



He hailed from a very cultured family with jolly connections - his mother was married to Sarojini Naidu. His father, a government official, passed away and his mother followed suit when he was barely 19 and the youngest among three brothers. Jairaj was totally heartbroken and shifted to Mumbai. "He wanted to join the Navy but he was delayed for the recruitment. He befriended his film neighbours, who urged him to join films because of his strapping physique. He was nearly six feet tall," relates Deepa. His film career took off as a body-double stuntman in the Sharda Film company. He would be involved in all aspects of filmmaking from camera work, edit to lab processing. Not long ago, he got his first acting break as the hero's friend and his body-double during stunt scenes in Jagragni Jasoos (1938) and graduated to playing the hero. His distinguished looks and physique landed him the lead role. However, his second venture, Russell Bhai, was his first release. He acted in as many as 11 silent films between 1929-1931. Jairaj in an earlier interview had elaborated on how silent films were made, "All shooting took place in natural

**Although Papa was famous for his parties, he was never involved in any scandal. All his heroines regarded him as their close friend. I remember Nargis had knitted him a sweater monogrammed with his initials**

— Deepa Shahi, daughter



sunlight. Our day began and ended early. We reached the sets by 7.30 in the morning and packed up by 5 in the evening... We all learnt the craft by trial and error. We discussed the story together, developed it and then started shooting. It was a challenge, you had to make people laugh, cry or get angry through facial expressions and gestures only. Charles Chaplin is the best example of this art. But then, cinema, unlike the stage, is a visual medium. That was why silent movies had universal appeal."

#### VARIETY TIME

After the first talkie film, *Alau Ara*, in 1931, Jairaj also switched over to talkies. Being a Hyderabad, he was fluent in Urdu and that proved to be a big asset for him. *Shikari*, replete with tigers, lions and snakes, was his first talkie.

With sound came songs and Jairaj was handicapped by the fact that he was to stammer, but he managed to stay in the reckoning by starring in action films. With the introduction of playback singing, he forged forth with films like *Rifle Girl*, *Shahar*, *Pavna* and *Mahangar No Mori* - which were all hits.

1950s and early '60s was Jairaj's golden era as an actor as he essayed a variety of roles of hero, villain and even comedian. He was, however, celebrated for his wide range of historical roles, playing Chandrashekhar Azad, Amar Singh Rathore, Prithviraj Chhatvan, Rana Pratap, Shahad Bhagat Singh and Tipu Sultan. "Papa was a natural rider

Jairaj produced and directed Gujarati star Nargis, Dilip Kumar and Fehar. Jaihan in 1965. "It was based on Lord Venkatesw's poem *Shook Ardas*. It was a story about two brothers living in a seaside town and the younger brother sacrifices his love as the elder brother is in love with his sweetheart. But papa lost all his money in his maiden production," Deepa recalls sadly. Jairaj had confessed in an earlier interview, "I did not have the business acumen to produce and promote a film. Unlike others producers, I had invested my own money."

He had admitted regretfully Jairaj was forced to sell his office and it was the most frustrating period of his career. He went back to acting and recovered.

He also directed films like *Atala*, *Mohar* and *Rajghar*. He also directed two television serials - *Tano Sena* and *Kastur Sagar*.

#### GOODWILL COUNTS

Jairaj was hailed as the industry's friend. He was a keen sportsman and an artist. He would organise all the charity cricket matches that stars played. He also designed musical shows and award ceremonies. He also took keen interest in the propagation of classical dance and music. "While he managed the entire show by drawing sketches of the stage to star performers, veteran character artiste David would conduct the shows," Deepa recalls.

He was close friends with the Kapoor. "So much so that both our families would go on vacations together," Deepa recalls happily how Prithviraj and his sons were like their extended family.

Prithviraj Kapoor and F. Jairaj were the founder members of the Cine Artists' Association in 1939. In 1981, most deservedly, Jairaj was honoured with the prestigious Dadasabhai Phalke award for his outstanding contribution to Indian cinema. Interestingly, Jairaj starred in Gujarati and Marathi films but never in Telugu, which was his mother tongue.

Prithviraj's father had arranged his marriage to a Parsi girl from Delhi and the two were blessed with six children. Of his two sons Dileep Raj even starred in *K. A. Abbas' Seher Aur Sapna* and was then hailed as the 'next Raj Kapoor'. "But he couldn't sustain his success. He now writes films and serials, while Jai Tilak, our second brother, became an engineer and he's settled in Chicago. All of us four sisters were married out of Mumbai and out of the film industry," updates Deepa.

Rajen, his grandson, is the sole torchbearer

