

## EXPERIMENTS WITH MOVIES IN INDIA

The shows held at the Watson Hotel by Lumiere Brothers' representative were seen by Harischandra Sakharam Bhatavdekar alias Savedada of Mumbai. He was so impressed that he started thinking of producing a movie himself and obtained an agency of Lumiere Brothers' machinery. Having had to explain its operation to his customers, he became somewhat knowledgeable about its use. He had a shop of photographic goods at Kennedy Bridge.

After making up his mind to produce a movie, Savedada ordered a cine-camera from London. On receiving it, he acquired the necessary technical know-how and filmed a wrestling bout of Pundalikdada and Krishna Nhavi at the Hanging Gardens of Mumbai. After getting it processed abroad, he screened the short film in 1899 at the Pari theatre, charging Rs 3.00 for a ticket. Even so, there were huge crowds to watch it. Thus Savedada became the pioneer of Indian movies. He thereafter produced short films about monkeys, street acrobats etc.

When in 1901, Wrangler R. P. Paranjpe returned from abroad after obtaining his degree, it was Savedada who made a documentary of his arrival and felicitation ceremony. This was the first documentary film produced in India. Coming to know of Savedada's success, Hiralal Sen and Jyotish Sarkar of Calcutta (now Kolkata) started making movies. An account of Hiralal Sen's attempts was published in the 1939 issue of *Deepali* of Calcutta. Sen had bought a projector back

in 1896. In 1900, a photographer of the Pathe Company had been to India from whom Sen took lessons in photography. In a short while he made a cine-camera himself and filmed a dancing sequence of Narendranath Bannerjee and Kusumkumari from the renowned play *Alibaba* in 1903. The same year, Savedada filmed the *Darbar* of (the court held by) Emperor Edward at Delhi.

In 1905, Jyotish Sarkar filmed the mammoth demonstrations held in Calcutta under the leadership of Surendranath Bannerjee to protest the partition of Bengal. This documentary was shown at the Coronation Theatre. However, as the anti-British sentiments rose, the British government banned the show. Later, Jyotish Sarkar tried to produce a film named *Bilwamangal* with financial help from J. F. Maadan who had made a big name as a film exhibitor, distributor and producer. However, Maadan stopped financial help and the film remained incomplete. Later, Devi Ghosh, who had produced short films for Aurora Film Company, offered some financial help, but it was not enough to complete the film and whatever shooting was done remained in the tins.

J.F. Maadan too made documentaries. He filmed, whatever he could of the 1905 movement against the partition of Bengal. He also filmed Lokmanya Tilak's visit to Calcutta in 1906 and the huge procession in which he was taken around. His other documentaries included the great flood of Hyderabad in 1908, George and Mary's visit to Mumbai, the devastating fire in a cotton godown, the Delhi *Darbar* and so on. Savedada had also produced short films such as the entry of a train in the Bori Bunder station, horse races etc. Thanawala, an amateur photographer, had filmed *Taboot* processions. Other amateurs too had made short movies.

The first Indian movie with a running story was screened in 1912. There was an amateurs' drama company called Shreepad Sangeet Natak Mandali in Girgaon. They

came to know Ramchandra Gopal alias Dadasaheb Torne of Malwan, who worked as a salesman in the electrical department of Greaves Cotton Company in Mumbai. An idea was mooted that the performance of a play be filmed. This was in 1906-07, but as the *Shreepad NatakMandali* lacked the capital and the essential technical knowledge for producing a movie, three years went by.

Nanabhai Chitre, General Manager of the evening paper *Advocate of India*, was a friend of Dadasaheb Torne, who spoke to Chitre about this idea. Chitre came to know that M/s Borne & Shepherd Co. had a cine-camera, and went there personally. As the company agreed to provide a Williamson camera, raw film and their photographer on a payment of Rs 1,000, much of the problem was solved. Filming began in 1909 in Mangaldas Wadi in Mumbai where the Naaz Theatre now stands. The play *Pundalik* was selected for the purpose of filming. The director was, naturally, Dadasaheb Torne himself. The actors and actresses would take entry and exit as in a stage play and do acting in front of the camera, which was fixed in one place.

The filming was over in due course and then *Pundalik* was sent abroad for processing. This first Indian silent movie with a story had to wait till 1912 for being screened. In the meantime, Nanasaheb Chitre's Coronation Theatre came up on Sandhurst Road where the Parekh Hospital now stands. *Pundalik* was screened there on 18th May 1912. In those days, there was a change of movie in the middle of a week, but *Pundalik* went on for two weeks. The response of the audience was very good. However, as there were no film distributors in those days, *Pundalik* was screened only in Mumbai. It did not, therefore, get adequate publicity. Besides, except for the novelty of it, there was nothing else worth mentioning. There was no film technique. It was simply the filming of a stage play. The technicians were foreign and the processing and printing were got done in

London. As a result, instead of Dadasaheb (Torne) getting the honour of being named the Father of Indian Film Industry it went to the other Dadasaheb, i.e. Dhundiraj Govind alias Dadasaheb Phalke of Triambakeshwar. *Pundalik* was soon forgotten.

Savedada had decided to produce a film on the life of Shrikrishna and was also making preparations for the purpose. However, the death of his colleague and brother depressed him. He gave up the idea of film production, and sold the camera for Rs 750 to his technician friends A. P. Karandikar and V.P. Divekar. Of this duo, Bapurao Karandikar had studied art for three years, like Dadasaheb Phalke, at the Kala Bhavan of Baroda. He had also worked for some time in Shri Phalke's Laxmi Art Printing Works in Mumbai. A technician S.N. Patankar too joined the duo as a partner and the three of them decided to produce a film. This too happened in 1912. They selected the mythological story of 'Savitri' for their film, which, however, had many technical errors. Something went awry with film processing as well. Consequently, this film too went the way of *Bilwamangal*. It was never screened.

Notwithstanding the financial loss, the trio did not give up but continued their efforts. A rich man offered them a capital of Rs 15,000. Selecting the episode of Vyas and Jaimini from the *Bhagawat*, they produced a short film called *Passion versus Learning*. Divekar acted the part of Vyas whereas Keshavrao Gokhale, renowned stage artist, acted the part of Jaimini. In the days when it was impossible to get a lady artiste for acting on the stage, they had the services of Narmada Mande, a beautiful young lady of Ahmedabad.

This short movie was properly made. Its screening brought them more capital. It was then that Patankar and Company really came into being. In 1915, the trio produced a silent movie called *The Death of Narayanrao Pesliawe*, of 6,000 ft. length with financial assistance from Chaturbhai

and Dharamdas. By the grace of the Prince of Bhor (Shreemant Shankar Chimnaji Pantasachiv) not only was his palace made available for filming the silent movie, but also his peons for the army in the movie. The Pantasachiv was thus the first Indian Prince to lend a hand to the Indian film industry.

The issue of *Dnyanprakash* dated 12th November 1915 contained an article praising this movie. A humorous short movie named *Kalpavriksha* was shown along with it. Besides various games of Maharashtrian girls such as *Phugdi*, *Zimma*, *Saagargote*, *Pinga*, were also shown, which were very much liked by the female audience. The show, packed to the full with so many items, was first held at the Aryan Cinema in Pune.

Both these silent movies earned a lot of money which helped pay off all the debt. Subsequently they found a new creditor and floated a company called 'Patankar Friends & Company'. This company's first silent movie was *Bhakt Prahlad*, a mythological one produced in 1918. Then Patankar quit the company and one Dwarkadas Narayandas Sampat joined Karandikar and Divekar and formed Kohinoor Company. It produced two mythological silent movies: *SatiParvati* and *Krishna-Sudama*.

The most invaluable work of Karandikar and Divekar was their filming of the funeral procession of Lokmanya Tilak! The whole of Mumbai was under a thick pal of gloom due to Lokmanya's death. A vast multitude of people had gathered in front of Sardar Gruha. All activity had come to a standstill. No conveyance was available. Karandikar and Divekar went on foot from Sardar Gruha to Chowpaty, carrying the camera and other material themselves and doing the filming all the way. Punjab-Kesari Lala Lajpatrai and Sarojini Naidu paid their last respects just before the pyre was lit. It was also filmed.

Lokmanya's ashes were taken to Pune and carried in a

procession from the railway station to Gaikwad Wada. The duo filmed not only the procession but also the printing press of *Kesari*, the trophies presented to honour Lokmanya from time to time and even the easy chair and the folding table he used. This documentary was screened in the Majestic Cinema of Mumbai and the Aryan Cinema of Pune the same day, that is, 7th August 1920. The audience watched it most keenly and devoutly. Unfortunately, no copy of it is available today. All these movies (with the exception of *Pundalik*) were, of course, screened after Dadasaheb started his productions

Dhundiraj Govind *alias* Dadasaheb Phalke was born on 30th April 1870 (Saka 1892, Falgun vadya 14, according to the Hindu calendar) at 8:30 p.m. at Triambakeshwar, a holy place 29 km from Nashik. His father's name was Govind Sadashiv *alias* Dajishastri and mother's was Dwarkabai. *Vedashastrasampanna* (well-versed in the Vedas) Dajishastri worked as a priest conducting religious ceremonies in Triambakeshwar. As Dajishastri worked also as a *Puranik* (one who conducts religious discourses) in the temple, by constant association with him Dadasaheb knew how to conduct religious rituals like a *yajna* and dispensing of medicine. He also knew by heart *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagwata*, *the Vedas* and *the Upanishads*. Thus from childhood he grew up in a holy ambience.

Including Dadasaheb, they were seven siblings. Shivramant, the eldest, was twelve years older than Dadasaheb and worked in Baroda. For some time he was the *Dewan* (Chief Administrator) of the princely state of Jawhar. He was well-versed in homeopathy. He gave his patients free medicines of the Roy Company of Mumbai. He died in 1921 at the age of 63.

Dadasaheb's second brother Raghunathrao worked as a priest, but died very prematurely at a young age of 21. Of his four sisters, there is record of only one having been

married into a Patwardhan family of Baroda.

As Dajishastrī was a great Sanskrit scholar, he got an appointment as a professor of Sanskrit in the Wilson College of Mumbai. This brought the family to Mumbai. Although Dadasaheb's primary education was over in Triambakeshwar, his education up to matriculation was completed in Mumbai.

Dajishastrī wanted Dadasaheb to be a Sanskrit scholar and become a professor like him. From his childhood, however, Dadasaheb had a liking for drawing and he had an innate gift too of that art. He made 'rangoli' during Diwali and at weddings and thread-ceremonies, and made artistic decorations for Ganesh-Gauri festivals with great enthusiasm. Later, he started sculpting very alluring Ganesh idols too. Considering his love of art and prowess therein, Dajishastrī granted Dadasaheb's wish to join the J. J. School of Art at Mumbai in 1885. He did a part, for the first time, in the play staged at the social gathering of the J. J. School. In some other plays too he did excellent roles as an amateur artist. He completed a one-year course in drawing at the J. J. School of Art. No other details of his boyhood are available.