

SCENE 1 - EX / TRIMBAK / BRAHMGIRI HILL / DAY - 1878

A small boy sits on a flight of stone stairs leading down into a deep pond. The child is slipping some chips of stone bearing the name of RAMA into the water. Surprisingly, the chips start to float.

(Enacting his *kathavachak* father and maybe even school teachers)

DHUNDIRAJ

Come, each of you write lord RAMA's name on the stones and throw them into  
KUSHAVARTA

FRIEND1:

Hey Dhundi, why would our stones float on water?

DHUNDIRAJ

Why not? If you write with faith, even your stones will float; come on, throw your  
stones.

FRIEND 2

Hey, my stone is floating!!

FRIEND 3

Mine too!

FRIEND1

And mine, but how come our stones are floating? Where did you get them from?

DHUNDIRAJ

They're floating because these are not stones but coals ( *Dagdi Kolsa* )

FRIEND1

Oh, that's why they were lighter.

FRIEND2:

I thought it was really some divine power!! Ha ha!

DHUNDIRAJ

OK now, all of you line up and tell me what role you are playing.

FRIEND 2

Angad

FRIEND 3

Jamvant

FRIEND 4  
Sugriv

FRIEND 5  
Laxman

FRIEND 1  
Halumal

DHUNDIRAJ

What is this? You cannot even pronounce a simple word, how will you deliver whole sentences? Come on, somebody else can become Hanuman.

FRIEND  
This is not fair Dhundi, I'll never play with you ever again.  
(Crying and angry he runs off.)

FRIENDS:  
Dhundi, why do you play RAMA all the time?  
Today, I'll be RAMA or else even I won't play.

DHUNDIRAJ  
Well, for that you'll have to learn the whole of the Ramayana by heart, if you agree, I have no issue.

FRIENDS:  
Sorry, no conditions please!

FRIEND2:  
Hey Rakhma, leave that lamb and come here. You're supposed to play Sita.

RAKHMA:  
Mind you, it's not a simple lamb; it's the 'Golden Deer'. Dhundi, would you take my lamb in our play?

All the children erupt into peals of laughter.

CHILDREN  
Ha Ha Ha

FRIEND3:  
Lamb? In the Ramayana? What a joke!

FRIEND 4:  
Can your lamb speak?

RAKHMA:  
Don't make a fool of my lamb, why should my lamb speak? We will make the lamb run like the Golden Deer, and anybody can shout "Laxmana, save me" What's the big deal?

DHUNDIRAJ  
Hello, is anybody going to listen to me? Enough of your suggestions.

As they are engrossed in their play, a mist appears, blindfolding every one in its whiteness.

Fade in a mix of tribal marriage ceremonial music.

In that white veil of the mist, the children, mesmerized, watch a marriage procession, all kinds of freaks and creatures following Shivji who is sitting on a bull.

When the mist clears, the sky is blue and crystal clear, but the mountain has turned white, like the Himalayas.

And far, far away Shivji's marriage procession disappears over a mist-covered hill.

The spell is broken when, from a distance, one friend comes running shouting, breathless.

FRIEND  
Dhundi...Dhundi.....  
Nobody is going to listen to you anymore, the British have come to arrest your father!

Everybody gets tense and surprised on hearing the news.

FRIEND2:  
My God, the British? They're very cruel!

FRIEND3:  
Their soldiers hit very hard!

FRIEND4:  
They have big leather whips!

DHUNDIRAJ  
Shut up, you're all fooling me. Why would the British arrest my father? It's all lies.

Dhundiraj runs home.

SCENE 2 - IN / EX DAJI SHASTRI PHALKE'S HOUSE / LANE OUT SIDE  
EVENING / 1878

As Dhundiraj approaches his house, he finds the lane leading in very congested and sees a big crowd gathered around his house.

He slows down and starts to panic, but still pushes his way through the legs of the crowds, only to find a British soldier right in front of his door.

Dhundiraj is completely soaked in sweat and terrified. He gathers strength and rushes out of the crowd to enter his own house from the back.

Going from one dark room to the next, he finally finds the rest of his family. He settles by his mother who is standing behind the door.

Daji Shastri (Dhundiraj's father) and a British man are discussing something.

Sheets of airplane designs from an old Sanskrit text, *Viman Shastra*, lie scattered between them

Unable to comprehend what they are talking about, Dhundiraj keeps peeking out at his father. Dhundiraj's father sees him peeping and reads his face. He smiles at little Dhundiraj and calls him in.

The smile on his father's face is enough to release the tension and a relieved Dhundiraj runs towards his father and embraces him. The boy is overjoyed that his father is safe.

Dhundiraj's father introduces little Dhundiraj to the guest, and tells him that his father is going to teach the Britisher Sanskrit and other allied things.

BRITISH MAN

Will you come with us to Bombay, young man? We're taking your father away with us, to teach in a college

Dhundiraj looks around him uncomprehendingly.

Shaking hands with the British guest, the boy is awe-struck and unknowingly moves his hand over white skin, pink nails, and gazes with wonder at the wrist watch, chained spectacles, hairdo, golden mustache etc.

Then, concluding their discussion, the British man and Dhundiraj's father walk towards the main door.

The crowd scatters and settles down a bit further away to see what's going on.

Seeing the Britisher bowing down and greeting the elder Phalke abruptly brings an end to the expected climax, and everybody is spellbound at what they are witnessing.

Dhundiraj's joy knows no bounds. He runs straight down to the pond and his favorite play places, singing and dancing, all on his own and almost neglecting all his friends running about behind him.

SCENE 3 - EX/IN / SPACE STUDIO / NIGHT / 1917

13-year old Babarai, dressed up like Hanuman, is flying against a full moon, carrying the three-storied Phalke studio in his palm.

His shadow falls floating over miniaturized landscapes below.

Babarai brings the tiny little studio closer to his face and peeps inside through the window. The two big eyes of mischievous Hanuman fill the frame.

Inside, Phalke, from the black-and-white footage of “How films are made” is seated at his table, thinking, with a pen in his hand.

Now Babarai peeps inside the hall.

5-year old Mandakini,, 9-year old Mahadev, and 3-year old Neelkanth are sleeping in a row. The mother is putting 1-year old Prabhakar to sleep, singing a lullaby. He chuckles in his dream.

Phalke starts writing. His voice begins to read out what he is writing.

PHALKE

Suddenly I remember a true story of my early days. I was running a photography shop in Godhra in the state of Baroda. My business required me to travel all the time. In those days, there was a great demand for Sanskrit manuscripts, and my hunger for knowledge was also limitless.

Prabhakar is fast asleep.

Saraswati, his mother, gets up, and goes down the steps leading to the second floor.

She passes through the mask and make-up room, and enters the processing and developing room. She sits down in front of the developing and printing machine, and starts working, her hand moving as if spinning a wheel.

There is no sound in the entire house except the sound of the film passing through the liquid chemical. It is pure silence, like that in a space craft.

The film passes through the printer, then through a developing tank

A miniature image of Kamala, Phalke’s first wife, tries to come to life as Saraswati examines her expression. Each frame by itself is frozen, like a pinned butterfly, some times fogged, ghost-like, restless, reluctant to be photographed...

SCENE 4 – EX / IN PHALKE’S PHOTO STUDIO / GODHRA / 1895

Kamala stands at the door, almost in tears. Phalke is loading his cart, preparing for a business trip.

KAMALA

I’m scared when you’re away.

PHALKE

Then why did you bring me here to die? We were all right in Baroda. I was teaching. My brother was there. “No, I want to be alone. Just you and me.” No? That’s what you wanted.

KAMALA

This is nothing but a jungle – was there nowhere else to go?

PHALKE

You know very well that for my business to grow I need trains, tigers, ruins, and princely states. And all these things are here. Do you understand?

Phalke is almost ready to leave.

Suddenly, he See some body coming towards his house. It is the Muslim priest.

MUSLIM PRIEST

Who are you?

PHALKE

Phalke. From Nashik, Tryambakeshwar

MUSLIM PRIEST

What do you do?

PHALKE

You can see I am a photographer

MUSLIM PRIEST

What is photography?

PHALKE

Why don't you see for yourself? What kind of back ground do you prefer? Paradise, city, or forest?

PRIEST

I myself dabble in the world of spirits. But I protect my people from their harm. Leave this business. Or go some place else, where it is done. This glass eye sucks the soul of the man and makes him the living dead. I have noticed that you are away quite often... we don't wish you any harm

PHALKE

But –

The Muslim priest finishes his threat and disappears at a distance.  
Phalke is tense

KAMALA

What was he saying?

PHALKE

Nothing.

Phalke climbs onto the cart. Kamala, standing at the door, sees him going.  
Then she closes the door from within.  
The screen goes dark.

SCENE 5 / EXT TEMPLE TOWN / NIGHT - 1895

A horse cart drives through the narrow lanes of a temple town bathed in silver moonlight.  
The town is deserted.  
The horse cart comes to a stop outside a ruined four-story *haveli*

SCENE 6 / INT / PANDITJI'S HAVELI / NIGHT

Phalke stops to feed the horse before he enters the house.  
He searches inside the labyrinthine house.  
The light of his lamp falls on wall frescoes dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

PHALKE

'Panditji! Panditji!'

Shastriji is busy making gold in the darkness of his underground alchemical laboratory.  
Suddenly a small bubble comes to the surface of one of the boiling liquids and explodes.  
It bursts into Shastriji's face, turning it black with soot.  
Green smoke begins to fill the room.  
Dhundiraj bursts into laughter on seeing Shastriji's face.

PANDITJI:  
Have we been introduced? What can I do for you?

Phalke takes out a small purse from inside his clothes, removes five rupees and places the money at the other man's feet.

PANDITJI: (CONT'D)  
What is the meaning of this?

PHALKE  
I wish to speak to you.

PANDITJI:  
You must be joking. Why would I spill my guts for five bucks?

PHALKE  
This is but a token of my esteem.  
After I have told you my problem, I will shower you with gold coins.

PANDITJI:  
Gold coins! Real gold coins!  
It is true I desire gold, but only that which I can make with my own hands.

Wisps of smoke of many colors escape from the mouths of the alchemist's crucibles.  
Panditji checked one of the brass utensils, but there was no gold yet.  
Flinging the vessel away in a rage, he wipes his hands.

PANDITJI: (CONT'D)  
All right, let's talk.  
God, it's hot!

PHALKE  
I hear you have a whole library of Sanskrit books and manuscripts?

PANDITJI:  
I used to, but I fed them to the white ants.  
They were everywhere, curse them!  
Instead of letting them eat away my wooden doors, I fed them on those thankless, useless  
books.  
How hot it is!  
Sit, sit.



PHALKE:

A foreigner has arrived from abroad.

He has a book.

I've seen with my own eyes that he took out a small bottle from his pocket and dropped just two drops onto a large bowl of copper.

Then he told his servant to wash the bowl.

The bowl began to sparkle when it had been washed.

Then he said, 'The English government buys all this gold from me. I have a fortune in savings abroad.

But I need at least fifty gold coins before I can leave here.'

So I said, 'Why don't you sell the bowl you just made? It'll fetch you a good sum.'

He said, 'No. The Resident made me swear on the Bible that I would sell my gold only to the British government.'

So I said, 'So sell it to the British government.'

The foreigner replied, 'I make the gold here, then they write to the laath Saab in Calcutta. Then the laath Saab writes to the head of the company in England, who sends the money.'

But this poor chap gets nothing, because he's known as a drunk.

So the company sends his salary to his wife.

He's hoping that someone will buy his book on alchemy for fifty gold coins, because he remembers all the formulas by heart.

PANDITJI:

Such a book is possible only in Arabic.

PHALKE:

You're absolutely right.

PHALKE: (CONT'D)

These Western empires might conquer and loot us, but they'll never crack the Arabic language.

PHALKE

Actually, this foreigner's father is of the English race, but his mother is Arabic.

In spite of being a Christian, he brought his son up like a devout Muslim.

I suspect he got this book from his mother.

PANDITJI (leans towards Dhundiraj):

Have you seen this book?

PHALKE

With my own two eyes.

For just fifty gold coins, we can buy it from the old drunk.

PANDITJI

He's a fool to sell such a priceless book.

PHALKE

He's ready to sell it because he remembers it by heart.

PANDITJI

But how will I get hold of fifty gold coins? Where will I live if I sell the house?

PHALKE

I'll give you fifty gold coins for all your books.

Panditji breaks out in a sweat.

Thoughtfully, he heads towards another room.

He opens a door, picks up a lit oil lamp, and enters within, followed by Dhundiraj and a small mouse.

There are about 3,000 or 4,000 books inside.

The books turn to dust at the merest touch.

Their titles are in gold leaf lettering and they are filled with colorful illustrations.

Phalke picks up the oil lamp.

Every book he has ever heard of is here.

PHALKE

How much for the lot?

PANDITJI

They're not worth toilet paper. I hate the sight of them. Your gods and goddesses, your myriad religions - I hate all the religions of the world.

All I want to do is make gold with my own hands just once.

PHALKE

Are fifty gold coins acceptable to you?

PANDITJI

No. It's got to be either fifty-one or one hundred and one.

I want an auspicious amount.

Take it or go away.

Panditji comes out of the room and bolts the door behind him.

Phalke takes out his money and counts it.

Then he loads the books into the cart outside and comes inside again.

Panditji is making a green paste out of some herbs.

Phalke is holding a photo gun in his hands.

PANDITJI: (CONT'D)  
Sir, are you a hunter too?

PHALKE  
No Panditji, this is a gun to take pictures only - flying birds, running horses...

PANDITJI:  
Stop, I think you can help me.  
I have one herb that can turn a man into a tiger and another that can turn tigers into men.  
I want you to photograph me as I metamorphose into a tiger.  
So stay ready and shoot me.  
I also want to see what happens to me.  
Then give me this other herb.

PHALKE  
But suppose you eat me?

PANDITJI:  
After I turn into a tiger, how will I know that it's a photo gun?  
It's an experiment, a service to science.  
Here, don't be afraid.

Panditji gives one packet to Phalke and swallows the other.  
He begins to turn into a tiger at the end of Phalke's gun.  
He roars and jumps onto Phalke.  
Phalke clutches his gun and flees for his life.

SCENE 7 / EX / IN PHALKE'S PHOTO STUDIO / GODHRA /  
DARKROOM / DAY

In the photo developer Panditji is morphing into a lion.  
We hear the sounds of drum beating as if encircling a hunt.  
Then, Kamala, bursts open the dark room door and rushes to Phalke. She is screaming,  
sobbing, hysterical.  
Bright daylight streams into the room and the half-man half-lion in the developing  
photograph turns black.

PHALKE  
What happened?

KAMALA  
(Sobbing)  
A rat...I saw a rat

PHALKE

So?

Phalke sees his photograph turning black, right under his nose. He is furious, shaking with rage.

PHALKE (CONT'D)

O hell! I'm ruined. How will I prove it now? This was the only proof. How will I convince the Anthropological Society? Do you know you have destroyed historical proof? Can't you knock?

Phalke tears up the photo paper in a rage, storms out and stands outside the door. She follows him meekly, full of guilt.

PHALKE (CONT'D)

I want you to leave today. Go to my place. Go to your father's.

KAMALA

Can't we go to Trimbak?

PHALKE

What will I do there? *Katha kirtan* like my father?

KAMALA

You can paint.

PHALKE

I am a loser there. The only thing I can paint is back drops for the theatre

KAMALA

We can live in Bombay. We have relatives there, so much theatre there

PHALKE

No. My future is here

SCENE 8 / IN PHALKE'S PHOTO STUDIO / GODHRA /  
BEDROOM / NIGHT

Phalke and Kamala are sitting on the bed.

Kamala begins to tell him a story.

KAMALA

There was once a wood cutter, whose beard grew when he slept and covered the entire

town  
with darkness. That's how there would be night in the town. When his wife woke up and  
tied  
her hair with the sweep of a hand, there would be light in the village.  
In the darkness, children would write the dreams of this town, but they were only one line  
dreams, as the darkness would eat up all the ink as soon as one line was written, to  
become  
even darker.  
then the woodcutter made two wooden boxes. In one box he filled up all the darkness.  
The  
other didnt have a door so it couldnt be opened; the darkness could not enter this box and  
hence it remained lit.  
dipping their pens in the dark box, the children and the dreams of the town began to  
grow.  
when the king heard of this box, he wanted to control a box, which made the dreams of  
his  
kingdom.  
So the woodcutter opened the lit box for the children. but now everyone could see the  
dreams  
written with light. the entire town dreamed the same dream. the king's dream could also  
be  
seen by his subjects. for the people who kept asking, is it any surprise then, that the king  
lost all his power?  
All they could see was some entangled bunch of hair, which had come floating in the  
river  
and was lying on its banks.

SCENE 9 / IN / EX / PHALKE STUDIO /GODHRA  
FULL MOON NIGHT / 1896

Phalke and Kamala are asleep.

Suddenly, the silence is broken by a sound.

Phalke awakes. The noise seems to be coming from the upper floor. He picks up the lantern and makes his way up the stairs. He comes to a closed door, and pushes it. It creaks open slowly, and in the light of his lamp he sees that his books have vanished. In the lamp's light, a rat looks up at him mockingly, wiping its whiskers, burping after his feast of books.

Tiny fragments of paper with letters on them are caught up in a whirlwind. The tiny shards fuse together into a whole book, and fly out the window.

Phalke is mesmerized.

SCENE 10 / IN/EX / SPACE STUDIO FROM PHALKE FOOTAGE  
DAY / 1917

Phalke dips his fountain pen into an ink pot with a picture of a swan on it.  
He releases the tank and the pen sucks up the black ink.  
Phalke sits with his pen poised over the paper, thinks for a while, and then starts writing.

PHALKE

I had already taken the advance for the books from some British customers, and they wanted their deliveries, but the books had vanished. Why would anybody steal the books, and who would believe me when I said that a rat had devoured them?

So to be on safe side I went to the police

SCENE 11 / IN / POLICE STATION / GODHRA  
DAY / 1896

A lion-like policeman with a red beard seems unsympathetic to Phalke's plight

POLICEMAN

We have checked every literate person. We can't trace your so-called stolen books. And we can't raid the English.

By the way, do you recognize these photos?

PHALKE

I took them.

POLICE MAN

These boys went missing shortly after, and your photographs helped us to trace them.  
Here is your prize money.

There is a murmur, like that of angry bees, from behind him.

He turns and sees that a crowd is gathering.

At the front of the hissing crowd stand the missing boys, staring at him like zombies with their blind, white, pupil-less eyes.

POLICE MAN (CONT'D)

But these people think that you're a sorcerer, Mr. Kelpha, and that your camera is the evil eye.

By the way, what *does* Kelpha mean, Mr. Phalke?

PHALKE

It is the negative of my own name

Phalke walks out without a backward glance. The crowd watches him go, their eyes boring into his receding back.

SCENE 12 / IN/EX / PHOTO STUDIO / GODHRA  
DAY / 1896

Kamala is unpacking the glass bottles of developing chemicals that her husband had ordered, waiting for him to come home.

Someone raps on the door.

KAMALA  
Who is it?

PHALKE  
Open up. It's me

Kamala unbolts the door from inside.  
Phalke enters and sits. She brings in water, and helps him wash his feet and face.

KAMALA  
Did they find the thief?

PHALKE  
No, instead, they turned on me.

KAMALA  
Why?

Phalke sits to eat. She serves him.

PHALKE  
Some boys had run away from home. My photographs helped in tracing them.

KAMALA  
Then your magic came in handy, after all

PHALKE  
You don't understand.  
They are accusing me of having unnatural powers  
They went looking for the actual places of the back drops against which I had  
photographed the boys, and found them still frozen in the same pose in which I had  
snapped them, as though under a spell.... you are right, let's go from here. Start packing.

KAMALA  
Don't be disheartened. Here's a letter for you, from Nadkarni in Bombay, and a parcel.

Kamala finishes unpacking the parcel, examining the bottles of hypo, silver nitrate, potassium nitrate, instruction booklets, addresses, Kodak labels, and Eastman's face on other products.

Phalke reads the letter.

#### LETTER

Your post cards are selling like crackers, especially the sexy poses of the white women. Rail shail bhool jao. Sapere ki photo dekh kar been baj gai. Tumhare sher aur panditji ka kissa shandar tha. Tum kya mujhe itna bevakoof samajhte ho?

Bechari Kamala bhabhi tumhari kalpana shakti ke samne, bechari. Thhad thada rahi hogi. Tumhare chemicals aur film bhej raha hoon.

Ravi Varma ka Nal Damayanti dekha, ek videshi painting ki nakal hai. Khud milaker dekh lo. Farq sirf itna hai vahan kapde utarti hai, yahan hum unhe kapde pehnate hain. Vah raja saheb sach kaha, hindusthani nakal ka vaner shresht hai aur akbaar padhte ho ki nahin? Tumhare raja sahib ke preyasi angoothi chaat kar chali gayi. Raja sahab ne inn dinon painting chhod rakhi hai.

Phalke and Kamala compare the two versions of the Nal painting.

#### SCENE 13 / IN / EX / DARK ROOM / PHOTO STUDIO / GODHRA NIGHT / 1896

Reading the instructions by candlelight, Phalke mixes photo chemicals in the tray.

One by one the photos emerge, ghost-like.

Sometimes, a photograph from the *camera indica* comes alive, and talks to him.

Phalke listens, head buried beneath a large black cloth, bent over the camera on a tripod.

He wipes his hands, comes out and shuts the door behind him, waiting for the prints to dry.

Outside, Kamala is asleep, dreaming like a fairy.

He looks at her, a smile flickers on her face.

After a moment of absolute silence, he hears a sound from the direction of the dark room.

He goes to the door and stands there, listening.

Then, through a crack in the door, he peeps inside.

A little rat is licking the melted wax of the burning candle.

Then, like an acrobat, the rat jumps and lands with his feet on the rim of the hypo tray.

He starts drinking the chemicals of the tray, guzzling greedily to his heart's content.

Phalke waits, holding his breath, watching....his eyes curious.

After drinking a stomach full of hypo, the rat somersaults and lands on the table facing the door.

Then he starts breathing in and out like in a yogic exercise.

Then Phalke sees something strange.

With every breath the rat takes, golden whiskers, like slender needles, begin to sprout beneath his nose.

When he breathes out, the delicate needles of gold splinter and scatter across the table top.



Then the rat notices Phalke watching him through the door. He stops, and runs away, crashing into the candle which stands like a lamp post on the landscape of the table top. The rat rights himself and skitters away. Phalke enters the room, and touches the needles of golden hair. He smiles.

SCENE 14 / IN / EX / MARKET / GOLDSMITH'S SHOP / DAY

Phalke makes his way through a marketplace crowded with artisans and craftsmen displaying their wares – silver ware, paintings, colorful wooden toys for children, and wall hangings of embroidered cloth.

Finally, Phalke finds what he is looking for - a goldsmith's shop.

Phalke takes out a cloth pouch from inside his shirt and empties it onto the glass topped counter.

The rat's golden whiskers tinkle delicately as they land.

The goldsmith lights a flame and fires the slender golden threads to check for purity.

The whiskers are pure gold.

The smith gathers all of them, and weighs them on a pair of tiny scales.

Then, the goldsmith pays Phalke, and he leaves.

SCENE 15 / IN / PHALKE PHOTO STUDIO / NIGHT

Phalke peeps into the darkroom through the gap in the door.

The rat is drinking from the tray of chemicals again.

He breathes in, and whiskers begin to sprout beneath his nose.

The tip of a single whisker begins to turn to liquid gold that drips onto the table top.

The molten metal swirls and fuses to form the shape of Ganapati.

It is a wonderful likeness of the elephant-headed god.

Phalke opens the door, and the rat scuttles away.

Wonder-struck, Phalke enters the room, picks up the sculpture and looks at it closely.

Phalke looks around, searching for the rat.

PHALKE

My lord, you seem to be the living embodiment of the divine sculptor himself

Suddenly, there is a noise from outside.

Frightened, the rat scampers up Phalke's back and perches on his shoulder.

The knocking on the door becomes more aggressive, and in a flash, the rat disappears inside Phalke's coat.

Finding a tear in the lining, he wriggles frantically inside, scurrying into the small of Phalke's back.

The sensation causes Phalke to twist this way and that.

The knocking intensifies further; Phalke blows out the candle and goes out.

Petrified, Kamala is standing in the center of the room.

Three government officials have pushed their way into the house.

When Phalke comes out, Kamala takes shelter behind his back, as the officials begin to up-end the contents of the room with their batons. Out of the corner of her eye, Kamala notices a wriggling movement inside her husband's coat.

PHALKE

Is everything okay?

One of the officials, who seems to be a doctor, begins to examine Phalke. Then he turns to Kamala. Phalke steps between them.

PHALKE (CONT'D)

Who are you?

OFFICIAL

We're checking for plague. Do you have rats here? There's a reward for every captured rat.

The outlined shape on Phalke's back begins to tremble.

PHALKE

No, there are no rats here, and nor is anybody ill

OFFICIAL

I'm sorry, but we're just doing our duty. Watch out, we're living in bad times

The officials leave.

Phalke re-enters the darkroom and picks up the statue of Ganapati.

Kamala sees it, and is astounded.

PHALKE

This is for you, to keep you safe when I am gone

SCENE 16 / EX / HILL VIEW OF THE GOLD CITY / GODHRA  
EVENING / 1896

Sitting on Phalke's shoulder, the rat is giving a discourse on the science of miracles. At the foot of the hill, a golden city glitters. Phalke listens like a devotee.

RAT

Anybody can perform miracles who understands that the reality of the world is light. A realized soul can restructure atoms of light in any shape. The tangible appearance of the light atoms depends upon the desire and will power of he who conjures it, like long-dead people appearing in his dream. I have clearly seen the absolute one-ness of the light behind the painful multiplicity of the illusory world

A faint howling and screaming reaches us from the golden city below.  
Slowly, a cloud of vultures start appearing in sky, swooping down towards the city

SCENE 17 / EX / TOWN SQUARE / GODHRA / DAY

A man hangs upside down in the view finder.  
A hand outside the camera's black cloth cover tells him to stay steady.  
Inside the camera the man is upside down. Phalke snaps the shutter.  
The lens opens like an eye and the plate moves upward.  
The man in the frame feels dizzy, and falls down as if he has been flung aside.  
He is dead.  
Two men enter the frame and pull away the body.  
Phalke emerges from beneath the black camera cloth and looks out.  
The photographed man is being dragged away. The next man has taken his place.

People are being indexed and classified through their thumb prints, face measurement, and recordings of voices for the Great India Project.  
Suddenly, in a split second, a kite dives down towards the camera, lifts it up with its claws, and flies away.  
Phalke, balancing against the force of attack, looks up. He runs to follow the kite.

SCENE 18 / IN / PHALKE SPACE STUDIO / DAY

A kite swoops through the azure blue sky, an old still camera dangling from its claws.  
  
Inside the space studio, Phalke's children are lined up at the window, looking out on the scene.  
At the table in his old film footage, Phalke continues writing about his memories of the Great India Project.

SCENE 19 / EX / TOWN SQUARE / GODHRA / DAY

People are running for their life, in all directions.  
Things are being thrown out of houses marked by the sign of the Black Death.  
Policemen on horseback are trying to control the situation.  
Plague patients are being segregated, more houses are being marked, and polluted things are being burnt.  
Holding a Bible in one hand, a priest is shouting a sermon in front of a newly built church.  
He begins to attack the crowd of devotees in ringing tones.

PRIEST

The plague has come to your homes, my brethren, and you well deserved it

The crowd gapes at him, thunder-struck. Using the tricks of oratory, the priest slaps his congregation in the face with the essence of his sermon, which is that they deserve what they have got.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

We have seen in history that when such a disaster struck, it was to punish the enemies of the Lord. When Pharaoh acted against the will of God, the scourge of plague brought him to his knees. Kneel down now.

In the crowd, people begin to fall to their knees before the preacher.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

The pure of heart have nothing to fear, but evildoers will tremble. Plague is the pestle of the Almighty, and the world is the floor on which the Lord threshes the grain mercilessly until it is removed from its husk. Losing patience with our sins, the Lord has taken the light away, and the world is plunged in darkness.

The messenger of the Devil, bearing his long sickle, must be giving the order to destroy your homes. Each blow rained upon you will claim a life each.

To reinforce his words, he starts a magic lantern show that illustrates his sermon.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

His left hand is stretched out over your homes. His finger is probably pointing to your house. His long red sickle is turned towards your courtyard.

Perhaps Plague has entered into your bedroom like a deadly bride, and is waiting for you to return home...

And in this blood-soaked soil, the seeds of Truth will be sown. Perhaps this is the road to your salvation.

Once, those untouched by Plague wrapped themselves in the robes of the dead, and invited Death to a feast. This path reveals impatience and arrogance.

SCENE 20 / EX / LANDSCAPE / GODHRA / DAY

Phalke is running for his life.

In the distance, a train cuts through the empty landscape, waving its plume of smoke.

Hordes of screaming people are running behind Phalke with stones in their hands, flinging them at his back.

SCENE 21 / IN / EX / PHALKE'S STUDIO / GODHRA / TWILIGHT

The rat is resting on a comfortable bed in a nest that Phalke has built for it inside a jewelry box. All the furniture is made of gold.

Light streams in through the key hole, projecting the outside scene onto the wall above the bed, upside down shadows playing like the image inside a *camera obscura*.

He sees a train with its wheels in the air passing over his head, like a centipede overturned.

Kamala's shadow passes, combing her hair.

She pauses, and approaches the box. The jewelry box room goes dark.

Suddenly, there is a commotion outside and Phalke's urgent voice announces his arrival.

PHALKE

Pack up! We have to leave at once!

He is in a panic, flinging their belongings together, ready to flee.

KAMALA

Why? What happened?

PHALKE

The townspeople are after us!

Kamala runs after him, and light floods the box once again.

The rat sees Phalke throw a final glance at him, before they flee, leaving the door open. Abandoned, the rat runs around his tiny room in consternation, seeking a way out of his prison.

The wooden box loses its balance and falls to the floor.

The box is still shaking when, a few seconds later, the crowd pours in through the door, hunting for Phalke.

They tear the place apart, before someone spots the jewelry box.

The crowd descends on it and tries to force it open.

Inside the box, the rat slides from side to side with the shaking.

He can hear the enraged crowd screaming.

Terrified, he presses against the far wall, below the hinges of the lid.

Somebody slams the box down on the floor.

Blows rain down on the lid, and the rat cowers in a corner, looking up at the destruction.

Somebody slams the box down again and again.

The box begins to splinter, and light streams in through the cracks in the wood.

Now the rat can see enormous black eyes, their pupils dilated with rage.

Shaking fingers try to tear the box apart, the delicate whorls on the skin showing clearly in the increasing light inside.

The lid splinters with a final crash and an enormous hand enters the ruined box and stops on seeing the rat.

The rat cowers in the corner as the hand moves forward again and picks him up.

As the hand touches the rat, it turns to solid gold.

The hand turns to lift it up. They open to show the gold turned to balls of hair.  
All at once, hissing smoke turns the hair to dark grey ash.

At that instant, everything that is gold in the room turns to ash – the furniture in the rat’s nest, the gold-rimmed eyeglasses on faces, the gold in people’s teeth, the gold paintings on the wall.

SCENE 22 / EX / GOLDEN CITY / GODHRA / NIGHT

Phalke is dragging Kamala by the hand, stumbling and running up the hill as far as they can get, their breath catching in their throats.

When they reach the top, Phalke finally stops and they look back at the scene below. The beautiful minarets, domes and gold-painted walls of the city are turning to hair, transforming into ash, and are scattered on the air.

Phalke looks at the full golden moon hanging low in the night sky.  
As he watches, it turns in a knitting ball of hair, before exploding into ash.  
Utter darkness descends.

SCENE 23 / IN / EX / PHALKE’S SPACE STUDIO / NIGHT

Phalke’s pen stops writing.  
He pauses to think.

Outside, Babarai is carrying the space studio carefully in his hand.  
He looks down at the ground and sees the golden city turning to balls of hair, like Lanka burning below.  
The landscape changes as he flies and the minarets turn to industrial chimneys spewing industrial smoke.

SCENE 24 / IN / EX / TRAIN / DAY

Wheels piston forward in a regular motion, striking sparks from the rails.  
Coals are fed into a golden fire in an enormous stove.  
Smoke and golden embers spew out of vents into the clear air above.  
A train makes its way across the land.

Phalke and Kamal are sitting in a sea of despairing human faces.

SCENE 25 / IN / EX / VT STATION / BOMBAY / DAY

The VT station terminus yawns like a giant cave.  
The train chugs into the darkness, as though entering into the *camera obscura* again.

The train comes to a halt, and people begin to disembark in a rush.

They are met on the platform outside the compartment doors by a medical team who begin to check the travelers one by one.

Depending on their findings, people are separated into two groups and led away.

Phalke and Kamala are checked.

As he walks away after his examination, he looks behind him for Kamala and sees her being led away in the opposite direction, her head turned to him in a final glance for help. He makes a movement towards her, but she disappears into the crowd before his very eyes.

It begins to rain.

The crowds melt away, and Phalke is left alone in a deserted Victoria station, stupefied by the carvings of gargoyles, lizards, lions, tigers, flora and fauna, like some fantastic fairyland.

Streams of water pour out of the mouths of mythical monsters, frothing at the jaws.

Phalke sits shaking, shivering with cold, leaning against carvings of rats in the wall.

#### SCENE 26 / EX / FORT / BOMBAY / NIGHT

Coarse white cloth fills the frame. A hand enters and lifts the cloth to reveal the face of a young woman.

The hand covers the dead face and moves to the next shroud.

Making his way through grounds littered with shrouds, Phalke roams from camp to camp, looking for his wife's corpse.

His mouth is parched; his brain throbs with a rapid pulse - he touches his own wrist (for he dare not ask counsel of any man lest he be deserted), and feels his frightened blood go galloping out of his heart. There is nothing but the fatal swelling left to make his conviction complete; immediately, he has an odd feel under the arm - no pain, but a little straining of the skin; he touches the gland, and finds the skin sane and sound but under the cuticle there lies a small lump like a pistol-bullet, that moves as he pushes it.

He looks around.

The shops are deserted, he has pierced deep into the native quarter and is threading through its narrow dim lanes.

He has to go carefully, for men are stretched asleep all about and there is hardly room to drive between them.

And every now and then a swarm of rats scampers across past the horses' feet in the vague light.

White plaster of Paris statues of Ganapati stand sentinel at street corners.

The forbears of the rats that are carrying the plague from house to house are in Bombay now. The shops are but sheds, little booths open to the street; and the goods have been removed, and on the counters families are sleeping, usually with an oil lamp present.

But at last he turns a corner and sees a great glare of light ahead.

It is the home of a bride, wrapped in a perfect conflagration of illuminations, - mainly gas-work designs, gotten up especially for the occasion.

Within is an abundance of Brilliancy - flames, costumes, colors, decorations, mirrors - it is another Aladdin show.

The bride is a trim and comely little thing, dressed as we would dress a boy. She moves about very much at her ease, and stops and talks with the guests and allows her wedding jewelry to be examined. It is very fine, particularly a rope of great diamonds, a lovely thing to look at and handle. It has a great Emerald hanging from it.

#### SCENE 27 / EX / FLORA FOUNTAIN / BOMBAY / NIGHT / FLASHBACK

Kamala is standing by Phalke's side, her face lit with joy.

Tilak has just concluded his speech.

Vedic chanting fills the air. A hot air balloon is being prepared for flight.

Phalke and Kamala cut through the crowd and approach the site of the launch.

A man, Sant Tukaram-like, goes and sits in the balloon, and begins to sing religious songs.

The balloon begins to rise into the air.

As it lifts off we see Kamala's face turned upward, surrounded by devotees singing with the man in chorus until the balloon disappears into the star-filled sky.

#### SCENE 28 / IN / EX / SPACE STUDIO / NIGHT

The studio is flying through the night like a space craft, cradled in Babarai's hand.

The sound of the *kirtan* awakens five-year old Mandakini from her sleep.

She goes to the window and looks out.

The hot air balloon has risen to the level of her window.

Within it, she sees Tukaram dancing to his song.

Gradually, the rest of the family awakes.

Prabhakar, Mahadev and finally their mother cluster around the window with Mandakini.

Tukaram begins to circle around the house, moving from window to window.

The children follow him from side to side, accompanied by the glory of his song.

Fade out.

#### SCENE 28 / EX / FLORA FOUNTAIN / NIGHT

Phalke is sitting alone on the site of the balloon launch, hunched over in thought.

He gets up and slowly walks away.

In the background, the clock on Rajabai Tower chimes the hour.



SCENE 29 / MAGIC SHOW / BOMBAY / NIGHT

A large mirror in a carved frame is on the stage.

Phalke walks onto the stage, where a man wearing the tall Mandrake cap of the magician asks him to walk around the mirror and examine it to his satisfaction.

The magician then asks him to don a hooded red robe.

He positions him some ten feet from the mirror, where the vivid red reflection is clearly visible to the audience.

The theatre is darkened, except for a brightening light that comes from within the mirror itself.

As Phalke waves his robed arms around and bows to his bowing reflection, his reflection begins to show signs of disobedience.

It crosses its arms over its chest and starts waving them about.

Suddenly, the reflection grimaces, removes a knife and stabs itself in the chest.

The reflection collapses onto the reflected floor - it is he himself.

Now a ghost-like white form rises from the dead reflection and hovers in the mirror all at once, a ghost emerges from the glass.

It looks towards the startled, terrified spectators.

The masterful illusion mystifies some policemen in the audience, who begin to discuss the phenomenon between them.

POLICEMAN 1

The mirror is probably a trick cabinet with black lined doors in the rear and an assistant hidden inside.

POLICEMAN 2

There must be lights concealed between the glass and the silver back.

POLICEMAN 3

Did you notice, as the lights grew brighter, the mirror grew transparent, and a red-robed assistant showed himself in the glass?

POLICEMAN 1

Concealed magic lanterns probably produced the phantom, but I've never seen another magician do that before. There is something uncanny about the illusions.

Suddenly a man in the audience comes to life, pointing to the magician and shouting hysterically.

MAN

He's not a showman at all, but has sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his unholy powers.

SCENE 30 / IN / SPACE STUDIO / BOMBAY / 1896

Phalke is writing his memoirs, his voice reading out the text.

PHALKE

We had to run away from that venue that day. I became the magician's apprentice, and we traveled all over the country with our performances. It was he who christened me Kelpha. I remained with him for quite a while, until, one day, the police arrived and arrested him for disturbing the peace. After that, I was on my own once more.

SCENE 31 / IN / WATSON'S HOTEL / BOMBAY / 1896

In the hall, a painting exhibition is in progress.

All the important people of the time have gathered, alongside young art students, to view the works of the master artist, Raja Ravi Verma.

The hall is abuzz with comments and banter as groups move around the exhibition.

Ravi Verma stands surrounded by students, engrossed in discussion with them.

RAVI VERMA

An artist must be able to control the flow of watercolors precisely. You can't make corrections in watercolors like you can in oils. Watercolors are alright, but there's no peace in them. Real peace is found only in charcoal. It's more realistic. Watercolors run too much. Oils are slow, difficult and laborious to execute.

OFFICIAL (clapping)

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please?

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata contain the most inexhaustible stories for pictorial representation which any country possesses.

Phalke enters the gallery and stops just inside the door. He looks around the crowded room, and begins to make his way across. As he walks, men in the gallery, old classmates and colleagues, recognize Phalke and accost him. He is diffident in the extreme, painfully conscious of his worn clothes and obvious lack of success. He quickly passes on, looking for somebody in the great hall.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

All that is needed is to promote their beauty and complete their fame in their pure and noble passage with the powers of European art. They should engage the service of the national pencil as they have fastened on the national memory, and animated the national voice.

Applause greets his words.

The official then drapes a silver medal from the Chicago Exhibition of World Art around Raja Ravi Verma's neck.

The assembly turns expectantly towards a large canvas on a stand, covered with a cloth drape.

At this moment, Phalke is trying to pick his way unobtrusively through the crowd, but his appearance draws people's attention, and they make way for him with some distaste.

The ripple in the audience draws Raja Ravi Verma's attention.

He turns and sees Phalke, who is looking up at him, smiling.

Ravi Verma smiles back in recognition.

At that moment, Diwan Madhavrao, advisor to the princely state of Baroda and later Phalke's benefactor, addresses Ravi Verma.

DIWAN MADHAVRAO

Raja sahib, you only have two hands. How many copies of your paintings can you and your students make? Why don't you send them to Germany and have oleograph prints made instead? That way, they'll reach every home. There is an insatiable demand for your pictures, as you know.

Ravi Verma smiles, and looks at Phalke.

Phalke is consumed with tension, and looking at the enormous cloth-covered canvas.

A hand unveils the painting called "The Galaxy of Women", a representation of women from across India, playing various musical instruments.

There is pin-drop silence. The crowd drinks in the image.

Phalke stares intently at it.

Softly, the sound of music begins to grow, as though coming from the painted instruments themselves, and the women musicians slowly begin to come to life.

As the picture unfreezes, Phalke's intent face starts to glow.

Ravi Verma notices what Phalke is doing, and smiles.

Applause erupts among the crowd.

SCENE 32 / IN / CAR EN ROUTE TO PRESS / LONAVALA / DAY / 1900

A young Parsi painter, Fatima, is driving 60-year old Ravi Verma to the printing press. He looks old and tired. He turns to the window and sees verdant rice fields in a sea of water.

Everywhere, men are carrying enormous tablets of stone to the press, bent over by the weight of their load.

They greet Ravi Verma as he drives by.

FATIMA

Can I ask you something? How many new paintings have you finished here?

RAVI

You can see how the responsibilities of the press eat into my time. I'm always on the road, traveling to my clients.

A hunting of three Germans is returning home on horseback with guns slung over their backs.

They make way for the car and noticing Ravi Verma, raise their caps to him.  
He waves, and they drive away.

FATIMA

Are you a painter or a printer?

RAVI

Why, my paintings, which were once confined to the palaces of kings, are now spreading  
throughout the land like a thought.

FATIMA (sarcastically)

But without a perspective...

SCENE 33 / IN / EX / RAVI VERMA PRESS / LONAVALA / DAY / 1900

The printing press is filled with activity.

Phalke and Sleischer, the German technician, are attending to a technical problem in the  
courtyard.

A group of villagers are collecting a lithograph stone of a rooster that represents the deity  
of their community, whom they call *Murgi Mata*, with fanfare, and devotional songs.  
The clashing of cymbals increase in volume as the stone is lifted with much ceremony  
onto the head of one man.

Singing and dancing, the group turns and begins to make its way out of the press.  
Phalke and the workers look on with amusement.

At this moment, Fatima drives into the compound and stops the car.

Ravi Verma gets out, looking at the group with some confusion.

As Fatima shuts her door, the German technicians on horseback return and dismount.

The workers of the press run to the men and collect the day's hunt – a deer, and wild  
fowl.

Singing and dancing, the group of villager carries the lithograph stone out of the press  
and wanders off into the distance

Ravi Verma turns to Phalke.

RAVI VERMA

Why are they taking away our lithograph stone of the Pathe company logo and where are  
they going?

PHALKE (amused)

Apparently they think it's a representation of their deity, so whenever they see a Pathe  
litho stone or any other image of their logo, they take it back to their village...

Ravi Verma and Phalke go in to the tri-color printing machine, followed by Fatima, Sleischer and the other Germans.

A press powered by steam is churning out print after print of Gangavataran, the descent of the river into Shiva's locks.

FATIMA (pointing to Ganga)  
Who's this girl?

Nobody responds. Ravi Verma turns to Phalke, who is coloring the litho stone.

RAVI VERMA  
So, Mr. Phalke, Mr. Sleischer – how's it going? The prints are looking good.

PHALKE  
You showed us how to do it, sir. You are the painter, but to etch these delicate emotions on stone, that too as a negative, you become like lord Rama, who freed Ahalya from her cursed prison of stone and brought her back to life with the touch of his toe.

RAVI (laughs)  
Nice simile.

SCENE 34 / IN / RAVI VARMA'S COTTAGE / PRINTING PRESS / LONAVALA / DAY

A party is in progress.

In the center of the room, a beautiful young *nautch* girl is entralling the audience with her semi-classical song and dance.

Ravi Verma turns to Sleischer, who is sitting by his side.

RAVI  
I've decided to sell the press.

He looks at Fatima who is watching the dancing girl. At Ravi Verma's words, she turns to him in pleased surprise.

SLASHER  
Has there been a mistake on my part?

RAVI VERMA  
No, in fact, the press is doing very well.

FATIMA  
So then, why?

RAVI VERMA

I can't cope with all the travel and hurry any more. I'm sorry to sell it, but we have to one day be able to give our daughters away.

SLEISCHER

Who says that business is like one's daughter, to be given away? It could be like a son who becomes an inheritor, instead

RAVI VERMA

It happens. You want to buy it?

SLEISCHER

How will I be able to afford it?

RAVI VERMA

I'm asking as your friend

SLEISCHER

As a foreigner, nobody will loan me the money, and all my savings total only 25,000 rupees

RAVI VERMA

I accept the offer

SLEISCHER

And what will I print?

RAVI VERMA

I give you the right to print my pictures. After all, where will I find such an appreciative client as yourself?

Smiling in amusement, Fatima turns back to the dancing girl.

Phalke, Ravi Verma and Sleichser all exchange looks of relief.

Phalke turns back to a sketch book in which he has been drawing the dancing girl, and picks up his last sketch where he left off.

The music comes to an end. The nautch girl bows gracefully to the guests.

Phalke puts the final touch to his drawing and flips the pages of the book to examine his work. The images fuse into a single movement, and the girl's dance comes to life once more.

SCENE 35 / IN / RAVI VARMA PRINTING STUDIO / LONAVALA / DAY

Ravi Verma is watching Phalke take out prints of Raja Harishchandra.

RAVI VARMA

The best part of this story is that all the king's trials were an illusion woven around him to test him.

Then he sees Seth Mavji coming, and welcomes him

RAVI VARMA

This boy will be very famous one day, this Phalke. He is helping us with his formal knowledge of industrial design. I've known him since he was studying at the JJ College in Bombay and at Kala Bhavan in Baroda. It's our loss that we had no such facilities in my time except, perhaps, my uncle, Raja Raja Varma.

But tell me, what brings you here?

SETH MAVJI

Is it true that you've sold the printing press?

RAVI VARMA

Yes, it's true

MAVJI

You could have consulted me first.

RAVI VARMA

In the heat of the moment, I promised it to someone

MAVJI

Have you signed the agreement?

RAVI VARMA

We will, soon

MAVJI

Please don't go through with this offer, I'll buy it from you

RAVI VARMA

He's already paid me. Besides, when you dissolved our partnership, you asked me to repay you at my convenience.

MAVJI

And the paintings?

RAVI VARMA  
Now they belong to him.

He turns back to his work and puts the finishing touches of crayon onto a litho stone of Shakuntala in the hermitage, her face averted, plucking a thorn from her foot.

SCENE 36 / IN/EX / PHALKE'S PRINTING PRESS/HOME / LONAVALA / DAY

A baby plays in his mother's lap, chuckling with glee.

16-year old Saraswati, Phalke's second wife, looks up from 6-month old Babarai to her husband.

Phalke is standing at a pedestal with a large lump of clay that he is shaping into his own likeness, glancing into a mirror by his side for reference.

In the back, he can see Seth Mavji, and his family.

The Seth addresses Phalke.

SETH MAVJI

Now that Ravi Varma has sold the press, do you still hope to get as much work from Sleischer?

PHALKE

I don't know, but I have no option but to stay here if I wish to gain more experience, since they're the only ones with the technology and know-how that I'm looking for.

SETH MAVJI

What if I sent you to Germany to learn? When you return, we can start a press in Bombay.

The Seth tries to gauge Phalke's mind.

SETH MAVJI

We would be partners, I would provide the finance, and you will provide the know-how. I know you're a talented man.

Phalke looks contemplatively at his wife and child in the mirror, wondering if they can spare him for so long.

SCENE 37 / LAKSHMI PRINTING PRESS / DADAR / BOMBAY / 1908

Phalke is composing type.

A montage begins of the history of the Indian printing press, from Bengal partition to trial of Tilak in 1908.

Cartoons, print, and headlines some times turn like internet pages, accompanied by gramophone recordings...speeches, music...a collage of animated nation building images

Cut to a close up of a gold medal. Phalke is being felicitated on a stage.

A prominent personage explains the genesis of the award.



### PROMINENT PERSONAGE

For a remarkable flair in blending literary and illustrative journalism, we have to turn to brilliant young Phalke. His career coincides with the Bengal and Maharashtra renaissance, and the rise of the Congress. Today, the sanest Indians are for the nationhood of India, undivided by caste, religion and racial differences. Phalke seeks through the medium of the press to rouse India to a sense of its fallen condition.

The audience begins to clap.  
Phalke begins to speak.

### PHALKE

The two new words that have recently entered our political lexicon, liberals and extremists, will change in meaning with time. Today's extremist will become the liberal of tomorrow. Those who are followed and spied upon by the government's intelligence agents take comfort from the thought that the omniscient father who sees all is the secret agent of the people. That divine agency will force the British government to deal justly with us.

We see Phalke aging, his eyesight going dim.  
With that, printing technology is also changed.  
We see newspapers are rolling out from a rotating machine with headlines from the trial of Tilak, Kudhiram Bose being hanged, Tilak standing at his trial – all in a 3-color illustrated magazine called Swarnmala, a Marathi monthly, published by Phalke

### SCENE 38 / IN/EX / COURT ROOM / BOMBAY / NIGHT 1908

Inside and out, the court is crowded with people.  
Phalke, wearing thick glasses, makes his way through the crowd.  
We see the trial from his point of view.  
He keeps taking the notes of the proceedings in short hand.  
We intercut the scene with newspapers being printed at the press.

### TILAK

Have I to raise an army or dig trenches to repel the enemy's attack? The Government has turned the whole country into a vast prison. What it will do is only to remove me from this large prison to a small one.

### PROSECUTOR

And what would you say to these two post cards. Why would you need to read books on bomb making? Are you not encouraging the bomb cult?

### TILAK

I wanted to read those books for criticizing what was known as "the Bomb Cult", hoping that the people would be allowed a more effective voice in the management of their own affairs and to point out the futility of repressive measures in preventing the use

of bombs.

It is not sedition to find fault with the Government or to advocate the reform of administration. It is one's inherent right to fight for the liberty of one's people for a change in the Government. Bureaucracy is not Government. To criticize the bureaucracy is not bringing into contempt or hatred the Government established by law in this country. It is legally recognized that to contend for the right of self-government is not seditious.

I refute the prosecution's suggestion that I supported the cult of the bomb. On the contrary, I had frequently stressed that bomb-throwing was not the method of winning Swaraj and that it was not sanctioned by morality. By writing the two editorials in 'Kesari' I discharged a duty I owed as a journalist to the public.

My real object in writing these editorials was to expose the calumnies of the Anglo-Indian Press and to refute the rabid suggestions they made for intensifying repression and even shooting natives out of hand. My intention was certainly not to excite disaffection, for I was only replying to the vicious statements in the Anglo-Indian papers against which the Government took no action whatsoever. As a matter of fact, we are entitled to greater latitude than the Anglo-Indian papers; as the Penal Code says that what is done in self-defense is not an offence. Now, Gentlemen of the Jury, if you were the representatives of your community what would you have done under these circumstances? Evidently, you would have done what I did.

This kind of translation will make anything seditious. I can certainly ask at your hands the same privilege in this country as is enjoyed by the English Press. English people now enjoy the liberty of the Press which they demanded and got it in the eighteenth century.

This is a similar case. I appeal to you, not for myself, but in the interest of the cause which I have the honor to represent. It is the cause that is sacred.

THE ADVOCATE GENERAL, MR. BRANSON (Sarcastically)

I express sympathy for the Jury for the torture suffered by it in having to listen for five days to Tilak. I relied heavily on Justice Davar's Judgment of 1897 in the first trial of Tilak for sedition. This judgment interpreted disaffection as absence of affection; which included hatred, enmity, dislike, hostility, contempt and every form of ill-will towards the Government. Look here. Here is a man who warns the Government, 'If you don't give Swaraj or if you don't make a beginning to give it, we won't stop the bombs'. This clearly amounts to exciting disaffection towards the Government.

A queer silence prevails in the courtroom. The atmosphere is gloomy and appears to be tense because of the cloudy monsoon season. Tense anxiety is writ large on everybody's face. The conviction is in any case a foregone conclusion. But Tilak himself is calm and undisturbed

He speaks to his friend Khaparde, who is sitting next to him.

TILAK

Dadasaheb, today the complexion of the game appears to be different. Most probably, it is to be transportation for life. This might be our last meeting

On hearing these words, Phalke sees Khaparde burst into tears.

SCENE 39 / IN/EX / COURT ROOM / BOMBAY / NIGHT 1908

The face of the clock dissolves to night.

The Jury returns at 9.20 p.m.

The Judge enters and seats himself. He is handed a note from the foreman of the jury. He opens it, scans what it says, and then reads it out aloud.

JUDGE

The defendant, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, has been found guilty of all three charges of sedition under Section 124-A in respect of the article of 12th May 1908, Section 124-A of sedition in respect of the editorial of 9th June 1908, and Section 153-A of raising ill-feelings amongst classes in respect of the editorial of 9th June 1908.)

I accept the verdict of the majority of the Jury and hence now I have no option but to pass sentence on the Accused.

These words of the Judge strike the courtroom like a thunderbolt.

He addresses Tilak.

JUDGE

Do you wish to say anything more before I pass the sentence?

Tilak, in a solemn and loud voice, roars like a lion.

TILAK

In spite of the verdict of the Jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are Higher Powers that rule the destiny of things, and it may be the will of the Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free.

JUDGE

It is my painful duty now to pass the sentence upon you. You are a man of undoubted talents and great power and influence. Ten years ago you were convicted, and the court dealt most leniently with you then. Your hatred of the ruling class has not disappeared during these ten years. You wrote about bombs as if they were legitimate instruments in political agitations. It can only be a diseased and perverted mind that can think that bombs are legitimate instruments in political agitations. Such journalism is a curse to the country. You are liable to be transported for life under the first two charges. Having regard to your age and other circumstances, I think it is most desirable, in the interest of peace and order, and in the interest of the country which you profess to love, that you should be out of it for some time. I pass a sentence of three years transportation under each of the first two charges, both the sentences to run consecutively. On the third charge I fine you Rs.1, 000."

Thousands of people have gathered that night in pouring rain outside the High Court to know the result. On hearing the verdict, they disperse with great sorrow, shouting aloud.

CROWDS  
Long live Tilak!

Phalke watches Tilak being led out of the courtroom.

Under a heavy police escort Tilak is taken out of the High Court building by a side entrance and put in a police van which disappears quickly into the dark.

As Phalke turns away, two police man catch him by his arms and whisk him away.

SCENE 40 / IN / A DARK ROOM INSIDE THE POLICE STATION

Under a hanging light, on the table, there is a match box with the image of the Hindu goddess, Ashtabuja. She is depicted riding a lion and furiously attacking two butchers who have apparently just decapitated a cow.

Phalke is being interrogated by two interrogators, one English and one Indian, maybe for the purposes of translation

ENGLISH INTERROGATOR

According to Indian law, this picture contains visible representation likely to incite people to acts of violence and to bring into hatred and contempt certain classes of his majesty's subjects in British India...

PHALKE

The image was no more than a mimetic visualization of an episode in the Mahabharata. Ashtabuja Devi, otherwise known as Mahishasuramardini, rode on a lion to battle with the demon Mahishasur, whom Vishnu had requested she slay.

In this scene, Mahishasur with the assistance of his general Bidalaksha pushes forward to fight a duel with great goddess. The lion gives a blow to Bidalaksha with his paw and lays him flat on the ground. The goddess pierces Mahishasur with her trident. As soon as the demon is shot in his chest with the trident he assumes the form of a demon buffalo.

The goddess mounts onto his back and separates his head from his body.

The picture shows the lion springing on Bidalaksha and the goddess is shown simultaneously severing Mahishasur's head, piercing the demon buffalo with her trident and treading on the decapitated buffalo.

ENGLISH INTERROGATOR

Do you want us to believe that an innocent cow is a demon buffalo in whose death the Hindu consumers of the image glorified?

PHALKE

It is erroneous to interpret the two demons shown as apparently decapitating a cow

INDIAN INTERROGATOR

But a closer look complicates the matter greatly, for the buffalo is definitely cow-like in color and physiology. Similarly there is a subtle displacement of agency marked by the presence of blood on Bidalaksha's sword and its absence on the goddess's. The implication is clearly that it is the fore grounded figure with the sword who has just slain the buffalo/cow and upon whom the lion wreaks vengeance.

## ENGLISH INTERROGATOR

In the absence of clear textual knowledge among the popular consumers of this image a reading that constructs it as the goddess's retribution among two Muslims or untouchable butchers who have just slaughtered a cow is highly plausible.  
The blood stains on the sword of one of the two men will be removed and the animal will be colored black. Do you agree?

Phalke's vision is going hazy. He cannot hear or understand the interrogator.  
He is trying to focus on the match box.  
The image begins to swell, growing in size, rising and approaching his eyes.  
Suddenly, the miniature heads on the goddess' garland begin to move like parts on an assembly line, or like beads being told. They are the heads of representatives of the East India Company and the British Empire over the last two hundred years.  
The lion roars like an explosive, and leaps out from the matchbox.  
Phalke sits still, head bowed over, a passive observer sitting in a 3-D virtual reality.  
Something moves in the corner of his eye.  
He lifts his head and sees the majestic lion emerge from the darkness and approach the British interrogator.  
The lion leaps on the man and devours him.

## SCENE 41 / IN / LAKSHMI PRINTING PRESS / BOMBAY / NIGHT / 1910

Devanagiri letter types are being fed into an enormous fire, where they melt into a huge lump of lead.  
Phalke watches the process and questions the technician in charge.

PHALKE

What are you doing?

TECHNICIAN

I don't know, the Seth told us to do it.

PHALKE

I'd like to check the lay-outs before you print them.

TECHNICIAN

The Seth has asked us to stop the work on "Swarnmala". Some other urgent job's come in from "The Times of India".

PHALKE (shocked and surprised)

What! Is Sethji in his office?

Phalke turns and makes his way through a maze of typesetters, printers, and binders.

He notices various strange activities - from an image of Kamadhenu, a butcher *asura* with upraised sword is being cut out, as per the Censor's instructions.

At another machine, three-color blocks of some advertisements are being made.

Nothing is familiar. The workers gather around him.

After standing with them for a moment he rushes to confront Seth Mavji, who is seated at a table in his office.

The walls are covered with samples of his print work, and testimonials to his excellence.

PHALKE

I hear you've stopped work on 'Swarmala'?

SETH

Do you realize that your press is running at a huge loss?

PHALKE

This press is not purely a business venture, which is why I don't worry about profits and losses.

SETH

Perhaps you don't consider profit and loss, but the money that I invested in you was meant to make a profit

PHALKE

I didn't realize...if that is the truth, then please release me from my contract.

SETH

It's not so easy. Go back; we've got a lot of work from 'The Times of India' to complete.

He gestures towards the poster of Kamadhenu, the divine cow, trembling before the asura with upraised sword.

SETH

Also, the government wants us to delete this portion of this image. They think it's propaganda for the anti-cow slaughter movement, and they think the asura is a representative of the Muslims.

The Seth turns to an English government official, who is checking back copies of the 'Swarmala' magazine.

SETH

Am I right?

He points towards a young Parsi man.

SETH

The new machines have arrived. He is here to help you. Do you know how to type?  
You'd better learn fast, technology's overtaking you.

All this while the newly appointed Parsi technician listens quietly, amused, looking at the older man with the confidence of a new age.

PHALKE

I want to be released from my contract.

SETH

I sent you to Germany to learn the craft of printing at my expense on the understanding that you would only use this knowledge for the Lakshmi Printing Press, and you are not allowed to use this know-how anywhere else.

You are free to go, but perhaps you are forgetting the third clause of our contract. 'I will be in the printing business only with Lakshmi Printing Press. Outside, I am free to work in any other business, but not in any business associated with printing and publishing technologies.'

Don't even think about resigning. I've stopped work on 'Swarnmala'. Make some money first.

And you think you're Raja Harishchandra? Consider yourself sold like him, bound by your word

Phalke reads the contract for himself.

As he goes through the fine print, his head begins to spin and his sight starts to dim. Darkness descends.

## PART 2

### SCENE 42 / SCENE IN OPERA HOUSE / NIGHT

Blind, sitting with his family and relatives Phalke is watching a play.

Saraswati sits by his side.

The sad tones of the queen reach his ears.

RANI:

Last night I dreamed bad dreams.

I am filled with foreboding...

HARISCHANDRA:

I, too, have had bad dreams.

By his efforts, an enraged Brahmin has acquired the power to control all the divine goddesses of knowledge.

And when I took pity on the women and went to rescue them, the Brahmin turned his rage on me. And when I tried to pacify him, he demanded my whole kingdom in return.

Where will I find him now? How will I eat my daily meal without thinking of his plate?

I gave away my kingdom, even if only in a dream.

Send out the town crier. Announce that from this day the kingdom belongs to a Brahmin of unknown origins.

GUARD:

Your Majesty, an enraged Brahmin is at the door.

VISHWAMITRA:

So, do you recognize me or not?

HARISCHANDRA:

Lord, I feel that we have met somewhere.

VISHWAMITRA:

True! You of the warrior caste! Why would you remember me? Cheat! Do you remember whom you gave the world away to last night? Where is my kingdom?

HARISCHANDRA:

What's the problem? Even before you arrived, I had already transferred to you all that I possess.

VISHWAMITRA:

And my fee for accepting this grand charity of yours?



HARISCHANDRA:  
Whatever you want.  
Chief Minister, bring me a hundred gold coins at once.

VISHWAMITRA:  
Is the treasury still yours that you order the minister around?

HARISCHANDRA:  
Forgive me. What if I no longer have any gold? Do I not still have my body?

SCENE 43 / IN / ISMAILIYA BUILDING / MARINE DRIVE / BOMBAY / NIGHT

Phalke's eyes are bandaged.  
His fingers mould some soft wax into different forms. Some of his work lies scattered on the table in front of him – a bird, a mouse, a lion, and a human stick figure.

A record of HMV revolves on the gramophone, the logo of the listening dog rotating slowly.

Saraswatibai is standing by the window and looking out.  
The ocean waves look like boats of light. They dance into the shore and break up.  
The light of a distant lighthouse sweeps across the sea.  
Saraswatibai is weeping silently by the window, her tears dropping into a tiny sweater that she is knitting for her unborn child.  
Smoke escapes from a factory's chimney and evaporates towards the moon.

Tired, Phalke sets down the wax and lies down.  
The moon shines in. Nobody speaks.  
The song on the gramophone scratches sadly on.  
Restlessly, Phalke tosses this way and that.  
Then, abruptly, Phalke gets up and changes the record to a lively popular tune, called 'The Laughing Song'.

SARASWATIBAI

If you don't want to come to an understanding with Mavji Seth, why don't you start another printing press? Why are you so adamant about giving up the business altogether?

PHALKE

Have you lost your mind?  
Do you expect a blind man to succeed in the business of printing? At the moment, I can only see when I am molding the wax. The moment I put it down, my world goes dark.

SARASWATIBAI

Dr. Prabhakar is removing your bandages tomorrow, and you will be alright. After all, we must plan for the future of our child.

PHALKE

How many times must I tell you? I cannot compete with that which is like my own child  
– printing and the business of the Lakshmi Printing Press. I won't go back.

SARASWATIBAI

So what will you do next?

PHALKE

Blind or not, it's my duty to provide for you.

Phalke turns his bandaged white eyes towards the white wall.

SARASWATIBAI

Tomorrow morning, Dr. Prabhakar will come and return your light to you

SCENE 44 / EX / BRAHMGIRI / TRIMBKESHVER / DAY / DREAM / 1892

Standing by a camera mounted on a tripod, 22-year old Phalke gazes on the panoramic view of blue mountains topped by trees of differently colored barks and shapes.

Then he buries his head inside the black cloth of the camera.

Suddenly, white mist crosses his frame and it turns white everywhere.

His head emerges from the dark cloth and he looks around.

The whole landscape has turned white, and he can no longer see himself.

Waiting for the mist to pass, he lies down on the grass with a towel bunched beneath his head for a pillow.

Suddenly he feels something slither through the mist and crawl over him.

It stands on his chest above his face with fanned hood.

Then, rubbing its head against his chest, the snake begins to slough off the skin covering its eyes.

Understanding its plight, Phalke picks up the towel on which his head was resting, and wipes the snake's eyes clean.

Having regained its sight, the snake goes quietly away.

The mist clears, and he can see the landscape.

Multiple sunbeams are descending from the sky to the earth, scattered by the clouds

The sky is blue, but because the mist is still clinging to the mountains, they look white, like the Himalayan range.

This is the source of the Godavari. Phalke is exhilarated by this vision.

He bends beneath the camera once more, and is astonished, for Kamala, smiling, is approaching through the lens towards him.

SCENE 45 / IN / ISMAILIYA BUILDING / BOMBAY / DAYBREAK

Phalke turns in bed, and finds Kamala, instead of Saraswati, by his side.  
Surprised, he springs to his feet.  
With bandaged eyes, he stumbles against the chair and table.  
Saraswati wakes up, new life stirring in her swollen womb, and makes him sit.  
She fetches a glass of water.

SARASWATIBAI.

If you have a daughter, what will you name her?

Dawn is breaking. Outside, a lamplighter douses the lamps.

SCENE 46 / IN / ISMAILIYA BUILDING / BOMBAY

Prabhakar removes the bandages.  
Some people offer to open Saraswati press.  
Every one is surprised at his attitude.  
What stops him from coming back to printing industry?