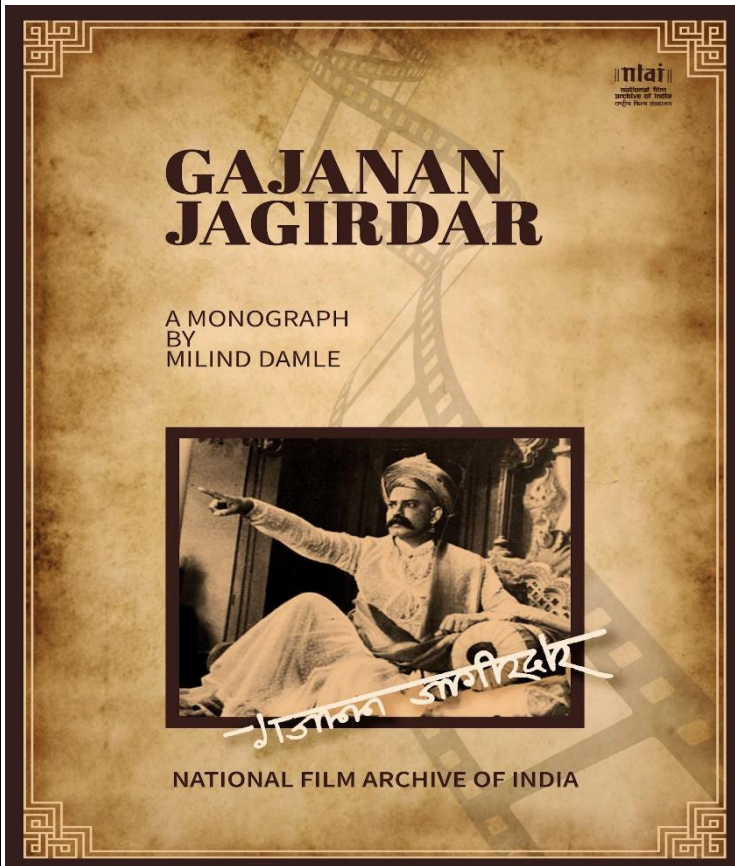


Review

Apoorva Dua

Of Principals and Unsung Pioneers: A Look at Dr Milind Damle's Monograph on the Late Gajanan Jagirdar



As a recent graduate of the esteemed Film and Television Institute of India, where I studied a brief one-year course, I always feel the need to go back and reflect on my alma mater and the glorious history that it garners. There's so much gravitas in those streets, which earlier led to the famous Prabhat Studios, that make you ponder for hours as to what this place must have looked like back in the days and "what if" you could meet the people who shaped this space. One such person's repertoire, often unknown to my generation (for the better lack of discussion of the film fraternity's forefathers), is the **Late Shri Gajanan Jagirdar**, whose incredibly detailed monograph has been written by my FTII professor and filmmaker, Dr Milind Damle.

On 13th August 2020, the Film and Television Institute of India officially renamed their library after the Late Shri Gajanan Jagirdar - notable actor, writer, director and the first-ever principal of the FTII (or rather **Film Institute of India**, as the

Television wing commenced in 1971). This inspired Dr Damle, who was supposed to present an audio-visual piece as a tribute to this personality, to go further ahead and develop a full-fledged monograph. The text sheds light on the fact that a person of such importance to the first film institute of the country as well as such a celebrated figure of both the Hindi and Marathi film industry, has incredibly less literature written about him.

The monograph depicts the life of an artist whose contribution to both Hindi and Marathi cinema is unparalleled. From a mere subtitler (the person who used to write subtitles, mainly in English, for silent films) at the prestigious Prabhat Studios to a recognised mainstream actor to the first-ever principal of the Film Institute of India, Gajanan Jagirdar donned many hats in life, but more importantly, lived and left an incredible legacy behind. Commonly known for his roles in films like *Shejari* (1941), *Ramshastri* (1944), *Guide* (1965), and *Umrao Jaan* (1981), among hundreds more, Jagirdar's own story seems rather untold, but this book alters that.

While conversing with the author, Dr Milind Damle, I learned an interesting thing about this monograph - the story behind the inner leaf of the cover.

The above pictures are the front and back inner leaves published as part of the book's official cover. While the front leaf boasts a signature of Gajanan Jagirdar atop a still from his film *Ramshastri* (1944), the rear leaf reads even more deeply. The quote mentioned here is a message to actor Uday Tikekar, who fondly addressed Jagirdar as “Papa”. Such was their camaraderie. In fact, you can read the story behind this heartfelt message in the monograph as part of Tikekar’s tribute to Jagirdar. Here's an excerpt from the tribute about the message-

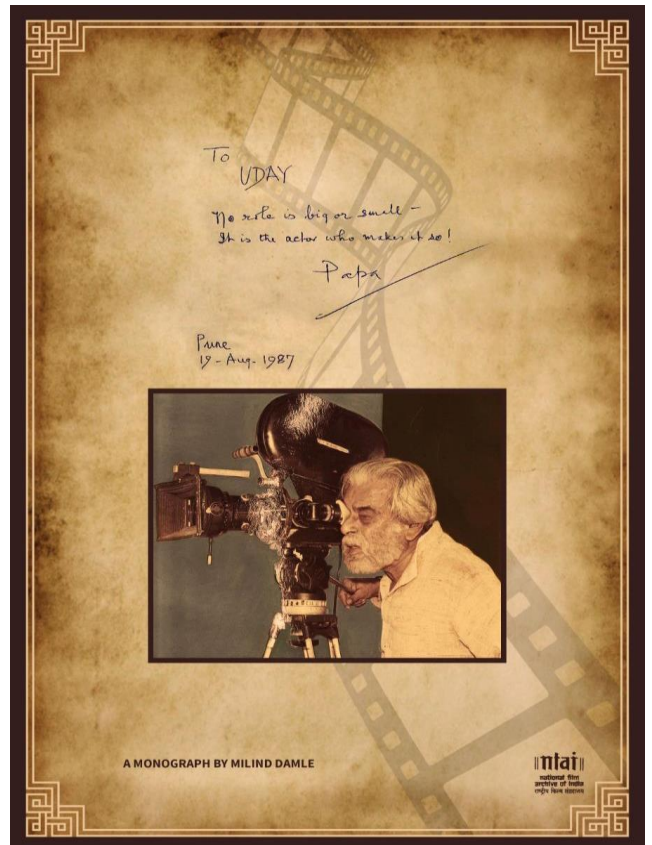
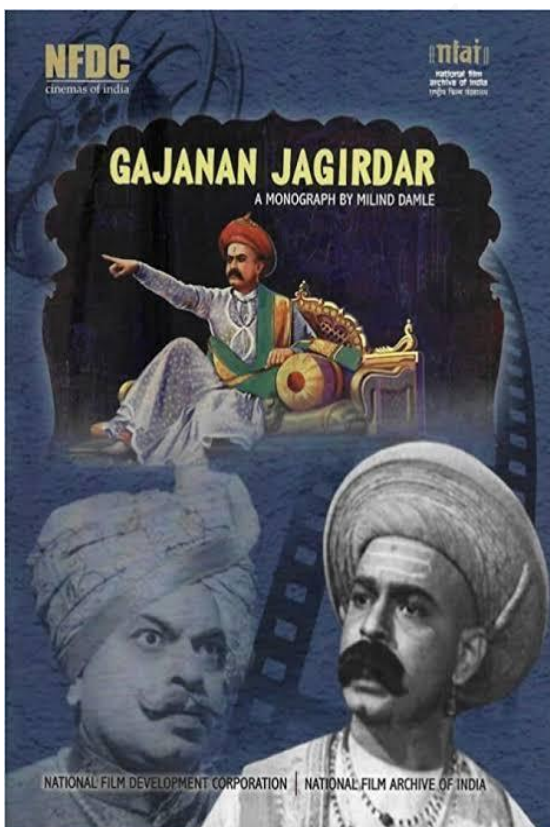
As a memoir of the serial that I did under his direction, 'Swami', I had requested him a copy of the script with his signature and 'Papa' gave it to me without hesitance. The message he wrote for me on the script is something to cherish and a message for all actors of any age and gender...

- Uday Tikekar

The cover of the monograph, published by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India, alongside the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), appears like this -

It boasts a few portraits of some of Jagirdar’s most notable performances in films like *Ramshastri* (1944) and *Chhoo Mantar* (1956).

The monograph, having arrived at a rather eventful time (FTII completing 60 years since its inception in 1960 and renaming the institute’s library after Gajanan Jagirdar), is a rather comprehensive biographical account that goes beyond mere facts and filmographies. What makes it meaningful is the collection of stories and anecdotes from his yesteryears, especially his transition from theatre to film. Not to mention, he introduced faces like Raj Kapoor and Kamini Kaushal to the Hindi film industry when he was casting for his first film *Jail Yatra* as a producer under his banner ‘Jagirdar Productions’, which, due to unforeseen circumstances, released way past its original timeline.



A deeper dive into the monograph reveals not just the artist in him but also his life as a young individual growing up in pre- and post-independence India. It’s interesting to learn that his love for language and oratory skills helped him develop an interest in political rallies and events, in addition to his love for theatre and, later on, cinema. He ventured into the many faces of filmmaking during the disturbing time of independence while also voicing his opinions as an activist. He was impacted the most when the prints

of his much-awaited, assumed blockbuster period film *Bairam Khan* got destroyed in the Hindu-Muslim riots due to the Direct Action Day in 1946. But despite this loss, he persisted as a filmmaker, resulting in his extraordinary career.

Another interesting fact in this book is the mention of what appears to be a foreword written by actor Late Shrimati Nargis Dutt to an unpublished manuscript titled “Magic Circle” by Gajanan Jagirdar. In the foreword, Nargis Dutt mentions how incredibly the book talks about filmmaking and how it can encourage future generations who want to learn more about the craft. Here’s a brief excerpt from the impression -

Jagirdar Saheb has been a veteran in every field of cinema. His understanding of this great medium will be very beneficial for those who are trying to enter this world of glamour. Young people only see the glitter but do not realise how much hard work is involved. I feel that every such aspirant must go through this book to know where to begin and what they are going to face once they venture out in trying to join this circle.

- Nargis Sunil Dutt

It is a misfortune to know that this book did not see the light of day, as it points out Jagirdar’s interest in spreading knowledge regarding the efforts that go into filmmaking with the next generation. However, it seems to be fate that such a learned and crafted member of the film industry has now been commemorated by having his name etched on not just FTII’s walls but also in history.

Accompanied with original photographs (courtesy Ashok Jagirdar, son of Late Shri Gajanan Jagirdar), this book takes you to a time when not just the film industry but also the country was taking shape. It goes without saying that a deeply researched monograph like this couldn’t have come at a better time. In this age and time of technology, it’s a matter of seconds that the next person reading this biographical account will, by default, search the internet for Shri Gajanan Jagirdar and his body of work. But what we cannot find there is that he was more than just his films and his crucial role as a film educator, which is indeed aptly covered in this book.

To get your hands on a copy of Dr Milind Damle’s Monograph on Late Gajanan Jagirdar, you can click [here](#). The monograph has been released by the National Film Archives of India (NFAI) in collaboration with the National Film Development Corporation and published by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India.

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