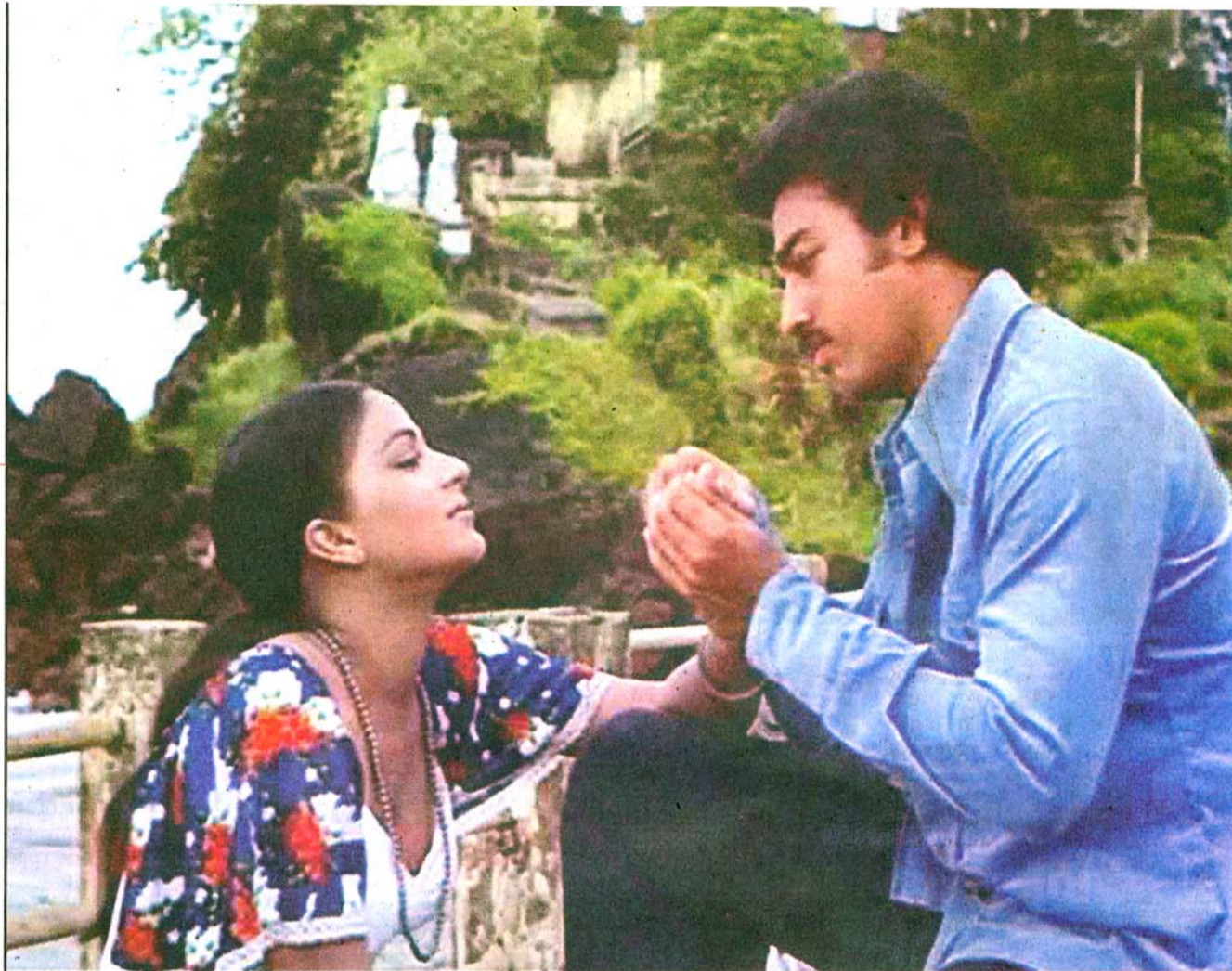


Timeless LOVE

When no distributor wanted to touch the film, producer L.V.Prasad released it himself with minimum prints on June 5, 1981. A week later, *Ek Duije Ke Liye* became a blockbuster, and 30 years down, it remains a timeless classic. *Screen* talks to four pivotal team members



Ramesh Prasad, Associate Producer

"K.Balachander, the doyen of Tamil cinema who had introduced megastars like Kamal Haasan and Rajnikanth, had written and directed *Maro Charitra*, a black-and-white Telugu film that ran for 100 days in Chennai and was a huge hit in Bengaluru too.

Gemini Studios in Chennai was supposed to buy the rights for the Hindi remake, on which my father was actually keen, but as luck would have it, they decided against it and the producer, Ram Aranganallal, called us up. My father wanted Balachander only for the Hindi version, and he too was very keen to work with us. We decided to retain Kamal Haasan as Vasu, but signed Rati Agnihotri who was a known actress down South and had even worked with Kamal.

Our music team — Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Anand Bakshi — were regulars with us for 15 years and the music was done very fast. All the timeless songs were composed in a matter of days. Laxmikantji told us that our inputs were so detailed and clear and the subject so fresh that they were very inspired.

We made only minimum changes for this version giving full freedom to our director as my father never believed in interfering with a director he had signed, and we only replaced Vizag, where the original was shot, with Goa.

Speaking of the business aspect, the film earned so much for us that with the profits we set up our post-production studio for even 70mm films. Today, we do work even for international projects and somewhere all this was made possible only because of this film.

But surprisingly, when the movie was completed, no distributor wanted to buy *Ek Duije Ke Liye*! So we released it ourselves with minimum prints. And after one week, the prints increased five-fold!

The Mumbai premiere, I recall, was attended by the entire industry, and I remember Raj Kapoor-saab telling my father that he personally loved the movie but that we had killed the film because of the tragic ending. He told him how he had shot two endings for *Bobby* — a happy and a tragic one — and had decided to keep the former climax, leading to that film's blockbuster success. But my father and his director had always been convinced that the impact of our film would only come with a tragic ending. And they were proved right. The film attained depth and Vasu and Sapna immortality among audiences only because of this, because all the love stories that live on for centuries are tragedies like the stories of Romeo and Juliet and Heer and Ranjha!"

Rati Agnihotri, Actress

"I am a Punjabi, but I have lived several years in Chennai when my father was posted there and began my acting career in South Indian films.

"Though it was my debut Hindi movie, *Ek Duije Ke Liye* remains my most happening film, because I worked with

the very best in every department, be it my hero, director, producer, technical team or music. Each and every sequence of the film is a story in itself. It is a timeless classic, as fresh today as it was when we began shooting for it in the year 1979.

At the tender age of 16 then, I had not even experienced all the emotions that I had to portray in the film — I had never seen the dream world of love and never experienced feelings of rebellion or anger towards my parents! Besides, Kamalji and Madhaviji had worked in the original Telugu film! My father had watched the original, but he did not allow me to watch it because he left that I might copy the actress!

Today, with hindsight, I realise that I just did it. There was this sequence where I was lying on the beach and Kamalji spins a top on my stomach. The temperature then in Goa was 40 degrees plus and the sand was burning hot! The heat would be terrible — we would all huddle under a few umbrellas in the scorching sun because the spot-boys and chairs had to be kept away from the frame.

Or there was the cliff sequence that Kamalji and

peccable, the music superb. I rate *Solah bars ki bali umar* as my career's best song, because I was 16 myself at that time and the unforgettable words and music have been etched on my soul!"

Kamal Haasan, Actor

"While *Maro Charitra* was my first film in Telugu, *Ek Duije Ke Liye* was my first in Hindi. By that time, Mr Balachander had done over 25 films with me, and had begun crafting his scripts with me in mind. Our bond was of a mentor and a student. He would use all my strengths as actor. I would also be with him on the sets as much as possible. I would be assistant director, choreograph my songs, or even stand in for cameos if an actor did not turn up, like in his Hindi film *Aaina*.

I was happy in the South and I was not really looking at a career in Mumbai. But I signed on *Ek Duije Ke Liye* because it came from the combination of Balachanderji and Prasadji. Even in this film, I helped in the dances, and in conceiving sequences like that of the top on Rati's stomach.

We made only basic changes and additions vis-

such a big success in Chennai, the team decided not to remake it in Tamil, but chose Hindi. I had sung in *Maro Charitra* and my director Balachandersaab was keen that I sing in the Hindi version too. But Laxmikantji was doubtful as they were very particular about diction. I wouldn't say that Laxmikant-Pyarelal were reluctant, but they had heard my South Indian songs and they were definitely apprehensive.

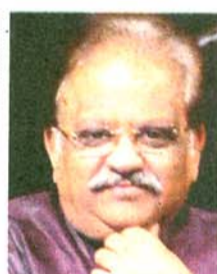
But Balachandersaab explained the logic that the hero too was a South Indian boy who starts learning Hindi for his love and masters it only at the end of the film, and so a faulty accent would sound very natural. After the composers were convinced, the Prasad team called me. I remember that I was in America on a concert tour and it must have been cumbersome for them to make international calls then. All overseas flights were then from Mumbai and they told me to stop over for a day in Mumbai on my return journey to Chennai.

I went to Laxmikantji's music room and he asked me to sing a semi-classical song. I sang



The film earned so much for us that with the profits we set up our post-production studio. Today, we work on even international projects and somewhere all this was possible only because of this film

— RAMESH PRASAD



I was so nervous that I spilled tea accidentally on Lataji's saree, and thought, 'My career in Mumbai is over!' But she was so gracious about it and praised my singing

— S.P. BALASUBRAMANIAM



I was happy in the South and I was not really looking at a career in Mumbai. But I signed on *Ek Duije Ke Liye* because it came from the combination of K. Balachanderji and Prasadji

— KAMAL HAASAN



There are so many sequences that I notice have been copied or imitated in dozens of later films: But there is only one Vasu, one Sapna and one *Ek Duije Ke Liye*!

— RATI AGNIHOTRI

I climbed to carve our names — we had to climb those jagged and hot rocks barefoot because if we wore anything on our feet we would have slipped.

The famous sequence where I put the burnt remains of Vasu's photograph in my teacup and defiantly drink it in front of my mother, licking the few fragments stuck to my lips was done in a single continuous shot. I never even thought of what the burnt photograph's pieces would do to my stomach! When we are young we have so much energy and enthusiasm, we eat a lot, and so we are in full fettle. Like the chase sequence with the villain, though beautifully shot, was very dangerous. One slip and I would have fallen dozens of feet down. As I said, I just did it, without even thinking of the potentially dangerous situation!

Ek Duije... still gives me a high — it's shown every other day on some channel or the other, and you can still relate to this wholesome love story that can make you fall in love all over again! There are so many sequences that I notice have been copied or imitated in dozens of later films, but there is only one Vasu, one Sapna and one *Ek Duije Ke Liye*! The chemistry within the team was im-

à-vis the original version. Even the *Mere jeevan saathi* song had a similar lyrical concept in the original movie, but from an elevator in Chennai's famous saree shop, Rasi Silks, in the original, we shifted the shooting to the five-star lift of Hotel Taj Coromandel! Even in my character there was no change at all from *Maro Charitra*, and I lived the character of Vasu again for six months.

Ek Duije..., however, is also especially dear to me for another quirky but vital reason: when I signed the film I was in debt to the tune of Rs 14 lakh — a huge sum in those days for Tamil actors — because I had incurred losses on some films I had produced and distributed. I would have needed months, if not years, to clear that amount. But after this film released, it released me too — from debt! With the assignments that came my way and my getting the kind of money I asked for, I cleared the amount just because of this film! And finally, I improved my Hindi language in real life paralleling with my character Vasu's progress!"

S.P. Balasubramaniam, lead singer

"Because the original, though in Telugu, was

Naushadsaab's title-track by Mohammed Rafisaab from *Mere Mehboob*. He then told me to sing a simple song and my choice was LP's *Jaanealon zaraa*, also by Rafisaab, from *Dosti*. That clinched the beginning of a long relationship with L-P and Anand Bakshi.

My first recording was the duet version of *Tere mere beech mein* at Mehboob Studios. As you know, it is sung entirely by Lata (Mangeshkarji) and I only recite some interpolations. I was very nervous, even though Lataji had praised and congratulated me during rehearsals. But I was so nervous that I spilled tea accidentally on her saree, and thought, 'My career in Mumbai is over!' But she was so gracious about it and praised my singing. Of course after that I sang so many wonderful songs with Lataji.

But the most interesting part was that at one point, Vasu tells Sapna through my voice, *Nee rhomba nalla paadraa*, which means "You sing very well". Imagine the irony that through my voice I was certifying Lataji's expertise as a singer!"

■ As told to Rajiv Vijayakar

Love - and success - beyond boundaries

Sapna (Rati Agnihotri) lives in Goa with her Punjabi meat-eating family. Their neighbours, who detest their meat-eating habits, are a vegetarian Tamilian family. Their son Vasudevan (Kamal Haasan) and Sapna fall in love. The strong opposition they face from their parents only strengthens their passion. The families tell them that they have to pass a test of their love — stay away for a year and not communicate at all in any way.

Vasu leaves for Hyderabad where he befriends a widow, Sandhya (Madhavi) and learns how to dance and to read and write Hindi. But when he hears that Sapna has got married, he angrily decides to marry Sandhya. But Sandhya, realising that the news is false, decides to reunite the lovers. Meanwhile, her enraged brother Danny (Raza Murad), who thinks that Vasu has jilted his sister, takes revenge on Vasu and Sapna, and their tragic deaths reform their parents.

Ek Duije Ke Liye has three Dadasaheb Phalke laureates in its team — producer L.V.Prasad, writer-director K.Balachander and playback singer Lata Mangeshkar. With dialogues by Inder Raj Anand, lyrics by Anand Bakshi and music by Laxmikant-Pyarelal, the golden jubilee film that blazed past *Laawaris*, *Love Story*, *Kranti* and *Naseeb* like a wildfire at the 1981 box-office is said to have grossed around 10 crore.

The songs were sensations, boosting the opening of this — for Hindi cinema — non-star-cast film and enhancing its repeat value. *Tere mere beech mein*, *Hum tum dono jab mile jayenge*, *Hum bane tum bane ek duije ke liye*, *Solah bars ki baali umar* and *Mere jeevan saathi pyar kiye jaa* were all hits, and the first of these topped the charts for weeks.

Arvind Deshpande, Rakesh Bedi, Shubha Khote, Asrani and Satyen Kappoo were in the supporting cast. The art director was Sudhendu Roy. Most of the remaining team, other than Rati, was repeated from the film's record-breaking Telugu original by the same director, *Maro Charitra*, which included Madhavi, cinematographer B.S.Loknath, editor N.R.Kittoo and key supporting artistes.

■ RV

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