

Notes

The Times of India gave pre-screening publicity as follows: '*Raja Harishchandra* is a most thrilling story from Indian mythology. Harishchandra was a great king of India, who flourished several centuries before the Christian era. He (sic) and his wife's names were household words in every Indian home for their truthfulness and chastity respectively. Their son Rohidas was a marvellous type of noble manhood. What Job was in Christian (sic) Bible, so Harishchandra was in the Indian mythology. The patience of this king was tried so much that he was reduced to utter poverty and he had to pass his days in jungles in the company of cruel beasts. The same fate overcame his faithful wife and the dutiful son. But truth triumphed at last and they came out successfully through the ordeal. Several Indian scenes as depicted in this film are simply marvellous. It is really a pleasure to see this piece of Indian workmanship'.

The Bombay Chronicle, while reviewing *Raja Harishchandra* in its issue of Monday, 5th May 1913 said, 'An interesting departure is made this week by the management of Coronation Cinematographer. The first great Indian dramatic film on the lines of the great epics of the western world ... it is curious that the first experiment in this direction was so long in coming (sic) ... all the stories of Indian mythology era will long make their appearance ... followed by representations of modern dramas and comedies, another field which opens up vast possibilities ... it is to Mr Phalke that Bombay owes this ... the result of his first effort exceeds one's expectations (sic) ... it is a remarkable triumph for this film, from a technical viewpoint there are some imperfections, as Mr Phalke will probably admit ... this wonderful drama is splendidly

represented by the company of actors selected by Mr Phalke ... the film was witnessed by a large crowd (sic) on Saturday night on whom it evidently made a great impression and we have no doubt that the Coronation will have crowded houses throughout the week. One can freely praise the beauty and ingenuity with which he (Phalke) has succeeded in presenting effectively the most difficult scences (sic)'. In the issue of *The Bombay Chronicle* dated 12th January 1914, the following review was published on *Mohini-Bhasmasur*: "The Coronation Cinema has this week, full one and a half hours swadeshi programme. *Mohini's* almost romantic and charming (sic) Pauranik drama which drew crowded houses at the Olympia (sic) in the previous week is a chief attraction this week at this enterprising theatre. In this film we see ... 'hand print' is an interesting swadeshi comic (sic) film and the *Godavari Views* (scenes at Nashik, Triambakeshwar; an informative documentary) another film by Mr Phalke, were highly appreciated. Mr Phalke is the pioneer of swadeshi film manufacturing in India and a visit to the Coronation (sic) cinema this week will give an idea of his successful enterprise'.

The extent of affection and confidence Mr Kepburn had for Dadasaheb is apparent from his articles in the issues of *The Bioscope* dated 28th May 1914 and 4th June. An excerpt from the 28th May issue:

'No subjects dealing with Indian romance and mythology have as yet been presented in this country on the screen. Some two years ago Mr D. G. Phalke, a well-known artist of Bombay came over to this country and studied the moving picture industry in every phase and in this connection he acknowledges in very warm terms his indebtedness to, among others, Mr Cecil Hep worth, who invited him to Walton and gave him much valuable advice and information. Upon his return to India Mr Phalke who took back with him considerable plant, found that he had very different conditions to contend with, owing in great measure to the hot climate and the difficulty of securing the services of suitable artists, operators and other requisites for the different equipment of his enterprise. However by diligent study and perseverance each obstacle was gradually surmounted and

eventually in April 1913 his first drama *Harischandra* was produced and met very considerable favour. Mr Phalke has since screened another drama entitled *Mohini* and very shortly a third one (sic) is to be placed to his credit, bearing the title *Nala-Damayanti* which has been produced at a very considerable cost. These subjects have been taken from Indian mythology in which Mr Phalke intends to specialise in many of his future productions'.

In the very next issue of the weekly dated 4th June 1914, Mr Kepburn wrote as follows: 'Since one of the greatest and most valuable possibilities of the cinematograph is the circulation throughout the world of plays dealing with national life and characteristics, acted by motive (sic) (native?) players amidst local scenes, it is with no small interest that one awaits the appearance in this country of Mr D. G. Phalke's first Indian films some details of which were given in last week's *Bioscope*. In spite of its wonderfully beautiful and distinctive qualities, Indian mythology is practically unknown in this country with the exception of a few stories which have reached us through rather inadequate translations, and one feels, therefore, that Mr Phalke is directing his energies in the best and the most profitable direction in specialising upon the presentation by film of Indian mythological dramas. In a film version of a story, the whole beauty of the original may be retained so far as its action and characterisation are concerned, whilst it is possible to realise local colour and scenic detail in a manner, which would be quite out of the question in any purely literary form, or even in the most lavish production. One feels, in short, that the cinematograph is the ideal medium for the presentation of all such stories, in which, if they are to be fully understood and sympathised with by foreigners, vivid realism of atmosphere and setting are essential considerations.

Mr Phalke's first film *Harischandra* was received with the greatest enthusiasm in India, the leading Bombay newspapers having reviewed it very favourably and (at) considerable length'. 5. On the occasion of the silver jubilee of the Indian cinema, the English cine-periodical *The Moving Pictures* said about *Lankadalian*: '1917 is the most important year in the Indian

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film industry for during the year, Phalke's *Lankadalian* was released. It created quite a furor (sic) wherever (sic) it was exhibited. Till this picture was released Mr Phalke had produced more than twenty films. Twenty two exactly. (This might include documentaries, informative films, travel films, topical, industrial and technological and other short films.) The phenomenal success of *Lankadahan* decided the fate of the films as business proposition. It proved that films as business had come to stay in India. It will not be far from truth to say that *Lanka Dahan* once for all demonstrated to the sceptic public the potentials of the new business. The phenomenal success this business achieved was not a little responsible for the floating of more film producing concerns in India and particularly Bombay'.

In 1939 the silver jubilee of the Indian Cinema was celebrated. On that occasion Dadasaheb gave expression to his anguish in the *Sunday Times* as follows. About the changeover of Phalke Films into Hindusthan Film Cinema Company, he said: "Though I went on producing films, it proved a most uneventful career for me, owing to many reasons. And for full 15 years following 19181 led practically an empty life in the film production. This long spell broke with the appearance of *Setu Bandhan* a synchronised picture in 1933, and with *Gangavataran* for Kolhapur Cinetone. I cried a halt and quit (sic) the field two years ago'.

As a rule Gandhi gives messages only on rare occasions and these only for causes whose virtue is ever undoubtful. As for cinema industry he has the least interest in it and one may not expect a word of appreciation from him. During his last days he suffered from amnesia. I had once casually come to my parents' home, taking my daughter with me. After I returned, the next day he kept talking with his granddaughter as if she were sitting in front of him. I was very sad to see it. What an enterprising Dada of bygone days and what is he reduced to now! Later his amnesia had improved quite a lot. Mai said in an interview to an English periodical, 'Even on the death bed, Dadasaheb remained mentally alert. Despite loss of memory, his dreams and aspirations, his zeal for pursuing new pastures, fresh avenues had not forsaken him. T have big plans and dreams in my

mind, there is so much to do' he was saying'. 9. Dada was a voracious reader. A representative of the famous newspaper of Madras, *The Hindu*, had been to us. He wrote about Dada, 'When I entered his room, Sherlock Holmes and Shakespeare were lying hand in hand. Webster was also sitting besides (sic) him'.