



## The Advent of Sound in Indian Cinema : Theatre, Orientalism, Action, Magic

### **Virchand Dharamsey**

Indian cinema is considered to have started with the screening of the films of the Lumiere Brothers in 1896. 'History writing' of Indian Cinema' should ideally have started with the first impact of these screenings - Who were the sole-selling agencies established to import cine equipment and raw materials at the time? Who were the exhibitors and exhibition houses that followed thereafter? Who was the man who first handled the camera and made the first film-cut? And even less can be found if we travel further back in time in order to trace the story of Indian Film – to the various mass entertainments before cinema became the mass entertainment.

The beginnings of Indian Film History remain based on scanty material and hearsay, resulting in a distorted history. Without a doubt, new work in history writing has begun in the past two decades, but we still have much ground to cover. This study has attempted to explore and bring to light important precursors to the shaping of early Indian cinema, and I have conducted my explorations in the area of the early Talkies Era.

I hunt for film reviews and, repeatedly, go through the visual materials I find, whenever I chance upon these. I do my best to identify the film and the actors therein. In addition to these, I rely upon interviews I've had with film directors, actors, music directors, technicians, journalists and old film buffs. My approach to the subject has been as that of an archaeologist - firstly to excavate and collect sufficient material and in this way, collect primary resources. The material includes the publications of the film studios / companies, their advertisements in newspapers and journals and other such relevant materials. I have noted the movements of early directors, actors and technicians from one studio to the next and also their migrations to new cities and places. This paper also tells the story of the arrival of sound and the great interest it managed to arouse in several studios.

I started this excavation twenty years ago and now I feel I possibly have sufficient material for 'writing a history' of Indian Silent Cinema and its transition into the period of the early Talkies.

India has produced 1329 silent films. We generally find names that feature in the annals of history are those of Dada Saheb Phalke (43 films), Baburao Painter (22 films), Nataraja Mudaliar (8 films), Dhiren Ganguli (11 films), R. S. Prakash (16 films), Himanshu Rai (3 films) and Madans (85 films). We don't find the names of the early pioneers S. N. Patankar, Suchet Singh, Abu Seth and their contemporaries Dwarkadas Sampat (113 films), Maneklal Patel (73 films), Bhogilal Dave (72 films), Ardeshir Irani (70 films) followed by Chandulal Shah (50 films), Haribhai Desai (39 films) and others, and directors such as Kanjibhai Rathod, Manilal Joshi, R. S. Choudhari, B. P. Mishra, Mohan Bhavnani, Homi Master, K. P. Bhave, N. D. Sarpotdar, Harshadrai Mehta, Naval Gandhi and others.

With reference to the Talkies one finds writings on the New Theatres, Prabhat, and Bombay Talkies. Ardeshir Irani is remembered only for his first talkie Alam Ara (1931) and the colour film Kisan Kanya (1937), he had produced nearly 40 films in the Talkie Era. The recent interest in Wadia Brothers now finds mention for their contributions.



Parsi Theater

I tell here the tale of the great impact of Parsi Theatre on early Indian Cinema. During my research I found that a detailed study of Parsi Theatre was of much help, and proceeded to excavate data on this popular art-form. Some of the immediate conclusions that I arrived at I will be sharing here.

But may primary aim here is to correct the picture about the pre-dominance of the Social films in the early sound era. I focus here on the entirely neglected genres of Oriental-Costume films, Magical films and stunt films, their volume no less in comparison with the genre of Social films at the time.

The advent of sound in Indian cinema brought the theatrical idiom to early Indian talkies, with most of the studios producing a style of 'filmized plays'. Under the influence of the Parsi theatre, the production of filmized plays continued to flourish, imbibing the elements of the oriental and mythological subjects and costumes. The progression of the narrative through songs and dances was yet another element that was borrowed from the Parsi theatre.

## Arrival of the Talkies

On 6 October 1927, Warner Brothers released the first sound film Jazz Singer (Allan Crossland), with musical accompaniment on disc, but with four singing/talking sequences. On July 1928, they released their all-talking picture The Lights of New York. In December 1928, Universal's film titled Melody of Love (A. B. Heath) was released by Madan Theatres at Elphinstone Palace in Kolkata and was shown on 21 February at the Excelsior Theatre, Mumbai. On 14 December 1929, Universal's Show Boat was released at the Excelsior Theatre.



D. Billmoria in Gul Sanwar

The success of these releases inspired Madan Theatres to produce their own talkies in India and their releases also inspired others, such as Imperial's Ardeshir Irani who had attended the Mumbai screening of Show Boat.

By 1930 the race had begun to produce talkies which included Krishna Film Company and Sharda Film Company of Mumbai. Both were leading studios at the time. [Krishna Film Company was established by Maneklal Patel and Sharda Film Company established by Bhogilal K.M. Dave, who was one of the founders of the Star Film Company with Ardeshir Irani in 1922, and Nanubhai Desai in 1925. Nanubhai left Sharda in 1930.]

The shooting of the first talkie was started by Imperial and Krishna. Sharda's sound equipment failed and hence they had to bow out of the race for the time being. Madan Theatres and Krishna Film Co, while working on their talkies, also went on to produce talkie-shorts and both companies succeeded in releasing their revues on 5 February 1931 at Mumbai. In the press, Madan Theatres had advertized its presentation as 'The First Indian Talkie' and released this at the Empress Theatre. Their star attraction was Munnibai, the famous singer-actress of Parsi Theatrical Co., who sang Apne Moulaki Jogan Bani in their revue. Hence this was the first song that was seen on screen. Other artistes from Bengal who featured in this revue were Ahindra Chowdhury, Nirmalendu Lahiri, K.C. Dey, Durgadas Banerji, Rani Bala, and Dhiraj Bhattacharya.

Krishna Film Co. had released its revue at Rialto and it was advertized as the 'First Indian Talkie of Shorts' that would showcase Gujarati Garabas, Bengali, Konkani and Arabic songs, and an orchestra played by Prof. Deodar's Indian School of Music, followed by a satirical song by Munshi and Joshi. The Krishna revue had a fifteen day run and in the second week it added the feature Nakali Tansen in three parts. Thus Nakli Tansen is the first narrative short film. Krishna had also produced the first Bengali Talkie directed by Prafulla Ghosh, titled Jagran. The film however, was banned by the censors, so Krishna lost the opportunity of being known as the producer of the first Bengali Talkie.

Meanwhile, on 14 February 1931, it was reported, "Imperial had already shot 7000 feet and which will be eventfully extended to about 12 reels. It is being directed by Mr. Joseph David. Provisional title is Alam Ara (Light of World)." Joseph David was a well known Parsi Theatre playwright and director. To this, a rejoinder was published on 23 February as follows, "It was mentioned that Mr. Joseph David was producing the Imperial Film Co's First talkie. This is entirely correct from the technical point of view, but we are asked to state that the general direction of all Imperial talkies remain in the hands of Mr. Ardeshir Irani, the executive of the Company." On 28 February, the first announcement was made of the arrival of an 'All talking, singing, dancing India's first perfect talkie in Hindi – peak of Romance – Essence of drama'. On 7 March it was announced that Alam Ara was to arrive at Cinema Majestic on 14 March 1931 with the cast of Master Vithal, Zubeida, Sushila, Jiloo, Elizer and Prithviraj.

It will be of interest to know about the making of Alam Ara. The method of production had been thought out along the lines of the filmized plays. An excerpt from the memoirs of R. S. Chowdhary, the most respected name among the Imperial directors, relates an interesting incident:

"Having selected a stage-play, Ardeshir sent for a well-known stage-director, Joseph David. After giving rehearsal for several days to members of the cast, Joseph David brought them before the camera and the mike. The set he had ordered was planned with two wings of exits and entries on the sides. The coconut was broken, silence was ordered, the camera and the mike were opened on to the players who started rattling off their lines and the scene went on and on for 400 feet. Some characters went out; others entered talking. The scene went on and on and on for 800 feet, and Demming, the American sound expert shouted furiously: 'Will somebody please say—cut?!'"<sup>1</sup>

So went out the exits and entries and Ardeshir Irani took charge along with his directors Moti Gidwani, Pesi Karani, B. P. Mishra and R. S. Chowdhary.

In 1931, twenty-three films were produced by six studios<sup>2</sup> and one by an independent company (of M. Bhavnani). Among the films released, only two were socials, three were social costume-dramas in the Parsi theatre tradition, one a costume-drama with a Rajput background, four with an Oriental subject; four were based on legends with Oriental settings that included two Laila Majnus (Madan, Dir. J. J. Madan. Krishna, Dir. Kanjibhai Rathod), one historical Noorjehan (Imperial, Dir. Ezra Mir) with an Oriental atmosphere, nine mythologicals that included the devotional films Chinatamani (Bharat/Krishna, Dir. Kanjibhai Rathod) and two Shakuntalas (Madan, Dir. J. J. Madan. Saroj, Dir. M. Bhavnani) based on the Kalidas play.

There is an interesting story that records the rivalry between Krishna and Madan. Krishna Movietone (Nearly all the film companies changed to their name to 'Movietone') had planned to produce Shirin Farhad, but Madan Theatres immediately announced their plans to make their own Shirin Farhad. This prompted Krishna to drop their plans of producing the film leading them to a loss of Rs. 500 that they had paid to Munshi Nazan for the script. Krishna then began to produce Laila Majnu but again Madan followed suit. Madan also clashed with Krishna with the film Harischandra.

Soon after, Nanubhai Desai of Saroj decided to produce his Shakuntala at New Theatres, Madan asked their writer Radheshyam Kathavachak to put together the script for the same. Kathavachak would write the script during the night and the following day that written text would go on the floor.

## Impact of Parsi Theatre

With this new element of sound in Indian cinema, film producers looked to Parsi Theatre, which at that time enjoyed the popularity that equals that of today's Bollywood. Studio bosses invited known playwright-lyricists and popular singer-actors to participate in film-making. The Indian talkie also imbibed the Parsi theatre tradition of Oriental and mythological subjects and costumes, plots of high exaggeration, mistaken identities, coincidences, lost and found themes and above all, the progression of the narrative through songs and dances and the tradition of

negating time and space. And in this way, the theatrical idiom became the dominant influence at the time. Most of the playwrights of Parsi Theatre were active in the early talkie period. They were Aga Hashar Kashmiri, Betab, Abbasali, Radhe Shyam Kathavachak, Munshi Dil, Munshi Nazan, Munshi Nazar, Munshi Farog, Hakim Ahmed Suja, Gaurishankar Akhtar and Joseph David, to name a few.

Before the arrival of the Talkie, songs from Parsi theatre plays - Harischandra, Chandravali, Tilsami Muhar, Jan-e-Alam, Bhul Bhulaiya, Indra Sabha, etc. were so popular that recording companies re-recorded the same songs by various singers. Song lyrics were written in simple Hindustani language as also were comic scenes, although the main narrative of the plays would mostly be in Persianized-Urdu.

Some typical song mukhadas contain lines from these plays. For instance, "Dukhiya Sukhiya Banake Toone, Hilmil paniyan Ko Jairi Nanandiya, Naina Lagaye Chale Jaye Re" (from the play Khun-e-Nahak), "Hai Mujhe Darde Jigarne Sataya" (from the play Zulum Vahasi), and "Dile Naadaan Ko Hum Samjai Jayege" (from the play Dil Farosh ).

Films continued the theatre tradition of the music composer first setting the tune for a song after which the lyricist would write the words. Also every theatrical company had a dance-master, and this practice too continued into film. In present times, every film has dance choreographers many of whose names lead to an appreciation in the market value of a film. This is quite a change from the early days when the names of film composers were rarely published in film advertisements. The names of playback singers were mentioned only from the late fifties - the most celebrated singer Lata Mangeshkar herself is not mentioned on the disc of Bombay Talkies Mahal (Dir. Kamal Amrohi, 1949, the name Kamini appears on the records of Mahal).

Much of the phenomenal success of the Indian film has been due to the popularity of music, song and dance right from the advent of the Talkies. One of the first and biggest hits - Madan's Shirin Farhad (J. J. Madan, 1931) proved to be a greater success than Alam Ara due to the popularity of its songs. The tradition and success of music, song and dance are a part of Indian folk theatrical tradition, and when the gramophone companies first came to India, they recorded songs not only from Parsi Theatre, but also of Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi plays, and came out with discs of dialogues from popular plays. These songs proved equally popular and recording companies again came out with recordings of some songs by various singers.

In the early talkie period, the influence of Parsi stage dominated the dialogue, and the language had the artificial lilt of theatrical betbaji (poetic couplets). Jairaj in his conversation remembers that in Shikari (1932) Munshi Dil insisted on speaking the dialogues in betbaji. The film was directed by Naval Gandhi, well-known for his work on Tagore's Sacrifice (Orient Picture Corp. 1927), the most talked about silent film in the 1927-28 according to the Report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee. Although, the Indian talkie undoubtedly has its roots in Parsi Theatre, as the popularity of cinema grew that of Parsi and other regional theatres steadily

declined, and a number of theatre stars, as they were also popular actor-singers, continued with their careers in film instead.

Madan, who was controlling several Parsi theatrical companies at the time, had under his wing a number of singing stars including Kajjan, Nissar, Master Mohan, Narmada Shankar, Sharifa, Mukhtar Begum, A. R. Kabuli. Simultaneously in Mumbai, the leading film companies were attempting to acquire at least one popular stage singer-actor. Ranjit Studio acquired Master Bhagwanndas, Saroj, Master Ashraf Khan, Krishna, and Master Mohamed, who later became music director, while Imperial tried Master Patwardhan. Sardar Akhtar came from the Lahore stage and a number of other well-known singers too acted in films. These included the likes of Begum Akhtar, Zohra, Mushtari, Rafiq Gazanavi, Harischandra Bali, and Kundanlal Saigal (who went on to become the first legend of the Indian cinema). A good number of music directors also came from theatre. Ustad Zandekhan joined Ranjit; Madan had Nagardas Nayak, Motilal and Vrajlal Varma; Prabhat had Govindrao Tembe; Imperial had Pransukh Nayak; and Prakash got the services of Lalloobhai Nayak.

## From Silent to Talkies

It is worth noting that no directors from theatre joined cinema in the first phase of the talkies. At the same time, numerous filmmakers and actors travelled effortlessly from the Silent Era to the Talkies. But our aim here is not to write about the on-goings of early talkies but about the oriental / costume, magical and stunt genres. Among the filmmakers who contributed most to these genres are J. B. H. Wadia, Nanubhai Vakil, Dhirubhai Desai, and Kikubhai Desai. J.B.H. and his brother Homi (who was the cameraman in silent period), rightly remain the most known of these film-makers. But the others are little known and here I intend to introduce Nanubhai Vakil and Dhirubhai Desai, Kikubhai Desai and others.



Ermeline in Azad Abala

Nanubhai and Dhirubhai started their careers in the silent days and continued to direct films during their long careers extending well into the era of the talkies. Nanubhai was probably the first among the highly educated people to join the film industry. He was a B.A. and an LLB and the most successful director of Ranjit during the silent era. His foray into the early talkies was first made for Sagar and later he founded Mahalakshmi Movietone with Zubeida in 1933 that had to close down in 1935. Dhirubhai Desai, who was introduced by Nanubhai Desai to Sharda in 1928, later established his own Studio Vishnu. He produced and directed big budget oriental and costume films as well as stunt films, and made several films for independent producers. Later he shifted to Mythological films under the banner Chandrakala Pictures. He continued to be active until 1970 and made his last film Daku aur Bhagwan in 1975. I would also like to add that although Nandlal Jasawantlal is different kind of film maker as compared to those discussed here, however, along with Nanubhai and Dhirubhai, Nandlal too remained successfully active throughout his career and is largely remembered today for his two big hits for Filmistan, Anarkali (1953) and Nagin (1954).

Nanubhai and Dhirubhai were not alone in transiting from the Silent to the Talkie era, and in making oriental / costume, magical and stunt films successful entertainment. Kikubhai had produced several films in the silent era, and during the talkie era he held the responsibility of the director as well. Along with them others who continued into the talkie era were A. P. Kapoor, Balwant Bhat, R. N. Vaidya (also an actor), M. Udvardia, Chunilal Parekh, Bapurao Apte (also an actor), G. P. Pawar, A. H. Essa (who directed Wadia's silent Diler Daku), Shanti Dave and Dwarka Khosala.





Master Navinchandra

The directors who entered in the early talkie were Homi Wadia, A. R. Kabuli (also an actor), G. R. Sethi, J. P. Advani, A. M. Khan, K. Amarnath, Aspi Irani, Nari Ghadiali, K. Talpade, Nanabhai Bhat, Naseem Sidiqi, Ramanlal Desai and Bhagwan. Due recognition has never been given to these film-makers in the history of Indian cinema, along with several others who remained known as B and C grade filmmakers, and featured only on filmographies.

Though big studios hired a number of singing stars from theatre, a large number of actors from the silent days continued acting as well, and had long careers. These silent-talkie stars include Zebunissa, Padma, Gulab, Navinchandra, Yashwant Dave, Shiraz, Harischandra Rao and Chandra Rao Kadam, Sayani, Bachu, Vasantrao Pahelwan Boman Shroff, Promoth Bose, Sultan Alam, Atta Mohamed, Zaverbhai, Jani Babu, Manchi Thoothi, Bhagwan (who later became a leading director-actor) who contributed much to these genres. <sup>3</sup> For the stunt and action genre Ermeline was the most popular actor of the silent era (she was also an excellent horse rider); but like Master Vitthal she remained unsuccessful in the talkies.



Gulab in Challenge

Of the actors who arrived during the talkie era, Nadia remains the most celebrated. Among others were Romila, Sarojini, Indu Rani, Husn Banu, Gohar Karnataki, Bansi and Amirbai Karnataki, Brij Rani, Radha Rani, Kanta Kumari, Shankar Vazre, Jayant, John Cawas, Prakash, Sardar Mansoor, S. Nazir, Dalpat, Azimbhai, Benjamin, Gul Banu, Husnara, Feroze Dastur, Anil Kumar, Ashiq Hussein- to name a few. Of course, this list is not complete.

## The early Talkie era

Generally, one observes that Indian film historians while discussing the early Indian talkie period only reflect on New Theatres, Prabhat and Bombay Talkies. We can also find some material on Madans as at the time, they were controlling a large chunk of distribution and exhibition circuits apart from having their own productions. We can also find some material on Minerva Movietone. Other top studios receive casual mention or are insufficiently dealt with; Imperial is talked about only in terms of Alam Ara as the first talkie, and of Kisan Kanya as the first Indian colour production. Ranjit had to its credit more than 100 talkies with several important directors and technicians, but is hardly referred to. Sagar had given opportunities to Sarvottam Badami, Zia Sarhadi, Ramchandra Thakur, and Mehboob Khan to direct their first films. Sagar also made the major discovery of Motilal, who is considered by many as the first natural actor, as also of Surendra, who held along with Saigal as a singer-actor. Sagar originally produced Aurat, released under the National Studios banner. Sagar had such a formidable reputation that when the Fazalboys wanted to bring in the Tatas for financial investment, the Tatas asked for Chimanlal Desai and Sagar's joint participation. As a result Sagar Film Company

and Fazalbhoys Film City and General Films Company merged to become National Studios.

A cinematic idiom in a talkie started with the Debaki Bose film *Puran Bhakat* in 1933. Sagar's *Veer Abhimanyu* (Prafulla Ghosh, 1931), Ranjit's *Radha Rani* (Chandulal Shah, 1932) and Prabhat's *Jalti Nishani* (V. Shantaram, 1932) are also some early examples of films that had shown cinematic sense. However, the filmized plays continued to be produced until 1940 and even later. The reputed studios gradually shifted to social themes. However, some studios such as Imperial, Ranjit and Sagar did continue to produce films with action and oriental backgrounds. All these studios also simultaneously produced mythological and devotional films.



Toofan Mail

Ranjit's hugely successful *Toofan Mail* (1934) was the first popular action film and started the action and thrill trend, inspired by the success of their own *Bhola Shikar* (1933), both directed by Jayant Desai (who was the most popular director of the 1930s). Wadia Movietone shifted from the style of its Oriental 'Yemen' series towards the action and thrill genre in 1935.

## Orientalist and Stunt Films

We now come to orientalism, which was a distinctive feature of Parsi theater. The production of oriental films began in the first decade of the 20th century in the West. In India, Parsi theatre created oriental dramas, inspired by Shakespeare and other popular playwrights of the West and adapted them to suit local tastes. They created Roman, Arabic backgrounds which amalgamated into Indian backgrounds and costumes. Their comic scenes remained Indian (in Hindustani) and not Persianized as in the Parsi theatre tradition. We don't consider films with Rajput, Sultanate or Mughal subjects as costume dramas although for the West, these are also termed as oriental.



Gul Bakawali

In India during the silent period, the costume genres were more popular than the Oriental films. No doubt, at the beginning of the silent era, Hindu mythological films were produced in large numbers, but gradually the social and costume films out-numbered the mythological films. It has its offshoot also in fantasy films that provided much space for trick photography. Most of the costume films were made with a Rajput background with some stunts thrown in. But later, Bhogilal Dave and Nanubhai Desai introduced stunts with Master Vithal in the lead, and made the stunt film genre popular. The scenario changed with Nanubhai Desai's moving out of Sharda. However, Bangalore based Surya Film Co. of Haribhai Desai (who was earlier associated with Sharda) remained a major producer of stunt films. Nanubhai Desai's Saroj, Young United Players of the Wadias, Saqi's Asiatic Film Company, Vijay Bhat's Royal, Mehta's Luhar Productions, Chandra Art Production of Chandra Rao Kadam, Kikubhai Desai's Paramount (who was earlier associated with Surya Film Co.) continued to produce the major chunk of stunt films at the end of the silent era. In the talkies, the success of Ranjit's Toofan Mail (Jayant Desai, 1934) brought the stunt films back.

The first Oriental film Gul Bakawali was produced in Mumbai in 1924 by Kohinoor Film Co. and directed by Kanjibhai Rathod, the first professional director who was a Dalit. The film had Khalil in the lead, and introduced Zubeida. It also featured her mother Fatima Begum, the first woman film maker and studio owner. If we look at 1930 productions, Mumbai had produced 110 films out of the total 192 films. Of the 110 films, 79 were costume films with Rajput backgrounds. The genre was popular due to the large circulation of stories inspired from Col. Tod's Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan. At the time, only 11 films were produced with Oriental subjects.

We find the rise of Oriental themes with the advent of the sound. In the first five years (1931-35), out of a total of 429 talkies, 120 were Oriental films, 77 were mythological, and 57 were costume-dramas with stunts. Pure stunt films in the talkies started in 1934.



Nalini Jaywant in Naaz

On the other hand, during 1936-40 a total of 487 films were produced, Oriental films were 43 and this steadily decreased as films moved gradually away from the theatrical style towards a more cinematic idiom, mythological films also went further down to 17 while costume / stunts increased to 138 films. But this is not to say that Oriental films died down altogether. They remained popular and from time to time big banners with equally big stars continued to make Oriental films. Two examples : firstly, Mehboob's *Aan* (1952), which became the first post-independence film to achieve world success with releases in U.K., France and the rest of the European countries, as also in the United States and South America, apart from the traditional markets of the Middle-east and Africa. The other example is another exotic film titled *Naaz* (S. K. Ojha, 1954), shot in Egypt.

It is also to be noted here that *Gul Bakawali* was remade in the talkies in 1932 by Saroj (A. P. Kapoor) with Zebunissa and again by Rustom Modi (1947), Dhirubhai Desai (1957) and by Jugal Kishore (1963). *Gul Bakawali* also holds the honour of being the first oriental / costume talkie to be produced in Tamil and in Telugu. In Tamil it was produced by Tamilnadu Talkies in 1935 (S. Soundarrajan) and in Telugu the film was produced by Liberty Pictures (Sadashiv Rao, 1938). *Gul Bakawali* (Ramanna, 1955) was again produced by R. R. Pictures in Tamil and Hindi

with M. G. Ramchandran and T. R. Rajkumari in the lead and in Telugu with the title Gul Bakawali Katha (1962) by N.A.T. (P) Ltd.

Before we talk about the companies which remain on the margins of film history, let us look at the Oriental and stunt films which were produced by major Mumbai studios, Kolkata studios and by Prabhat Film Co. in Pune.

Prabhat's second production Jalti Nishani(V. Shantaram, 1932), New Theatres productions Josh-e-Mohabbat (1932) and Zinda Lash (1932,) Aga Hashar's Yahoodi ki Ladki (1933) and Karwan-e-Hayat (1935) directed by Premankur Atorthy were all Oriental films. Nanubhai Vakil made Yahoodi Ki Beti (Desai Films, 1956) that brought back memories of Yahoodi ki Ladki. S. D. Narang also remade it in 1957 as did Bimal Roy under the title Yahoodi in 1958.

Kolkata studios included the Madans, who continued to produce films based on their successful plays like Laila Majnu (1931), Shirin Farhad (1931), Alibaba and Forty Thieves (1932), Chhatra Bakawali (1932), Gulru Zarina (1932), Indra Sabha (1932) all directed by J. J. Madan. Another Kolkata company, East India Film Co., has to its credit its production titled Seeta (Debaki Bose, 1934), the first Indian film sent to the Venice Film Festival. East India Film Co. also produced several Oriental films that include Abe Hayat (Krishna Gopal, 1933) with A. R. Kardar, Kismet Ki Kasauti (Pesi Karani, 1934) Baghi Sipahi (A. R. Kardar, 1936), and Kolkata's Radha Film Co. produced Char Darvesh (Prafulla Ghosh, 1933) with Kanan Bala.

## Some Oriental films from various Mumbai Studios

Imperial Company, producer of the first talkie Alam Ara (Ardeshir Irani, 1931 (with Vithal, Zubeida, Jilloo, Prithviraj, Elizer, W.M. Khan, Jagdish Sethi), made several other oriental films. They are Dagabaz Ashiq(Pesi Karani, 1932) with Prithviraj, Daku Ki Ladki (Moti Gidwani / R. S. Chowdhary, 1933), Gul Sanovar (1934) and Khwab-e-Hasti (1934), all having Sulochana and D. Billimoria in the lead. The latter two films were directed by Homi Master. Imperial made Laylo Nihar (Raymino J. Asher, 1936) written by the well-know playwright Talib.

Sagar produced Abul Hasan (1931) and Romantic Prince (Meri Jan, 1931) with Master Vithal and Zubeida, both directed by Prafulla Ghosh; Bul Bul-e-Baghdad (Nanubhai Vakil, 1932), Zarina (Ezra Mir, 1932) with Zubeida, Mehboob's debut film Judgment of Allah (1935) inspired by The Sign of the Cross (Cecil B. De Mille, 1932) as well as other films like Watan (1939) and Alibaba (1940). Sagar also made the stunt films Silver King (Chimanlal Luhar, 1935) and Deccan Queen (Mehboob, 1936).



Madhuri in Ban ki Chidiya



Hatam Tai

Ranjit's Sitamgar (1934) with its screenplay by Betab was also inspired by The Sign of the Cross. Other Ranjit Films were Nadira (1934), Noore Watan (1935) and Zamin Ka Chand (1937), all directed by Jayant Desai with Madhuri and E. Billimoria in the lead. This trio also made the highly successful action films Toofan Mail (1934) and Ban ki Chidiya (1938) influenced by the westerns. A film reviewer wrote that

the name of the film Ban ki Chidiya should have been 'Chabukwali' instead. Toofan Mail started the vogue of the action and thriller genres, followed by Homi Wadia and Nadia's Hunterwali (1935) and Kikubhai Desai's Burkhawali (1936) with Miss Pokhraj. Jayant Desai was one of the most popular directors of the 30s. Later he made several successful mythological films under his own banner.



Lalita in Dard-E-Dil

Krishnatone / Bharat Movietone produced Laila Majnu (1931) and Pak Daman (1931), both directed by Kanjibhai Rathod with the lead played by Rampyari. Khuda Dost (1932), Roshanara (1932) and Hatimtai (1933) were directed by G. R. Sethi. Sethi remade Hatimtai (Fine Art Prod.) in 1947. Krishna also had a state of the art studio at Andheri until the late 1930s, whose area ran into nearly 70 acres with all the facilities for indoor and outdoor shootings, including replicas of the Mughal gardens. The studio failed due to several reasons the details of which would require another time and place to be discussed.

For Ajanta Cinetone, Mohan Bhavnani directed Afzal (1933), Dard-e-Dil (1934) and Sair-e-Paristan (1934). Mahalakshmi Cinetone of Nanabhai Vakil-Zubeida produced Rashk-e-Laila (1934), Gulshan-e-Alam (1935), both directed by Vakil with Zubeida in the lead role.

Wadia Movietone made Lal-e-Yaman (1933) and Baag-e-Misar (1934) with Feroze Dastur, Jal Khambatta, Padma, Master Mohammed, Boman Shroff, and Sayani. Kala Gulab (1934) and Noor-e-Yaman (1935) featured Feroze Dastur, Sharifa, Husn Banu, Jal Khambatta, Sardar Mansoor, Master Mohammed, Boman Shroff, Sayani. Nadia had a small role in Noor-e-Yaman. All the four films were directed by J. B. H. Wadia.



Later Sohrab Modi made the films *Khooon Ka Khooon* (1935) and *Saeed-e-Havas* (1936), both of which were filmized plays. In 1947, His brother Rustom Modi made *Gul Bakawali* (Central Studios, 1947) with Feroz Dastur, Sanober and Jamshedji—also a filmized play.



Sulochana in *Daku ki Ladki*



Gulsanovar



Zubeida in Zarina



Aruna Devi in Deccan Queen

## Studios on the margins

In the first decade of the talkies, studios like Vishnu, Royal / Prakash, Paramount / India Liberty, Mohan, Saroj and others continued the action and magic

genres with an Oriental, Rajput background or at times with contemporary Princely States as a backdrop. Sometimes these kinds of the films exposed the tyranny of the Princely States or maybe the British rule. Prakash Studios, later known for its films *Bharat Milap* (1942) and *Rama Rajya* (1943), both directed by Vijay Bhat, was the leading producer of the stunt genre. Nanubhai Desai's Saroj Studios took on popular theatre actor-singer Master Ashraf Khan to rival Master Nissar, the famous actor-singer of Madan Studios. Nanubhai Desai and Bhogilal Dave at Sharda made Master Vithal the most popular star during the silent era, and it can probably be said, the first superstar of Indian cinema, but one of the surprising failures in the talkies. Nanubhai's Saroj was one of leading studios during the first decade of talkies. The other two studios that came with all the Oriental, magical and stunt ingredients were Kikubhai Desai's Paramount/India Liberty and Mohan whose films created the vogue of the stunt films in the South.



Noor-E-Iman

Apart from these major studios, there were also other studios / companies that were producing Oriental films like Arvind Cinetone's *Noor-e-Iman* (Madanrai Vakil, 1933), Kumar Movietone's *Amirzadi*, (A. R. Kabuli, 1934), *Afghan Abla* (J. P. Advani, 1934), *Payam-e-Ulfat* (Soni & Kabuli, 1935), *Fida-E-Tohid* (Shankar Movietone, 1934) Manhar Movietone's *Noor Mahal* (Moti Gidwani, 1934) Subhash Movietone's *Hoor-e-Baghdad* (R. N. Vaidya, 1934), Jawahar Movietone's *Thief of Iraq* (Asooji and Kanjibhai Rathod, 1934). Several independent companies such as Purnima Pictures, Jaibharat Navbharat and Sundar were focused on the Stunt film genre.

Harischandra Rao's Harischandra Art and his brother's Chandra Art mostly favoured Stunt films. Master Bhagwan, who co-directed a film with Harischandra

Rao, later built his own Jagriti Studio also produced Stunt films. Harishchandra Rao's brother, Chandra Rao Kadam, an actor-director of the Stunt films managed, later owned the Chandivali studios in Mumbai.

The plots of most of the Stunt films were centered around the Dewan or Commander dethroning the ruler and becoming a tyrant. The same person's son or daughter would become the savior of the people and would rebel against the father, fall in love with the princess or prince, would finally succeed in reinstalling the king to the throne and would eventually marry into the royal family. This would often be accompanied by patriotic fervor. Another popular Stunt film plot was the hunt for a treasure with a torn map as a guide.

## Filmmakers who thrilled the audiences

Discussion about oriental and Stunt films involves mainly the Wadia Brothers. While their contribution remains immense, they were not alone. Thanks to J. B. H.'s memoirs as well his meticulous approach to the preserving of his films and all the related materials, his grandson Riyad Vinci Wadia's documentary film *Fearless: The Hunterwali Story* succeeded in drawing attention of the West to the films made by the Wadias, as a result of which Dorothee Wenner came out with a Nadia biography in German and English. Wenner's book discusses only the Nadia films produced by the Wadias / Basant. However, Nadia featured in several films produced by other studios which remain unnoticed. The reason for this can be the paucity of the archival material available.

It is important to note that Nadia also acted in several outsiders' films such as Deepak Production's *Lady Robin hood* (R. N. Vaidya, 1946). Vaidya earlier directed Wadia's *Fauladi Mukka* (1936) and *Hurricane Hansa* (1937) with Nadia in the lead. Vaidya started his career at Kohinoor Film Co. as a villain and later became director at Kohinoor United Artistes, Sharda and Paramount. Other films in which Nadia acted were Girdhar Production's *Mohabbat Ki Jeet* (Ramanlal Desai, 1943) with Navinchandra, R. M. V. Production's *Kismetwali* (Behram Mukadam, 1947) neither cited in the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (1999), New Deepak Pictures neither *Toofan Queen* (Ramanik Vaidya, 1947), *Super Picture's Chabuk Sawar* (1947), *Jungle Goddess* (Nari Ghadiali, 1948) and *Billi*, (Nari Ghadiali, 1949), Deepak Pictures made *Delhi Express* (Balwant Bhat, 1949) and *Jewel Pictures' Shamsheerbaz* (1953) and *Carnival Queen* (1955), both directed by Noshir Engineer. Ghadiali directed his own N. K. G. Productions' *Fighting Queen* (1956) and also *Jungle Queen* (Rajani Ch. 1956). It is to be noted that most of these directors directed Nadia under the Basant Films banner.

A. H. Essa, who directed Wadia Brother's silent film *Dilruba Daku* (Amazon, 1933) made some films like *Flashing Sword* (Capitol Sound Pics., 1934), *Pucca Badmash* (1939), *Thunder* (1939) and *Deshbhakt* (1941) all for Rex Pictures. *Deshbhakt* starred Harischandra Rao, Shahnawaz (who later shifted to Bombay Talkies), Gope and Agha.

Aspi Irani, another important stunt producer-director who formed his own company produced a number of stunt films under Super Pictures. He directed Wadia's songless film Naujawan (1937) and Imperial's Vasant Bengali (1938). In 1942 Ranjit and Wadia came together and produced Return of Toofan Mail (1942) also directed by Aspi. He directed several films for Wadia, Basant and Ranjit and remained active until the 70s. He went missing one day.

Many studios were involved in producing Oriental and Stunt films and were successful. Unfortunately, except for a few booklets, no archival material of these companies has survived. We start with Vijay and Shankar Bhat's Prakash Studio, which was built in 1934. The Bhats entered the industry as story-writers and during the fag end of the silent period they established Royal Film Co. Their first talkie Alif Laila came under the banner of Royal Cinetone in 1933. It was directed by Balwant Bhat and Shanti Dave, both directors of silent films. Dave was once an assistant to B. P. Mishra, the Imperial / Sagar director, who introduced Mehboob Khan to the silver-screen and passed away in 1932.

After their first film, Royal, renamed as Prakash Pictures, produced several social films like Actress (1934), Sacred Scandal (1934), Snehlata (1936) and Poornima (1938). Poornima was based on Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai's Gujarati classic Poornima, a story that dealt with a prostitute's daughter and the society she lived in. All these films were directed by Balwant Bhat. But Prakash Pictures' main genre remained Stunt and also Oriental films like Shamsheer-e-Arab (Niranjan Bhardwaj, 1935) and Khwab ki Duniya (Vijay Bhat, 1937). Prakash produced a number of Stunt films like Azad Veer (Rasik Bhat, 1936), Passing Show (1936), Mr. X (1938) both directed by Dwarka Khosla, Tope ka Gola (1936),



Jayant in a passing show



Pramila in Bijil



Challenge

His Highness (1937), Bijli (1939), Hero No. 1 (1939) all directed by Balwant Bhat; State Express (Vijay Bhat, 1938) and Hukum ka Ekka (Shanti Dave, 1939). All these films proved successful but it was the film Challenge (1937) directed by Balwant Bhat that was one of the biggest box office hits. An interesting feature of this film was the introduction of a dog as a character. This film also was unique in its pairing of a horse (Bahadur) with a dog (Tiger), which became a popular animal team in the Indian film industry. Balwant Bhat continued with Prakash during this

stunt period and he was active until the mid fifties. His brother Batuk Bhat who joined as sound recordist, and who wrote the story of Challenge, was none other than Nanabhai Bhat by another name. Batuk Bhat directed Basant's first film Muqabala (1942) with Babubhai Mistri and in 1943 directed Hunterwali ki Beti. Babubhai Mistri, cameraman / director, is known for handling mythological subjects and made a number of films for Basant.

The contribution of Prakash Pictures to the Stunt film genre remains important as their films were as inventive as were those of the Wadias; but Prakash could not produce stunt queens like Wadia's Nadia. Their major discovery was Jayant (father of Amjad Khan), who was their hero in almost all their stunt films and continued to act until his death. Their main actresses were Noorjehan, Pramila, Sardar Akhtar, Rajkumari (also singer), Shirin (Mahesh Bhatt's mother) as well as Gulab. Gulab joined Krishna Film Co. in 1925 with Baap Kamai (Kanjibhai Rathod) as their heroine. She had a long career in the film industry and was later known for her vampish roles. Lallubhai, their music director, was also their comedian along with Esmail. In Prakash, Jairaj was given a chance to become director and Meena Kumari, as Baby Meena, was introduced in Leather Face (1939). Since the 40s Prakash stopped producing stunt films and became well known for its two most successful mythologicals, Bharat Milap (1942) and Ram Rajya (1943), continued making Social and Devotional films until it closed down in the late sixties.

Prakash's other directors were Rasik Bhat and Dwarka Khosala. Dwarka Khosala started out as a cameraman and had already made several films in Kolkata. He continued to direct till 1960 and to his credit are several well known films like Chaubis Ghante (1958) with Premnath, Shakila and K.N. Singh, and Bus Conductor (1959) with Shyama, Premnath and Amarnath. Famous cameraman Prahlad Dutt also worked with Prakash.

Kikubhai Desai, the founder of Paramount Studios / Indian Liberty Pictures, started his career with Kohinoor Film Co. as their Bengaluru representative and later joined Surya Co., and came to Mumbai as their agent.



Gohor Karnataki in Guru



Jadui Danda





Miss Pokhraj in Burkhawali

Today the Industry may not know him, but the fact remains that his legacy and style of film-making was successfully imitated and continued by his son, Manmohan Desai. However, Paramount's first talkie was *Husn ka Ghulam* produced by Saroj Movietone in 1933. His initial talkies *Chalta Purza* and *Hoor-e-Baghdad* were produced under Subhash Movietone, both directed by R. N. Vaidya who directed several of Paramount's silent films. Kikubhai Desai followed the Surya style and produced two silent films directed by R. N. Vaidya. In 1934, Kikubhai produced *Baghdad ka Chor* directed by D. N. Madhok, now known as a song writer and remembered for songs of the film *Rattan* (1944). Numerous Paramount/ India Liberty films were packed with magic, stunts and fantasy. Some of their popular films were *Jaduai Danda* (Dwarka Khosala, 1935), *Toofani Tamancha* (R. N. Vaidya, 1935), *Burkhawali* (1936) *Farze Ada* (A. M. Khan, 1936), *Circus ki Sundari* (Balwant Bhat, 1941). Kikubhai himself directed several films like *Khuni Khanjar* (Kikubhai and R. N. Vaidya, 1935), *Lal Punja* (1936), *Taranhar* (1937), *Madhrat Ka Mehman* (1938).

Paramount films were released in Punjab by Wadia Paramount, the joint venture between Wadia and Kikubhai. I would like to relate a story, though I am not sure whether I read it or heard it, but it is quite interesting : Kikubhai and J. B. H. Wadia were good friends and watched their films together prior to a release. During one such screening of a Paramount film, J. B. H. told Kikubhai (J. B. H. was a purist of English language) he was disturbed with one word which one of the characters of the film would pronounce several times in an Indianized way. In his opinion, J. B. H. commented, this word would create problems, to which Kikubhai's reply was, at the last minute he would not be able to make any change as the film was slated to be released and since the Censor Board had taken no objection. Hence, they decided to watch the audience reaction on the day of the premier. It was a complete

surprise to both of them that the corrupt word became so popular that the audience came out rhyming that word. This can be considered the introduction of Indianised English in Indian films.



Alladin aur Jadu ka Chirag

Among Paramount's popular actors, Gohar Karnataki was a singing star. Miss Pokhraj who played the role of Burkhawali (1936) was known as Pearl White and Shankar Vazre as their Talmadge. Others were Shiraz, Bachha, Gulnar, and Moti who would also play vampish roles. Master Navinchandra, another famous stunt actor, who was second to Master Vitthal as a stuntman during the silent era, continued to be popular and worked with Jayant Pictures. He later moved from company to company and acted in several Paramount films like Guru Ghantal (1937), Sinhaldwip ki Sundari (1937), Sunheri Toli (1939) all directed by Kikubhai Desai; Alladin and the Wonderful Lamp (1938) and Golibar (1940) directed by Nanubhai Vakil. Paramount Studios is today well known as Filmalaya.

Kikuibhai's other major director was A. M. Khan who later shifted to Mohan and continued to direct the same kind of films e.g., Sair-e-Paristan (1958), Jadui Anguthi (1964) until the mid sixties. Another old timer was G. P. Pawar who directed Reshami Sari while the doyen of the oriental, stunt and costume films Nanubhai Vakil directed several films for Paramount and Mohan. In the 50s, Nanubhai Vakil made several films in collaboration with Kaifi Azmi.



Moti in Golibar

Saroj Movietone was a partnership company when it was started but within a few months its partners retired and Nanubhai Desai became the sole proprietor. Nanubhai started with Star Film Co. in 1921. He was the founder of Sharda Film Co. with Bhogilal Dave. As success brings its own disputes, Desai retired from the partnership with Sharda and decided to launch Sagar with the support of Ardeshir Irani. Master Vithal also left Sharda to support Nanubhai and joined Sagar. Accordingly a new agreement was drawn up between Sagar and Vithal. But at the last moment some issue cropped up and Nanubhai withdrew from Sagar and started Saroj. But as per the agreement, Vithal had to stay with Sagar. The legal case between Sharda, Vithal and Sagar is well known. Sagar became another company of Ardeshir Irani's and for the new venture Irani asked for money in advance from Sagar's Southern Distributors, Select Pictures, who were also agents of Imperial. Not hearing any news about the activities of Sagar, Chimanlal Desai, partner of Select Pictures came to Mumbai and finally became a partner of Sagar. The Irani-Select Pictures partnership continued until the year 1931 when Ardeshir Irani handed over the reins to the partners of Select Pictures, Chimanlal Desai and Ambalal Patel. Ambalal retired from Sagar in around 1936, after which Chimanlal became the sole proprietor.

Saroj Pictures became Saroj Movietone in 1931 and not having sound equipment decided to produce two films at New Theatres Studio that includes Gul Bakawali (1932) with Zebunissa, Ashraf Khan, Najju Begum and directed by A. P. Kapoor, who was earlier a director with Sharda. Zebunissa, known also as Zebu, had started her career with Royal Art Studio in 1926 and remained with the company until it closed down around 1940. Their next film was Idd ka Chand (1933) which had nothing to do with Idd. The film told the story of Sultan Adil of

Yunan and his brother Jamil, both of whom fall in love with the Princess of Istanbul on seeing a drawing of her. The ruler then creates all obstacles possible for Jamil, but Jamil overcomes these and finally marries the Princess of Istanbul on the Idd day. Sardar Akhtar was introduced in this film in the role of a princess and her name appears as Sardar Begum.

By this time A. P. Kapoor had left Saroj and A. R. Kabuli, theatre actor-director, and J. P. Advani,



Zebunnisa in Saif-e-Suleman

once assistant to Bhavnani, joined Saroj. In 1931, Advani directed Heer Ranjah (1931) for Krishna Movietone. Advani had made Gafil Musafir (1934) with Sardar Akhtar and Ashraf Khan, Saif-e-Sulemani (1934) with Sardar Akhtar, Ashraf Khan, Zebunissa, A. R. Kabuli and Bahar-e-Sulemani (1935) with Nissar and Zebunissa. Saif-e- Sulemani was the last film of Ashraf Khan who left with A. R. Kabuli to join Kumar Movietone. Master Nissar replaced Ashraf Khan and acted in Johar-e-Shamseer (J. P. Advani, 1934) with Zebunissa. Sardar Akhtar also left after working with Nissar in Misar ka Khazana (1935), the film having been directed by Rajhans, who had earlier directed a film for Madans. Rajhans had also directed Modern Girl and Iman Farosh. He had made several films at Burma and also at Hong Kong. Nanubhai invited Kanjibhai Rathod to direct Hothal Padmini (1934). Kanjibhai continued to make films till 1940 but he could not become a successful talkie director. Nanubhai also invited Wilford Deming (who had supervised the sound of Alam Ara and also at New Theatres), to direct Gaibi Sitara (1935). R. S. Chaudhary had directed two films for Saroj; one was Kal ki Baat (1937) a very ambitious pseudo-historical film having gorgeous settings and based on the story of Mihirkula with Surendra, Durga Khote, Rose, Mubarak and Zebunissa. Desai ended up as production manager of Azad at Pakkshiraja Studio.



Dard-e-Ulfat

Dhirubhai Desai founded Vishnu Cinetone with Krishna's script writer Natwar Shyam, and cameraman Chaturbhai Patel. Dhirubhai started in Sharda as a director. He was also the favourite director of Indulal Yajnik. He also directed some Saroj Films of Nanubhai Desai. His early talkies were Oriental films', *Bulbul-e-Paristan* (1934) with Gulab, a big hit at Delhi. Dhirubhai directed one big budget *Dard-e-Ulfat* for C. R. Gvalani's Swastika Pics. (1935) and the cast consisted of Sofia, Madhukar Gupte and Yakbal (also known as Iqbal). Later Yakbal's daughter became a famous star, whom we know as Meena Kumari. Dhirubhai also produced and directed at Vishnu *Hoor-e-Samundar* (1936) with Meher Sultana and Ashiq Hussein, *Baghi* (1939) with Mehtab, *Payame Haq* (1939) with Anil Kumar, Ashiq Hussein, Ansuya and Gulab, *Pyar / Next to God* (1940) with Meher Sultana and Prakash. While A. M. Khan directed *Mastana Mashuq*, Kanjibhai Rathod directed *Gul Badan* (1937) which proved to be a big hit in Delhi. The success of a number of films with Muslim / Oriental themes that were produced under Vishnu Pictures brought with it a threat. The producers were told not to produce films with the Muslim subjects under a banner such as Vishnu Pictures, but he continued to make such films like *Payam-e-Haq*, *Pyar* and *Bagi* with Mehtab, Amirbai Karnataki, and Anavari. Mehtab provided the music for *Bagi*.



Gul Badan



Pyar

The journal, Cinema of Lahore (August 1940), commenting on Pyar / Next to God (1940) directed by Dhirubhai with music by Zande Khan, wrote "The story is full of suspense and becomes more interesting in the end. In fact the story never becomes dull. Direction is praiseworthy. The story is said of Persia, so the costumes and settings should be of Persian style but we find that they do not conform

perfectly to any period of history. "Next to God" is full of entertainment and is one of the best pictures produced by Vishnu Cinetone."

Dhirubhai directed several stunt films like Delhi Ka Thug and Lal Cheeta (1935) Vanraj Kesari (1937) Fashionable Wife, Royal Commander and Talwar ka Dhani all in 1938. Vishnu had stock actors Meher Sultana, Ansuya, Anil Kumar Ashiq Hussein, Atta Mohammad, Bulbule, Himmat (the last three from the silent era), Samson (who later continued acting in Filmistan Films), comedian Fazlu and Kantilal who at the time would also provide music in films like Punjab ka Sinha. S. Nazir also acted in some of their films. Other directors, who worked for Vishnu films were Udawadia, Chunilal Parekh, G. R. Sethi and Kanjibhai Rathod.

From 1946 Dhirubhai shifted to mythological films produced under his banner Chandrakala Pictures. His Saranga produced in 1960 with Sudesh Kumar, Jayshree Gadakar, Neelofar, and B. M. Vyas was a big success. He was active until 1970. He continued making the occasional costume and social films. His films were known for their excellent trick photography.



Yakbal in Dard E Ulfat

Mohan Studios was founded by Ramaniklal and Mohanlal Shah. The importance of this studio lies in the fact that important independent film makers had Mohan as their home. Mohanlal of Ramaniklal Mohanlal and Co. entered the film industry as a distributor in 1931 and ran a touring cinema in the Madras Presidency. In 1932 he shifted to Mumbai. In 1936, they secured an agency of Bombay Talkies films, took over Kumar Movietone Studio, started Mohan Studios and entered into production in 1937 with Danger Signal in Hindi and Tamil, directed by K. Amarnath. In the same year Mohan produced two more Tamil films also directed by K. Amarnath

titled Pucca Rowdy and Minnalkodi with K. T. Rukmini and B. Srinivas Rao. Minnalkodi was a big hit. Mohan's other films directed by K. Amarnath were Chasmawali (1939) with Indurani, Midnight Mail (1939), Captain Kishori (1940), and Thief of Tatar (1940). He was later to direct the film Village Girl (1945) with Nurjehan and Nazir for Ramanik Productions, a sister concern of Mohan. He formed his own company and produced and directed films like Bazaar (1950) with Nigar Sultana, Shyam, Gope and Yakub. Naya Andaz (1956) with Meena Kumari and Kishore Kumar, and continued to make costume films like Mehbooba (1954), Baradari (1955) and Kabulikhan (1963).

A. M. Khan also joined Mohan in 1937 and films directed by him include Kul Deepak (1937), Bhedi Trishul, Chabukwali, and Cyclewali (with Ramola) (all 1938) Kala Jagir, Rana Sangram, Ratna Lutari (all 1939), Motorwali (1942) with Radha Rani and Jadui Jhoola (1943) with Zebunissa. Khan continued to work with Mohan till Policewali (1949) although he had formed his own company A. M. Khan Productions in 1946. He continued to direct films like Sair-e-Paristan (1958) and Jadui Anguthi (1964) until the mid-sixties.



Bhedi Trishul

Nanubhai Vakil started at Mohan with Jadui Kangan (1940) and in the same year he directed Deepak Mahal carrying the song "Mere Angana Mein, Tumhara Kya Kaam Hai" written by Anuj which was later copied and popularized in the Amitabh Bachchan starrer 1981 film Laawaris. He directed several films for Mohan, the last one being Raj Mukut in 1950. Nanubhai Vakil is also known for his remakes of Alam Ara (1956 and last in 1973), Lal-e-Yaman (1956) and Yahudi ki Beti (1956). He also made Alam Ara ki Beti in 1960.



Among the actors who were associated with Mohan for a long time were Indu Rani, Sarojini, Romila, Gulab, Amirbai Karnataki, Husnara Ara, Radha Rani, Prakash and Benjamin. Vishnu's Anil Kumar and Ashiq Hussein later joined Mohan. Nadia also acted in one of their films Himmatwali (Ratilal, 1947) with Prakash. Naseem Sidiqi also directed a few films.

Mohan's films remained with Oriental, Fantasy, Action-Thriller, Costume dramas and once in a while also Mythological. In 1947 they produced Khubsurat Duniya directed by Mohan Sinha with Madhubala in the lead. Their production continued until 1952 / 53, and one of the last films they produced was different from their usual genre; it was a Musical-Comedy Chham Chhama Chham (1952) directed by P. L. Santoshi, with Rehana, Kishore Kumar, Mohna, Radhakrishna and Pran, and a music score by O. P. Nayyar.

Master Bhagwan is generally known for his musical hit Albela (1951) but the team of him and Baburao Pahelwan was popular for their stunts. Bhagwan started his career in the silent period and Bahadur Kisan (1938) was the film he jointly directed with Chandra Rao Kadam for Kadam's Chandra Art. Kadam had given him an opportunity to direct Criminal in 1939 with Chandra Rao, Hansa Wadkar, Bhagwan himself and Vasantryo Pahelwan. Most of Bhagwan's stunt films had the music of Anna Saheb, who was later known as C. Ramchandra. Bhagwan-Baburao's films were popular among teenagers and Bhagwan himself directed and produced for his Jagriti Pictures several successful films like Badla (1943), Bahadur (1944), Dosti (1946), Madadgar (1947), Matalabi (1948), Bhole Bhale and Bhedi Bungla (1949). He also directed and acted in several films for other producers almost with the same team. These films includes Matwale, Shake Hands (1947) and Jalan (1948). His Bhedi Bungla (1949) was his big hit before he achieved another kind of popularity with his Albela (1951).

Another leading stunt actor Brij Rani formed Bharat Productions and produced and acted in Van Sundari (1942), Galloping Ghost and Circus Girl (1943) directed by Ramanlal Desai. She also played the lead role in the Ranjit-Wadia co-production Return of Toofan Mail (1942).

Some of the directors who succeeded the old guard (we are not discussing their works here) are Mohd. Hussein, A. R. Jamindar, K. Parwez, Sultan, B. J. Patel, Radha Kant, A. Shamsheer, A. Karim, Kedar Kapoor, Akkoo, Dhanpatrai, Pradeep Nayyar and Kamran who continued making films in these genres. The Oriental / Costume / Stunt genres continued with actors like Shakila, Chitra, Krishna Kumari, Naina, Nilofer, Neeru, Amarnath, Mahipal, Daljit, Kamran, Samar Roy, Manhar Desai, Sham Kumar and Dara Singh, the new legend. With the rise and success of Amitabh Bachchan and his films the categories of A, B and C grade films merged into one.

*(This essay is for Iyasha and Aditi)*

*[The publicity material used in the text is all from the personal collection of the author. Ed ]*

## REFERENCES

1. Chowdhary, R.S. Shot, Talkie Silver Jubilee Souvenir, 1956, Editor, B. Jha, p.84.
2. These studios were Imperial, Krishna, Ranjit, Sagar, Saroj (produced it's first talkies at New Theatres) and Madan.
3. This is to clarify that a large number of directors and actors continued from the silent era. However, we mention only those that feature in the genres discussed in this paper.

**Virchand Dharamsey** is a freelance researcher whose interest covers a number of disciplines from art and archaeology to ethnology and cinema