

He was, however, inclined to limit sub-titles to the minimum, being of the view that the audience should be able to construct the implied conversation in an episode from the acting, facial expressions and movements of the actors.

Although Mumbai was very convenient for business, Dadasaheb did not find it convenient for film production in those days. From the point of view of making the public interested in cinema so as to make the Indian cine-industry stable in the country, he thought it advisable to produce mythological pictures about gods and the like. As mythological stories were well known all over India and the public at large had faith in them, Dadasaheb's thinking was right from the standpoint of business. As Nashik was convenient for reaching temples, rivers, *ghats*, stone carvings, forests, mansions etc. required for such films, Dadasaheb moved the Phalke Film Company to Nashik on 3rd October 1913.

Dadasaheb rented the '*howd*' bungalow, opposite Phule Market, of a Gujarati landlord, Balkrishna Dadaji Vaidya, on a rental of Rs 75 per month. The three-storeyed bungalow had two out-houses and a spacious open ground on all sides. On the right, there was a grove known as 'Warchi Baug' on a small elevation, which was full of various kinds of trees such as mango, guava, jackfruit, custard apple, *kavath*, *bakuli*, *umbar* etc. There was also a huge tree of *bakan limbu*. Under this *bakan* tree, Dadasaheb erected a temporary studio in natural surroundings. There were no reflectors then as we have now. So Dadasaheb used a sheet of white cloth to get the desired degree of brightness. Over a long period, it was Saraswatibai who stood holding a sheet in her hands as would be instructed by Dadasaheb.

For his next movie, Dadasaheb selected the story of 'Nal-Damayanti'. All preliminaries were complete but due to some problems it had to be put on the back burner. Then he took up the story of 'Mohini-Bhasmasur'. About the same time, Chittakarshak Natak Company had come to Nashik

for their performances of Totayache Banda' and Shakespeare's plays. A mother-daughter duo, Durgabai and Kamlabai Kamat, worked in this company. Dadasaheb had seen the company's performances. As luck would have it, Kamlabai took ill with typhoid. So she remained behind while the company departed for the next leg of the tour.

After recovering from her illness, Kamlabai agreed to act in *Mohini-Bhasmasur* for fun. Dadasaheb seized the opportunity. She was good-looking and Dadasaheb gave her the role of Mohini. Durgabai also acted the role of Parvati. Thus these ladies were the first two lady artistes of the Indian screen. Raghunathrao, brother of Rambhau Gokhale, proprietor of 'Chittakarshak', was also a well-known stage artiste. As Kamlabai married him, she became Kamlabai Gokhale. A documentary on her life has been produced recently. She was the mother of the famous cinema, drama and television artiste Chandrakant Gokhale and grandmother of Vikram Gokhale whose name is at the forefront of the three media. The outdoor shooting of *Mohini-Bhasmasur* at Gangapur, Nashik, and Triambakeshwar was speedily completed and it was screened at the Olympia Theatre of Mumbai on 2nd January 1914.

The humorous short film, *Paws of Flour*, which was produced simultaneously with *Raja Harishchandra*, was also shown along with *Mohini Bhasmasur*. Although some critics opined that Dadasaheb had sacrificed decency for the sake of humour in that film, a large proportion of the audience thoroughly enjoyed it. *Mohini-Bhasmasur* too was welcomed with zest.³

The length of *Mohini-Bhasmasur* was 3,264 ft. For the scene in which Bhasmasur puts his hand on his own head and is reduced to ashes due to the power bestowed on him by God Shankar, Dadasaheb thought of a trick. He first filmed a scene showing Bhasmasur writhing with unbearable pain due to the heat of fire. Then keeping the camera in

the same fixed position, he retracted the film and ignited some spoiled film in the place where Bhasmasur stood. Thus he achieved the effect of Bhasmasur burning.

Dadasaheb took up the mythological story of 'Satyawans-Savitri' after *Mohini-Bhasmasur* for his next silent movie. Its shooting also started soon. Ladies doing female roles, which had not happened on the stage, was achieved by Dadasaheb in his previous movie in 1913. As he could not get Kamlabai Kamat (Gokhale) for the movie *Satyawan-Savitri*, he got the role of Savitri performed by a prostitute.

It was a heart-rending scene in which Yamraj takes away Satyawans's life force and Savitri sorrowfully begs him to restore her husband to life. But this Savitri was not able to express the proper emotions. Dadasaheb repeatedly showed her how to do it, even acted himself, but it made little difference, as she was not an experienced artiste. Ultimately, Dadasaheb said, somewhat harshly, "Your husband has fallen dead here, Yamraj is taking away his life, but your face shows no emotion although I have tried so hard". The woman, instead of becoming serious, began to laugh. Someone said to Dadasaheb, under his breath, "Sir, this woman does not have only one husband. If one leaves, there is always another. So how can she have that emotional expression?" Dadasaheb must have understood. He got the scene done by the woman to the extent possible, without any more fuss.

There was one more episode during the filming of this movie. The role of Yamraj was given to a gymnast, but that roughneck was afraid of riding a buffalo. Dadasaheb himself mounted the buffalo to show him, but it would not stand still. After trying for a long time, the shooting was given up for the day and was somehow gone through the next day, making the Yamraj sit on a she-buffalo.

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for their performances of Totayache Banda' and Shakespeare's plays. A mother-daughter duo, Durgabai and Kamlabai Kamat, worked in this company. Dadasaheb had seen the company's performances. As luck would have it, Kamlabai took ill with typhoid. So she remained behind while the company departed for the next leg of the tour.

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When viewing the movie the audience did not notice that Yamraj was riding a she-buffalo, instead of a

he-buffalo. Even so, it did not escape the notice of an alert critic. He severely criticised Dadasaheb and said, "Dadasaheb should immediately show Yamraj riding a he-buffalo, otherwise we shall have to take action to stop screening of the film". This, of course, had no effect on the audience. On the contrary, the crowds swelled even more. There was a large number of ladies in the audience and *Satyawan-Savitri* proved exceedingly profitable like its two predecessors. Dadasaheb himself has mentioned this. Thus he achieved for all the three movies a great financial as well as worldly success and made the foundation of Indian cinema very strong. *Satyawan-Savitri*, which was screened on 6th June 1914, had a length of 3,680 ft.

SECOND UNSUCCESSFUL TRIP TO LONDON AND ENDLESS DIFFICULTIES

All the three movies of Dadasaheb, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyavan-Savitri* achieved extraordinary financial and worldly success and all the debts were paid back. Money was continuing to flow in from all the three films and in view of his success, he was able to assist some of his friends too. So much income was earned from only one print of each movie.

Consequently, Dadasaheb's fame spread to foreign countries too. There was a demand for 20 copies each of his movies. In India, some persons were ready to take a sole agency of his movies. Some 500 to 700 theatre managers in India wanted his movies for screening. Considering the tremendous response to the movies, Dadasaheb thought of buying electrical machinery by spending twenty-five to thirty thousand rupees. Till then the machinery had to be worked by hand because of which work went on at snail's pace. The speed of the film too fluctuated. He knew that he had to have a proper studio for producing movies to his satisfaction. He convinced his friends that with that much capital, Indian cinema business could be run profitably and the technicians trained by him would be useful for the purpose.

With equipment which was not only insufficient but far from up to date, Dadasaheb had so trained his assistants in the various branches of film production by labouring

continuously for two years, that he was confident they would turn out work of the standard achieved by technicians of America and England. That confidence was quite legitimate. When he screened his movies later in London, the expert technicians working in studios equipped with the latest machinery in foreign countries as well as knowledgeable persons in the field admired his work. The cine-journals there reported it. Dadasaheb gave the credit for the eulogy to his technicians.

On 1st August 1914, he left for London for buying electrically operated equipment. As war clouds of the First World War were gathering and the war was likely to break out any moment, his relatives and well-wishers advised Dadasaheb not to go to London just then. However, as was his wont, he departed for London without heeding anybody's advice, taking with him his movies, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyawan-Savitri*. The World War sparked off on the 4th of August.

The war caused great panic in India. Many people sent their families to the countryside. Comparatively, the atmosphere in England was commendable. Stability and firmness were evident. There were hoardings everywhere announcing 'Business As Usual'. News bulletins pertaining to the war were issued every half an hour. Dadasaheb was, therefore, quietly engrossed in buying his equipment. Mr Kepburn, editor of the cine-periodical *Bioscope* and Dadasaheb were friends already. He arranged to screen Dadasaheb's movies for persons connected with the cinema industry in London.⁴

Viewing Dadasaheb's movies, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini-Bhasmasur* and *Satyawan-Savitri* in London, everyone was astonished. In regard to his technical skill, *Biograph* wrote, "From the technical point of view his pictures are surprisingly excellent", whereas another cine-periodical, *Kinotograph*, wrote with emotion, "Why was this Phalke not

born in England?" Other newspapers too praised his movies no end. The most important thing was, as mentioned in a previous chapter, when Dadasaheb saw the malicious perversity of Indian culture depicted in the English movie *Daughter of Bharat*, he had told Mr Kepburn with great self-confidence that they would see the real Indian culture in his movies. That proved to be literally true.

Phalke had not received training in film techniques from anyone. When he proved by his movies that he was a self-made man, some producers asked him to produce movies in England. The foremost among them was producer Cecil Hepworth himself, who had helped Dadasaheb in every way when he had visited London the first time. A distinguished producer like Hepworth placed before him a scheme according to which Dadasaheb was to produce Indian movies in England, bringing artistes and technicians from India whose travel expenses, expenditure on lodging and boarding in England and salary would be paid by Hepworth. Phalke himself would get a salary of 300 pounds a month besides 20% of the profits. Anyone would have been tempted to accept such a profitable, easy-on-the-job scheme, which would have ended all one's worries. Had he accepted the proposal, Dadasaheb would have achieved fame and fortune and could have lived in England with his family in luxury. However, he expressed his heartfelt thanks to Mr Hepworth and, politely refusing the offer said, "I strove hard, subjected my family to suffering, fought many a danger and difficulty in order to make this an indigenous business for India. It is my aim and obsession that this business should be in Indian hands, that through this medium, along with public entertainment there should be education of the public too and that Indians and even foreigners, if possible, should come to know Indian culture. If I accept your offer, I will be deviating from my aim and ideal and so I am unable to accept it, for which I beg your pardon".

These thoughts, these words, are sufficient to prove that Dadasaheb was a fervent patriot. The fame of his movies had reached America too. As in England, the world famous Warner Brothers of America had expressed their desire through their office in England to buy some copies of his films. He accepted the offer too. However, considering the news from India and the worrisome condition of his studio, he had to return without concluding any agreement regarding the sale of copies of the films. He had only completed his purchase of the electrical equipment. He had gone to London with great daring and enthusiasm without fear of the war. If the proposal regarding sale of copies of his films had gone through, he would have got a lot of capital. But it was not to be. He had to return empty-handed. Learning of the situation in India, he was naturally anxious. All his enthusiasm had abated. From this point of view, his trip was unfortunately a total failure. He returned to India by the end of 1914.

Dadasaheb was worried about what he would have to face on returning to India, what the situation would be like. When he reached Nashik, he found the situation worse than he feared. The moneylender had not only stopped advancing money, but had also asked to lock the studio, and dismiss all the employees. Saraswatibai pleaded with him not to lock the studio or dismiss the employees until Dadasaheb returned, but he was not at all prepared to part with more money. Due to the atmosphere of uncertainty created by the war, no financier was prepared to offer capital to Dadasaheb. On the other hand, those who were likely to give financial help had invested their money in other businesses.

Dadasaheb was already in debt. In such circumstances, if the studio were to be closed, he would have had no option but to apply for insolvency. If that were to happen, the premature death of the indigenous cinema industry was inevitable and that would have been a disgrace for India in