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Interview of Movie Actor Ganpat Sakharam Alias Bhai Tambat by

Bapu Watve

Bapu Watve : When were you born?

Ganpatrao : In 1902

Bapu Watve : Which means you are now 82 years old.

Ganpatrao : Yes. 82 complete. Running 83.

Bapu Watve : What is your current residential address?

Ganpatrao : Ganpat Sakharam Bhai Tambat, Navi Tambat Ali, House No. 442.

Bapu Watve : Your family was in the business of making copper and brass utensils?

Ganpatrao : Yes

Bapu Watve : You also joined that?

Ganpatrao : Yes.

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Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : Business was hit by the recession. I had to do something to earn living. So joined here.

Bapu Watve : How long were you in your own business?

Ganpatrao : Almost 11 years.

Bapu Watve : What was your age when you joined your family business?

Ganpatrao : At my age of 14.

Bapu Watve : So you must have become an expert in your trade.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I use to do all the work.

Bapu Watve : What type of work.

Ganpatrao : I used to make all traditional brass and copper utensils.

Bapu Watve : Then how did you join the film line?

Ganpatrao : Because our business was hit by of recession. Here, in Hatti Khana area, in the bungalow of Raje Balwa 'British India Film Company' was started. My friend Narayanrao Tambat was employed there. One day I went with him to that company. At that time I had a very good physique.

Bapu Watve : You must be exercising.

Ganpatrao : Yes. In that period of silent movies, they needed people with good physique.

Bapu Watve : Yes. Then?

Ganpatrao : One Mr. Deva Sukte was director there. He enquired with Narayanrao about me and Narayanrao told him that I was his brother. He further inquired if I would be interested in working with them. Then Narayanrao told him that he will ask me and briefed me about their talk. I accepted since I was also in need of a job.

Bapu Watve : You must be about 25 at that time.

Ganpatrao : Yes. 25 years old. It was in the year 1928.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : ‘Hanuman Vijay’ was the first film being made by them. I got a role of a demon.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : The scene was Maruti tying a demon to a tree with his tail.

Bapu Watve : Was he tied to a tree?

Ganpatrao : Yes. The company produced 3 or 4 movies.

Bapu Watve : Can you recall their names?

Ganpatrao : Yes. ‘Hanuman Vijay’, ‘Bal Gopal’, ‘Ram Leela’ etc. Then the company closed down.

Bapu Watve : Did you act in all those films?

Ganpatrao : Yes. In all.

Bapu Watve : Did you get the main role in any of those films?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I got second important roles.

Bapu Watve : Can you give details?

Ganpatrao : In 'Hanuman Vijay' I was prime minister of demons; in 'Gopal Krushna' I was the head milkman.

Bapu Watve : Was the film 'Gopal Krishna' produced by them?

Ganpatrao : The name of the film was 'Bal Gopal'.

Bapu Watve : 'Bal Gopal'?

Ganpatrao : Yes. 'Bal Gopal'

Bapu Watve : Were you 'actor' only or were you also given any other work?

Ganpatrao : No, I worked only as an actor.

Bapu Watve : Were you not given any other work?

Ganpatrao : No. No other work.

Bapu Watve : Then what?

Ganpatrao : After the closure of that company, another new company 'Mayor Film Company' got started.

Bapu Watve : Where? In Nasik?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Just behind us near Rahkar Bungalow, there is another bungalow. There it started, 'Circle Cinema'. It was owned by a Zoroastrian. They were all disciples of Maher Baba. They had set up a studio.

Bapu Watve : Ok

Ganpatrao : I got a comic role.

Bapu Watve : What was the name of the film?

Ganpatrao : 'Valya Koli'. A mythological film.

Bapu Watve : What was your role in it?

Ganpatrao : I had a role of a comic demon.

Bapu Watve : Ok. Then?

Ganpatrao : Then 'Asiatic film company' got formed.

Bapu Watve : Where? In Nasik?

Ganpatrao : Yes. In Nasik. Near Tambat Ghat. I was employed as Actor. After few days of shooting, the company shifted to Bombay.

Bapu Watve : What was the name of the film?

Ganpatrao : I do not recollect.

Bapu Watve : Was it also mythological?

Ganpatrao : No. It was social. 'Shaheed'

Bapu Watve : 'Shaheed'

Ganpatrao : Yes. The film name was 'Shaheed'.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : That company also closed down.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : Then for few days I had no work. Then Dadasaheb Phalke started work on the film 'Setubandhan'.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : He wanted well-built people for the film. There was one person Wagh from Dadar with a wrestler-like physique. He was brought for the role of 'Maruti'.

Bapu Watve : Brought here to Nasik.

Ganpatrao : Yes. To Nasik. Our employer Maya Shankar Thakkar was a partner in Hindustan Company.

Bapu Watve : Yes.

Ganpatrao : He had provided the capital of Rs. 50,000/- and had told Dadasaheb to manage film production within that amount. Dadasaheb collected big wrestlers from Wadi Bandar and took them to Madras for shooting. He had taken his son Babarai as cameraman. But he was not that good at his work and the filming did not go well. Then he came to Nasik and opened a studio called 'Phalke Diamond Studio' near Tambat ghat.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : Then I got a job with Phalke.

Bapu Watve : But he had gone to Humpi near Madras. Did he shoot anything there?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He shot the film. But because his son Babarai was not experienced at his work hence the whole thing failed. Then Dada came back. He had brought huge boxes with him filled with large pillars and other material required for making the set. So out of Rs. 50000/- he had spent Rs. 40000/- in making film sets only.

Bapu Watve : Oh God.

Ganpatrao : Maya Shankar Seth had told him to manage the entire film production within the budget of Rs. 50000/-. But he had spent the entire amount on making sets only. Then he went to Maya Shankar Seth asking for more funds. Phalke was keen to make the film. Maya Shankar refused to say that he has no money left. In the past, Wamanrao Apte, proprietor of Kohinoor Mills, had taken over Phalke's earlier film company and had named it 'Hindustan Film Company'. When he learnt about this, he agreed to finance the film, if made under his banner.

Bapu Watve : In Bombay?

Ganpatrao : No. In Nasik studio only. Then the film got completed within about a year and a half. But by the time era of talking films had arrived.

Bapu Watve : That is correct.

Ganpatrao : Imperial Company had produced first talkie film 'Alam Ara'. Zubeda Banu and Master Vitthal had acted in that.

Bapu Watve : Yes. Yes.

Ganpatrao : At the same time Prabhat produced 'Raja Harishchandra'

Bapu Watve : 'Ayodhyecha Raja'

Ganpatrao : So who will see the silent movie in the era of talkies? So Dadasaheb met Mr. Ardeshir Irani, the owner of Imperial Studio.

Bapu Watve : Was Setubandhan Shot in Bombay or Nasik?

Ganpatrao : It was completely filmed in Nasik.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : It was decided to synchronize the dialogues. So Dadasaheb took 40-42 actors & actresses amongst us to Bombay. We were put up at Ramji Purshottam Chawl opposite Prarthana Samaj and we took our food at Arya Pathikashram. This went on for a few days. After 8 to 10 days Dadasaheb took us to see Imperial Studio.

Bapu Watve : So how did you spend your time during these 8/10 days. Exercising?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Exercising, eating and moving around. Mandodari's role was enacted by actress Iqbal who was at Calcutta shooting for another film and therefore could not come in time. So we had to just while away our time for two months. After 8/10 days, Dadasaheb took us to Imperial Studio and showed us Bakraphone, Camera etc and told us how to talk etc. We were all from Nasik wearing Dhoti or Pajamas.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : At that time 5 pictures were being shot there. Our Nanasaheb Sarpotdar was filming his film 'Devaki' there. Also, there were Bhaurao Datar and Jadhavrao whom I had known earlier.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : Gulam Mohammad, Adi, Bilimoriya were just finishing their shooting. Dada was taking us around. Gulam Mohammad enquired about us and was told that we were actors from Nasik. He wondered whether we were actors because we were not dressed in a suit and wearing Dhoti or Pajamas.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : After 7/8 days Dada planned some shooting and called us for Makeup. We were all well-built and muscular and were made up as Demons or monkeys.

Bapu Watve : Apes.

Ganpatrao : When we came out with make-up on, people were amazed at our physique and lined up to see us.

Bapu Watve : The same people had made fun of you earlier.

Ganpatrao : Yes. Had called us porters. And now the entire studio was lined up to see us. Gulam Mohammad mentioned to Bhaurao Datar, who was there, that we were very strong. Bhaurao told him not to taunt us and said these people will not bother to reply but would just lift him and throw him on the ground. After that everybody was afraid of us and would wish us when we went to the studio.

Bapu Watve : Do you remember other famous people from Nasik who were your contemporaries?

Ganpatrao : Those who had worked in Hindustan Company?

Bapu Watve : Yes. Mama Shinde was a director.

Ganpatrao : Mama Shinde director, Anna Salunke cameraman, Kshirsagar in the laboratory, Madhav Mistry in Settings.

Bapu Watve : There was one Telang. Who was he?

Ganpatrao : He was a cameraman before Salunke.

Bapu Watve : Is this Salunke the same person who had acted role of Taramati in Harishchandra?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He used to enact the female role. With Dada that was the practice. One had to do any work.

Bapu Watve : Ok. And there was also one Dabke who had enacted 'Harishchandra' in Phalke Films.

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : He, later on, became a cameraman.

Ganpatrao : Yes. But that was before I had joined Dada.

Bapu Watve : Ok. What happened after ‘Setubandhan’?

Ganpatrao : After synchronization of ‘Setubandhan’, Apte closed down Nasik Studio.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : He had other businesses like Cloth mill etc. He started a sugar mill at Phaltan in partnership with one Gujrathi fellow. He lost interest in the film line.

Bapu Watve : Oh

Ganpatrao : I had no work for two years. Since I had developed interest in this line, I decided to look for a job in this line only. One actress - Anusuya from the old Hindustan Company was working in ‘Vishnu Cinetone’ in Mumbai. So I and my friend Haribhau Lonare went to Dadar and met her. She introduced us to her employer. He asked us to see him after 15 days.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : Since we had 15 days free, we decided to approach “ Prabhat” who had a good reputation. It was in 1934.

Bapu Watve : About 50 years back.

Ganpatrao : One of Haribhau’s relative was staying in the camp area in Pune. So we went and stayed with him and the next day morning went to Prabhat Studio and enquired about Shantaram Bapu’s residence. I had taken a certificate from Dadasaheb

which described me as an all round actor and good-natured man, signed by Dhondiraj Govind Phalke.

Bapu Watve : Ok. Then

Ganpatrao : I showed the certificate to Shantaram Bapu. He smiled and asked if I was from Phalke. I told him that the film 'Setubandhan' was being shown in Pune then and Lonare had acted role of Maruti and I had acted role of Minister and he can see that. That time Company had shifted from Kolhapur and had produced film 'Amrutmanthan' and were preparing for 'Chandrasena''s rehearsals.

Bapu Watve : Ok

Ganpatrao : They were looking for well-built people for the role of demons. He told us that he can employ us but although we were established actors their salary scale was low. He could offer us a salary of only Rs. 30/- per month.

Bapu Watve : Per month.

Ganpatrao : Yes. In those days the salaries were like that only. He asked us to think over the offer and report the next day.

Bapu Watve : Could you have managed in Rs. 30/-

Ganpatrao : Yes. In those days the things did not cost a lot- 12 kg wheat, 1.5 lit Milk, 1.5 Rs coal, 3.5 Rs house rent were all cheap. We could easily manage in Rs. 30 for a month.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : We went back, thought over and decided to accept his offer. We were confident that once we make entry into Prabhat, we will progress. We went and met

Shantaram Bapu in his bungalow and informed him of our decision. He asked us to meet Bhide (Time Keeper). He gave a slip for timekeeper who took us to the actor's room and asked us to sit.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : Next day we signed an agreement and our career with Prabhat started.

Bapu Watve : Do you have any memories of Dadasaheb Phalke?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Few very peculiar and strange memories.

Bapu Watve : You can tell us a few good memories.

Ganpatrao : He was very whimsical. Once for the shooting of 'Setubandhan' we were going to Bhandardara dam. He was shooting at the dam. He had a fixed 12-inch lens and the camera was placed at the base of the dam. The dam wall was being shown as a wall of Ravan's fort and demons were guarding it. When we left for Bhandardara, Dadasaheb, Mama Shinde were in a car and we actors were in a truck. Near Ghoti we stopped at a railway crossing. Many of us including one Brahmin Gopal got down for nature's call. Dadasaheb had asked us to return back within five minutes. That Brahmin went a little distance away and did not return within the given time of five minutes. Dadasaheb instructed Shinde to start the vehicles leaving Gopal behind. He was left back and we proceeded to Bhandardara.

Bapu Watve : Oh God.

Ganpatrao : He was stranded there. Around seven in the evening we picked him up on our way back.

Bapu Watve : Ok. What was his method of working? Full day?

Ganpatrao : We had to do all types of work.

Bapu Watve : Did he also work full time?

Ganpatrao : He was very hard working. And was also a very good teacher.

Bapu Watve : But he himself worked hard and made others also work hard?

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : Was he hot-tempered?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Very very hot-tempered.

Bapu Watve : You were not associated with him for long.

Ganpatrao : No. Only one film. 'Setubandhan'

Bapu Watve : Ok. After joining Prabhat, what role did you get in 'Chandrasena'?

Ganpatrao : Of Chief Minister.

Bapu Watve : Of Ahiravan Mahiravan?

Ganpatrao : No. Ahiravan & Mahiravan's Chief Minister's roles were enacted by Kelkar and Manajirao.

Bapu Watve : Your work in Prabhat got started. What was your next film? 'Dharmatma'?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I was the priest's minister.

Bapu Watve : Then 'Sant Tukaram'?

Ganpatrao : Yes. In 'Sant Tukaram' I was 'Moropant Pingale', who brings gifts from Shivaji.

Bapu Watve : By that time you had also started making name for yourself.

Ganpatrao : Yes. Employers were appreciating my work and were gaining confidence in my work.

Bapu Watve : What was special in the working style of 'Prabhat'?

Ganpatrao : The work was regular and very disciplined. As a drama, there used to be a regular practice for a month or two. While sets were being erected, actors would be practicing with dialogue and while make-up was going on.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : Everything was very well managed. Owners themselves use to work very hard. Damlemama and Saheb mama would always be sitting there. After the day's shooting got over Shantaram Bapu would be working in the editing room till 2 o'clock in the morning. He would not sleep properly till the entire film was shot. In my view, in India, he was the best director who could demonstrate the actor what he wanted.

Bapu Watve : After that, in which film did you get the important role? 'Manus'?

Ganpatrao : as Inspector in 'Manus', and as Changdeo in 'Dnyaneshwar'

Bapu Watve : How did you get the role in ‘Gopalkrishna’?

Ganpatrao : That was because of Damlemama and Fattemama. I got the role of Kans. There was a talk of getting some wrestlers from outside for the roles of Kans and Keshi. But Damlemama said why to get people from outside. We have people from Nasik. We can get them to act. From that time I started getting bigger roles.

Bapu Watve : You were Kans and Haribhau Adharkar was your brother Keshi in ‘Gopalkrushna’.

Ganpatrao : Yes.

22.22 mints

Bapu Watve : And then you got an important role in ‘Dnyaneshwar’

Ganpatrao : Changdeo in ‘Dnyaneshwar’. I had to sit on a tiger. The real tiger was brought there. Was sitting on it for a full day.

Bapu Watve : Were you not frightened?

Ganpatrao : I was thrilled. Damlemama said that the tiger loves the man who feeds him daily. So we would use that person in your get-up. But I had guts and I told him that I will act the scene myself. That was a big tigress name Khudshi. First, they put up a large cage. Then inside they created a set of a forest. 3 cameras were kept. Each one in a tree. On day one, the tigress was released in the cage and the ringmaster was standing outside the range of the camera. But a tiger never stands on four legs. So I could not sit on her. The first day was wasted with no work. Then the ringmaster got an idea. He got a trolley from a circus and put four barrels on the trolley. The tigress was used to standing on barrels. So after getting the signal she climbed and stood on them. Then, I sat on her and the trolley was pulled to produce the effect of tigress walking. Once she

looked back at me but when the ringmaster called her she again looked at him. The animal was not used to studio lights and would therefore get upset. Thus, the scene was shot in 2 days. Damlemama was very pleased and patted my back. After the scene was shot, the employees of the circus who use to feed the tigress rushed to me and embraced me. They said that I showed great courage because the tigress was very dangerous. They said that even they are afraid to go near her.

Bapu Watve : You undertook the task because you were determined.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I was determined.

Bapu Watve : There was a scene in which you go to meet Dnyaneshwar with 800 disciples.

Ganpatrao : 900. It was a mob of 900. And Dnyaneshwar was played by Shahu Modak

Bapu Watve : How long did it take to make up the mob of 900?

Ganpatrao : Work started at 5 in the morning. Our make-up master Paranjape had created hair locks of jute. All of us actors were fitting beards. The entire mob had to wear a get-up of sage.

Bapu Watve : Yes.

Ganpatrao : With Hair and beard and ash on the body, the mob got ready by about 11:30 am. The scene was shot in the noon.

Bapu Watve : Ok. Which was your important film next? Sant Sakhu?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Sant Sakhu. I had the role of Vishwambhar Buva. In the film, the girl had surrendered herself to the god Pandurang. The mother-in-law calls an evil charmer to remove the devil from her body.

Bapu Watve : Vishwambhar Buva

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : Then Raja Nene's '10 Vajata'.

Ganpatrao : Yes. Raja Nene had given me the role of carriage driver.

Bapu Watve : You also had a song in that film.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I had a song.

Bapu Watve : Then 'Ramshastri'.

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : But before that, you worked in a Hindi film 'Nai Kahani'. Kashyap was the director.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I was heroin's father. Rose was heroin.

Bapu Watve : And then 'Ramshastri'

Ganpatrao : No before 'Ramshastri' I acted in another film 'Seedha Rasta'

Bapu Watve : How did you get the role of Raghoba in Ramshastri?

Ganpatrao : For the role of Raghoba, a look test was conducted on 3 or 4 people with makeup and a famous south Indian actor from Mumbai, Nayampalli was selected. He was given a contract of Rs. 50,000/- and advance of Rs. 5000/- was paid.

One day Damalemama, Sahebmama, Bedekar and Gajanan Jahagirdar were sitting in the office and he was called with the makeup put on. However, he did not fit in their image of Raghoba Peshwa who was a Brahmin. So they rejected him. After two days Damalemama and Sahebmama decided to try me out and makeup artist Gupte was asked to make me up. Make-up master Gupte informed me. My head was shaved off. I was fitted with a mustache, rich dress of Peshwa, diamond ear ring, special shoes, headgear etc. I was having a good physique.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : With all the makeup, I was taken to Damalemama's office where Damalemama, Sahebmama, Bedekar and Gajanan Jahagirdar were sitting. They approved my looks and I was selected for the role. They told Nayampalli that his contract is cancelled. Nayampalli refused to pay back the advance of Rs. 5000/- because he said that since his head was shaved off he would not get any work in Mumbai. The company agreed to forfeit the advance paid to him.

30 mints

Bapu Watve : Lalita Pawar was also cast.

Ganpatrao : Yes. Lalita Pawar was cast as Anandibai, Master Chotu as Madhavrao Peshwe. Ranoji master was Madhvrao's valet and Vitthal Nagoba was Raghoba Dada's valet.

Bapu Watve : This role of Raghoba Dada in 'Ramshastri' made you famous.

Ganpatrao : Yes. That role made me famous. Just to stitch dress, Kakde tailor from Kolhapur took 2 years.

Bapu Watve : Had he brought his staff here?

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : You were also made to ride a horse.

Ganpatrao : Yes. Rajaram Maharaj had given two horses to the company. I had to practice horse riding every day. Mane wrestler taught us sword fighting for 12 months.

Bapu Watve : All this preparation for the film 'Ramshastri'?

Ganpatrao : Yes. We use to work very hard.

Bapu Watve : Afterwards, you were felicitated at many places for your role of Raghoba.

Ganpatrao : Yes. At many places. Famous Brahmins use to call me to their residences for tea and would appreciate my work.

Bapu Watve : Who was the director of the film 'Ramshastri'?

Ganpatrao : Bedekar. He was very clever and hard taskmaster.

Bapu Watve : Did he act the scene for you?

Ganpatrao : No. He would explain the scene and made us repeat it till he was satisfied. In the scene of Narayanrao getting killed by the arm forces when he was rushing to Raghoba asking his uncle to save him, Lalitabai asked Bedekar to act out the scene for me. But Bedekar declined it by saying he could not act like me.

Bapu Watve : But he explained to you how to speak, voice tone etc.

Ganpatrao : Yes. He did. He was a very clever person in Directing scenes.

Bapu Watve : Did Fattelal use to be present on the sets?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He would always be there. And Damlemama also use to visit often. They were very close friends.

Bapu Watve : But you earned name and fame because of 'Ramshastri'. Did you get any offers from outside the company?

Ganpatrao : After our studio got closed and we were sacked.

Bapu Watve : No. While you were with Prabhat and since you had earned name for your role in Ramshastri, did you get any offers from outside?

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : From Mumbai companies with good salaries?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I received many offers, but I did not accept them. But to outside companies that came to Prabhat for shooting, our manager Balasaheb Pathak use to recommend my name for side roles and I use to earn 1000 or 2000 on the side in addition to my salary. I acted in three or four films like that.

Bapu Watve : That was a considerable amount in those days. Do you remember names of any such outside films, shot at Prabhat studio?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Swami's role in Shantaram's 'Bhagyarekha', Rich Man's role in M.G.Rangnekar's 'Kuber', then Priest's role in 'Samrat Ashok'.

Bapu Watve : You also acted in 'Shikast'.

Ganpatrao : Yes. With Dilipkumar in 'Shikast' directed Mumbai's Ramesh Sehgal.

Bapu Watve : What was that role?

Ganpatrao : I was an old family retainer in his mansion built by forefathers. The old man had great influence over the house.

Bapu Watve : How was your experience, working with Dilipkumar?

Ganpatrao : He is a very good actor.

Bapu Watve : Did he respect you?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Very much. Part of the shooting then took place in Mumbai.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : Director Ramesh Sahgal called me to Mumbai for 7 or 8 days for a shooting planned at Central Studio near Mahalakshmi. Some shooting took place there and then there was some outdoor shooting. In the outdoor scene, Dilipkumar and I had a fight with sticks with another gang in farmland. The shooting took place for two days. After the day's work got over, you know the practice of Mumbai people.

Bapu Watve : Yes, Yes.

Ganpatrao : The drinking session started. Ramesh Sehgal filled a glass for me. I told him that not only I did not drink I also did not eat non-veg. He expressed great surprise.

Then I told him that I am leaving for Poona the next day. He insisted that I must stay back with him for a couple of days.

Bapu Watve : Who? Ramesh Sehgal asked?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He had a big bungalow in Chembur. He took me there and made me stay with him as his guest and then I returned to Pune.

Bapu Watve : This shows that he honoured you.

Ganpatrao : Yes. Honoured me.

Bapu Watve : Had Dilipkumar and Ramesh Sehgal saw your Prabhat film?

Ganpatrao : Yes. They had liked my acting.

Bapu Watve : When you were getting offers from outside with a good salary why did you not join them?

Ganpatrao : I was used to a certain lifestyle. By mixing with new people I would have had to change my lifestyle to suit them. Also, Prabhat had a very systematic way of working. So, although I was being offered more money, I decided to remain in Pune and not to leave.

Bapu Watve : But you would have got better chances in Hindi.

Ganpatrao : Yes. The company had retained a Hindi teacher for us.

Bapu Watve : Is it?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I had practiced Hindi a lot.

Bapu Watve : Who taught Hindi in Prabhat?

Ganpatrao : Initially it was D.D. Kashyap. He became a director later on.

Bapu Watve : And then?

Ganpatrao : Mukhram Sharma.

Bapu Watve : The one who became a famous author in Hindi? Was he teaching you Hindi?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He taught me. He advised me that, Ganpatrao, whenever you are reading Hindi books, read loudly. It would improve your pronunciation. In the Prabhat library, there were many Hindi books. I use to bring them to the actor's room and read loudly. That improved my Hindi.

Bapu Watve : At that time there was also a gymnasium in Prabhat.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I use to go there daily. I enjoyed exercising. When S. Pralhad from Bangalore joined Prabhat he suggested owner, build a gymnasium at Prabhat. He was a weight lifter and practiced English exercises. He got all equipment required. Then 2/3 people who had originally come from Kolhapur and me who loved to exercise, use to go to the gym at 5 o'clock in the morning for a workout. In those days it was essential to have a good physique.

Bapu Watve : Right. And they had employed a retired army person to teach you to drill for the film 'Manus'.

Ganpatrao : Yes. You will recall there is a shot of a police parade in 'Manus'. It was hardly shown for 1 or 2 minutes. But for that, police uniforms were stitched for 18 persons and that army man use to take our pared.

Bapu Watve : In uniform?

Ganpatrao : Yes. For the first two months in uniform and later on without uniform.

Bapu Watve : How long was the drill? Full day?

Ganpatrao : For about 1 hour in the evening from about 5 pm. Even after the completion of the film, the army man continued to come and we were practicing drill. He told us that he is getting his salary so he has to come. Then we also use to go there and stand.

Bapu Watve : I have heard that this continued even after the film got released.

Ganpatrao : In 'Prabhat' there was discipline.

Bapu Watve : Did the actors not complain?

Ganpatrao : No. People use to enjoy it. In 'Prabhat', there was no differentiation between employers and employees. Everybody had a sense of belonging. Everyone considered the studio as their home and company as his own.

Bapu Watve : You worked under so many directors, Shantaram Bapu, Damle, Fattelal, Bedekar, Raja Nene. What are your comments about Shantaram?

Ganpatrao : He was the best in demonstrating acting.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : Bedekar was very good in Dialogues.

Bapu Watve : What about Damlemama and Fattelal?

Ganpatrao : They were both clever. Both of them were not demonstrative but were very knowledgeable.

Bapu Watve : You got most of your important roles in Damle Fattelal's film.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I worked mostly with Damle mama and Fattelal who made mostly mythological films or films about saints. I worked in only one film of Shantaram, 'Manus' where I had the role of an inspector.

Bapu Watve : Who liked you most?

Ganpatrao : Damle mama. He was the person who initially promoted me.

Bapu Watve : After 'Ramshastri', in which 'Prabhat' made pictures, you got roles?

Ganpatrao : Role of Akrur in 'Gokul' directed by Vasant Painter, in 'Ham Ek Hai' directed by P.L.Santoshi I was hero's father and in Bedekar's 'Lakharani' I was king.

Bapu Watve : King's role! Who were the other actors with you?

Ganpatrao : Actress from Calcutta, Monica Desai and Guru Datt.

Bapu Watve : I do not think you were part of any film of Prabhat after that.

Ganpatrao : No. In 1949, like everybody else, I also got notice and I had to leave Prabhat.

Bapu Watve : Why do you think Prabhat collapsed like that?

Ganpatrao : Reason! Shantaram left.

Bapu Watve : In 1942.

Ganpatrao : Damlemama's health deteriorated and he died. The two capable persons were gone. Had Damlemama been around, the studio would not have gone. He loved the studio. He had created a paradise (like Gokul) out of barren land. We were witness to that. I am sure the studio would not have collapsed had Damlemama been alive.

Bapu Watve : Then

Ganpatrao : Fattelal was not that capable. After Shantaram's departure, Baburao Pai had joined the company as one partner. He could not manage and the company got closed.

Bapu Watve : What did you do after leaving Prabhat?

Ganpatrao : Balasaheb Pathak was our manager in Prabhat. For about a year, he had sensed the impending collapse of the company and had started preparations. He raised capital of about three lakhs from Maharaja of Aundh and had purchased a camera and lights etc. In Navayug studio on Shankarshet road, he took a shed on rent and decided to produce films himself. 10 or 12 days after leaving Prabhat, Balasaheb came to my home in Chimanbaug and told me not to go anywhere and that he was starting a company and in his first film "Mayabazar" he was giving me the role of 'Ghatotkach'.

Bapu Watve : His company 'Manik Studio'?

Ganpatrao : Manik Studio

Bapu Watve : In how many films produced by them did you act?

Ganpatrao : After Mayabazar, Kalyancha Subhedar.

Bapu Watve : What was your role in that?

Ganpatrao : Firangoji Narsala, Minister of Chakan fort. Ambatkar was Director.

Bapu Watve : D.S. Ambatkar

Ganpatrao : Then they produced 'Shivleela' in which I acted role of 'Bhasmasur', Directed by Govind Ghanekar. Then one more social film and the company got closed.

Bapu Watve : Closed?

Ganpatrao : Yes closed. I was in Pune up to 1956.

Bapu Watve : You did not get much work after that?

Ganpatrao : No. I did not get any work and we returned to Nasik. Left Nasik in 28, returned back in 56.

Bapu Watve : In those 28 years, in how many silent movies and talking movies did you act? Can you remember?

Ganpatrao : Must have been about 50 or 60.

48 mints

Bapu Watve : You had worked in well-equipped studio-like Prabhat. Before that, you had also worked in Nasik. Did you find the difference in working at these places?

Ganpatrao : Lot of differences. Prabhat was well developed and had advanced modern equipment. Nasik studios were at the primary level and not developed.

Bapu Watve : What kind of studios were there?

Ganpatrao : Studio used to be a tin shed. All shooting was carried out in natural lighting. There would not be any shooting for 4 months of the rainy season. In old days, women did not come forward to work in cinema. Then Dadasaheb would make young children grow their hair and act. I saw that when I went to the studio with friends.

Bapu Watve : You were at Nasik then?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He produced his films in Nasik only. I used to visit to observe shooting.

Bapu Watve : Do you have any memories of that time?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He used to work in a laboratory himself. He was himself is a cameraman and would also make up artists. He specialized in trick scenes and had an offer from Casey company in England which he refused.

Bapu Watve : Had you seen a shooting of any trick scene?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Scene of setting Lanka on fire.

Bapu Watve : That must be around 1917.



ntai

Ganpatrao : It was a scene of 'Lanka Dahan'. He had created cardboard houses and a model of Maruti. He then wrapped Maruti's tail and alighted it and with a string moved Maruti around. This is how he shot trick scenes.

Bapu Watve : Any other memory of Dadasaheb Phalke?

Ganpatrao : He was very strict. If work does not get done within the allotted time he would cancel it.

Bapu Watve : Since you had worked with Phalke before joining 'Prabhat', did you get any benefit from that?

Ganpatrao : No.

Bapu Watve : Did you getting any help from the Government?

Ganpatrao : In 1970, when Vasant Rao Naik was chief Minister, we were felicitated at the hands of the Governor. At that time Maharashtra Government decided to call all artists who were contemporaries of Dadasaheb Phalke for the function. We were 12 or 14 people from Nasik. Maharashtra Govt arranged transportation for us to Mumbai at their cost and arranged for our stay at Sardar Gruha. The next day, there was a function of the unveiling of the statue of Dadasaheb at Lalbaug at the hands of Vasant Rao Naik. A large pandal was erected and many Maharashtrian artists were present. That road is now named Dadasaheb Phalke Road.

Bapu Watve : You were felicitated because you were his colleague at one time.

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : Did you receive any help from the government?

Ganpatrao : No. At the function, we were garlanded and were given a silver medal which had a camera engraved on one side and Dadasaheb's photo on another side. And then we were brought back to Nasik at Government expense. Then we, the old artists, got together and decided that considering our advanced age, we should ask for help from government and all of us applied.

Bapu Watve : This was in 1970?

Ganpatrao : Yes in 1970. Then Government sanctioned a grant to us of Rs. 300/- each per annum. Later on, it was increased to Rs. 400/- and now we are getting Rs. 900/- per year.

Bapu Watve : That is Rs. 75/- per month. Are you still getting it?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I am still getting the pension and hope to get it till I am alive.

Bapu Watve : You worked for several years in Prabhat and other organizations. What kind of influence did these organizations leave on you? Did you develop a disciplined lifestyle and punctuality due to your association with Prabhat?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I benefited a lot due to Prabhat.

Bapu Watve : How?

Ganpatrao : Prabhat made me an actor. Prabhat was my Guru. It also inculcated discipline in me.

Bapu Watve : What do you do now?

Ganpatrao : Nothing at the moment. After leaving Prabhat, I had set up a shop selling toffees, biscuits and groceries etc in the front portion of my house. I was in that business for about 18 to 20 years till I became 80 years old. I stopped it 2/3 years back due to old age.

55 mints

Bapu Watve : Do you remember the names of people from Nasik who were felicitated with you in 1970?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Nirantarmama, Panditji, Haribhau Lonare, Bhadane, Shaligram Kalal, Bhagwat etc 10 or 12 of us were there. I can remember only these names.

Bapu Watve : Are any of them alive today in Nasik?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Kalal and Bhagwat. Only two of them.

Bapu Watve : They must be quite old.

Ganpatrao : Yes. About my age.

Bapu Watve : What have these two people been doing?

Ganpatrao : Both had set up their own business. Kalal had opened a grocery shop which he still attends. Bhagwat has now retired.

Bapu Watve : What was the work of contemporaries of Dadasaheb Phalke who were honoured with you?

Ganpatrao : Some of them were in the media department. I was in the acting department, Bhagwat in the Dress department, Bhadane in Make-up, people were in different departments.

Bapu Watve : And Narayanrao Tambat?

Ganpatrao : In actor. R.M. Tambat was Art Director.

Bapu Watve : Do you remember any big stars with whom you acted?

Ganpatrao : Bhauroo Datar, Krushna Kumbhar,

Bapu Watve : They are from old times. What about the time after you joined Prabhat and also did outside work?

Ganpatrao : Dilipkumar, Sapru, Shahu Modak, Vivek, Dev Anand, Lalita Pawar, Minakshi was with me in Ramshastri, Gajanan Jahagirdar, Sudhabai Apte, Durgabai Khote, Shanta Apte, Baburao Pendharkar, Nalini Tarkhadkar.

Bapu Watve : Bhaishaeb! Any other old memories?

Ganpatrao : During the shooting of ' Setubandhan', at Pandavleni, the demons were crawling under the tree and monkeys were sitting on branches of the tree. The tree was about 20 feet tall.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : In those days everybody in the studio had to put on make-up. People from other departments who were slim were made up as monkeys and actors who were well built were made Demons. As the actors started crawling under the tree and the camera started, some people jumped from the tree, some got frightened and fell from the tree

and some people who were afraid did not jump at all. The scene got spoilt. Dada stopped the camera. Dada got very angry with people who had not jumped and suspended them right there and asked them not to come for work the next day. Somehow the scene was shot. When we sat in the car for the return journey from Pandavleni, Dada told Shinde not to take those in the car, people who had not jumped. They were left behind to walk back to the studio with full make-up of monkeys.

Bapu Watve : With full make-up. Tails and all? In the get-up of monkeys? On the road?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Like that only on road. I told you about the incidence of Bhandardara.

Bapu Watve : Yes.

Ganpatrao : The scene was to be shot at 5 in the morning at sunrise.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : Since it was outdoor shooting, we went to the studio at 3 o'clock. We got ready by 5:30 am and were slightly delayed. When the car reached his house Dada looked at his watch and asked Shinde what time it was? Why was he late when he was called at 5 O'clock? He cancelled the shooting and we were asked to go back and remove make-up. He was that strict.

Bapu Watve : Who was this Shinde?

Ganpatrao : He was assistant director and was in charge in absence of Dada. All of us had to go back and remove make-up. The next day we got ready by 4:30 am and the shooting took place.

Bapu Watve : Was he that strict.

Ganpatrao : Very strict. And everybody had to carry on any work given to him. An actor could be asked to do any other work also.

Bapu Watve : Was he very punctual?

Ganpatrao : Yes. And also very hard working.

Bapu Watve : This person Shinde, what was his name?

Ganpatrao : No. He was called Shindemama only.

Bapu Watve : Did he become Director later on?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Later on, when differences developed between Dadasaheb and Apte and Dadasaheb left the company, Shindemama took over as Director. Anna Salunkhe Cameraman, Sagar in charge of Laboratory, Madhav Mistry head of setting. These were the people in 'British India'.

Bapu Watve : Were you there in that company?

Ganpatrao : Yes. One person from Gujrat was the Director of a mythological film.

Bapu Watve : Do you remember the name of the film.

Ganpatrao : Yes. 'Seeta Gumfa'. In the film in outdoor, they wanted to show Ravan's fort. There is an old fort at Lasalgaon which the director had selected for the shot. For the role of a watchman, one Mr. Nagarkar from Nasik was selected. He was very slim but was a favourite of the owner and was, therefore, selected for the role of leader of guards. The rest of us were soldiers. I was chief of soldiers.

Bapu Watve : Ok.

Ganpatrao : The scene was of fighting and wrestling amongst the two of us. After an initial fight with swords, we started to wrestle. Now I was a trained wrestler. He did not know wrestling. So when I pulled him down, my weight fell on him. His leg got twisted. He started shouting and crying. Then Laxman wrestler who had the main role in the film came rushing, lifted him, massaged him and finally when he was in a position to stand he went to the fort and stood on guard. But when we soldiers came running to the fort, before putting up any fight, he acted dead.

Bapu Watve : What?

Ganpatrao : Yes. He was frightened. Somehow the scene was shot. We were put up on the first floor for 2 days, in a house owned by a Marwari. Our owner was a Zoroastrian. Those were days of silent movies which had lots of scenes of jumping etc which needed practice. Around 8 or 9 in the evening, after our meals when all the actors were resting, the owner came. He scolded us for not practicing and asked us to practice jumping. The Marwari had just returned home after closing his shop and was having his dinner. On the first floor, all of us were practicing distance jumping which was making a lot of noise. He was surprised to hear us jumping and came out shouting. He questioned if we were sane! Then onwards, even at a small sound of a step, he would shout at us. Such a fun!

Bapu Watve : What was the arrangement for lunch, for outdoors, in those days?

Ganpatrao : There use to be a good arrangement for lunch. Normally we used to bring food from home. But in case there was no lunch break, the company use to give us a meal.

Bapu Watve : What used to be menu?

Ganpatrao : Chapattis, sweets etc. More of sweets and mixtures. Once during the making of 'Setubandhan,' when we had gone to Mumbai all of us went for an outing to choupati.

Bapu Watve : All of you? How many? 40-42?

Ganpatrao : Yes. 40-42. Actress Iqbal was not going to come for 2 months. We had no work. Only eat and wander. At choupati, on a footpath, one person used to sit with a weighing scale. We decided to check our weight there. Amongst us, there was one Shaligram Kalal who was acting role of Bibhishan. He was a wrestler with a huge body.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : When he stood up on the weighing scale the machine broke. Then we went to choupati. Whenever we went to choupati, people use to come to see us. In Mumbai, there were not many people with our kind of big body frame.

Bapu Watve : What was your salary when you joined British India?

Ganpatrao : 20 Rupees per month. Things were cheap those days.

Bapu Watve : Was there any increment later on?

Ganpatrao : Yes. Rs. 20 was raised to Rs. 25. The company got closed then.

Bapu Watve : And then Rs. 30 at Prabhat.

Ganpatrao : Yes.

Bapu Watve : What was your last salary in Prabhat?

Ganpatrao : Rs. 200. in 1950.

Bapu Watve : Did you get better scales outside after leaving Prabhat?

Ganpatrao : After Prabhat, in Manik Studio I got a better scale. I worked in 3 films for which I got Rs. 10000 / 15000 for each film.

Bapu Watve : Did you save that?

Ganpatrao : Yes. I did. I was staying in Pune looking for work till 1956. But in Pune, one by one studio was closing down. Then I told my wife that while we have some money saved, we will build a house for income from rent. The wife was asking what was the hurry? But I told her that the money saved will get exhausted gradually if I do not get work. I came to Nasik and in 4-5 months re-built our existing house. It was not very big but was built to maximize income from rent.

Bapu Watve : So now you get sufficient income from rent to meet your needs.

Ganpatrao : Yes. I get a rent of Rs. 400/-. I am alone. So this amount can take care of me.

Bapu Watve : Now tell us about 'Shivleela'.

Ganpatrao : I have already told you about the incidence of riding tiger for 'Dnyaneshwar'. This incident is from 'Shivleela' produced by Manik Studio. I had the role of Bhasmasur. I was to chase a prince and princess riding in a chariot. In Prabhat, I was taught horse riding. Here owner of Manik Studio, Balasaheb Phatak got one horse from the camp area and I was asked to ride on it. This horse was taught to follow opposite instructions. If you pull him he would run and would halt if you loosen the grip. The attendant should have told me this.

Bapu Watve : Yes.

1:10:00 mints

Ganpatrao : The camera was set up. The road had a hill on one side and a deep gorge on the other side. When I pulled the leash, the horse started running as if in a race and must have covered a mile in 2 minutes.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : I was sure I was going to fall. Somehow I held it tight. I was shouting but the horse would not stop because he was taught to run when shouted at.

Bapu Watve : Then?

Ganpatrao : Some people were coming up the road from another side. They made out that I have lost control of the horse and 10/12 people stood in the way. As the horse stopped, I fell down. Luckily I fell on my back and not on my head. Otherwise, that would have been my end.

Bapu Watve : It was a life-threatening event.

Ganpatrao : Yes, a great risk to life. Just a few days earlier one actor Motilal, in Mumbai had died in a similar accident.

Bapu Watve : Not Motilal, it was actor Shyam in film 'Shabistan'.

Ganpatrao : Ok. When the film 'Gopal Krishna' started, Damlemama and Saheb mama were the directors. There is a cowshed in Dombivali.

Bapu Watve : In Bograswadi.

Ganpatrao : For the shooting of that film 50/60 cows were brought to the studio along with their attendants for about a year. There was one white cow named 'Nandini'. The whole atmosphere of the studio was changed and we got a feel of being in Gokul only. Once we were taken for 2/3 day's shooting to a cowshed in Dombivali. The scene was Krishna, playing his flute and cows coming to him. Damalemama had told the cook to give any amount of milk and ghee asked by us. Although we were not used to it, that day some people drank litres of milk while some ate kilos of ghee. And the next day all got stomach upset and fell ill. The whole atmosphere was so pleasing. It was a pleasure to work when Damalemama and Sahebmama were directors.

Bapu Watve : You acted under Marathi Directors as well as with Hindi Directors. What difference did you find in their work?

Ganpatrao : What?

Bapu Watve : Difference between our Marathi Directors directing Hindi film and Hindi Directors directing Hindi film. You have worked with both types.

Ganpatrao : Marathi directors were more meticulous. Hindi directors were not that meticulous. They use to make fun and enjoy.

Bapu Watve : You were telling me something about 'Manus'. That Shantaram Bapu was teaching acting to Shanta Hublikar.

Ganpatrao : Yes. That is about the song 'Ata Kashala Udyachi Baat, Udun Chalali Raat'. Shantaram Bapu had told Bedekar that in his house, in the hall, he had a full-sized mirror and he would himself act out the scene that he would be shooting the next day. In the film 'Manus', Shata Hublikar was enacting the role of a prostitute. She had to sing and dance but could not satisfy. Shantaram Bapu himself then showed her the dancing steps and actions required. This was the difference between Marathi and Hindi

directors. In 'Ramshastri', for the make-up of Bajirao's soldiers, actors had to put on a beard and part his hair in the middle. Owners gave the material for beards and a bottle of gum to all actors and made them practice for six months. For twelve months our head Mane was teaching us sword fighting actions. That kind of effort we had to put in. Kakade tailor from Kolhapur had to stitch 900 dresses of soldiers, on which he was working for 2 years.

Bapu Watve : Is it?

Ganpatrao : Because in the case of mob scene the dresses must be available. Because the Pune tailors were not adept at stitching bejewelled dresses of Peshwas, Damalemama and Saheb mama called tailors from Kolhapur to stitch those dresses.

Bapu Watve : Do you see the current films? What difference do you notice?

Ganpatrao : I do not like the current films. It has love scenes and nudity. No social message for the public. Only bad influence. Young boys and girls are attracted to fashions shown in film and get spoilt. In our old Prabhat films there used to be a social message. They used to educate people. That is the difference.