

Article**Milind Damle****Rolling Since 1960...**

Ever since the establishment of the Film Institute of India in the city of Pune in 1960 to its new avatar as the Film and Television Institute of India in 1971, plenty of changes have taken place within the organization, both structurally and functionally. Gradually, it has emerged as the epitome of film education. FTII today figures in the same rank and file as the ten premiere international film schools in Variety Magazine's Entertainment Education Report 2018-19. An informative journey that will encompass the fundamental objectives behind setting up of FTII 60 years back is as important as the multi-faceted mission of the present scenario. This, of course, notwithstanding the futuristic goals that have set a new momentum to the legacy of its aspiration and achievement, which has been the high point of the just concluded Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2021.

At Kolhapur in Maharashtra, the film industry was witnessing some remarkable happenings. In 1921, V. Shantaram made his debut on the silver screen with the film 'Surekha Haran,' directed by

none other than Baburao Painter and produced by Maharashtra Film Company.

2021 marked the 100th anniversary of V. Shantaram's glorious debut. In this silent film, V. Shantaram played the role of 'Krishna' and playing a woman's role with him was Vishnupant Pagnis, who would earn international acclaim for his role in Prabhat's and as 'Sant Tukaram.'



Soon Baburao Painter's 'Maharashtra Film Company' was deserted by the young brigade of Vishnupant Damle, Saheb Mama Fattela, Sitaramant Kulkarni, Keshavrao Dhaybar, and V. Shantaram; who collectively founded 'Prabhat Film Company' in Mangalwar Peth, Kolhapur on 1st June 1929. In 1932, V. Shantaram directed the movie 'Ayodhecha Raja' produced under the new banner of

‘Prabhat Film Company.’ The name these five partners gave to their new studio aptly resonated with their motif, ‘Prabhat’- the dawn of a new era. At first, a woman appears with a ‘tutari’ on the screen with a beautiful sunrise in her background. This was the ‘Prabhat Film Company’ logo, which began prospering more when it shifted to Pune in December 1933. This rings a bell about how FTII got its present location in this city!



Prabhat Film Company made films mostly on historical and mythological storylines, as also ones that had a strong social message. Prabhat Film Company’s ‘Sant Tukaram’ won an award at the ‘Venice Film Festival,’ garnering international acclaim. Even other films produced under this banner like ‘Shejari,’ ‘Manoos,’ ‘Kunku’ were way ahead of their time, appealing to both audiences and critics; worth mentioning the ones like ‘Angnikankan,’ ‘Sinhgad’ and ‘Ramshastri’ showcased stupendous grandeur in their scale and sets ups succeeded in readily enthralling the audience. Prabhat Film Company upheld its name in feature films, short films, documentaries, and animation movies. Prabhat also made an animated short film that featured the famous fox character- ‘Jambhu Kaka.’

Following such outstanding success, Prabhat Film Company became one of the most reputed production houses in the Indian film industry. Ironically at the same time, Prabhat also faced various ups and downs. It had witnessed many sweeping changes over its reigning years. In 1933, Prabhat produced India’s first colour sound film ‘Sairandhri.’ Prabhat’s journey was colourful and full of success like this film. Prabhat’s fall was similar to the abrupt end to any cinematic production. The audience and the public might not know what kind of whirlpool compelled Prabhat Film Company to pull down the shutters suddenly.

On 10th October 1953, Prabhat Film Company’s case reached the court. Prabhat was

liquidated and was bought by a renowned industrialist from Mumbai, S. H. Kelkar (Attarwale Kelkar), on 11th January 1957. He bought the premises of Prabhat, which also included the studio. It is said that S. H. Kelkar wanted to build a perfume factory on the premises of Prabhat. He had planted various sandalwood trees in the premises for the same. Subsequently, the central government announced its plan to set up a film institute in 1958 and started scouting potential sites.

In 1959, S.H. Kelkar sold the studio to the government and all the film rights to Mr. Mudliyar from Chennai. From 1953 to 1960, Prabhat studio was used to produce many films by different production houses. Thus, even if Prabhat was not in existence, its premises were still being used for filmmaking.



Film and Television Institute of India

After independence, the new government announced various schemes and plans regarding the nation’s development; interestingly, the entertainment industry had also found its place among these prospective sectors selected for development. The new government envisaged introducing reforms in every field while keeping all the earlier developments intact. They considered relooking at every field with a new, fresh lens concerning raising various prospects for the betterment of respective fields. On 19th August 1949, for bringing new ventures and outlook to cinema and in order to deeply study all the facets of the art of cinema, the government of India appointed the ‘Film Enquiry Committee.’ The main purpose of this committee was to work for the sake of the prosperity of cinema. They had to study the role of cinema, both as a form of art and a means to business. They were expected to find a medium that would perfectly link the bridge between these two things. Cabinet minister S. K. Patil was the chairman of this committee. The founders of ‘New Theatres’ and ‘Prabhat Film

Company’- B. N. Sircar and V. Shantaram respectively, were its other prominent members.

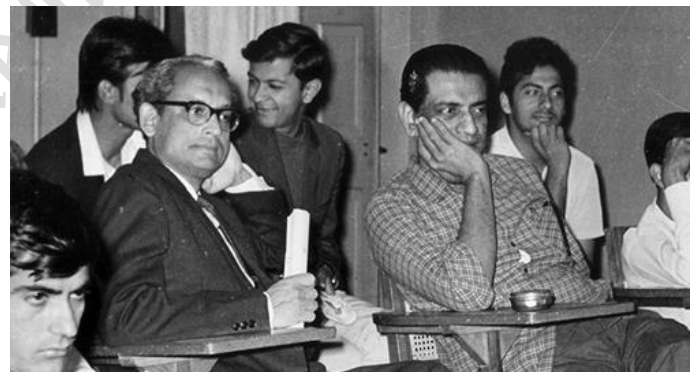


With two years of hard work and a deep study of all the possibilities, this committee submitted its report to the government of India in 1951. This committee worked extensively on the project and presented plenty of progressive ideas with a few vital changes for the betterment of the film industry. This committee presented ideas that got transformed to various film institutions. The International Film Festival of India—IFFI also came into existence around this time. In the year 1952, with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s permission, the first International Film Festival took place in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai. In the words of Pandit Nehru, “The Indian Film Industry should focus, not on the quantity, but the quality of films.” Institutions like ‘Children Film Society’ (1955), ‘Film Finance Corporation’ (1960), ‘Indian Film Library’ (1964), and later ‘National Film Development Corporation’ (1975) came into existence. The ‘Film Institute of India’ (1960) was founded as a ‘school of cinema’ and started functioning right from its inception during the same time.

The reason why Prabhat Film Company shifted its working/headquarters from Kolhapur to Pune was essentially strategic, superior air quality, abundant power supply, and Pune’s proximity to the tinsel town, Mumbai. While acquiring the property, the Government, likely, may have considered the advantage of Prabhat Studios with respect to all these aspects: huge space, a significant ‘historical’ importance, the glorious history and the commercial importance, a ‘ready-made-construction.’ All these things were tied up to the infrastructure of Prabhat Film Company already in place. This premise was ‘blessed’ with two well-equipped studios. Studio 1 - once the biggest studio in the Asia continent and

Studio 2, a bit smaller in size, were the two places where hills, lakes, jungles, and many such worlds had been created. These precious places were transformed into the Film Institute of India.

Through the construction of the film institute, the dream of one of the partners of Prabhat Film Company, Vishnupant Damle, aka Damle Mama, was fulfilled. He was interested in teaching the deep dynamics of filmmaking and executing those tropes here in our film industry. He researched various foreign film institutes, such as VGIK from Moscow, Russia. Damle Mama had worked extremely hard to achieve his dream of filmmaking. He was perfectly aware of all the hardships and drawbacks in this film industry. His perfect vision of such things truly made him a visionary filmmaker and producer. He genuinely wanted newcomers to learn the basics of this field before entering it. And this would ultimately result in the enhancement of the art form. This Film Institute was built on the premises of Prabhat Film Company, and it was like the completion of a full circle.



The Film Institute started its work in March 1960. Renowned filmmaker Satyajit Ray was to be appointed as the head of the Film Institute. But he respectfully declined the offer. He advised that the head of the Film Institute should be a capable person with adequate experience, knowledge in filmmaking, and an academic inclination. In line with this, Ray also suggested a name for this position- Gajanan Jagirdar!

As a result, upon the insistence of Satyajit Ray, the famous actor-director and one of the important members of Prabhat Film Company, Gajanan Jagirdar was appointed as the ‘Principal’ of the Film Institute of India. (Gajanan Jagirdar was the first and only ‘principal’ of the Film Institute). After



him, the post of 'principal' was renamed as 'Director.' Gajanan Jagirdar was a recognized, reputed, and respected personality; - no wonder that he was appointed as the head of the Film Institute. He was even famous for his roles- Mirza in 'Shejari,' directed by V. Shantaram, as Ramshastri Prabhune in 'Ramshastri' directed by Jagirdar himself. According to hearsay from a student, Gajanan Jagirdar used to enter the premises of the Institute at punctually 9 am sharp every morning along with other members of staff.



Gajanan Jagirdar was a successful filmmaker and artiste and proved to be a very talented teacher & principal at Film Institute. After bidding farewell to the post of the principal, he was re-appointed as the Professor Emeritus by the Film Institute in 1981. Gajanan Jagirdar was also an accomplished actor apart from an acclaimed filmmaker. He often acted in the diploma/ project films made by students. (Recently, on the 60th anniversary of the Film Institute, I wrote a monograph about Gajanan Jagirdar for the National Film Archives. The monograph contains the complete journey of Gajanan Jagirdar.)

Like the principal Jagirdar who was associated with 'Prabhat,' many employees of Prabhat too joined the organization. What needs special mention here is that, even though Prabhat Company did wind up, the company's driving spirit in its principles, discipline, films, architecture, and poetry still survived. Many memories of the company's time - some real-some anecdotes, some reel-sum happenings. All of them were introduced to the Film Institute by the aging generation who were still vividly soaked in the green of memories. The institute started, but the two most important disciplines it needed to succeed were yet to come to the Film Institute. One was the 'Student'! They came

a year later, and the other important branch was the 'Teacher'! There was no teacher when the institute started. The big question was how to teach cinema in India! In the early days, artists and technicians working in Mumbai and dealing with the art of film would come to the institute and teach the students, from the lessons they had learned, through their experience from work exposure. In those early years, the students also got education from many people who had worked and learned from Prabhat.

The work of the institute started in 1960, and the first batch of students began studying in the institute in 1961. Well-known producer-director Subhash Ghai was a student of the first batch. He was a student in the acting department of the institute, and he got the opportunity to act in a diploma film directed by the well-known director Ritwik Ghatak. One cannot forget the name of Satish Bahadur, who taught Film Appreciation to the students. Suresh Chhabria, who followed him, is remembered for his teaching style. Roshan Taneja was also a great teacher; his name is still held in high esteem by the old students of the acting stream. PK Nair, director of the National Film Archive of India, did not work as a teacher in the institute but helped the students in their education in many ways and introduced them to many international filmmakers and their works. Even today, many old students recall his methods to show new films. Nair Saheb used to get films from different provinces and countries, and he would show any new film to the students. Many students learned about



different techno-aesthetic facets by watching movies in the institute's main theatre, staying up all night, and discussing under the 'Wisdom Tree.' The main theatre and the beloved mango tree show that cinema

education may not only be confined to the classroom but also happen outdoors.

(Lyricist and writer from Prabhat era late G. D. Madgulkar named this mango tree, standing at a strategic point as ‘Wisdom Tree.’ He believed that sitting under the mango tree gives strong creative vibes, hence the name ‘Wisdom Tree.’)



It is impossible to name all the teachers who have contributed to the students’ formative process over the last 60 years. Likewise, it is quite impossible to name all the students who have made a name for themselves coming from FTII. It is for sure that there are many talented students from the institute who have contributed to the growth of Indian cinema and have made their place in the history of cinema. Since the list is long, we can’t take all names; but it is pertinent to greet all those walking on a different path and wishing to continue, holding hands. Among them is Adoor Gopalakrishnan, winner of the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the highest honour in the world of Indian cinema, and Rasul Pukutty, an Oscar winner. There are also a large number of active artists in different parts of India, making films in their mother tongues and waving the flag of the institute. From Jhanu Barua in Assam to Marathi Mulga Umesh Kulkarni in Maharashtra. If we look at the list of the National Film Award winners, we can see that the performance of the alumni of the institute is significant among the awardees every year.

Everyone has different thoughts, and everyone may look at cinema differently- basically, a thought-provoking perception firmly rooted at FTII. Winner of twelve National Awards, Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan recipient Jhanu Barua have a

reminiscence about the time of his entry in 1971, a unique incident that upholds the aforementioned statement of freedom in expression & thought here. Jhanu Barua travelled a long way from Assam and came to Pune for an interview for admission to the institute. He wanted to take admission at the institute for a course in scriptwriting and directing. After passing the written test, he entered a large room where four to five people were sitting. Barua did not know any of them. After a few questions, he was asked, ‘Have you seen any of Mrinal Sen’s films?’ As an answer to this question, Barua said, ‘I have seen one film by Mrinal Sen, but I did not like it. I think there were many more possibilities to it than what has been depicted.’ ‘What will you do differently?’ A person asked Barua to further elucidate his answer about the film. ‘If I make a movie, I will not make a movie like Mrinal Sen’s,’ he added.

After the interview, Barua left the room. The other waiting candidates asked, ‘What happened in the room when he came out? What were the questions? Barua told the other students what had happened inside. One of the students said, ‘Mrinal Sen himself is sitting inside. He is the head of the interview committee. You slandered his film in front of him.’ Barua was convinced, and on realizing that he had no hope of qualifying in the FTII interview round now, he packed his bags and left for Pune railway station. While waiting for the train to Assam in the evening, Barua suddenly saw an employee of FTII present at the time of the interview. That employee also saw Barua. He came running and asked Barua, ‘How did you get out of the institute before you saw the results?’ Barua told him what happened in the interview. The person said, ‘Son, you come back. You have been selected to the institution. Now you are a student of FTII.’ One such example from Jhanu Barua from a small place in Assam throws light to reveal how free-thinking a place FTII has been, even then and till now. Many students from different provinces, speaking other languages, come to the institute and add vibrancy and colour to this powerful melting pot of promise, prospect & potential.

What started as the Film Institute of India in 1960 was renamed as Film and Television Institute of



India in 1971? Two new studios were set up at the institute, which came to be better identified as Television studios. Under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, FTII and its 'T' (Television) Television Wing trained the technicians and executives in service at various Doordarshan Kendras across the country. The TV wing came to prominence by carrying out small tailor-made courses of short duration. The one-year course of TV Wing started in 2003 like Film Wing. Nimisha Pandey, a first batch student, won a National Award and underlined the importance of this course. Later, Mitakshara Kumar, Shalini Agarwal, Neha Party, Mahesh Ghanekar, Swapnil Kapur, Medhpranav Powar, Ramanna Dumpala, Nilesh Rasal, Zainuddin upheld the mantle of the TV wing high and brought considerable pride and prestige for the organization.



In the studios of the TV wing, it is evident from the programs produced here that P. L. Deshpande and many well-known artists have set foot there. 'Sunday morning' (Ravivarchi Sakal) and 'Chimanrao' (Chimanrao ani Gundyabhau) are two programs that need to be mentioned at this point. Interestingly the FTII Diamond Jubilee rhymed closely with the Golden Jubilee year of its television wing. During this occasion, on 6th August 2021, a beautiful sculpture was unveiled by The Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Narwane. The television wing or that building was given a new look on that day by naming it as 'P. L. Deshpande Television Wing'. It was appropriate to name the television wing after P. L. as he was one of the first producers of Indian television when Doordarshan came into existence. The first televised interview of India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was produced by P. L. Deshpande. TV Studio 1 was named after P. Kumar Vasudev (director of the first serial 'Hum Log'). Studio 2 was named after Professor V. J. Mule (a member of Doordarshan's

first team and an important pillar of the early engineering wing of the TV wing).

Students have always been accompanied by artists from Pune in the journey of FTII. Many actors appear in FTII diplomas. Before the television industry became 24 X 7, many new and familiar artists from Pune and Mumbai were eager to work for FTII's Diploma. Old students reminisced about Mohan Gokhale. Many eminent artists from Pune like Ram Mungi, Sonali Kulkarni, Kiran Yadnyopavit, Madhav Abhyankar, Vandana Waknis, Anil Khopkar, Shubhangi Damle, Yogesh Soman, Madhavi Soman, Kedar Pandit, Ashwini Abhyankar, Sanjeev Abhyankar, Madan Deodhar, Saksham Kulkarni, Pravin Tarde have always helped the students. Bollywood stars have also played big and minor roles in FTII. Many names like Aamir Khan, Manisha Koirala, Vidya Balan, Irrfan Khan, Saurabh Shukla, Manav Kaul, etc. FTII's student Arun Khopkar introduced Smita Patil through his diploma film 'Teevra Madhyam,' which was a big contribution to Indian cinema other than his works. Many wadas and houses in Pune have opened their doors for the shooting of students, considering the help, appreciating the encouraging gesture of so many years, FTII has now started 'Open Day,' and the residents of Pune could now take a tour of FTII for the first time. They got answers to many unanswered queries of so many years about how things work here, how many departments are there, how do they function, etc. 'We have walked in front of this main gate over so many years, but we have never been able to enter inside,' said many excited FTII visitors henceforth, quenching their curiosity. The history of the FTII's students' strikes has always fascinated the general public. We have always seen the expression on the faces of Punekar that these students are different from others. There is also a perception that an FTII student must have a grown beard. It should also be mentioned here that the in-laws of some ex-students from all over India are in Pune. The student of the first batch, whom I have mentioned earlier, P. Kumar Vasudev's wedding, had taken place in Studio One. His wife recently recalled that his 'Barat' had

gone from the main gate to the studio for their wedding!

For many years since the inception of the Film Institute of India, it has been producing generations that have influenced the technical aspects of films. An ordinary fan often thinks that the actor who appears on the screen is the only matter of concern, but he does not know anything about the one who records the actor, one who captures the performance on screen... so on and so forth. Apart from acting, the institute mainly deals in directing, production process, editing, cinematography, sound engineering, scriptwriting, art direction, and production design.



In 2017, FTII took a significant step forward. The SKIFT (Skill India in Film and Television) scheme was launched to spread cinema education and provide trained technicians to the film and television industry. The scheme was launched on 3rd May 2017, and to date, FTII has conducted 361 courses in 45 different cities. All these activities were of short duration, which could be called short courses. More than twelve thousand students have benefited from these types of courses. These courses were conducted from Leh Ladakh to North and South Andamans. It benefited all ages, from very young children to senior citizens. FTII has also successfully promoted cinema through various government agencies, governments

in different states, universities, and educational institutions. During the global pandemic of Covid 19, FTII took a short break in 2020, but it soon recovered. On 15 May 2020, FTII re-launched these courses online, adding students not only from within the country but also from various foreign countries. All these online courses, offline courses, and courses from the newly established Vijay Tendulkar Writer's Academy have been brought under one umbrella named 'FTII Centre for Open Learning.'

In the 75th year of independence, FTII is taking steps to conduct 75 free short courses. These initiatives are being constructed, keeping India's rural and tribal areas. To date, FTII has touched the lives of more than ten thousand film enthusiasts across the country and abroad, conducting 40 plus courses in both online and offline mediums.

FTII today stands on a strong foundation. Both studio floors built during Prabhat's tenure are still used by students. The equipment such as camera and lights are updated from time to time appropriately, keeping the state-of-the-art infrastructure. Every department of the institute orchestrated an academic symphony, with students bonding and blending in its dedication and determination. Just as there are ups and downs in an individual's life, there are also ups and downs in the life of an organization, and the institute has also been having a fair share of this bumpy ride and larger-than-life laps. Looking at all this, we must continue the learning process with more promise, power, and progress; all tucked in the spirited journey forward. One hopes that the students will attach value and vigour to keep aflame the bright tradition of Prabhat Film Company and the last 60 years of momentous progression with a promise that FTII retains its position among the top institutions in the world for all the time to come.

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