

### In Remembrance

Surinder Kaur: The Nightingale of the Punjab



Surinder Kaur with participants of Summer Program in Punjab Studies, 2004

Surinder Kaur (1929-2006), one of the most popular folk singers of Punjab, was born in Lahore. Along with her ten-year senior sister, Parkash Kaur (d. 1982), she received training in classical music under Ustad Inayat Husain and Pandit Mani Parshad. In August 1943, Surinder gave her first live performance on Lahore Radio, and in the following year her first gramophone record was cut by HMV. She and Parkash soon became household names, no Punjabi wedding was complete without their songs, played on hand-wound machines.

After partition of the Punjab in 1947, Surinder Kaur moved to Delhi and then to Bombay, the centre of Indian film industry. While at Bombay, she worked as a playback singer with some degree of success. In 1952, however, she returned to Delhi and married Joginder Singh Sodhi, a lecturer in Punjabi in Delhi University. My husband “was the one who made me a star,” she recalled. “He chose the lyrics, I sang, and we both collaborated on compositions.”

Apart from folksongs, Surinder Kaur sang lyrics by contemporary poets such as Shiv Kumar Batalvi, Nand Lal Noorpuri, Amrita Pritam, and Mohan Singh. An album entitled *Surinder Kaur: Three Generations* was released in 1995. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan considered her as the pioneer preserver of the Punjabi folk music tradition, and the honors that came her way included recognition by the Sangit Natak Akademi (1983), an honorary doctorate by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (2002), and the Padma Shri by the Indian government (2005). The 120 million Punjabis around the world will miss her dearly.

**Amarjit Chandan**