

Lights ! Camera ! Action ! by Manohar Khushalani



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Director Mohan Agashe walking with a walk band on the FTII campus

Manohar Khushalani Pune

Tripurari Sharan, who took over as director of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune on November 5, 2005, finds a changed campus. Classes are in full swing. Students are having animated discussions on film—the relative merits of French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, the new parallel Indian cinema, etc. Several students are busy with filmmaking projects. Things seem, well, normal. But it wasn't like this two years ago. There were turbulent times. Between 1997 and 2002, FTII students went on more than four strikes. In 1996 a committee comprising members

The Film and Television Institute has passed through an ordeal because its Director Mohan Agashe wanted to impose his concepts. With his departure, the campus is back to normal

experts, practicing professionals, faculty and students proposed what they called a "revived syllabus." It provided for increased input from visiting professionals and was flexible

and interactive in nature. The proposals were widely appreciated and according to Y. Lalwansingh, registered secretary (local) of the Federation of Film Societies of India, it was a much-needed improvement on the earlier syllabus. Mahan Agashe, who took over as FTII director in 1987, decided not to implement the "revived syllabus" till then you could say any new curriculum to the institute as he proposed his own set of "conceptual proposals." Trouble began when he replaced the integrated three-year diploma with three individual courses of a year's duration each and also proposed a plan by which "weak" students would be weeded out of the Institute.

WAKING UP TO A CHANGING SCENARIO

In the proposed batch of 100 students who joined the first year, only 40 would be admitted to a further two-year certificate course in cinematography. After the second year, only 10 out of the 40 students who passed would be allowed to do the final one-year diploma course.

Students were eager although all at the mercy of the faculty and the administration and were further dismayed when they found out that they would have to pay more than what annually in fees. As if this wasn't enough, their main grievance was that the fees would be further increased at any time. Agashe ultimately had to give in March 2002, one year ahead of the expected date.

The situation worsened after

CAMPUS COMPASS

Prasenjit Mukherjee took over as director in 2002. He introduced the three-year diploma course and during his brief tenure, FTII students were given a number of international awards. Mukherjee could not give the undivided attention to FTII in Pune as he was also, and still is, the director of the Film & Television Institute, Ministry of Information, in New Delhi, to the government appointed Tripurari Sharan, an IAS officer, as FTII Director. Sharan took over in November 2005 by which time, that Sharan, with his extensive administrative experience, would be able to bring stability to the ailing institute.

The FTII has a long and checkered history. It was established in 1969 by the Government of Maharashtra and

INTERVIEW

The stage is now set for FTII to revitalize itself

The new FTII Director, Tripurari Sharan, is a post-graduate in Sociology from the Jawahar Education University. He is an IAS officer with considerable experience in finance and strategy. He has worked with the National Theatre Group, Delhi, in the 1970s and 1980s. He was involved in the Cultural Club of Delhi University and the House Film Club. Manohar Khushalani caught up with him after he came to Delhi, recently.

MS: Have you been able to pinpoint areas in which you would like to work best?

TS: The teaching has already well established but we are starting a few new courses in script writing, cinematography and editing, along with new regular diploma courses which are the backbone of the institute.

MS: I have heard that FTII's reputation with the writing courses has not been the great.

TS: The writing course was discontinued in 1978. There were problems with the way the course was structured and the management of the time. On joining here, I had an opportunity to interact with a lot of former students. They will take into account their inputs and take appropriate measures when we start the course again.

MS: After the years of political khoochy directed by the Rajend Wilson, M.S. Barber, Govind Khushalani and Shyam Bhangal, there seems to be

MS: There seems to be a full, free view.

TS: In my understanding every course is political course because it affects a certain social reality. The other day I pointed out to a student that while that is clearly a nice looking by high school. I was surprised if any student would care to go there. — Manohar Khushalani

MS: Do you think that your being an IAS officer is an advantage or a disadvantage?

TS: Director's role has mostly to do with representation of the Indian Administrative Service. I am sure there are other professionals, such as having a certain expertise and capability, for which I work there for the job. Also, having worked with the government, I am aware of the administrative and procedural requirements in managing a public office. These are capabilities which are needed by the government. It needs certain skills. That actually puts me in an advantage.