

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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K ASIF (1922 – 1971)

LIFE

Asif Karim (his birth name) was born into a well-off Muslim family in the province of Uttar Pradesh in British India. His father was a medical doctor, and an older sister was married to film-director Nazir Ahmed Khan. After schooling, Asif changed his name to K Asif and went to Bombay, where his brother-in-law (Khan) helped him get started in the cinema industry. Although he directed only two complete films during his lifetime, they were both big successes, and one (*The Mogul, Mughal-e-Azam*) is often considered one of the best films of all time.

Asif's first film was *Flower (Phool)*, released in 1945, when he was only twenty-three years old. However, it was the fourth highest earning film that year and established him as a leading director of the future. Then, a combination of domestic and financial turmoil, plus bad luck, prevented him from completing his masterpiece (*The Mogul*) for another fifteen years. Asif started planning the film in the 1940s, but he had trouble signing up the lead male and female roles, and he concentrated instead on producing other films. When *The Mogul* was finally completed and released in 1960, it was a huge hit with both critics and audiences. Asif planned another mega-drama, starring Guru Dutt, the heart throb of that period, but again fate let him down when Dutt died and the shooting had to be cancelled. Asif found a new lead actor, but then he himself died during production and the film was released in an incomplete version by one of his wives.

Asif had three wives, all of them either actresses and/or from an acting family. His first and life-long wife Akhtar Begum, was the sister of famous actor Dilip Kumar. They had six children, and she accepted his later two wives as part of the family, even caring for their children. His second wife was Sitara Devi, a singer and actress, but that marriage was not a success and they divorced after less than a year. Asif's third wife was another actress, Nigar Sultana, who played a major role in *The Mogul*. She had a daughter by Asif, who herself became an actress. After Asif died in 1971, his two widows did not remarry.

ACHIEVEMENTS

In 1960, Asif won the awards for Best Movie and Best Director at the Filmfare ceremony in New Delhi for *The Mogul*.

LIST OF FEATURE FILMS (as director)

Flower (Phool) 1945

The Mogul (Mughal-e-Azam) 1960

Cheap Blood, Expensive Water (Sasta Khoon Mehanga Paani) 1986 (incomplete)

Love and God 1986 (incomplete)

