

PART TWO

1917

Navyug, Bombay, December 1917.

Phalke:

"While concluding my last article. I had expressed my intention to give the readers some more interesting information about cinema, but Providence wills that here, too, it should be (dis) graced by the story of my misfortunes. I concluded with a benedictory verse (Bharatvakya), expressing hopes and prosperity, but the stars in my fortune house, though powerful, are aspected completely by one or two malefic planets, and the results are nullified. My debilitating planets were almost set for the last three or four years, but now that my beneficent planets have become powerful, they too have taken inspiration, and become powerful. It will not surprise me at all if my health house is affected. A lamp will shine brightly only when it is on the point of being extinguished, or when it receives ample oil. I do not know if 'Lanka Dalian' is a case of the first kind, or of the other.

"Lanka Dalian' may be my last work, and Phalke's name may no more be heard. Or perhaps, I will be responsible for nobler service to my country, and Phalke's name will be famous the world over. But, judging from the tilth, corruption, and disorder that prevail in India, which is claiming Home Rule, the first seems to be a better possibility. Well, that is God's will! However, I have managed to survive, and continue to stay in Maharashtra. I have not renounced the world, and gone to the Himalayas. Moreover, I continue to be active in the field of cinema. Hence, I have to keep the pledge I gave to the readers. After reading my last article, many people wrote sympathetic letters to me.

Many ladies also sent kind messages for their sister, my wife. The affectionate sympathies provoked by my last article may also prove useful for the guidance of Indian artists. So, I proceed with the task I have undertaken. I will write about the importance of cinema in foreign countries, and its service to industry and education, in due course. Here, I will first refuse some irresponsible charges against cinema which are published in newspapers. For example, they say that cinema breeds immorality. Such allegations made by enemies of cinema are the outcome of ignorance, or viciousness.

Suppose a man come across a beautiful girl, and charms her. He deprives her of her virginity, and when she is harassed by gossip, and asks for assistance, refuses all responsibility and is not even gentleman enough to give her the fare to go to Pandharpur. Can such a rascal quote 'Shakuntala' in justification of his behaviour? Are we supposed to learn from the 'Saubhadra' how to stay incognito in relatives' houses, and steal their womenfolk? A person has a chaste wife from a noble family, and a son, but is attracted towards a modest and loving prostitute. Can this person be considered an admirer of Mruchakatika ? It is not proper to argue thus. On the contrary, it displays a lack of discretion. Those who are susceptible to depravity do not need cinema or theatre to mislead them. There are numerous other factors which lead to immorality. This is true for all countries, and for all times. It is my firm conviction that the main purpose of cinema and theatre is entertainment, one also acquires knowledge, that is a bonus, like sugar in the milk. Anyway, we must first see the prerequisites for making a film.

To write a screenplay for cinema, first of all, one needs a play which is visual. Writing a play for cinema in terms of action is an independent discipline. In foreign countries, there are special institutions which impart this training. There are big volumes on the art of writing silent plays. A good silent playwright receives a prize of about \$1,000 from the film manufacturing firm. This alone will indicate how difficult it is to write a good silent play. Not even 1/10 of the original play, for which such a high price has been paid, finally comes on the screen. The company owner has to change 9/10 of the play for his convenience. He has to take into account the limitations of photography, the skill of the actors, the tastes of the audience and numerous other technical difficulties and make additions and omissions in the silent play accordingly.

If people should write cinema stories only after working for several years in a film manufacturing company and taking training in all the arts, then their efforts will be particularly fruitful and then alone will it be possible to bring 3/4 of the original story on the screen, as desired by the author.

Cinema is a totally new phenomenon in India. There are many suggestions which come to me from time to time which do not evoke my curiosity at all. For instance, we are planning to use the story of Devyani for my next film. Some well-wishers suggest that it would be better if I were to take up "Vidyaharan" by Khadilkar. Someone else suggests the choice of "Vidyasadhana" by Dixit. A third person thinks that it would be worthwhile to bring Warekar's "Sanjivani" on the screen. The fourth is immensely pleased with the Gujarati version of "Kacha Devyani". It does not know that all these suggestions are made in good faith, and are due to high esteem for the original dramatic works. But the suggestion to film a play only because the play was applauded on the stage is as ridiculous as the suggestion that the suggestion that Lokmanya Tilak and Annie Besant on screen would make a good film. The other day I received an even stranger suggestion.

The plays of Gandharva Company are being performed in Bombay these days. One of my well-wishers says, "Come what may, but do replace your actor playing the female role with Balgandharva and then it will be as effective as Devyani in "Vidyaharan". No one would question the good faith underlying these suggestions. But surely, it is a pardonable ignorance to prescribe a migrans pill for a stomach upset, even if the suggestion is made in good faith. The spectator of the stage play is moved only by the beauty of the language of the play. A spectator would not understand anything if he did not know the language. I, myself, have been to see Italian, French and German plays without getting anything out of them. If we were to place a camera in front of them the results would be equally incomprehensible and meaningless.

To write plays of the screen is a completely different discipline. We must bear in mind that the stage play is meant for our two ears, while the screen play is for our two eyes. The spectator of the stage play must be able to comprehend the language of the play. The spectator of the screen play may not know the language but must necessarily have eyes to see.

Photography and Direction

It is well known that every illusion which is seen on the screen takes place before the camera or is recreated for it. The screen play is actually enacted by the actors in front of the camera. Mountains, rivers, oceans, houses, human beings, animals, birds, everything on the screen is real. The miracle of the visual appearance of objects is sometimes caused by the play of light and shadow. This is the magic of the film maker. A film must have good photography. Even with an interesting story and highly skilled actors, all the efforts of the film maker will come to naught if the photography is unscientific and of low standards. The moon and stars will not shine brightly if the sky is cloudy and foggy.

A film photographer must be skilled in photography and he should also be conversant with many other arts and sciences. He must have full knowledge and experience of climatic factors, shadows, lights, failing which unexpected mistakes can result on the screen. And it is likely that humorous situations will arise not from actors' actions but from the photographer's mistakes. How would the audience react if the inauspicious maroon colour of a widow's sari was seen on the screen as a chandrakala - a gorgeous black sari with silver print? A photographer has always to bear in mind that red photographs as black on the screen and he should choose the colours of costumes accordingly.

If a Subhadra or a Shakuntala comes before the camera chewing a betel leaf, how would it look if her lips appeared black like those of a chain smoker? The rouge applied by actors will look black creating the impression of hollow cheeks. The red and gold embroidered shawl will appear like a rough black rug because red as well as gold photograph as black for the screen. The scarlet blanket of a mendicant will appear blackish and a gold embroidered violet will be white. The same is the case with light and shade. All the action before the camera is performed in bright sunlight. If a scene is taken at noon, the beautiful lady will appear to have a moustache due to the shadow under her nose. Even fair logs will appear dark like those of a Bhilla woman due to the shadow of her sari. A snub nose will appear all the more snobbish if the light comes from the front. An oval face looks more oval if the light comes from the sides. Even healthy and graceful hands look thin if there is too much contrast of light and shade.

Many factors in India are not suitable to film making. This is the misfortune of Indian artists. It is very natural to perspire in the sun. If it is wiped off, there is the possibility that the make-up may be spoiled. If it is not wiped, the perspiring face looks shiny and comes spotted on the screen. Even the Europeans have to make up their faces in order to be photographed at 16 pictures a second or 1,000 photographs a minute taken for the film. We, who are known for our dark complexions have to do our make-up even more carefully. This will be clear only if you visit a film making studio.

Readers must have understood by now how careful a film photographer has to be. In my next article I promise to tell you about the problems of film photography, choice of actors and how these problems can be solved successfully. With this, I take your leave."