

Good

Smile

Arunoday Sharma

Homage to the Departed

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate. 'Good Souls' to my grandfather, Late Pandit Devidas Sharma and grandmother, Late Shrimati Leelavati Sharma.

They gave me their unconditional love - when I needed it most.

Back then I didn't even know what unconditional love was.

PREFACE

It always feels heavy to think about people, who are no more with you. The closer you have been to them; more difficult it gets to reproduce their memories. I have chosen these people because they have left an indelible impression on me.

My grandfather and grandmother (Dada and Dadi) are the only relations of mine who feature in this book. Others are my professional colleagues like, Jalal Agha, Nadira (actors), Gogi Anand and Hrishikesh Mukherjee (Directors), T K Desai (art director) and few more. I worked with all of them in number of films over decades - except Hrishikesh Da, with whom I did not get a chance to work with. I am just a huge fan of his style of film making.

Strangely this book also features Jackie, a female Doberman.

PROLOGUE

I have been a film and television professional in Mumbai, India, since 1972. I have worked as sound recording professional in several feature films, many documentaries and thousands of television shows.

"All the events and details quoted in this book are entirely my own experiences, conversations and interactions with people I have worked with. I have NOT used anyone else's ideas, experiences or thoughts published or not."

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1.

T. K. DESAI

My friend and colleague T K Desai expired in the morning of Jan 6, 2007 at his Bandra home, leaving behind his wife, 3 daughters and 2 sons.

T K Desai was a film „art director“ in Bombay's film industry, also known as Bollywood. He was a very sought after and popular person, easy to work and deal with. For a very long period he was mainly known to be a Navketan-man; just as I was as a „sound recordist“. He was much senior to me, though. He studied in the premier, JJ School of Arts, Mumbai. After finishing his education he joined M R Acharekar's Art School as Faculty for a brief period. Mr. Acharekar was art director with India's leading film production RK Films and Studios. So naturally TKD joined him in that field too and did many films of RK banner, as an art assistant, set painter, property assistant etc. He worked in movies like, Jagte Raho, Shree 420, Dil Hi To Hai, Anari, Ab Dilli Dur Nahin... He was also associated with films like Amrapali, Kohra and Chaudhvin Ka Chand. In 1963 still an assistant, he entered Navketan camp, in Vijay Anand's 'Tere Ghar Ke Samne'. In 1965 he got his break as an independent „art director“ in Amarjeet's „Teen Devian“. In Jewel Thief his work was hailed. He won Filmfare awards for Kohra (B&W) and Des Pardes.

My association with him started in 1972, when I was a recording-assistant in Gogi Anand's film „Darling Darling“. On the sets T K Desai's energy bowled me over. He seemed to have solutions to every requirement on the set. TKD was a very short man with a pronounced belly. His nose was very large and disfigured. He could be considered fairly ugly in this field of predominantly pretty and handsome. But no one including himself had any time to give it a vaguest of thoughts. TKD must have been one of the busiest and popular art directors of his time in Bombay.

Well TKD would be the person with whom I worked on maximum number of films. We both were parts of Navketan; including most of its sister concerns. I would imagine that out of my measly 30 odd films, TKD and my credits must have shared the screen time in 15 of them.

During „Ishq Ishq Ishq“ we spent a whole lot of time together in Nepal. Post this film, I too was considered to be a part of Navketan camp. Dev Saab and Navketan were heady with the success of Hare Ram Hare Krishna. His last release Heera Panna's soft landing on the box office did not affect spirits of the camp. So, many movies were lined up in which we both worked together. Overlapping production of films like Des Pardes, Jaaneman, Loot Maar, Bullet, Kalabaaz etc made us meet every day for many years. That is a lot of interaction. There were more films to follow. We went for an outdoor shooting to Nainital for Kalabaaz and to Coorg for Anand Aur Anand. I remember at Coorg after a few drinks he got a little aggressive with me. He was showing off with his strength to me by hugging me very tight. In defense I managed to lift him; but could not put him down straight. Due to this he fell down. Later in the

morning there were a lot of 'sorry sorry' and it was all wiped off with 'good morning'.

My last film with TKD was 'Kaun Ho Sakta Hai', which was shot entirely in Lonavala. I worked as a Production Designer in this film. This was my best chance to work closely with him, in his own department. Due to this, instead of meeting only during free times we met during work too. I did get some valuable production insights by



watching his way of working. At 78, he was energetic, able to think fast and provide alternates to create the required effect on screen. We went for walks during our free times. He was advised some form of exercise to keep fit. He would walk very slowly, but walk for an entire hour. I noticed walking slower made my muscles ache more than walking at my regular speed. He was very fond of flora. It was rainy season. So every nook and corner of this hill station looked fresh and green. He would stop and look at wild flowers and plants and talk about them,

Sometimes even pick them up to take them back to the hotel. He also told me stories about his career, family and life in general. We were meeting in this film after nearly 20 years! There were a lot of gaps in my information regarding him and his career, which I was happy I was able to fill up...

On the morning of Jan 23, I along with Hersh Kohli went to meet TKD's grieving family nearly two weeks after he had expired. I had come to know about his death very late. But as soon as I knew it, I wanted to visit his place. His daughter opened the door for us and offered us seats. In a short while TKD's very pretty wife appeared, sat near her husband's enlarged photograph and sobbed softly. While his daughter filled us with details, "he was chatting with the family till 2.30am, he went to the toilet early morning, came out complaining of discomfort, collapsing on the bed, someone running to call the doctor from opposite house and... doctor pronouncing him „no more". She said it was a very severe heart attack and in a matter of 5 minutes he was no more. Lucky, he did not have to suffer." I totally agree with the lady. I too am happy he did not suffer.

Before leaving TKD's house, I put my specks on, went to the blow up of his photograph and took a long hard look at his face smiling from behind a garland of fresh flowers. He wore his familiar cap and expression. As a comforting gesture I touched his wife's shoulders. In response she sobbed a little louder. We said Namaste to all and slowly stepped out...

With this, the formalities were over and then started a mental test for me. Am I going to visit them ever again? I started questioning myself. Was it the usual 'show your Face' show or will it have more depth? Will I be breaking my friendship with TKD just because he is dead or I should make plans to keep it going? Only the time will tell. I came home and phoned Mrs. Desai to speak to her, to start a dialogue; but she was not yet out of her depression. She gave me the phone number of TKD's assistant Ramesh, to get any information that I may be looking for. Ramesh spoke at length, "after working for nearly 50 years in this line, no one from any production house came

to see TKD when he died. He was totally bitter about the ways of this ruthless film industry. He was cremated and even after all the other ceremonies were over; no one called up." He was very bitter about Dev Saab too. "TKD worked all his life in Navketan, at least someone could have come to pay condolences from there or Dev Saab's behalf. He used bad-words for the association of art directors, who did not bother to send any representative when he passed away."

TKD as I said earlier was very popular among film producers, very technical, artistic, and excellent team member. But when he died he was not in the big league. He was so humble a man that no one felt any compulsion to visit his dwelling to console the family - including me.

2.

JALAL AGHA

Although we are from the same alma mater, I met Jalal Agha very late in my professional life. For the first time we worked together was in a Mithun-Ranjeeta starrer film called 'Kismet'. It was a 3 days playback shoot for him as a guest artiste. The movie was completed and released in 1980, did fairly well at the box office and then like always - all was forgotten.

Many years later we met yet again. This time it was during a seven-day outdoor shooting schedule of a Marathi TV series called, 'Pravasi'. Outdoor shootings are great adhesive agents for the unit members. Many of such friendships have got sealed for life. Pravasi was a 4 part MTDC promotional program, being made by Baba Majgaonkar with whom I had just finished his earlier Marathi series called 'Najuka'. Marathi was not Jalal's mother tongue, but he worked hard on his lines and did pretty well. At that time Jalal and I, just about knew each other's existence; but as I mentioned it was the outdoor shooting that really brought us closer and turned our acquaintance into a close friendship. My family too happened to visit that location for a day and that worked even more in my favor in bringing Jalal to our home; fairly often later on. Jalal was very fond of children. When you love your children a lot but can't get enough time with them, you look for other sources to satiate your channels of missing affection. This is what happened with Jalal. After estrangement, his wife got married again and moved to Germany along with their children. I am told that saving money for traveling to Germany had become his permanent agenda. He wanted to be with his kids as often as possible. Thankfully perhaps his relationship with his wife had not soured too badly; otherwise that too might have become a major road block against him. Let me put down here some of the incidences with him that I and my family always cherish.

My daughter used to be a boarder at the St. Mary's School, Pune. As soon as Jalal came to know of this, he offered, "I go to Poona often, if you need to send anything, I can gladly deliver it for you." For us there was always something to be sent, mainly food stuff. So sometime he would drop in at my home and pick up things or I would go to his Juhu apartment and drop them there. During her vacations my daughter would tell us that Jalal uncle visited her a few times that we didn't even know about. He would entertain her and her friends in the school compound that made them all very happy. After all when a star comes to meet you in your school, it certainly becomes a big deal for all the young children. In fact she must have felt important among others, because 'Jalal' had come to meet her. My daughter told me one day that he gave her an idea to make some pocket money. He said, "I will sign many autographs in your rough book and you could sell them for 2 rupees each." We still enjoy his crazy but lovely gestures like this.

One day he called me and said that he was leaving for Poona and I should get the packet to send to his place. Around 4 pm, I reached his house with my small

packet. At that time he was busy packing his own bag. I gave him the parcel. He asked, "will you have drink?" I said, "no thanks, I don't drink in the afternoon." He added, "no? Actually if you don't have a drink, I will not take your packet to Poona." I said, "come on Jalal, it is 4 O clock in the afternoon and the day is so hot". "Ok, then take it back", he handed the parcel back to me. Let me open a little window to show my inner self here.

With all the due to respect and love for all my actor friends, I often feel a bit insecure in their company. It is because I cannot fathom from their faces as to what is right and what is not and to what extent. And if the person happens to be a friend it gets all the more tedious to judge what he means. They make the scene so damn convincing. They are equipped to play the fool at will and a poor non-actor ends up playing in their hands.

Back to reality; to my shock Jalal offered me not beer or wine; but black rum with water! He kept packing his bag and kept refilling my glass as well. I think he also gave me something to munch too to counter that bitter medicine. An hour had passed. By now he had affectionately force-fed me three large drinks. He was also done with his packing. I had seen my parcel placed safely inside his bag. Now he was ready to leave. He was going to drive to Poona alone. He picked his bag and we both came down in the lift. He must have enjoyed my wobbly walk.

Once we invited him home on my birthday. Generally in my house the parties used to last well beyond 1.00 am; but that day by midnight most of our friends had left and Jalal had not even made his entry. I thought either he has forgotten the day or the directions to my house. There were no cell phones then. Around 12.30 am, we gave up and started packing, when I felt someone whispered my name from the street. I rushed to the balcony; there was no one. I let it pass. In a few minutes the voice was heard again. This time we all came to the balcony; and found Jalal driving his Gypsy car very slowly and calling me softly. He had forgotten my building, so as a true gentleman he was calling my name softly, while driving up and down, in the hope that someone will hear and respond. He was that civilized to not scream my name or honk in the middle of the night. In his next trip down my road, he saw us all in the balcony, parked his Jeep and came in. He was such lively person that after due, "sorry sorry" he made his drink, asked for Bob Marley music and let his hair down. I asked him, "why were you whispering my name from your vehicle? You could have honked or called a little louder. Thank god it was quiet enough for us to hear you." He said, "no it is too late to create a nuisance". He had taken 3 rounds outside my gate whispering my name, because he was not sure of the building. But I am sure it is also not easy to find someone who would be that conscientious, especially an actor! [Sorry to put them in this bracket again] He made us laugh by imitating my daughter's gestures while playing, 'Uno'. In spare time during that the outdoor shoot he used to play Uno, a card game with my daughter and my son. In fact he had introduced that game to our family and we were addicted to it for very long.

Well, Jalal sang along every Bob Marley song. He knew the entire album in sequence. One visual part that I remember is when he was about to enter the toilet to refresh,

the opening music of, "I shot the sheriff" started. On beat, he retraced his two steps backwards from the toilet door, did a jig on the beat, sang the first line and then went in. He was totally a cool, down to earth guy and not to forget, a good friend. He expired suddenly in Delhi due to a massive heart attack. It seems he had been warned by his close friends to get his health condition checked. But this was also true that he did not wish to spend his limited funds on himself. He wanted to save it for traveling to see his children.

His body was brought to his apartment and I went to see him. Some of his family members were wondering about my identity. So I made it short and sweet. I patted his cheeks and bid good bye. His family and friends did not know that one hot afternoon sometimes in the near past, this guy had blackmailed me and by pouring 3 stiff drinks down my throat. And now he was being forced to turn into an inaccessible star! Who is not allowed to meet an unknown guy like me?

3.

NADIRA MAMA



Feb 9, 2006 a scroll at the bottom of a news channel frame announced - "Nadira died early in the morning. She was suffering from meningitis. She was 74"... it took a few moments for the news to sink in; "Nadira ji has expired!" Instantly a large net of memories from the past fell over me. In so many years in this field I developed relationships of various levels with many actors, technicians and workers. As I think today, Nadira would be a very special for me. The reason for is not so much that I found many great qualities in her; but in the fact that she made me feel special. When we worked together, our relationship was only becoming better. I did not work for this relationship

to grow. She did. She just decided that this is the way she will be towards me and she stuck to it.

She has been around since 'Aan' and I was too junior to her. In the start of my career, I worked with her only in three films, 'Darling Darling', 'Ishq Ishq Ishq' and 'Aap Ki Khatir'. In the first film I was only an assistant and second film (Ishq Ishq Ishq) was my first film as an independent recordist. So I was completely raw then. I also did an interview with her for Plus Channel much later. But I guess I met her last time many years back in a party. She had been very affectionate and kind to me right from 'Darling Darling'. I used to live as a paying guest in Girgaon, then. And she was in a building called Vasundhara at the Peddar road. So every day after shoot pack up at the Mehboob studios, she would approach me to ask if I was going home. If I was free then I would immediately say yes, but as a technician some time I would take time wrap up things and put them back neatly. In that case she would wait for me for a few minutes without any problem. I would get a lift in her red „Triumph“ to Haji Ali, from where I would take a taxi home. At this point I must mention two other gentlemen too who so willingly gave me lifts in their Benz and Premier cars, numerous times. They were cinematographers Late Fali Mistry and Late Jal Mistry. Nadira was a very kind hearted and helpful person. It is my honor to put on record some notable incidences in my life of which Nadira was a part.

Once after 'Darling Darling' shoot at Mehboob studios her car stopped at the Bandra station crossing. The signal turned red and as always beggars of all kind surround the cars to beg. They start knocking the car windows and pester people. Nadira ji was wiping her sweaty face with a napkin, when a beggar in white shirt and pant extended his palm towards her. There it goes, I thought. She looked at his face through her large glares and in a moment her body was shaking. Just before the signal turned green she managed to dish out a fiver, gave him and sped on. Five rupees was big

money that time. My, 'conveyance allowance' used to be that much. But I realized at the next red signal she was completely worked up and was crying bitterly. I was zapped. Patting her shoulder to comfort her, I asked, "who was he Nadira ji?" She told me, "that man was, Purushottam". He has acted in 5-6 films a long time ago in lead roles. But as you can see, he has turned into a total wreck and a drunkard." She had seen him after ages, she told. She stopped the car at Haji Ali and I got off... Much later I came to know that she called up right people and spoke about Purushottam that got him some work on television. She also got him an interview on local Bombay TV station and somehow organized a small regular income that would be sent directly to his family. She did not want Purushottam to have access to that money as it would be lost on liquor.

Second incidence is from, 'Ishq Ishq Ishq'. In October 1973 I was in Pokhara, Nepal for a three month long shooting schedule. In a few days only I fell sick very badly due to some stomach ailment. Only thing I remember today is that my stomach pained horribly. Somehow Nadira saw me looking sick and immediately took me to her hotel room and organized a doctor. She was staying close to the shooting area. After she came to know of the cause of sickness, she ordered an extra bed for me in her own room. It was placed on the floor in the middle of her and her maid's bed. She ordered prescribed diet food for me from the hotel kitchen. She gave me prescribed dozes on time herself or her maid if she was not there. I was sick for 6 whole days. She totally took care of me for all those days. Very gradually I got better and went for shoot from her room itself. My friends had got my clothes from my room. She did not allow me to go to my hotel for many days. Only after ensuring from doctor that I was completely well, she let me to go my own hotel.

Sadly this news traveled to Bombay totally distorted and spiced. People asked me strange questions about her. They spoke to her also similarly. She was mad at all this, but could not avoid this hearsay.

Last important incidence happened sometime in mid-90s. This was the first time I went her house. We were shooting her interview for Plus. During long Q&A session she spoke eloquently about her past. Among many details of shooting of 'Aan', she narrated incidence multiple retakes of a, "slap shot" with Dilip Kumar and how she endured all the pain. She was ecstatic when Raj Kapoor approached her for a song, 'Mud Mud Ke Na Dekh' in Shri 420. She had high regards for the great film maker. After a while during the interview she was not required, as we were taking random shots of her house, trophies, photographs etc. I saw her standing near her bedroom door and realized that she looked very different. I was sure she had a drink or two, as she looked clearly intoxicated. Her personality changed and suddenly she seemed very frail. Her maids saw this and helped her to her bed. She lied down and called me to sit near her. I was a little scared because she was not in her senses and was looking unwell. Any ways I sat down next to her. Then she found a comb, gave it to me and asked me to comb her hair. It was crazy. I have been very close to her. But I felt totally awkward in the presence of my unit members. Moreover I was a senior person in 'Plus' and 'Arunji (me) combing Nadira's hair' did not make a pretty picture. Next thing she did was to ask me to call her Mama. After being forced a few times, I said "Ok mama. She said 'no ok mama, just mama'. I said, 'Nadira mama". She said, "NO, not

Nadira mama, just Mama.” Well I had to call her mama many times over, to handle her swinging mood.

This factual stuff may sound comic and odd; but it’s not difficult for any sensible person to realize what ‘Nadira mama’ had gone through in her personal life; how much she got, what she lost and what she could never get...

TV news said Nadira was admitted to a hospital at Tardeo. She was suffering from meningitis and other ailments’. As I heard this I wore my shoes and started on my journey to Tardeo some 30 km from my home. I reached the hospital and asked the staff to guide me to her room. But I was not allowed to go up there as she was in ICU and was in coma. A kind lady told me that I could come back and see her when she is out of ICU. I turned back disappointed. I knew it in my bones that I was not going to see her again, ever.

I felt it ironic that with her life, were gone my chances of returning the huge favor I owed her.

4.

GOGI ANAND

Someone said „you are as unique as everyone else is“ . Like everyone else in my life too there have been many people who not only crossed my path; but also walked along with me for a while... some stayed long enough, some as little as 24 hours. At various stations some got off, some of them grew big, while some others made me grow. This cycle does not stop. People always keep flowing in and out of everyone life adding value and making a difference. People keep joining your track and leaving it as and when they find their own destined diversions. I have decided to identify some of these people, who made a difference to me. I am not talking about any great human or a saint who gave me a life changing advice or a Mantra! I am trying to identify ordinary people who happen to be my friends and whose one little gesture or an insignificant decision significantly changed the course of my life. One such person was late Arunmitra Anand, popularly and lovingly known as Gogi Anand.

Gogi came to Bombay to take up to movies. He was related to the illustrious Anand family. He was well educated and extremely well read person. Well, in that sense entire Anand family consists of educated people.

Soon he was recommended to go to the Film Institute of India at Poona to study film making. He chose screenplay writing. To be sure of admission, it is said that he took a letter of recommendation from his uncle Dev Anand. There was no problem in admission. After he completed the course he returned to Bombay in 1963. He must have been too eager to find his own place in the glittering movie world and also realized that real work experience would give him much than campus studies, especially since Anand family was right at the top in this business those days. Navketan group was constantly making movies, so getting involved in serious work was no problem. Gogi started assisting in direction in their films. He worked in Navketan films like Prem Pujari, Gambler, Teen Devian and Heera Panna.

Sometime in 1970-71 Gogi launched his first directorial venture, Double Cross, a thriller with his uncle, Vijay Anand, as the leading man and Rekha as its heroine. Vijay Anand did a double role in it. The film was produced by Gogi" s cousin Yash Kohli (popularly known as Baba), also Dev" s nephew. This was Baba" s first feature too as a producer. Baba" s time was ripe to become a producer since he was already a very experienced production hand. He was production controller of some big Navketan films like Heera Panna (1973), Tere Mere Sapne (1971), Prem Pujari (1970) and earlier to that Jewel Thief (1967). So Gogi and Baba worked together in two of those films. R D Burman was their close friend, so it was not too difficult to launch an interestingly put together film project. Double Cross released in



1972, but did not do too well at the box office.

I too had reached Mumbai in May of the same year. It was an electrifying experience for me to get in contact with the people from Navketan camp. Whenever I met someone who knew Dev Anand or had worked with him, was enough for me to turn terribly dreamy. In such an emotional state I met Gogi sometime in early 1973, when I joined the unit of „Doosri Seeta“ as an assistant recordist. The film starred Jaya Bhaduri and Romesh Sharma, who were my friends from the FTII. In fact I was very close to Romesh. Even the cinematographer K K Mahajan, was an ex-FII. KK was also a close friend of Gogi. They had shared a large room with a great sea view at Mount Mary in Bandra for many years. So this film was produced with a great camaraderie between the entire unit.

In the meanwhile Gogi managed to start his third film „Darling Darling“. I was an assistant in this film too. During this period Gogi was very busy shooting and looking after editing for Doosri Seeta. In the meanwhile Doosri Seeta completed and its release date was announced. This would be the first film to release that was going to carry my title. I was very happy. One of the days during Darling Darling“s shooting at Sun u Sand hotel, I was told about premier of Doosri Seeta at Ganga-Jamuna theatres (they are not functioning now) at Tardeo. I was extremely excited in anticipation to be part of the starry premier crowd, which I had only envied by seeing pictures and reading the magazines during my college days.

On the premier day after an early pack up, caravan of Darling Darling's entire unit headed towards Ganga-Jamuna. Dev Saab was in Zeenat“s car. I was in Dev Saab“s car with some others. Cinematographer Fali Mistry was also with us along with many other smaller actors. But alas! Tragedy struck hard, spoiling all my chances of attending the first premier show of my life! No one could reach the theatre. The city was experiencing exceptionally heavy cloud burst that day. Our caravan could reach only till Worli... With a heavy heart I watched all the cars being turned back by the traffic cops. I was hurt deeply when someone said that it was a bad omen for the film. Somehow all of us reached back Sun n Sand late at night. I slept in the room that was hired for the shooting. It had rained so hard that I could not go home for next three days, due to flooding. Tragically the film too got washed out at the box-office very badly.

Gogi was developing a soft corner for me as we met practically every day. He was becoming like an elder brother to me. I remember he took me to see the premier show of God Father at the Sterling. We had to come back late night in a taxi and I was dreading to think about the fat bill that I would have to pay at my home. But when Gogi got off at his home he gave me enough extra money to reach my house too. I guess he liked me due to my sincerity and enthusiasm at work.

I would always reach the studio much before the shooting shift started. Many times even stage would not be open. I remember once during Doosri Seeta shooting at Filmistan, I found Gogi was already there. He was comfortably lying on a bench and reading the script. I asked him what time did he reach? He said 7.30. Next day I was there before him for a 9.30am shift!

Gogi was an avid reader. I remember Gogi listening to and narrating Urdu couplets with another literary person Prabhuji (Prabhu Dayal). They had worked together in

early Navketan films.

Once, during one of my rare free days, I was engrossed in playing carom with kids at my paying guest place. I was enjoying myself. The phone rang and the land lord, Jayant Patel told it was for me. I took the receiver and I heard someone saying that he was calling from Navketan office. My heart missed a beat. I asked him what was it about, he said, “we want to hire you as a recordist for our next film to be shot in Nepal.” I was flabbergasted. I pleaded, “I would not be able to do it, as I am only an assistant right now.” Hearing the names of Navketan and Dev Anand, a hush had descended in the room. Everyone was listening to my conversation. After a little hesitation I took down the address. After an hour long bus journey I was climbing a ‘rickety wooden staircase, Khira Nagar, Santacruz’. I met Hersh Kohli here. I was being pushed to decide fast though I was extremely scared to take up a Navketan film to be shot abroad. If it was a smaller banner or shooting was in Mumbai, I might have gone for it straight away. Hersh pushed me harder, “in four days unit is leaving and all the names have to be finalized”. Well, rest is history for me...

Much later I was informed that Gogi had personally recommended my name to Dev Saab. He had to also remove all doubts in Dev Saab’s mind about me. This one single point had changed the course of my life, then. It also fulfilled my childhood fantasy of experiencing the phenomenon that Dev Anand had been. Later for very long whatever I did in my professional life, I did it as a Navketan man. I had to leave work of „Darling Darling” in between until I came back after three months. Well, „Darling Darling” too bombed and after this Gogi took very long to put a project together. Many years later I remember he asked me to work with him for a film; I said „of course any time”, but the film never took off.

As long as I was with Navketan I met him often, either on sets or in office. I decided to enter field of documentaries in 1985 and asked to be relieved from Navketan. From then on Gogi went out of loop for very long. He would fall ill often due to his excessive drinking and tobacco habits. Once I went to see him at Nanavati Hospital, with our old colleague Amit Khanna. Gogi was being discharged that day. He looked very thin; but cheerful. But I was amused and shocked to notice that even in the hospital he had made arrangements to get his tobacco with the help of a ward boy! No doubt at that stage nobody could imagine that Gogi would ever make a movie again. That was a fair judgment, but I did not like that nobody seemed to have a positive word for him. I don’t think people visited him. Gogi was lonely and out of work for a long period! That is how the film industry works. The more successful you are busier you will be. Only Gogi’s well-wishers and close friends knew him as a bright guy, who could have made it - period.

Sometime in mid-90s, I heard that he was directing a daily TV soap for Balaji. I was so happy for him. That series was doing well too. He was beginning to make a name for himself in television! Soon after that he became a part of Plus Channel, where I was too working. He was hired to direct, ‘Swabhiman’, which too turned out to be a very successful daily soap. I was happy to see that finally he had found his eluding ground

in television. It was nice to see his title in every episode during the audio mixing. Technicians from Swabhiman sets told me that Gogi was doing very well as a director and he had picked up the strings of multi-camera set up very well. He would finish a day job well within an allotted shift.

Gogi never got married. He never had a steady girlfriend too, except for a short time during Doosri Seeta, when he had a live-in arrangement with someone.

There were some light moments in his life too. He once kept a pet monkey in his house. It was rumored that the monkey would jump down to a grocery store and steal potatoes and run back home. He would also christen the monkey with a name; whom he did not like those days. Another popular story was about a suitcase full of coins. Gogi had been dumping loose change in that suitcase for years. Finally it was full to the brim and couldn't be carried due to its weight. I had the opportunity to see it once. He always boasted about it, until one fine day I found him sheepishly grieving about it. It seems his servant had vanished with the famous suitcase.

I was informed of Gogi's last hospitalization by K K Mahajan and Praba. Some of us went to see him in Asha Parekh hospital. He was on life support system. There seemed no hope. His eyes were shut. His relations had been informed to be there. I felt very bad at his condition especially with a lingering thought that it might be the last time, I was seeing Gogi.

He died the next day. As soon as I got a call, I reached his house. But his body had not arrived till then. I entered his bedroom. Gogi's garlanded photograph was placed on the ground. After spending few long moments staring at the photograph, I left; to promptly return next morning to be a part of his unit, one last time...

I decided to put this particular piece together because nowhere on the internet I could find any useful and definite information about Gogi, not even about his birth or the date of his death. Some posthumous comments bracketed Gogi with words like 'anonymous' and 'unsung'. According to those Gogi may have been lost in the oblivion. But they don't know that he had his days too. He may have gone without making an earth shattering film, but he did commendable work for television. He had been very busy for most of his life, except for a few years. Lean periods are common for any film professional.

For me he was a very special person and 'the' reason that put my professional life on a higher, serious and superior track. The least I could do for Gogi was to share some of the relevant information about him with people, especially with who might be interested. I have known Gogi's younger brother Kaka too, since long. He was very nice to give me Gogi's birth details:

Arunmitra Anand lived between Aug 22, 1942 and Oct 25, 2004. He was born at Gurdaspur to parents Shri Vishwamitra Anand and Shrimati Gargi Devi Anand.

Finally through this reflection if I manage to remove 'unknown, unsung and anonymous' labels stuck on my friend, I would consider myself fortunate.

5.

HRISHI-DA, FOREVER

Aug 27, 2006 evening - Breaking news splashed 'Hrishikesh Mukherji No More' on my TV screen; 'Film maker Hrishikesh Mukherji Dies' announced another scroll under the news reader. Gradually it hit me what had happened and soon enough I was feeling really sad. We had lost a very talented veteran film maker, who has left behind an amazing body of work. As an ever learning film person I keep learning from every film and film maker. I did learn a lot from Hrishida's movies but more importantly I derived such a load of happiness from them.

I consider myself extremely lucky to have met Hrishida for a few hours, during a shooting of his interview. Interview was shot at his simple and informal home in Bandra in mid 90s. Mr. Mahesh Bhat was interviewing him. Hrishida had been under pressure of ill health for quite some time even then. He was on dialysis, which other than just being a physical problem, plays immensely on one's mind too. In spite of all this Hrishida was continuously cracking jokes with Mahesh Bhat, reminiscing about the past and often doubling up with splits of laughter. That day Dada really looked very cheerful and lively. That interview shoot was very elaborate and was done with two cameras. There were lots of lights and a camera trolley too to make it look good.

As a sound recordist. It is my job to make sure that the audio is clean and clear. But beyond that listening to so many intelligent people intently has had its own benefits for me. I cannot explain how much I have gained listening closely to hundreds of 'who is who' of India. I really lapped up every word that Hrishida spoke during the shoot. Every little nuance, detail and expression in his voice while narrating and explaining incidences from his illustrious past. Interviewing Hrishida was all for my benefit. By listening to him for all of those 5-6 hours, I realized Hrishida had an amazing sense of humor. He was also very comfortable in the company of another film maker, asking him questions. I felt so fulfilled that I had a chance to listen to him talk about his life, his films, his early days, struggles, about his actors, his early time as a film laboratory assistant, jolts and his successes along with numerous other anecdotes.

I have always carried immense respect for Hrishida as a film maker. I am in awe of his total control over comedy and well as emotions. His films could make you double up with hilarious scenes and choke you with emotions at the same time. His first film 'Musafir' was not mounted as a commercial film, but the no part of the film shows that the maker is raw in any sense. He was in complete control of the medium even then. It must be due to his mastery of editing. Film makers, whose basic forte was 'editing', have gone on to become great masters of film craft. Raj Kapoor and Vijay Anand are other two prominent names in this genre. The direction and editing courses in FTII, Pune have lessons on Hrishida's editing style. Chori Chori, Chupke Chupke, GolMaal, Anand, Anuradha, Abhiman, Aashirwad, Khoobsurat... the inexhaustible list of simple yet successful films proves how versatile film maker Hrishida was.

Inside my cupboard I have pictures of two of my favorite people; one is Vijay Anand, another Hrishikesh Mukherji. It shows the dates of his „in & out“ points, as we call it in editing terms.

I feel eternally indebted to people who have made me laugh, made me cry or have added to my intelligence in any way. Hrishida will always be missed and remembered for providing us with clean and intelligent cinematic experience.

6.

MY GRANDPARENTS



*Pandit Devidas Sharma
(13.01.1901-19.08.1963)*

Pandit Devidas Sharma, my grandfather would be the simplest person I have met in all my life. He was not greatly educated by today's standards nor did he have a fancy job. Well, during pre-independence days how many commoners could have a fancy degrees or jobs? If one had passed VIII, he was looked up to and someone with X certificate was considered well educated and would be hot on job scene. Pitaji, as we all called him was in higher league having passed 10th standard, from Bassi, Ludhiyana. He was also the captain of the school cricket team. I wonder if piercing ears was considered fashionable back then; he did sport, 'nantiyen' or ear studs. His first job was that of clerk in Ambala. Later he joined Military Engineering Services (MES) as a unit accountant. He had lived with his family in Lahore and Quetta, both in Pakistan now. He

used to talk about the winter in Quetta, "you know the water in the tap would freeze and no water would come out for use. So, we had to wrap that pipe with cloth, pour kerosene on it and light it up! As it heated, a pencil of ice would get spewed out of the mouth of the tap and then only regular water supply would start."

Pitaji along with his wife Leelavati (Biji) and five children; four sons and a daughter moved to Allahabad around 1945 and stabilized himself. It was good that the family did not experience the violence of post-independence migration; they were safely well inside India. His MES job continued. He had taken up a rented house in Khuldabad, very close to famous Khusro Bagh. It was a huge flat by present standards. It did not have electricity initially and the rent was Rs 30 per month! It seems electricity arrived to that building few years later and the rent was raised to Rs 35!



*Mrs Leelavati Sharma
(Exp 18.03.1975)*

First floor of this house had 4 large rooms of the same size. One of them was a kitchen, which had bathroom too. The bathroom had a large tub (hauz) made of bricks and cement. When water supply would start around 4am, pitaji would fill the tub with the help of a bicycle tube, tied to the tap! There was no regular rubber pipe. First room was quite empty. It had only a hospital type iron bed. I used to sleep on that, of course with cotton bedding over it. The window next to the cot opened towards Khusro bagh! But as a child I had no taste to appreciate that. Next room was pitaji and biji's bedroom. And yet another one was like a store. The house had a very strange toilet. On the floor above this was a large verandah, large terrace and a small room, which also had the same bagh view. In younger days Shyam chacha and Om chacha used it. Above this too there was a terrace, half of that was covered with tin and half was open. On one corner



there was a 'minar' (minaret). I could easily fit into it at age 11-12. I used to spend a lot of time flying kites from there.

I stayed with Pitaji for 2 years as a student of class VI, from Kesarvani School and VIII, from CAV School. Other than this we used to visit Allahabad during vacations or he and Biji would come over where ever we lived.

My grandfather was very popular and respected figure in entire Khuldabad area. Whenever he walked down the road, every shop keeper on both sides of the road called out with a 'namaste Sharma ji or Pandit ji' to him. The vegetable vendors and milkmen all showered respect on him. Gaining that kind of respect obviously must have been a slow (*Home, turn right at the end of steps*) process. He was very fond of cricket and followed the test matches by newspaper and radio. So, during

matches when he had time, he would walk down to his friend 'Beni' who owned a radio repair shop close by, to hear live commentary. Those days you could earn respect if you just happened to be employed, did some social work and were a good human being. Today that alone may not be enough. Pitaji and Biji both were devoted to 'arya samaj'. In fact both husband and wife were presidents of men's and women's sections of 'arya samaj', located in Chowk area of Allahabad. He was often called to various people's homes to perform 'havan', which he would do very professionally. I too have been part of many such occasions and that helped me too memorize entire procedure.

In 1961-62 I was in 8th standard, my school was very far from home. I can't really gauge the distance now, but after my father visited the school, he realized it. So he bought me a cycle called Eastern Star for Rs 135. In fact I really want to go back and walk that distance once again, just to know how long was that walk? Pitaji must have noticed that I had nothing to do post school time. I had friends and there were no activities for a child of my age. So, he took me to join a shakha of RSS. Whether he agreed with RSS philosophies or not; it did well for my physique. His decision was right. I got opportunity to run around, play constructive games and learn their deeply nationalist prayer. And in a short time I became a leading member. I was made in charge of hoisting their orange flag up and take it down at the end of shakha time and lead their prayer, 'Namaste sadaa vatsale matri bhoomay...'

He knew I was very fond of movies. I would be always singing film songs that were being played on 78 rpm records all over. We obviously had no radio or a record player at home. On returning from school I would often jump on his back and he would keep moving around the house doing his chores, with me on his back. Once I returned after my Hindi exam and when he asked me to show him the question paper, I gave him the flier of film 'Main Chup Rahoongi'. He looked at it and burst out laughing.

He was fluent in Urdu language, as was everyone else of that generation. I remember he

had kept a very old Urdu newspaper in his cupboard. In fact today I wonder if he had kept it as a pre-independence memory from Lahore or Quetta. One day he read out a story about a dacoit from that paper. It was a very interesting and emotional story. The dacoit happened to be a good soul. After hearing it for the first time I had tears in my eyes. He knew that, because he did not refuse to reread it whenever I asked for it again. May be he found seeds of emotions and recognizing goodness in people was germinating inside me.

He was a very active person all day. He would wake up at 4 to fill the hauz with water. Then go out to get milk, come back, light the choolha, boil it and then leave for his walk and meeting with friends in Khusro bagh. His friends were also mostly from 'arya samaj' or others who enjoyed his discourses. Pitaji would read out parts of 'Satyarth Prakash' and explain in Hindi meanings of Sanskrit verses. This was everyday routine. He would be back around 7.

I was very lucky in the fact that I was the eldest son of his eldest son. That gave me a lot of lead over my brothers and cousins in getting his affection and attention. He used to give me 'one anna' as my pocket money when I was in class 8. I remember I never spent any of those one anna coins. And finally one day I presented him 16 of them and demanded a one rupee note, which I got. I was very thrilled to have my own whole rupee in my palm! Memories fail here... He told about this to my parents. I have a vague feeling that my savings of one and a half rupees was lost to my mother. Perhaps she thought that was too much money for a child to possess.

One day during peak winter I was in bed, but was awake a little as Pitaji was filling water. In fact I can pin point the period; it must have been winter of 1962... I heard a puppy crying. I was concerned. Our house was on the historical Grand Trunk road that connects Kabul to Calcutta. A lot heavy traffic moved on it especially at night. I started imagining that the puppy is in the middle of the road and is too scared to move, frozen with cold and fright etc. The unceasing wailing was very disturbing for me and I was filled with concern. I wanted to find the puppy and move it to some place safer... When I emerged out of the building with my cycle, I found it the puppy right in the middle of the road, as I was imagining! I wondered how it survived so many passing trucks. It was a very small light brown fluffy pup. I picked it and went back up. Pitaji was surprised to see me back and that too with a puppy! I pleaded to him to keep it. I went to school with the pup in mind and was dying to get back home at the earliest. I could not keep it at home more than 3-4 days.

Pitaji would make breakfast for me every day. But I remember one dish out of a few and that was, 'two slices of bread soaked in milk with sugar' and heated on fire of 'choolha'. He would light up the wood fire for that little job and extinguish it soon after. People, who know about it; know that lighting a choolha is not easy nor is it quick as a flick of switch... It is strange but still sometimes, back of my hand emanates the smell of that simple dish.

Getting to see movies there was an impossible thing, as Pitaji didn't see them and I was too young to be sent alone. Still I managed to see two films that year by pushing Biji to the wall. I forced her to take me to see two most unlikely films a child of my age should

see, 'Dil Tera Deewana' and 'Baat Ek Raat Ki'. 'Dil Tera Deewana' was playing in Palace theater in Civil Lines. As soon as we entered the hall, Biji was horrified, 'hai hai, there is not a single woman here!' When the movie was over, I had soaked the entire movie in my nervous system. I had memorized the entire film including music in opening titles, dialogues, songs, interlude music...! I could play it back at will to anyone interested.



It must be during my last few months with my grandparents, when one fine Sunday afternoon, we three were ready to go to Arya Samaj, me most unwillingly. I did not want to go through repetition of 'havan' mantras and the rest of it. I showed my displeasure openly, but they also did not want to leave me home alone for so many hours, which was fair. To compensate me for my reluctance they said that we will go to eat 'chat' in by-lanes of Chowk and that had held my interest. Chat was really excellent there.

A 'tonga' was hailed at this ancient gate outside the Kishorilal building. Biji and Pitaji sat at the back and I hopped in front with the tonga-wala. Still mildly bitter, I sealed my displeasure with a final salvo, "अगर पिताजी कहीं गुम हो गए तो वो स्वामी दयानंद के पास मिलेंगे और अगर मैं खो गया तो मैं देव आनंद के पास मिलूंगा." (if Pitaji is ever lost, he will be found with Swami Dayanand and if I am lost then I will be found with Dev Anand.)"

Well, it seems sincere utterance of those well-meant wailing words got engraved in my future timeline. It turned out to be a freaky prophesy that people still remember with a smile. I did join Mr. Dev Anand in 1973, exactly 10 years later!

Next year I was in 9th standard and was back with my parents. My father was posted in district Basti. Calculations tell me that it was the morning of, 19 Aug, 1963. It was raining very heavily. We four brothers were covered with rain coats and caps, ready to go the school. Servants were waiting to take us on cycles. Due to heavy down pour, I was very reluctant to go. My excuse was that teachers will any ways give us a 'rainy day' and send us back, but both parents were pushing us to go. I wished something should happen 'right now' so that I don't go to school in this horrid weather.

As I was fighting daddy's insistence and my reluctance, the phone must have rung. I think my mother picked it. I don't know what happened; but she came to the verandah and addressed us, 'change your clothes, we have to go to Allahabad... adding, Pitaji has expired.' Her voice cracked and she burst out crying and then got busy packing for the journey.

It was so strange that in spite of the earth shattering jolt, I felt relieved. Slowly I got rid of my rain coat, school bag and uniform. My single-track thinking did not allow the bad news to take its rightful place in my mind. In fact it sank in only next day, when I saw Pitaji's body placed on large ice slabs, on a platform under the stair-case to our house. My body reacted very violently. With grief my feet twisted sideways and I had to go up to the house to recover from the shock.



Pitaji expired on 19 August, 1963 among his friends on these lawns of Khusro Baugh.



His body was placed on this platform on the left, where a bi-cycle can be seen.



Khuldabad market remained shut for 3 days, as mark of respect for him. Amrit Bazar Patrika published a lengthy article on him.

7.

BABA THE LION

Out of all the people I have met in my life so far, I was most impressed by the simple personality of just one person. Murlidhar Devidas Amte or Baba Amte, who expired on Feb 9, 2008. Baba had been champion of leprosy affected people. At one point whole world had noticed, recognized and applauded his compassionate and scientific efforts in this field..

But this time it was all together another issue. Baba Amte was leading a 'Bharat Jodo' or 'Knit India', cycle-march of young and motivated cyclists through the vertical (Kanya Kumari to Kashmir) length of the country. They had reached Pune around mid-Jan 1986 where our documentary unit joined them. The Bharat Jodo cycle-march was to culminate on April 4 at Kashmir. Nearly 120 young boys and girls cycled a thoroughly planned distance every day, carrying a wave of „andolan“ for waking up divisive forces to the dangers and futility of their actions. I was going to be with them for a good three months from now on, since they were to cover only 50-60 km a day. To lead this march was physically very taxing for Baba and results of which were also going to be uncertain. But he was so completely motivated and wanted to make a difference.

Baba traveled in his specially modified bus that had a bed for him. He had to be lying down while the bus moved and only sit up only if he had to stand. During an interview he told us about the problems with his spine. He was a wrestler in his youth and one of those aggressive moments has left him with this lifelong disadvantage. So Baba could not „be“ in a sitting posture. He could either lie down or stand up. And before he stands up he had to put a wide belt across his waste to support his damaged spine. Whether a short halt or a night's stay, we were welcome warmly by already informed organizations. Some of them schools, NGOs, government bodies, industrialists or just rich people. They made arrangement for us to freshen up, gave us food or snacks. A group of participants would sing an especially composed song, titled, 'Bharat Jodo'. Baba would give a short speech and after local leaders had their little share of lime light, the caravan would move on. Every night the group stayed at a new place.

A, 72 years old Baba would get down and go up in the bus at least 5 times a day. He was sure that he will be able to make a mark in the educated man's psyche and make him realize that the breakaway forces had to be stopped. But in rural areas, he spoke about preservation of ecology by planting more trees and using water intelligently. He had some brilliant suggestions for the farmers to increase their yield. To lead a happier family life, he told men to stop spending their little money on alcohol and tobacco. He also hammered a point home that educating the girl child and respect for women was very important for the general wellbeing of a family.

A cloud of cycles, traffic regulators on motor cycles, supply trucks, mini bus for shooting staff and Baba Amte's bus winded through Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, parts of MP and UP... We entered Delhi to a tumultuous welcome by various agencies. It was also a landmark for the group that got 2 nights stay here. I came to know that we will be meeting Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, our Prime Minister then. I was very excited

because the shoot was going to be in the residential part of the house and not in an office. India was going through roughest phases in Sikh militancy that was demanding a separate state of Khalistan. Many had lost their lives to this violent demon, including Indira Gandhi, Rajiv's mother.

Since PM was very busy to accommodate us, our appointment was quite late that evening. In the mean while we kept everything ready to roll. There was a huge security staff before the main entrance. There were even more people before the door to the house. But we were not frisked nor given a metal detector test. They had been instructed, not to. We entered the living room that had a large wooden table surrounded by many chairs. We all were standing and waiting. Someone brought us glasses of water and then tea with snacks. I asked him, „from which door with Mr. Gandhi emerged“, he pointed at a door. We pointed the camera there and were ready to roll. Almost immediately PM entered wearing his usual white Kurta-Pyjama. We all shook hands while Siddharth introduced us to him. Since Baba could not sit, so even the PM stood throughout the 20 min conversation.

We all came out like winners, very happy with ourselves of canning a hugely important chunk of the documentary. Baba remained in for some private talk. In Delhi Baba visited Amar Jawan Jyoti memorial too, where chief of air force joined him to lay the wreath.

After a very comfortable stay at Delhi, we entered Punjab, then the land of uncertainties. Our group was raising slogans of 'Bharat Jodo' in the face of a very 'bloody' Khalistani movement. Thousands of Hindus had been killed in that land. And I don't think we had any Sikh in our group. Without any protection the group kept cycling into the interiors of land of five rivers. When we reached Batala there was huge posse of cops waiting for us. This town was most infected with militancy. Cops surrounded us and circled a strong metal chain around us. That was scary. But since the camera had been rolling continuously, there was no time think about the danger. Not a single bullet sound overlapped the speeches against the divisive forces.

We climbed into the bus and soon we were in rich rural ambience of Punjab. Siddharth Kak wanted to capture the beauty of huge sheet of yellow mustard flower beds from top of the bus. Three of us climbed up. Our bus displaying „Knit India“ banners started. We exchanged looks. Those 20 minutes might have been moments most filled with self-doubt and inhibitions. Many thoughts crossed my mind, “if anything happened to any of us (obviously me first), actually it would not be too bad”. “We were after all on a very positive mission.” “So if any one of us got hurt, he would get famous.”

We were in Anandpur Sahib on March 23, the day when Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were hanged. Baba sprinkled flowers on the memorial of Bhagat Singh. In the main Gurudwara, they showed us a trail of dried blood of a Sikh who was hit by police bullet. Our camera followed the trail.

In Amritsar we stayed one night at Dharamshala of Durgiana temple and another night at the Ramdas Sarai of Golden temple. Baba wanted to make it clear that he treated everyone with the same Indian yard stick. But the religious Sikh community inside most Gurudwars displayed an aggressive body language towards us.

The shooting was so full of interesting adventures; we did not realize we were suddenly gaping at the mouth of another landmark- 'Jawahar Tunnel'. Other end of which opens in the state of J&K, last state on the itinerary of the cyclists. There

was a clear hint of excitement of a huge achievement, in sight. At the same time many were getting depressed with the thought a most amazing chapter of their life ending soon. Many had developed deep attachments with their colleagues and they would not be able to bear a separation from them. For many others it would be going back to their drab offices, colleges or fields.

Past four months had been filled with a positive group activity that was also the need of the hour. It had brought them close to each other; perhaps more than their own families...

Stadium at Jammu. Culmination of Knit India/Bharat Jodo march. Everyone was overcome with multi-layered emotions; end of many regular activities; end of a long journey, new found attachments, exhaustion, success in a positive endeavor and most importantly... a blankness. It was written on their faces. Everyone was crying openly, easily and without inhibitions. In a moment I decided that these momentous moments must be captured. I called the cameraman and immediately started shooting wet faces of the cyclists, cooks, drivers, mechanics, everyone. So far we had captured only their smiles and sweaty faces.

Baba was on a bed a little higher up on steps. I went to him. He hugged me and thanked me for being with him during a rather difficult and different kind of professional work. I was overcome with his gesture.

We met J&K CM, Farukh Abdullah; he was very articulate in his Hindi interview with us, also praising Baba's initiative on such an arduous task at his age. State government took everyone to Srinagar by buses at its own expense. We were also shown source of Jhelum- Verinag and Pahalgam... with this an elaborate chapter got over and all the cycling participants were sent to their homes by trains...

Now our shooting unit had to proceed to Baba Amte's Karmabhoomi, Anandvan in Nagpur. We had to shoot Anandvan and more of his interviews in Anandvan ambience. Anandvan is heavenly home to destitute, widows, leprosy affected, blinds and orphans. Baba, his wife and son are like friendly gods for all these people. Women and children come from far to learn arts and handicraft to augment their family income. Farmers come to learn modern agricultural methods and imbibe new ideas. He won accolades by helping and treating lepers scientifically and then embracing them. He proved that Leprosy is not an infectious disease and is curable. Baba's driver who drove his bus had only half his fingers and toes and his face was flat and stretched. I had happy chats with him often. But this little part will describe the spirit of Anandvan in a nut shell and what real Baba Amte is all about...

Among the blind there are many children too. They are just normal kids, running around squealing through the winding pathways having flower beds on both sides. They obviously do know their way around every bend. But the agriculture experts here have developed a special variety of rose that has 'no thorns'. Why? So that no blind person gets scratched, while walking. This agricultural feat was achieved specially to avoid a blind getting hurt! Can any other place on earth have compassion of this degree?

We stayed in the Ashram for a few days. It was our good luck to see Baba receiving a parcel from central government that contained his Padma Vibhushan award...

The documentary was titled, 'Manav Yatra'. It got telecast on the national carrier.

But somehow it did not create expected ripples in media. The effect of the huge Tsunami that we rode for months died almost unnoticed...

Many years later I and my family visited my cousin Dr. Anil Kumar in Indore. Those days Baba had embraced the struggle for Narmada and was living in the area of agitation, not far from there. I asked one of Anil's friends, how far it would be where Baba Amte was putting up? I would like to go and visit him. He told me it was about 300 km from there but the roads are not good. Since you are here with your family, you don't have that kind of time. But... since you thought of visiting him, you must be having heart of a lion! I swallowed doctor's compliment with a little wonder, hesitation and no smile.

But it dawned on me now that if I was called lion hearted, only because I wished to meet Baba, what kind of lion he must have been?

8.

REVIVING IMMORTALITY

This is dedicated to a person having practically no significance in the glittering world of cinema. I would not claim him to be a great friend of mine too. He had much more important and closer friends in his life. Late Prabhu Dayal or Prabhuji, was fairly senior to me. In fact on paper Prabhuji is not even as someone totally 'down under' kind of guy. He acted in a few films like Hum Dono, CID, and House No 44... and also assisted in direction in early Navketan movies like Tere Ghar Ke Samne, Kala Pani, Gambler, Farar... I am happy to say that if you Google, 'Prabhu Dayal', you will not go empty handed. IMDb too has a page on him.

Well, I decided to write about Prabhuji, because a five years old incidence got suddenly refreshed in my mind. But before I talk about that incidence itself, I will have to project a long flashback sequence...

I met Prabhuji in 1974 when I came back from Nepal after the shooting of film, 'Ishq Ishq'. Soon I became a Navketan man and started regularly visiting their office in Khira Nagar on S V Road, Santacruz. Prabhuji would also drop in once in a while, have a cup of tea, make some loud noises with his old colleagues like Gogi Anand, Vishwa, Sehdev, accountants Raman and Mr. Pisharodi and then leave. Prabhuji's professional association with Navketan was over much before I joined them. Physically he was a very thin and scrawny looking person. He was bald, had a boney face, sunken teeth and a hooked nose. The veins in his arms seemed embossed extra high. He might have been very athletic in his younger days. He always walked in with a lot of energy and spoke in a loud and energetic voice. In conversations he used a fair amount of bad words but he did it almost poetically, without meaning any of it.

Inside his head he carried an amazing collection of English quotes, Urdu shayari and Farsi (Persian) poetry. On every occasion he had something profound to render. Being a fan of Sher-o-Shayari myself, I liked him immediately. He would narrate an entire Nazm or Ghazal (Matla to Maqta) in Farsi or in chaste Urdu without a hitch. Such was his memory and knowledge of both the languages. The more I did not understand those poems, the more I was impressed by him. After he would finish the narration, his lips would curl in a way that said. "Isn't that deep?" Among us all perhaps Gogi Anand was the only person who got some hang of all that.

Gradually I came to know that his wife Uma, was one of Dev Saab's nieces. I thought that made him an insider in the camp. As a newcomer, I was impressed by anyone who had an easy access to Dev Saab. And Prabhuji was one of those few who could just fling open boss's room to say, "hi and bye".

One fine day there was no shooting and Prabhuji had casually walked into the office. He saw many pretty young girls (wannabe actresses) perched on the brown wooden benches in famous long Navketan passage to meet someone; or anyone who was involved in casting. They were all well dressed and were there for one obvious reason, 'for getting a chance to face the camera' in a Dev Anand movie! Prabhuji pushed open the 'Production' cabin. He found many young guys, assistants in production and direction chatting away loudly. I too was one of them. He asked us to shut up with a

harmless swear word. Then he said, “What is wrong with you all Navketan men? So many young girls are waiting outside and you men are happily chatting here like women? Have you all lost your virility? What has happened to this film company?” He looked up and mourned. Then he stretched out his left arm towards us and ended his outburst with a, “you all are no men, shame on you all”, before walking out. That was Prabhujji in his elements...

Some years later, I too got married to a girl in the periphery of that family. After which he became very nice to me and started treating me as a younger family member. He had a daughter, Abu. He doted on her. In fact she was the only bright patch in his life; everything else was dark and pointed south. Soon he started keeping unwell and thus stayed home. For years he received a small supporting pension like amount from Navketan office and some of his bro-in-laws too contributed for his survival.

One day his Abu suddenly fell very sick and soon died. She was a young girl of about 20 or so. This shattered Prabhujji down to the core. I met him during one of those bleak days. He hesitated to talk to me, to avoid getting choked with emotions. Another day, I saw him chewing a ‘paan’ in 4-Bungalow area. He was so weak that he could not stand straight due to that mild tobacco’s intoxication. He walked away with unsteady steps. I felt he was justified to intoxicate himself to cover up the huge mound of sadness that had become a part of his weightless personality...

Later I learnt that he lost his eyesight and soon, his hearing.

It is not hard to imagine, how a man must feel when there is total blankness around him. No picture, no sound! No communication. There was no one to say anything with a touch. Situation was, 'someone has to guide your hand to a plate and you eat, puts a glass in your hand and you drink'. But how many people’s touch could he recognize? Except for his wife, no one was in touch with him anyway.

Now, I am at the point when I am ready to write that, which made me start writing this, to start with. One day I was coming from the market when I saw Prabhujji sitting outside a shop right under his home. He was sitting there, may be for fresh air. But I was really happy to see him. Very warmly I said, “Hello Prabhujji, how are you?”... There was no answer. I placed my hands on his knees and sat down in front of him and spoke again. He kept his hands on mine, but did not react. Then I remembered about the loss of his hearing and blindness. I got up and stepped back in order to gauge what else I could do in order to communicate. My head was not working. I kept looking at his face and noticed his eyes well up slowly. Suddenly I realized that there would be no man poorer than him at that moment. I walked off before my own face got wet... This is the incident that crossed my mind last week and in a flash I had the solution to that day’s problem, although way, too late. I could have communicated with him... by writing my message on his palm with my finger! I could have told him my name! He had not lost his speech, so he might have replied. He needed to have a conversation with someone; with anyone and at that time I could have conversed with him. But my brains had deserted me that day.

I would imagine that meeting between us, as one of my most intense moments of my life. No dialogues, no communication, no looks; just a situation that could not be overcome.

Maybe there is no reason for anyone to remember Prabhujji, think or talk about him;

fondly or otherwise. He might not be a material worth remembering or worth giving a thought to; but I am so happy to have written this piece. After all everyone is entitled to some years of immortality after death. This is my sincere effort to inject immortality in the nameless and weightless soul that was, Prabhuji.

9.

AFFECTIONATELY YOURS, JACKIE

We remember our past either due to associations with some people, or because of certain important incidences. Past always comes to our mind not as a date or a period; but as its various association. There is no reason to think about May 3, as a date, but when I know on this day I came to Mumbai for good that makes the association and significance of a date gets established. In everyone's life there are faces and voices that keep surfacing in memories.

But whenever I think of about love, affection, friendship; Jackie's face emerges in my mind. Jackie was a female Doberman of pure breed. She was very agile, alert and smart. She lived with Babu Family, in the house of my sister-in-law in Pune. It is a large house, with open space all around, large trees and lot of foliage.

Jackie had company of Zara (again a female Doberman) and Gypsy (a female German Shephard). In the morning all three would be kept locked at the back of the house, because Zara was capable of attacking odd guys bringing newspaper or milk. But all three of them were allowed to roam everywhere after a while. Our trips to Pune were good fun because of these three highly entertaining dogs. All three were trained to not enter inside the house, unless it was raining or it was too hot. Pune does get very hot in summer...

Jackie was a very understanding person. It showed in her tolerance towards children. She was always very mild with them. She never ran up to them or played high energy games. Many toddlers in the family would sit on her, pull her ears or even try to poke her in the eyes; but she would sit patiently and take it. Only if the condition turned too difficult for her, she would get up and walk off.

Although Jackie and I met only on occasions, she became very close to me. I was always greeted with a lot jumping and licking every time we visited Babu Family. She wanted always my hand petting her head. If I moved it away, she would lower her head under my hand and put it back.

We hit out very well. We played games like grabbing the ball. But the ball would always end up in her mouth. Obviously it was impossible to beat her in it. She also Loved, 'find the right stone' game. In this, I would choose a stone, memorize its shape and rub my hands over it for smell to stay, make her smell it and throw it away hard. She would dash off in that direction, find the same stone and get it back. She it did every time. She was so swift that many times she grabbed the stone while it was still in hopping in the air. She had become so fond of playing stone game with me that many times her teeth bled while grabbing at the moving rough stones. But she would be too excited to bother about it. In fact I would stop playing or try to find lighter or smoother stones for her.

My best memory of Jackie is very sweet. It was during a hot afternoon siesta. Everyone was asleep. I too was sleeping on a mattress in the hall at the ground level of the house. Except for the whirring of fan and scant calls of afternoon birds, it was quiet...

And suddenly the silence broke with a loud crackling bang- very close to my own head! It sounded as if a piece of brick or concrete had fallen. With a shock I opened my eyes to see from where it fell. I looked up to see if any part of the ceiling had come off. It was not so. Then I saw Jackie was sitting next to my bed and staring at me anxiously. Just there on the floor was half a brick. I realized that it was her who had brought the brick and dropped it down as an invitation to play. I don't have any memory of real people approaching me like that for anything.

Jackie was very affectionate, gentle and fun and she displayed it too very well. She was very sensible and attached to her family and vice versa. Due this she lived a very full and very long life. Of course she did turn very weak towards the end. Once I was helping a vet who had come to check her up. I was holding Jackie while vet gave her an injection. After it was over, doctor said she must be very nice to you otherwise we always tie up dog's mouth in case they bite due to pain.

It is nearly 5 years that she died a mysterious death. Early morning of Dec 5, 2002, she was found dead under a tree, some distance away from home. No one had seen her going out and perhaps no one saw her dying too. There are two versions to this mystery. Firstly there is a belief that dogs never like to die at home. When they know it is time, they just slip out quietly and meet their end. And perhaps that's what she did. Another version is that when Aarti left for her gym, perhaps the gate was left open and Jackie followed the car without Aarti's knowledge. Later street dogs chased her and perhaps she got cardiac arrest trying to outrun them. Jackie was nearly 17 years old, when she died, which is equivalent to 17x7 or 119 human years!

I had felt very bad for many days after the sad news was conveyed to me in Mumbai. Everyone in her family mourned for days. Her memories are still cherished by all and that is why I took more than half a day putting this piece together.



THANK YOU

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