

# Lasting Legacy Of a Towering Bollywood Star

By SIDDHANT ADLAKHA

They called him the Tragedy King.

Dilip Kumar was known for throwing himself into serious roles, but the result was always gentler and more complex than his moniker suggested. Born Mohammed Yusuf Khan, he died on Wednesday at 98. The last of a golden Bollywood triumvirate that included Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor, Kumar was among the leading men who helped craft the cinematic image of post-independence India.

During a career that spanned six decades, he starred in some of the most beloved and successful Indian films ever made, including the largely black-and-white historical epic “Mughal-e-Azam” (1960), best remembered for its Technicolor dance sequence “Jab Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya” (“Why Fear When You’re in Love?”).

In the 1950s and ’60s, his work struck such a lasting chord that it set the template for entire genres that came to define Hindi cinema. The “double role,” for instance, is a commonly employed device in which an actor plays multiple parts, either in stories of lost twins or of reincarnation; Kumar’s films were so definitive that he had a hand in popularizing both versions of the concept. He even played twin brothers in his final film, “Qila” (1998).

Three of Kumar’s most famous works are available to stream in the United States. The advantage of watching them is that they feature not three, or even four, but five of his greatest performances, each one more moving and nuanced than the last.

## ‘Madhumati’ (1958)

Stream on the Criterion Channel.

Though it was not the first Hindi film to feature a theme of reincarnation, “Madhumati” cemented the reincarnation revenge saga eventually aped by Bollywood hits like “Karz” (1980), “Karan Arjun” (1995) and “Om Shanti Om” (2007).

Directed by Bimal Roy and written by Ritwik Ghatak, “Madhumati” follows Devinder (Kumar), a world-weary engineer who takes refuge in an old mansion during a storm. The mansion’s walls and paintings feel inexplicably familiar to him. Before long, he begins to recall memories from a life that was not his own, in which a young artist and estate manager, Anand (also Kumar), had fallen in love with a local tribal woman, Madhumati (Vyjayanthimala), before both were murdered by Anand’s envious employer, Raja Ugra Narain (Pran).

Devinder’s attempts to draw a confession out of the still-living Narain would inspire the overwrought plots of many imitators, but in “Madhumati,” this revenge scheme is relegated to the final act.

Most of the film luxuriates in Anand and Madhumati’s star-crossed romance, set against the serene hills of Nainital. As

Dilip Kumar’s varied and nuanced work helped create the cinematic image of modern India.



MOHAN FILMS



BIMAL ROY PRODUCTIONS

Anand, Kumar has an unburdened grace and simplicity; he’s subtly mischievous in Madhumati’s presence, and visibly distracted by an unspoken romantic high whenever they’re apart. As Devinder, however, Kumar pulls off the herculean feat of turning déjà vu — a fleeting sensation — into an ever-present emotional fabric, as he begins to recall and reckon with an impossible kind of grief, though he cannot yet fathom its origin.

Top, Vyjayanthimala, left, and Dilip Kumar in “Devdas.” Above, Kumar in “Madhumati,” which features a reincarnation theme.

## ‘Ram Aur Shyam’ (1967)

Stream on Amazon Prime and Eros Now; buy or rent on Apple TV, Google Play and YouTube.

Like “Madhumati,” this Tapi Chanakya’s prince-and-pauper twin comedy would go on to spawn a litany of imitators that also cast major stars to play opposite themselves. The blockbuster success of “Ram Aur Shyam” is largely owed to it playing like a one-man variety act. Kumar portrays twins separated at birth in a story that plays hopscotch across the boxes of tone and genre (a “masala film”). Kumar plays both Ram, a timid, soft-spoken man raised in a wealthy family, and his long-lost twin, Shyam, a cocksure villager whose magnetic aura lends itself to action heroics.

As Ram, Kumar cowers in the corner of every frame, especially in the presence of his violent brother-in-law Gajendra (Pran). He elicits pity through posture, often lowering himself to the height of his 8-year-old niece, while his hands fidget nervously and hover on-guard near his chest. In contrast, Kumar practically envelops the screen as the roguish Shyam, standing tall even as he leans against walls and pillars.

Kumar was known for his immersive Method approach, but “Ram Aur Shyam” proves that no matter how far inward he dove, he was always aware of the camera’s gaze and his relationship to it.

## ‘Devdas’ (1955)

Stream on Hoopla and the Criterion Channel; buy or rent on Amazon Prime.

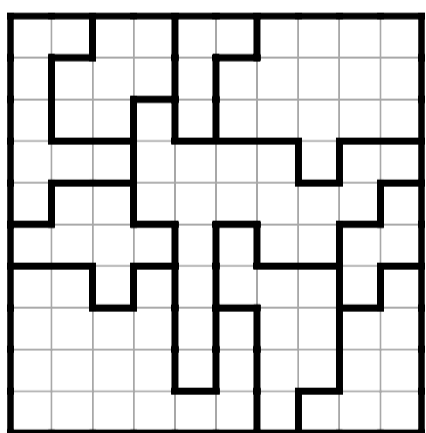
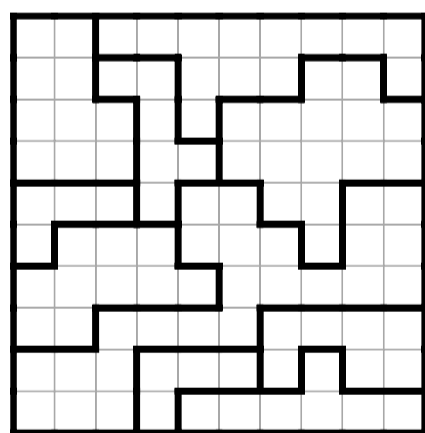
Kumar plays only one role in “Devdas,” but the title character’s spiritual struggle makes it feel as if there are two entities at war. The film is based on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s 1917 novel of the same name, of which there have been 20 screen adaptations. The title role is a calling card akin to Hamlet, and a chance for actors to spiral into an abyss of drunken sorrow.

Many great performers have hammed it up along the way (see Shah Rukh Khan in the exotic 2002 version), but Kumar’s take in Bimal Roy’s adaptation is a painfully realistic portrait of a man wrestling with the ugliest parts of his nature.

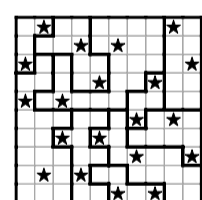
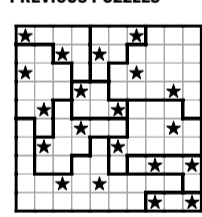
When Devdas reunites with his childhood sweetheart, Paro (Suchitra Sen), all we hear is Kumar’s gentle voice whispering from off-screen. When he finally steps out of the shadows, his eyes are enraptured and enamored, delivering one of the most impactful entrances in Indian cinema. It’s hard not to fall in love with Devdas — which makes it all the more agonizing when his demons and insecurities turn him violently abusive. Caught between his love for Paro, the courtesan Chandramukhi (Vyjayanthimala) and the bottom of his glass, he becomes consumed by his mistakes. The more he drinks, the more ill he becomes, and Kumar’s masterstroke is the way he turns a physical ailment into an emotional one, blending his agony and self-loathing until all that’s left is an inescapable haze of regret.

Few performances feel as if they run the entire gamut of human emotion. The first time Devdas takes a drink, Kumar runs that gamut in a single scene.

## Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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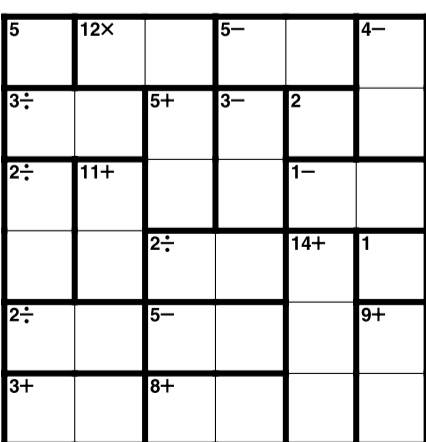
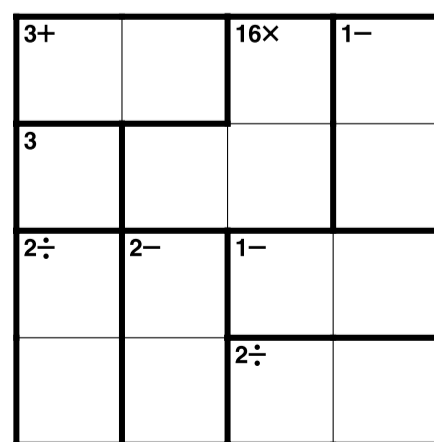
## Brain Tickler

Think of a word starting with **B** that can follow “birch” to make a common two-word phrase ... that can precede another word starting with **B** to make another common two-word phrase ... which itself can precede “button” to make a third common two-word phrase. Birch \_\_\_\_ Button

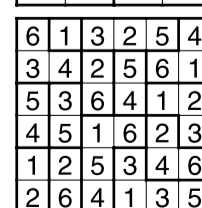
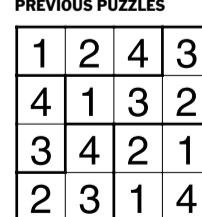
PUZZLE BY WILL SHORTZ

SATURDAY’S ANSWER Diets, tides, deist

## KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

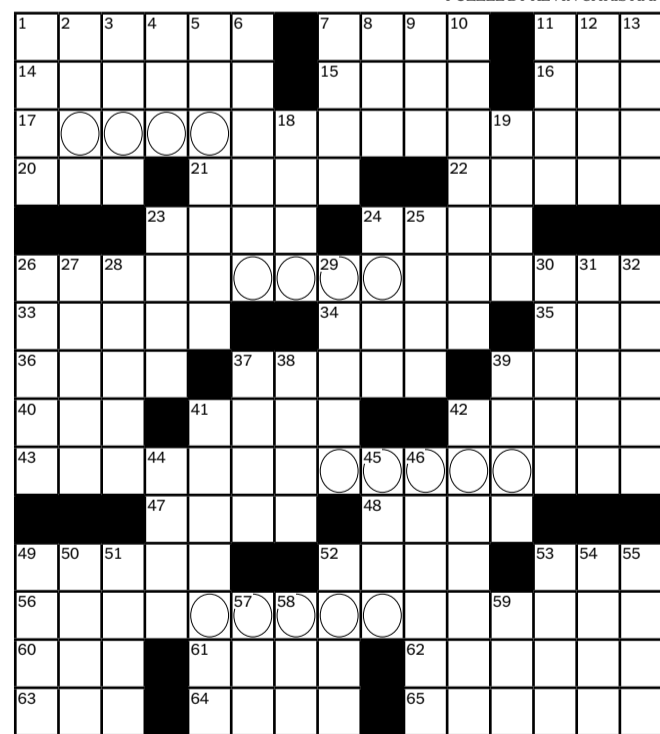
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## Crossword Edited by Will Shortz

- ACROSS**
- Hard to understand
  - Vegan protein source
  - Electric guitarist’s need
  - It makes an auto shine
  - Spirited horse
  - Luuu finger food
  - Song lyric before “short and stout”
  - Taurus symbol
  - Turn down, as lights
  - “Check this out!”
  - Out of practice
  - “The Simpsons” character voiced by Nancy Cartwright
  - \_\_\_ to the throne
  - Attorney general under George W. Bush
  - Sully
  - 1960s Ron Howard TV role
  - Eggs in a fertility lab
  - End of a cigarette or rifle
  - Were in accord
  - Nephew of Donald Duck
  - Number that never goes down
- DOWN**
- Morrison who said “A writer’s life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity”
  - Some pork cuts
  - Appeasing, idiomatically
  - Writes
  - Gape
  - What designated drivers should be
  - Taurus symbol
  - Give silent approval
  - Grilled Japanese dish on skewers
  - What a dipstick character measures the level of
  - Prep for publication
  - Where this puzzle’s circled letters can be found
  - Part of the body that’s stubbed
  - Trick
  - \_\_\_ network
  - The “A” of DNA
  - Oscar-winning Malek
  - Do some last-minute studying

PUZZLE BY KEVIN CHRISTIAN



7/12/21

- Leatherworker’s pointed tool
- Fancy work from a manicurist
- Squeeze money from
- Format of much AM radio
- Metal in a mine
- What Jack Sprat couldn’t eat, in a nursery rhyme
- Transform using mobile technology, as a market
- TikTok and Zoom, for two
- Not worth debating
- Feel sorry for
- Band with the 1983 #1 hit “62-Across”
- Surrounding glow
- Like the wire in paper clips
- “Cross my heart and \_\_\_ to die”
- Oklahoma city
- Facing the pitcher
- Ha-ha
- Dog to avoid
- Pull out all the stops
- Nephew of Donald Duck
- 100- or 200-meter, e.g.
- Final authority
- Enlist
- Quaint lodgings
- Sound of a car or goose
- Brought up the rear?
- Disreputable sort
- International grp. with a 1970s U.S. embargo
- Water: Sp.
- Southeast Europe’s \_\_\_ Peninsula
- Person who may speak with a brogue
- Home of Cincinnati
- Ill humor
- Unit that may be preceded by kilo-, mega- or giga-
- Black: Fr.
- Killer whale
- Telephone
- Univ. URL ending
- \_\_\_ in the bud
- \_\_\_ TV (cable channel with “Impractical Jokers”)

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