

Centenary Tribute: Dev Anand

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Prabhat, Guru and Dev: The Pune Connection



In 1943, Prabhat Film Company, Pune, which was very popular for its mythological, social and family pictures and known for its unique film production techniques and discipline as a company, was struggling to complete their feature film 'Ramshastri'. After *Sant Sakhu* (1941), the big budget and ambitious 'Ramshastri' was announced, and the preparations started; it being a big budget and a period film, Prabhat continued producing smaller films such as *Daha Vajta* (1942), *Nayi Kahani* (1943) on the parallel production line. The making of 'Ramshastri' is also a narrative or a story. In total, six directors worked on the film. Originally, 'Ramshastri' was planned while V Shantaram was a partner in Prabhat. In 1942, after *Shejari/ Padosi* (1941), Shantaram Bapu left Prabhat. It was S. Fattelal (Sahebmama) and V G Damle (Damlemama) who began their work on the

production of 'Ramshastri'; however, in June 1943, Damlemama fell seriously ill. The responsibility of directing the film went to Raja Nene. Of course, Fattelal supported him, but he had never partnered with anyone other than Damlemama. Damle and Fattelal were like one unit who had given hits like *Sant Tukaram* (1937) earlier for Prabhat, which won at the Venice International Film Festival and garnered widespread and critical acclaim in India. Slowly, the differences between Fattelal and Raja Nene came afloat. 'Ramshastri' still had to wait a little longer with Gajanan Jagirdar to be the main lead and direct the film. He would be the 5th director, and the 6th was Vishram Bedekar, who showed interest and agreed to help, support, and sometimes assist Jagirdar in completing *Ramshastri* in record time.

Prabhat's last flag bearer was undoubtedly '*Ramshastri*', which eventually, after a big struggle, was completed and released in 1944 and achieved massive commercial and critical success. '*Ramshastri*' won 6 awards at the Bengal Film Journalists Association that year, including best film.

While much turbulence was happening in Pune at Prabhat in 1943, far away in Lahore, a young man, Dharamdev Pishorimal Anand, was planning to go to Bombay. He dreamed of acting in films and earning a big name; his idol was the film star Ashok Kumar. He tried to shake hands with Ashok Kumar while on a film promotion tour to Lahore, where this young boy was studying at Lahore Government College. In July 1943, he, a fresh graduate and just 20 years of age, left Lahore in the Frontier Mail and reached Bombay. His struggle began while the country was experiencing the heat of World War II. To survive, he took up a job and started working in the British Government Censor office, reading letters written by someone for someone. Anand, unknown to both sender and receiver, was reading these letters to support his struggle in Mumbai. His salary of Rs. 165/- was significant considering the war situation; two years had passed in between. The boredom of reading letters grew, and he considered resigning repeatedly.

One day, he called it quits and decided to pursue his dream full-time. The words by an army officer in one such letter, 'Chuck the Job', hit this young man as his decision became concrete. He boarded a train back home in Bandra.

Ashok Kumar was on a hoarding at a platform where the train stopped. It was

raining heavily. He looked at the poster and wondered, 'I am in the same city where the star named Ashok Kumar is. When will I make it to the screen? When will my star shine??'

While doing so, Anand used to think about the *Shinkanji* seller in Amritsar who had remarked looking at this young boy's forehead. 'I can see the shining sun on your forehead, soon you will be a big man'. The sorbet seller had not mentioned the struggle while selling the cold sorbet.

And suddenly, on that rainy day inside the local compartment, Masurkar, an amateur singer and a friend who used to get lessons along with Anand near the Opera House, appeared and said, I have been looking for you all over. Go and meet the boss. Prabhat Film Company is looking for a young lead, and I think it's you. Anand asked who the boss was and where he could find him.

The boss was Mr Baburao Pai, a 'Famous' distributor and partner of Prabhat Film Company. Was it not destined that Mr Baburao Pai, who was originally a distributor of Prabhat Films, became a partner in 1939, and he was being remembered in a local train in Mumbai by two people that he didn't know and referred for a role in a film for a company based out of Pune.

This young man with the name Dharamdev Pishorimal Anand, while answering Mr Pai about his name, said I have dropped 'Dharam' and will continue with only 'Dev Anand'. (From here on he will be mentioned only as 'Dev Saab') The first meeting of the two was as usual for any young struggler meeting a producer, but the impression that Dev Saab cast on Mr Pai was permanent.

Dev Saab, being patient from the outside but restless inside, tried to meet Mr. Pai. He eventually got a brief meeting and impressed him immediately with his manners, good English, and *Khandani Adab*. He got an offer to meet the director of this film for Prabhat the following afternoon. P L Santoshi came at 1 pm to the ‘Famous’ office opposite Opera House and informed Dev Saab that the lead with whom they had started shooting was indisciplined and had been thrown out of the film. Mr Santoshi was referring to one actor, but Bapu Watave, in his book, mentioned that it was not one but two actors with whom the shooting had started, but it got stopped due to carelessness and indiscipline on the part of both the actors. Due to this, the shooting stopped, and Prabhat began to look for a young, bright, smiling face to suit the role; more than that, they wanted someone who was disciplined and would fit in the company’s work culture.

In the first meeting at the office of Mr Pai in Mumbai, Dev Saab impressed the director of the film P L Santoshi and got a promise for two things immediately: one was the audition in front of the camera. The second was a first-class ticket to Pune by the famous and iconic Deccan Queen the next day! The third was a little risky, which came a little later when he requested Mr. Pai to give him a salary of Rs. 400/- against the offer given for Rs. 300/-. Interestingly, Mr Pai agreed to that, and Dev Saab became an actor debuting in *Hum Ek Hai* (1946) by the famous Prabhat Film Company.

That day, he dropped all other words and symbols and continued with only ‘Dev Anand’; the struggle would not be over, but he had hit the road for a long journey ahead!



Dev Saab’s entry to the silver screen in Hum Ek Hain

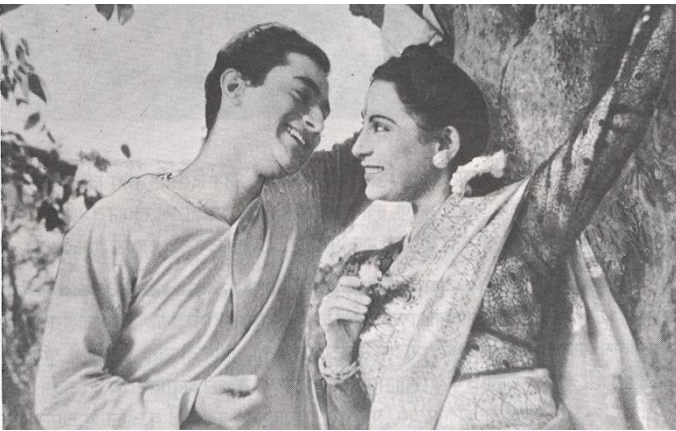
The film *Hum Ek Hai*, which launched Dev Saab as Shankar under the direction of P L Santoshi, one of the outside directors for Prabhat like Yashvant Pethkar, R V Rane, Raja Nene and a few more. Durga Khote was in the lead and took the centre position on the film’s poster. It was a story that suited Prabhat’s taste and was produced similarly.



Poster of Hum Ek Hain

A Jamindarin Lady, called or addressed as ‘Ma’, the old village landlady, supports its people during a famine and raises three orphaned children of differing religions, including a girl from a different caste. Alka Achrekar plays the role of the daughter Durga, Rehman as Yusuf, Rane as Dr John and Dev Anand as Shankar. The children are raised by ‘Ma’ with the same treatment to all.

They are encouraged to practise their separate religions and free thoughts. However, they may grow up, they are taught always to remain united. The same village has another Jamindar Bade Babu opposite 'Ma'. He and his son Chote Babu are always against the goodness of 'Ma'. The son Chhote Babu, played by Ramsingh, returns from a foreign land and starts liking his father's friend's daughter, Vidya, played by Kamla Kotnis. She is a well-educated daughter of Pt. Shyamacharan. Chote Babu eventually wants to marry Vidya. Vidya has confronted Chote Babu once and has a liking for Shankar. Chote Babu tries his best to create hatred between the family, creating enmity among them. Still, on a more significant issue in the interest of society, the family unites and stands firm against the odds. Their unity pays off, and they come out victorious; the teaching of 'Ma' remains their idol! *Hum Ek Hai* Dev Saab had Kamala Kotnis against him as his love interest, Vidya, eventually married him. Kamala Kotnis was Dev Saab's favourite actress, and he has mentioned her many times on different platforms and in interviews.



*Dev Saab with Kamala Kotnis
in Hum Ek Hai*

This new guy from Punjab fit the role of Shankar and also suited the discipline of Prabhat Film Company, which they were

known for, which resulted in getting one more film for him next year.

The film was made in 1945 and released on 8th June 1946; however, it could not achieve the success of Prabhat's earlier films. When Dev Saab got his break, Prabhat was not in its best form. Two main pillars have left the company. New partners have joined in with their ideas of growth. Damle Mama was ill, and the company was not doing its best. It was on the decline.

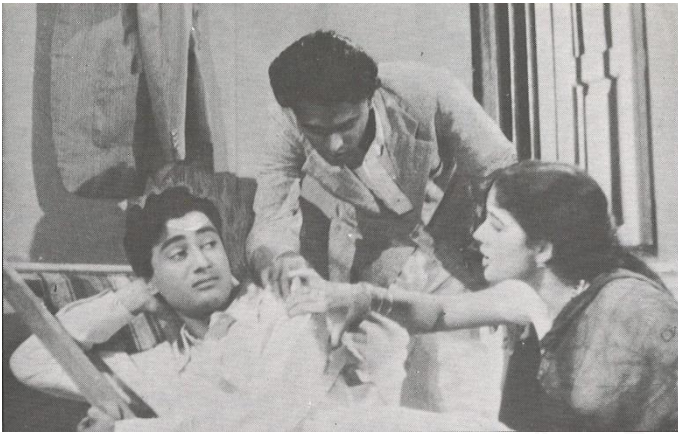
The Sunrise that the Indian film fraternity had seen in the form of Prabhat Film Company and a part of their logo was soon to set after shining for 25 years, but while setting in the last hour, it gave the industry a new sun shining in the form of Dev Saab. The words of the Shikanji seller in Amritsar were coming to reality; the sun had started shining on Dev Saab's forehead. Soon, he was made a solo lead in Prabhat's following picture.

Unlike multiple couples and big casting in *Hum Ek Hai*, the second that Dev Saab got was a single lead against a big name Khurshid in Prabhat's Yashwant Pethkar's directorial venture *Aage Badho* (1947), a social drama set in contemporary India discussing the issue of widow marriage.

Aage Badho was a story that would suit the Prabhat ideology of social reform. It was based on a story by Sane Guruji. Sarla gets widowed on the day of her marriage as the firecrackers burn her husband, and he dies in that accident. Later, she meets Uday and their love flourishes. Both decide to get married, but Uday has to go home as his mother becomes ill and bedridden. Before he reaches, his mother dies, and that affects Uday's mental health. Here, Sarla delivers a baby whose father is Uday. After many ups and

downs, Uday and Sarala meet and get married.

This film was released in the month of India's independence, the date was 2nd August 1947, in the Krishna Talkies in Mumbai. The film didn't do well, though, at the box office. The only fundamental problem the audiences had was pairing young Dev Saab and an actress older than him as his love interest in Khurshid. She looked older in each frame, and obviously, the casting didn't go well on screen as a pair that would woo the audience.



Dev Saab and Khurshid in Aage Badho

The 'Time and Space' in which *Hum Ek Hai* was being made gave a completely different and parallel narrative to the generations of film lovers to discuss, enjoy and cherish to be true in the fullest capacity. This narrative was taking place outside the silver screen, not in front of the camera but as a part of the 'Behind the Scenes'. Another 'would be' iconic filmmaker was breathing the same air at the same time and space as young Dev Saab was at the Prabhat Film Company. His name was Guru Dutt. Earlier, Guru Dutt was on a scholarship at Uday Shankar Cultural Center in Almora, where he learnt dance forms from 1942 to 44. Again, thanks to Mr. Baburao Pai, he got a 3-year contract and joined the Prabhat Film

Company in the dance department. Though he was to be working as a dance director in the Prabhat Films, a student in Guru Dutt kept on learning all possible things in the studio. While doing so, he assisted P L Santoshi on *Hum Ek Hai*. Both Dev Saab and Guru Dutt happened to be friends from this very film throughout their careers and lives, but how they met and were introduced to each other is a fascinating story. I have heard about it for 25 years since joining FTII as a student. And how does this story go?

At Prabhat, like the leading film production departments, there were other supporting departments. After all, it was a full-fledged company. So, like makeup, carpentry, and painting, there was a laundry serving multipurpose requirements. One day, an employee, Narayan ji Gaikwad, got the news that his wife had delivered a baby boy. He informed Shantaram Bapu, and he, in turn, named the boy 'Tukaram'. Why this name? Maybe because Sant Tukaram (1937) was in the making or already a hit film. Going by the years, this boy must have been born in 1936-37. Why I can't be so sure is because Tukaram ji Gaikwad does not recall it exactly. Hence, the story goes a little here and there, anyway...

Later, while *Hum Ek Hai* was under production, the father, Narayan ji Gaikwad, gave a few washed and ironed clothes for delivery to young Tukaram, who must be 9 or 10 years old then, by mistake, created an exchange while delivering the clothes.

On the sets inside the studio, Dev Saab realised that someone else assisting P L Santoshi was wearing his Kurta or shirt. Upon enquiry, he learned that the person wearing the Kurta or shirt was Guru Dutt, and he had

worn it, even after knowing it didn't belong to him, as he had nothing else to wear. Guru Dutt apologised and promised to return the same. Dev accepted the apology (he must have smiled, flaunting his broken teeth) and thus became friends with Guru Dutt.

The friendship grew as the production progressed, and both promised each other a film. Dev Saab promised to give a movie to direct if he becomes a producer, and Guru Dutt promised to cast Dev Saab if he directs a movie.



Dev Saab and Guru Dutt

Dev Saab fulfilled his promise first as he turned producer with Navketan Films, giving Guru Dutt the chance to direct his debut film, *Bazi* (1951). Immediately as Guru Dutt got the opportunity, he returned the favour in *Jaal* (1952), where Guru Dutt directed Dev, who was in the lead. After becoming a producer in 1954 by producing *CID* (1956), Guru Dutt again cast Dev Saab in the lead role, but Guru Dutt did not direct it; he gave the job to his assistant, Raj Khosla.

Interestingly, another actor, Rehman, also became good friends with Guru Dutt. He got significant and vital roles in his later films, including iconic *Pyasa*, *Saheb Bibi Aur Gulam*, and *Chaudahvi Ka Chand*.

Tukaram ji Gaikwad is now almost 87 years plus; by pure mathematics and also by

his looks, he seems to be of the same age; now he has weakened eyesight, but as he starts recalling this particular kurta story, his eyes light up, and he could see it happening in front of him. One can feel the same while listening!



Tukaram ji Gaikwad

As Tukaram ji, there was one more interesting character in Pune, who was fond of Dev Saab, among many others. The old Irani grandpa often met at the Lucky Restaurant at the Deccan Gymkhana. This Iranian restaurant was only addressed as 'Lucky', which stood behind the Deccan Theatre for many years, famous for its Bun maska, Chai and samosas. A poster-sized photograph of Dev Saab was displayed on the wall. In the shooting phase at Prabhat, Dev Saab used to ride a bicycle and reach 'Lucky' to spend time with his new friends Guru Dutt, Rehman and Babu Watve; they all loved the small samosas.

There were stories of some uncleared debt of Dev Saab at the Lucky, which the old Iranian grandpa was proud of and often spoke about if asked.

At the 75th birth year of Dev Saab, the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, situated on the erstwhile Prabhat studio, decided to celebrate it on campus. Dev Saab came and, after the program, decided to walk down the Prabhat road up to Deccan Gymkhana. He did not forget to visit his favourite 'Lucky' and chat with the old Irani Grandpa. Both still remembered the debt and laughed about it.

At 75, Dev Saab was fit, and while walking, he stopped at many spots, recalling the old golden days he spent in Pune. He liked visiting Pune, and on every critical occasion of FTII, he came very fondly to spend time.

"Yes, Yes, go on, click as many pictures as you want" were his words in the Main theatre of FTII on 20th March 2010. Dev Saab was the chief guest of the institute's Golden Jubilee celebration. The theatre was overflowing with many ex-students, current students and staff of the institute, plus there were guests from Pune and family members of the Prabhat founders.

As the guests walked onto the stage, all the others went to their chairs, but Dev Saab waited and turned in anticipation as he heard a journalist requesting, "Dev saab Ek Pose, Please."

'Yes, Of course!' Exclaimed the young man at the age of 87. He took centre stage, keeping his hands on his waist, posing for the eagerly waiting cameras. The audience cheered, which was well reciprocated by Dev Saab raising one hand. The audience had stood up, waiting for his order to sit. Again, he raised his hand and waved it in his style, and a wave of laughter went across as everybody sat down. For almost five minutes, the theatre clapped the gestures of Dev Saab,

saluting his stardom, experience and many more qualities.



Dev Saab at Main Theatre of FTII, Pune

After the first two films, Dev Saab never came for shooting in Pune. Still, his fan and writer, Shashikant Kinikar, recalls organising the premier of Dev Saab's *Gangster* in 1995 at the Alankar Talkies in Pune.

This year, as a part of the birth centenary celebrations, NFDC and NFAI organised screenings of Dev Saab films over four days. Many of his films were screened with a couple of them, like *Guide* (1965) and *Johny Mera Naam* (1970), which had repeat screenings, too. On Dev Saab's 100th birthday, i.e. on 26th September 23, one got the opportunity to introduce the special guests to the full house gathering of Dev Saab fans at the reputed NFAI auditorium is a memory to cherish.

There must be millions of fans of Dev Saab, but a contribution in Pune is worth a mention in the form of a garden. Interestingly, the garden is named after Dev Saab 'Sadabhar Dev Anand Udyan' (Evergreen Dev Anand Garden), which suits aptly. This particular garden is on the Mahaveer Jain Vidyalaya campus and was curated by Yuvraj Shah, a fan of Dev Saab.



Sadabahar Dev Anand Garden

One always wondered why a boy from Punjab starts his journey towards his dreamland in Mumbai from Lahore (Which is now in Pakistan). However, he got his first break in cinema, not in Mumbai but in Pune, at a film company that originated in Kolhapur. Dev Saab's debut role in *Hum Ek Hai* was titled Shankar and not Usuf and John, the other two characters. Interestingly, Prabhat was famous for producing Marathi and Hindi

films together. They had great success in films such as *Kunku / Duniya Na Mane* (1937), *Manus / Aadmi* (1939), and *Shejari / Padosi* (1941) as bilingual productions. However, the film in which Dev Saab got his break was produced only in Hindi, titled *Hum Ek Hai*, and did not have a Marathi version, indicating the National Integration in the pre-independence period of India. Further interesting was that when *Hum Ek Hai* was produced, 'Prabhat' was not at its best time and had slowed down, and there were only seven films that were produced under their banner after this film, one of them again had Dev Saab in the solo lead.

To conclude a must to mention, the last film produced by the Prabhat Film Company before going into liquidation was titled 'Guru Dev Dutt' in 1951, the same year, while in Mumbai, Guru Dutt's directorial debut, *Baazi*, produced by Dev Saab was released. A circle completed!

How interesting this Pune connection has been for Prabhat, Guru & Dev!

Reference:

Watve Babu/ Ek Hoti Prabhat Nagari/ Anant Damle/ 2002

Anand Dev/ Romancing With Life/ VIKING/ 2007

Damle Milind/ A Monograph on Gajanan Jagirdar/ NFDC-NFAI/ 2022

Photo courtesy:

Anil Damle, Prabhat Enterprise, Pune; Tukaram ji Gaikwad, Pune; Staff of FTII, Pune; Internet

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