the Nehru Memorial Fund. Lata called him her brother Yusuf Bhai.

17. **Think it through:** In which city is the Royal Albert Hall? See answer ↓

Quick check 7. True or false: Dilip Kumar introduced her Royal Albert Hall concert. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: thenewsminute.com

6 Honours and years

6.1 Which honours did she win?

- **Padma Bhushan** in 1969.
- **Dadasaheb Phalke Award** in 1989.
- **Padma Vibhushan** in 1999.
- **Bharat Ratna** in 2001, India's highest civilian honour.
- **Legion of Honour** (France), Officier rank.

6.2 Did anyone share her Bharat Ratna year?

Yes. Ustad Bismillah Khan also received the Bharat Ratna in 2001. The two awards were separate.

6.3 Did Dilip Kumar share her Phalke Award?

No. Lata won her Phalke Award in 1989. Dilip Kumar won his own award separately.

18. **Think it through:** Which came first, the Padma Vibhushan or the Phalke Award? See answer ↓

Quick check 8. True or false: Lata Mangeshkar received the Bharat Ratna in 2001. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 9. True or false: Lata Mangeshkar and Dilip Kumar shared one Phalke Award. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: xn--i1b5bzbybhfo5c8b4bxh.xn--11b7cb3a6a.xn--h2brj9c:443; padmaawards.gov.in; deccanherald.com; thewire.in

7 Records and counts

7.1 What was the Guinness record?

The Guinness Book of Records listed her in 1974 as the most recorded artist. The claim was that she had sung at least 25,000 songs. Mohammed Rafi disputed it.

Guinness removed the entry in 1991 without explanation. So she does not hold that record today.

7.2 How many songs and languages?

Reports differ a lot. Estimates run from 15,000 to 30,000 songs. Some reports say 36 languages. Guinness said 20 Indian languages.

So never give one exact number as a fact in an exam answer.

19. **Think it through:** Why should you avoid quoting an exact song count? See answer ↓

Quick check 10. True or false: Guinness still lists Lata Mangeshkar as the most recorded singer. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: businesstoday.in; ft.lk

Last days and exam practice

8 Her last days

8.1 How did she die?

She caught COVID-19 and went to hospital on 11 January 2022. She died on 6 February 2022 at Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai. The cause was multi-organ failure.

8.2 How did India say goodbye?

The government declared two days of national mourning. Her funeral took place at Shivaji Park, Mumbai, with state honours. Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid his last respects.

> 20. **Think it through:** Where was she cremated? See answer ↓

> **Quick check 11.** True or false: Lata Mangeshkar died on 6 February 2022. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: english.madhyamam.com

9 Exam practice

9.1 What did SSC CGL ask?

Asked before

PYQ 1 · SSC CGL 2024 Tier I, General Awareness, 9 September Shift 2, Q10

Which music-composer duo was honoured with the National Lata Mangeshkar Award for the year 2020?

(a) Sachin–Jigar
(b) Jatin-Lalit
(c) Salim–Sulaiman
(d) Anand-Milind

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Asked before

PYQ 2 · SSC CGL 2024 Tier I, General Awareness, 9 September Shift 1, Q2

Which of the following awards was won by Lata Mangeshkar in the year 2001?

(a) Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award
(b) Padma Vibhushan
(c) Dadasaheb Phalke Award
(d) Bharat Ratna

mcqquestion.com/articles/ssc-cgl-2024-general-awareness-09-sep-shift-1-full-question-paper/#q2

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Sources: outlookindia.com

10 Exam traps

10.1 Which facts do students mix up?

- Padma Bhushan 1969, Phalke 1989, Padma Vibhushan 1999, Bharat Ratna 2001.
- The song was first sung on 27 January 1963, not 26 January.
- Kavi Pradeep wrote the words. C. Ramchandra composed the tune.
- The National Lata Mangeshkar Award is a Madhya Pradesh award for other musicians.
- Lata's Phalke Award came in 1989. Dilip Kumar won his own separately.
- Her breakthrough was "Aayega Aanewala" (Mahal, 1949). Majboor (1948) was an earlier hit.
- Guinness listed her in 1974 and dropped the entry in 1991.

> **Quick check 12.** True or false: The National Lata Mangeshkar Award is an award Lata herself won. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember this

- **Born:** Indore, 28 September 1929. Died: Mumbai, 6 February 2022.
- **Breakthrough:** “Aayega Aanewala”, Mahal, 1949.
- **1963 song:** 27 January, National Stadium. Words by Kavi Pradeep, music by C. Ramchandra.
- **Honours:** Padma Bhushan 1969, Phalke 1989, Padma Vibhushan 1999, Bharat Ratna 2001.
- **Trap:** the Lata Mangeshkar Award is given to others.

Explain it back: Why is the National Lata Mangeshkar Award not one of her own honours?

Practice MCQs

1. In which year did Lata Mangeshkar receive the Bharat Ratna?

A. 1989

B. 2009

C. 2001

D. 1999

See answer ↓

2. In which year did Lata Mangeshkar receive the Padma Vibhushan?

A. 2001

B. 1989

C. 1999

D. 1969

See answer ↓

3. In which year did Lata Mangeshkar win the Dadasaheb Phalke Award?

A. 1979

B. 1999

C. 1969

D. 1989

See answer ↓

4. Where did Lata Mangeshkar first sing Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon in public, on 27 January 1963?

A. National Stadium, New Delhi

B. Red Fort, Delhi

C. Shivaji Park, Mumbai

D. Royal Albert Hall, London

See answer ↓

5. Who wrote the words of Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon?

A. Mehboob Khan

B. Kavi Pradeep

C. C. Ramchandra

D. Naushad

See answer ↓

6. On which date did Lata Mangeshkar die?

A. 6 February 2021

B. 11 January 2022

C. 28 September 2022

D. 6 February 2022

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The Gazette of India lists her Bharat Ratna in 2001. Why the others fail: 1999 is her Padma Vibhushan. 1989 is her Phalke Award. 2009 is not her Bharat Ratna year. Memory hook: Bharat Ratna 2001, same as Bismillah Khan. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** The 1999 Padma list names her for the Padma Vibhushan. Why the others fail: 1969 is her Padma Bhushan. 2001 is her Bharat Ratna. 1989 is her Phalke Award. Memory hook: Bhushan 1969, Vibhushan 1999. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** She won the Phalke Award in 1989. Why the others fail: 1979 is not her Phalke year. 1999 is her Padma Vibhushan. 1969 is her Padma Bhushan. Memory hook: Phalke is individual. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** She first sang it at the National Stadium in New Delhi. Why the others fail: Shivaji Park is where she was cremated in 2022. The Royal Albert Hall show was in 1974. Memory hook: 27 January 1963, National Stadium. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** Kavi Pradeep wrote the words. Why the others fail: C. Ramchandra composed the tune. Naushad was another leading composer. Mehboob Khan was the producer who organised the 1963 event. Memory hook: Pradeep words, Ramchandra music. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** She died on 6 February 2022 at Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai. Why the others fail: 11 January 2022 is the day she went to hospital. 28 September is her birthday. Memory hook: born 28 September 1929, died 6 February 2022. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** She was born in Indore. She died in Mumbai. ↑ 1
2. **True.** Lata Mangeshkar was India's best-known playback singer. ↑ 2
3. **False.** She was the eldest. Asha, Usha, Meena and Hridaynath were younger. ↑ 3
4. **True.** Khemchand Prakash composed it. ↑ 4
5. **True.** The venue was the National Stadium, New Delhi. ↑ 5
6. **False.** He composed the music. Kavi Pradeep wrote the words. ↑ 6
7. **True.** She called him her brother Yusuf Bhai. ↑ 7
8. **True.** The Gazette of India lists her. ↑ 8
9. **False.** Each won it separately. Lata won hers in 1989. ↑ 9

10. **False.** The entry was removed in 1991. ↑ 10
11. **True.** She was 92. ↑ 11
12. **False.** It is a Madhya Pradesh award given to other musicians. ↑ 12
13. **Think it through.** In Indore, which is now in Madhya Pradesh. ↑ 13
14. **Think it through.** Lata. ↑ 14
15. **Think it through.** Mahal, with “Aayega Aanewala”. ↑ 15
16. **Think it through.** Kavi Pradeep. C. Ramchandra composed the music. ↑ 16
17. **Think it through.** London. ↑ 17
18. **Think it through.** The Phalke Award, in 1989. The Padma Vibhushan came in 1999. ↑ 18
19. **Think it through.** Sources give different totals. ↑ 19
20. **Think it through.** At Shivaji Park, Mumbai. ↑ 20

Previous year answers

1. **(d) Anand-Milind** The Madhya Pradesh culture department gives this award each year. It honours other musicians. It is not an award Lata herself won.
2. **(d) Bharat Ratna** Her Padma Vibhushan came in 1999 and her Phalke Award in 1989.

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