

## MOTI LAL

(By O.P. Mathur & Krishna Murari, with input from internet)



Moti Lal Raghuvanshi (simply Moti Lal, as popularly known) was amongst the earliest Mathurs arriving and eventually settling down in Mumbai (then Bombay) in year 1934. A descendent from a well known old Delhi Mathur family, Moti Lal was born on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1910 at Shimla. His father, a well known educationist, died when Moti Lal was just a year old. The toddler Moti was brought up by his Nana who was a Civil Surgeon in U.P. service and thus he lived his early age in various places in U.P., finally returning back to Delhi.

The purpose of his first Bombay visit, it is said, was to appear for an examination for recruitment in the then Royal Indian Navy. Unfortunately on the examination day he fell sick and could not appear for the test. It was perhaps a blessing in disguise as destiny had in store for him another brilliant career in filmdom. Abandoning the idea of joining Navy, he decided to stay back in Bombay for a while to go around the city. While roaming around he happened to be at a film studio where some film shooting was going on. Director P.K. Ghosh spotted him in the crowd and asked if would like to act in films. How much money, Moti Lal asked. When told the amount for a 4 month contract, he immediately said Yes, and he was signed then and there (in his first year itself in Bombay) as hero for film 'Shehar ka Jadoo' with Sabita Devi as heroin. Next, Sagar Arts signed him for another film 'Doctor Madhurika', also with Sabita Devi. Both films did well and Moti Lal became a well known and popular hero overnight.

he got to know that I was having a party and came in his car to my house.



The star with his mother on the terrace of his Malabar Hill flat. Moti calls her his "best girl friend."

Soon thereafter he became the first in the category of Super stars in the history of Bollywood's black and white Hindi films era. Moti Lal later featured in another successful film 'Kulvadhu' with Sabita Devi (1937), followed by film after film, viz., to name a few popular ones (as per information on internet) Mehboob Khan's 'Jagirdar' (1937), 'Hum Tum Aur Woh' (1952), 'Taqdeer' (1943). Next was Kedar Sharma's 'Armaan' (1942) and 'Kalyan' (1944), then in S.S.Vasan's 'Paigham' (1959). His role as a drunken character (*on song, Zindgi Khwab hai*) in Raj Kapoor's 'Jagte Raho' (1956) and as Chunni Babu in 'Devdas' (1959) were liked very much, the latter winning for him Filmfare Award for Best Supporting Actor. Perhaps the role for which he received the most critical appreciation was that of a gentleman crook in S.S. Vasan's 'Mr. Sampat' (1952).

In those days film actors, as per established practice, used to be attached on contract basis with some particular film producer or studio on monthly payment terms with strict condition that during the contract period they will not work for any other producer. Moti Lal was the first actor in the history of Bombay filmdom who broke this tradition and freed himself from the shackles of paid

employment system by becoming a freelance actor, working with any producer on his own terms. This also paved, for the first time, way for other actors and film artists to free themselves from bondage of film producers if they choose to do.



Moti Lal was a 'natural' actor in the sense that he would not need directions for actions or expressions during film shootings. He was an expert in dialogue delivery as also in the art of talking. As 'Prince Charming' to his admirers, he was known for his stylish way of wearing his favourite felt hat and his typical smile. At one time during the prime of his film career he had four cars, including his favorite white Pontiac. It will surprise many today to know that during his hey days he had a pilot's licence and while city's other elites used to ride in expensive cars, the flamboyant Moti Lal, used to fly aeroplanes from Juhu Flying Club for a thrill. Horse racing was the sport of his choice and he used to frequent the race Course, dressed in white or cream suit with his famous white hat, driving his white car. He was a suave, polished gentleman, moving in high Society often with some Rajas and Maharajas of various states. However, to his family and friends he was down to earth, very loving and caring person.

In late 1930s and early 1940s Mathurs (mostly from Delhi) started coming and settling down in Mumbai. Moti Lal used to organize each year a Janam Ashtmi pooja at his house to which all Mathurs were welcome and would stay till after the mid night Aarti and distribution of Prasad. For many years this used to be the only and much awaited occasion for all Mumbai Mathur biradri members to meet.



*Facsimile of postage stamp issued by India Post in honour of Moti Lal after his death*

The last film he acted in and directed was 'Chhoti chhoti baten' (1965) but unfortunately he died on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1965 at Breach Candy Hospital before the film was fully completed and released. It won Certificate of Merit posthumously for the third best feature film and for the best story. Later, the film was completed by Mukesh and Moti Sagar and Moti Sagar (an associate and an actor in the film) received the award on his behalf.

The write up will be incomplete without mentioning two things about him – one well known and the other one not so well known. What is well known about him and which used to be the talk of the town in those days was his romance with some film heroines, Shobana Samarth and Nadira in particular. What perhaps is not-so-well known is that to ward off the rumour mongering of his romances he married a medical college going girl from a known Delhi Mathur family in 1936 and that the wedding was attended by Sarojini Naidu.

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