



THE BIGGEST STAR IN THE WORLD

— and she's not

in Beverly Hills

by David Cort

THE ACTRESS with the greatest following, in numbers and devotion, is not to be found in Hollywood, but on the opposite side of the planet — in Bombay, India.

Her name is Madhubala. She is nineteen years old, a small girl with arching eyebrows and a shy, sweet smile, who has risen to the top of the Indian movie industry in the last two years.

Madhubala's local audience is taken from the 420,000,000 people of India and Pakistan (about the population of the United States and all western Europe combined). Her pictures have also a lively export market in Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and East Africa. In India alone, the movie theatres take in 75,000,000 paid admissions a month, at prices as low as three cents a ticket.

On an average, since she first became a star, Madhubala has completed four pictures a year and at one point early this year was under contract to make as many as nine for various producers — working on two or three at the same time.

She is the highest paid star in her industry, and her industry is fast catching up with the biggest.

India now produces nearly 300 feature pictures a year, as against Hollywood's 450. About a dozen of India's films in any year will star Madhubala. A single issue of a movie magazine will run a slew of advertisements, reviews and pictures of Madhubala. And both she and the Indian movie industry can justly claim that they have hardly started.

American ignorance of Madhubala is understandable. For one thing, the riotous movie boom in India dates only from around 1943. For another, Madhubala's ascendancy is only two years old, and she herself is a new phenomenon in the eastern world.

The story of India for the past ten years may be condensed as: The war, the movie boom, independence, and Madhubala. Independence and Madhubala seem to go together, for reasons that may seem baffling to westerners. It may help to explain what India looks for in a beautiful woman. It does not, of course, want a blonde. The invariable attributes of an Indian actress are large, languishing brown eyes, a full-lipped mouth and an aquiline nose. India's former stars had these, but they were usually generously padded ladies given to overacting.

Madhubala has the classic features, but she has added something. Her modeling is both finer and bolder. She turns the traditional wantonness of a Hindu actress into spiritual recklessness, controlled by pride and fastidiousness. Madhubala not only has intelligence; she even *looks* intelligent. She uses a typical stare in her love scenes that is both confiding and questioning, as if she were challenging the hero to be all she is supposed to think he is. With a look, she defies the Hindu dogma that a man is superior to a woman.

Furthermore, Madhubala has the wide shoulders and athletic body of the modern girl the world over, a type fairly new to India. She walks like a dancer, that is, a western ballet dancer, not a Hindu dancer, who usually stands bowlegged on her heels and monotonously wiggles her neck and arms.

AS A NEW type in India, Madhubala must probably stand for the ideal of the free Indian woman or what India hopes the free Indian woman will be. She is in that sense a symbol of the advance guard of a revolution.

India's choice of Madhubala becomes truly remarkable when it is remembered that she is a Moslem, and a classic Moslem type, while India is preponderantly Hindu.

She was born Mumtaz Ataulah in Delhi in 1933, the fourth of ten children of Ataulah Khan. At the

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VARMA FILMS

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Her private life is in marked contrast to the roles she plays in the movies.

age of six, she was spotted by a movie producer, given the name of Madhubala and a small part, at a wage of \$45 a month. This prospect of added income induced her father, when she was nine, to move his family to Bombay, the center of India's movie industry.

An atmosphere of sheer nightmare quickly closed in on the family. Almost immediately the dock explosion and fire of April 14, 1944, (a historic date in India) wiped out their home and possessions. Appropriately, the family escaped death or injury because they had been to the movies, at a theatre distant from the scene of the disaster.

In 1947 came the tragic communal disorders, during which the Hindus drove 6,000,000 Moslems out of India, massacring half a million and abducting thousands of women. Madhubala and her sisters knew they were among the hunted. But by this time

she had acted in five pictures for Ranjit Movietone, in the last one as a star, and her position probably saved the family.

It is a measure of India's ability to grow in tolerance that, as it became more used to freedom, it reversed itself and chose to love the Moslem Madhubala. However, anti-Moslem prejudice must continue to be one of her chief problems. She is the victim of a whispering campaign that accuses her, for example, of eating the meat of the cow, which is sacred to Hindus. To offset such rumors she gave her life savings of 50,000 rupees to the Bengal Refugee Fund last winter to help Hindu refugees from Moslem East Pakistan. Her friends said that this proved her "a real daughter of Mother India." Her enemies turned the gift against other Moslem stars: "Why not also Dilip Kumar, Nargis, Suraiya, Yaqub? Or are they hoarding money (continued on page 95)

Canada Theatre

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Savage and Dolores Clamon, and opened the season on June 28.

A newer outdoor theatre is one in Toronto, called Melody Fair. It opened last year, and in one season seems to have won a following. It is in Toronto's Dufferin Park race course; it presents musicals - in - the - round under canvas. Operated by Leighton Brill, from the Oscar Hammerstein office, and Ben Kamsler, its second-season schedule included *Kiss Me Kate*, *Carousel*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Annie Get Your Gun*, with imported singers such as Ira Pettina, Gil Lamb, Ann Ayars and Marthe Errole.

Outside of Toronto, in the heavily populated summer centers of the province, straw-hat theatre also flourishes.

The group with perhaps the highest reputation, called the Straw Hat Players, was started by two University of Toronto students, Murray and Donald Davis, and stems from the university's Hart House theatre. This season the group has staged plays both at Gravenhurst and Port Carling, two Muskoka district towns.

Peter Potter, director of Glasgow's Citizen's theatre, was guest director for the Straw Hat Players during the first half of its season; then he returned to Glasgow to work on the Edinburgh entry of the Glasgow group. Russell Graves, of the teaching staff of Florida State University, replaced Mr. Potter for the rest of the season.

Another well-established Ontario summer theatre is at Peterborough, managed by Michael Sadleir, who with Bruce Yorke also runs the Bermudiana theatre in Bermuda during the winter. The Peterborough is now in its third year.

On the Niagara Peninsula are two summer theatres, which employ companies of American Equity and Canadian talent. The Niagara Falls summer theatre, on the Canadian side of the Falls, is run by Maud Franchot with Edward Thommen as director.

The Niagara Barn theatre, near Vine-land, Ont., has a new building which it opened as early as April 21 for a thirty-two week season. The new theatre, seats 450 and is part of a development that includes a motel, resort hotel, shops and a service station. Jack Blacklock and Mark Saunders are producers.

Summer theatres, with their lower costs and indulgent audiences, are attracting more and more young Canadians who want a stage career but don't want to leave their home territory. The big hope among theatre-minded people, of course, is that the summer enterprises can become year-round operations.

Biggest Star

(Continued from page 26)

to be sent to Pakistan?"

Madhubala's private life is in marked contrast to the roles she plays in the movies. Most often, though not invariably, she takes the part of a bad girl. The typical Indian plot casts her as a rich and frivolous heiress pursuing a poor but noble youth. India is more and more freely borrowing themes from such Western plays as *Smilin' Through* and *Pygmalion*.

Madhubala has a delicately sensuous figure. The movie magazines have called her "the Venus of the screen." The

advertisements for one picture satistically show her cowering under the waving hoofs of a rearing stallion. It should be added, however, that a kiss or any extensive exposure of the female person is never permitted in an Indian movie.

The biggest star in the world has one final perfection in her name. The "bala" part is only a feminine ending, but "Madhu" means variously "fragrant," "spring," and "love." It seems curiously right that free India should have chosen to worship an actress named "fragrant spring of love."

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