

ज्ञान प्रबोधिनी प्रशाला ५१
51@51
आम्ही ५१!



Story No. 44

Vikram Joglekar
(Class 10 - 1981)
(Class 12 - 1983)

28th November 2021

I have worked with six Academy award winning sound engineers. I value what I learned from them! Here is my only experience with awards. In 2011, I was working on a screen award show in the broadcast control room. The broadcast room was half a km away from the stage. Suddenly I hear my name being announced for an award for a film that I had worked on. I wasn't expecting this. I was far away from the stage. People started calling me and asking "Where are you?" I said, "I am working. I am busy helping you to put this show on air." It was for a movie by Dev Benegal for which I got this award. I never collected that award. Raju Hirani, Shriram Raghavan, Resul Pookutty are my most famous friends from FTII. But apart from them the other technical people, those who are directing, writing, shooting films, editing them or mixing sound or mixing sports and music shows for some of the top production houses here in India right now are part of my larger family. We are all somehow connected with each other. If I am watching a cricket match here in my home in Goa and feel that the stump microphone is too loud or if I hear something wrong, I can just pick up the phone and call and say 'I am watching this match and the stump mike sounds too loud.' because most often I know who is the sound recordist in charge there mixing that match.



Maths and Music

My primary school was Nutan Marathi Vidyalaya in Pune. I knew that I will have to go through some IQ tests for the admission to Prabodhini. I was not confident about my performance in the entrance test. I think it's just a miracle that I got into Prabodhini. What I realise now is that unlike other schools there was a great balance between curriculum and personality development. After school in the evenings, I played every game from football, volleyball to kabaddi and kho-kho. We trekked to so many forts in Maharashtra. I remember a trip to Shivapur on the bicycle for a *shibir*. Ajitrao Kanitkar and Avida (Avinash Dharmadhikari) used to be our instructors in these activities. I enjoyed growing up in that atmosphere. Deepatai Pillai was one of the influential teachers for me. She used to teach us English. I started reading and thinking in English because of her. I remember most of our teachers very fondly, some among them were Visubhau, Yashwantrao, Sharadrao Sunkar and Pushpatai Agashe. Vamanrao taught us Sanskrit. We used to go to his residence early morning to learn Sanskrit and recite hymns. I remember he taught us the *Purusha Sukta*. Learning that and much later realising that one can bring so much variation in expression in just three notes, helped me with music while doing alap and vistar. It also improved my attention to correct pronunciation of the text. What I learned in JPP shaped my life in many ways later. I studied in JPP till my 12th. JPP then was running a junior college (*Arambha Mahavidyalay*). I did not clear the maths examination in the 12th standard. So, I joined a coaching class for mathematics and passed the final exam with 98 marks. I studied music. That year helped me a lot to understand that I wanted to learn music and that I'm not going to be a scholar, a doctor, or an engineer. I realised my passion for music from Appa. Appa taught me every new *padya* and *abhangas* he composed.



**Vamanrao Abhyankar and
Yashwantrao Lele**



Pushpatai Agashe

FTII, Music and stint with NCPA

After JPP, I joined the Film and Television Institute (FTII) of India in Pune. I also began learning music more seriously, first with Devasthali Buwa and then with the Dagar brothers Zia Mohiuddin and Zia Fariduddin Dagar. I studied music for 12 years.

Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani were among the other early influences as film makers in the film school. Mani Kaul had made a film called Dhruvad in 1983. I watched that film. I felt instinctively that this is what I want to learn. Mani introduced me to my teachers. I stayed with Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar in a Gurukul for a while. Those days, getting up at five in the morning for *Riyaz*, devoting 5-6 hours for music every day was the routine. After passing out from FTII, I landed in my first job very soon.

My examiner, Mr Biswas, who had interviewed me for the final exam, was the audio director for the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai. After watching my diploma film which Bhaskar Chandavarkar had composed music for he asked me about my future plans. I told him that I wanted to record music. He said, "Whenever you are ready, come and meet me". I went to Mumbai to meet him and he immediately offered me a job. He wanted me to start on that very day or the next day!



I worked at NCPA for two years. At that time P. L. (Pu. La.) Deshpande was the Chairman of NCPA and Dr. Ashok Ranade was running a theatre research project there. It was a very pleasant period of my life and it did not feel like work. Imagine how wonderful it was to meet and spend time with people like P. L. Deshpande, Ashok Ranade and Vijaya Mehta after work. While in NCPA, as an audio engineer, I met and recorded many great musicians in live performances like Kishori Tai Amonkar, Bhimsenji and Mallikarjun Mansoorji. I recorded all kinds of live music performances from Indian classical to Carnatic to Jazz and Western classical including the Bolshoi orchestra. This helped me later in my life when I started working on films. I also worked on the sound track for an installation on Calligraphy for the IGNCA with Dr. Ashok Ranade which was my entry into the art world.



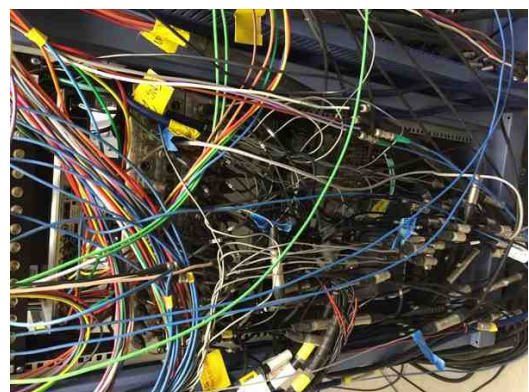
Inaugural function of the Piramal Art Gallery by Mr. J. R. D. Tata, Dr. J. J. Bhabha & P. L. Deshpande

While at NCPA, I was offered an opportunity to work with Kumar Shahani. Initially, I was asked to do some research and then to actually work on the film. This was my first film as an independent recordist (Khayal Gatha -1989). Accepting that project meant I would have to leave my job at NCPA. For my parents my decision to leave such a secure job at an established institution like NCPA was a disastrous career choice, coming from a lower middle-class family. I went to Ashok Ranade seeking his advice. He was clear in his advice, “Don’t waste this opportunity. Go!”

So, I decided to leave the job at NCPA. There were a number of projects where I worked on films which were related to music. Khayal Gatha was one such film where I had an opportunity to meet and record many senior musicians of the Gwalior Gharana. **While in JPP, I had done a project on the Gharanas of Hindustani music and that background helped me a lot.** I also worked on a film on Mansoorji and got to spend time with him in his house in Dharwad and record him just prior to his death.

Learning by doing: Cable puller to audio engineer

I have learnt doing every single film sound related job first hand. Just because I was a graduate of FTII did not mean that I could start recording for film straight away. Ketan Mehta was shooting a film called Holi in 1984 on FTII campus during my first year. I was a cable puller on that film and my job was to hold and pull the cables when the boom man is moving forward or backward with the microphones. I also played back music for films. While shooting a song sequence you need to playback music. The song is broken into cues. You have to play from one cue to another for each shot as per the Director’s instructions.



My nightmare

I also worked as a boom man and sound assistant for a British recording engineer Mike Shoring who used to come to India to record for Ismael Merchant and James Ivory films. I learned a lot from him. Later on, I took on other roles as a sound editor, location sound Mixer, sound designer and music composer. I was fortunate to get opportunities to take on all these various roles. Because I have worked on these multiple jobs by myself, today I can train people in all these skills. When I train someone for a specific skill, I can describe it in great detail because of my first-hand experience with that skill. I worked mainly on documentaries and non-main-stream films which were considered avant -grade. Most of the films I worked on were never released in cinema halls (with a few exceptions) and only did the film festival circuit. I consider myself fortunate to have worked with both of my Gurus, Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani. I did many films with both of them. Later on, I worked with some of my friends like Dev Benegal and Rajan Khosa.

1993: the transition years of technology globally and my career in Dolby

Around 1993-94, many changes and transitions began in the industry. The technology was changing from analog to digital, from mono to stereo, from stereo to surround sound. I worked for 30 years of my life for Dolby, the industry leader in many of these transitions. I still remember when I first met with Ray Dolby along with his wife Dagmar. They lived in India for a while between 1964 and 1966 before Ray founded the company. Ray was invited as the United Nations Scientific Advisor and spent some time in Delhi and Chandigarh. When Ray heard someone from India has been recruited in his company, he was very warm in welcoming me. He asked me about Chandigarh city.

In those early years I never felt like I was working for a multinational company, it was a small family. I had the feeling that I was working for a scientist that Ray actually was. We were then about 200 people in the company. Almost everyone knew everyone. So, in spite of Dolby being a multinational company it never felt like any other corporate organisation. I was always put in very challenging situations, as technology evolved very rapidly.

In 2010 I started my work in Broadcast support with Star TV launching the first HD channels with surround sound in India. This was a major transition in broadcast. My job then was enabling the content producers to create their content in surround sound. In 2012 Dolby introduced a new platform called Dolby Atmos. In the initial days of the launch of Dolby Atmos my job became introducing the new technology and the workflows, set up and align the studios and cinemas and install the required equipment. Today many devices we use like our cell phones, Tablets, TVs, Computers, streaming players have Dolby technology inside them. I had the opportunity to work in many countries with Dolby. I spent the first 6 years in India. Later, I worked in Europe, based in Italy but also sometimes working in Germany, Spain and Switzerland for the next 12 years. After the stint in Europe, I moved back to India and worked in the South-East Asian countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and in New Zealand and Australia. Later I started working in the middle East and Africa. Having worked in some of the finest film sound studios around the world I attempted to bring that knowledge to the regions that are catching up with technology now.

Training Sessions





**Surround microphone
placement ICC world cup
Dunedin NZ**



setting up the Commentary



**FIFA world cup relay from
BEIN Sports Doha**



IPL Master control room

Films and Sports!

My first job at Dolby was to work as a film mastering engineer in the studio and transfer it to a sound negative to make a Dolby optical track of it which would then get joined to the picture. I did the mastering of more than 200 films. Some of the early films I mastered in India were films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Rangeela*, *Pardes*. I continued this in Europe while I was based in Rome.

When I moved to broadcast, I worked on developing new techniques for sports broadcast. I worked with Star Sports for a few years working on developing surround sound and Dolby Atmos for many sports events including sound capture for the Pro Kabaddi League tournaments. I was part of the sound crew for the ICC Cricket World cup held in Australia, the Australian Open Tennis, and the IPL. I used to spend 8 to 10 hours in the studio every day. For IPL we covered 6-7 venues in India. Remote production in India started with IPL. One audio kit was installed at the stadium, we worked remotely from a centralised studio through satellite and IP connectivity. The onsite crew connected all the microphones and sound sources to an input output device that converts and sends the audio to the remote studio. The actual sound from the venue is then fine-tuned, filtered, mixed with the audio commentary and then broadcast everywhere throughout the country from a remote centralised location, the master control room. This has become quite common now but we did it for the first time in India in those days. I have covered Tennis, Cricket, Kabaddi Soccer and many other sports at different levels in different countries.

Sound recording: My first love and still going strong!

Our field is very much neglected but it is as much important as any other field in the film/broadcast industry. There is less money allocated in budgets for us. Our people are under-paid. There is a lack of appreciation for our field. Our field is ignored unless the sound system fails. How would spectators



My Office

feel watching a cricket match if there is dead silence of even for three seconds or if a film does silent in the cinema? People realise the importance of our field only in such circumstances! In addition, there is a heavy penalty for sound failures while broadcasting important sports events like IPL, Wimbledon, F1 car races, etc. Unless we fail, no one notices our presence and the work we do.

I love my job. I love recording sound. That is why I am still in this field. I was inspired by my Gurus. One such Guru is Walter Murch, who edited, sound designed and mixed great movies like Apocalypse now, Godfather and many more. I was fortunate to meet him a few times and continue to learn from him. He told me, “The joy of bringing sound and picture together is the purest joy in this work”.

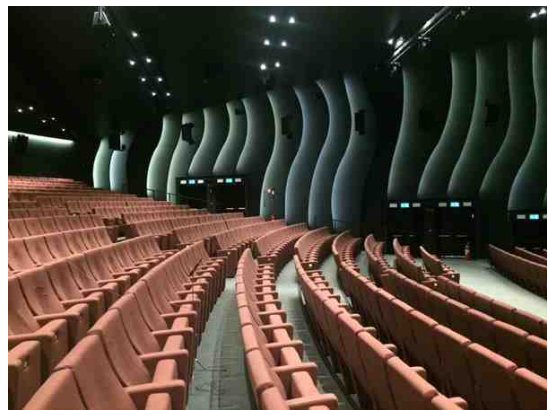
Randy Thom is the lead sound designer at Skywalker Ranch. He is another Guru of mine. He taught me a simple thing, “You have to try to record a sound event with a beginning, a middle and an end. Fade in and fade out to begin and end a sound are not organic transitions.”

The Venice Film festival

After doing my stint in the film industry working on recording sound tracks, I joined Dolby. I learnt the other side of production. It was about how a film print is made, how a sound negative and a print reaches the audience. The next transition was Digital Cinema and so new skills for digital cinema sound and projection had to be learned. That was another important part of my life.

I have been a part of the Venice Film Festival projection technology team for the last 15 years installing and tuning the sound at the various venues for the festival. We set up the audio playback systems so that all speakers are playing back properly and the film sound track is playing back correctly as conceived by the creators of the sound track. Every morning there is a rehearsal. The Directors, producers, film crew whose films are to be premiered at the festival, typically come at six in the morning to listen to the film. They want to make sure that it is going to be playing back accurately during their premier that day. We have only two hours between 6 am and 8 am to have this rehearsal and then fix any issues. The last screening ends at around midnight. So practically you live, sleep and eat at the venue of the film festival. Each day you are meeting a highly respected and sensitive artist who wants to make sure that the premier is going to go well.

It’s an extremely challenging and difficult job. Apart from meeting these creative people, the other benefit in being part of a festival crew is to discover films from various different cultures.



One of the best screening rooms in Venice



**My office at the Venice film festival
Sala Grande**

Teaching, Training and Collaborations

I conduct workshops on basic sound recording techniques, new technologies such as Dolby Atmos and sound design. I have been working in Africa for the last few years for the Dolby Institute and Multichoice Talent Factory. The last two years during Corona have been online teaching. I have trained a lot of people around the world, training people basic audio skills and how to mix surround sound. This is not a typical classroom setting but a lot of hands-on field work.



Nairobi industry training



broadcast training West Africa

I have been collaborating with many artists. I should mention my collaboration with visual artist Kabir Mohanty. We developed an interactive installation which was shown in many art galleries in India and outside including in the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin and the Solomon R. Guggenheim in New York. This was based on the idea of a Foley pit in creating sound effects for film and we had school children visiting the art galleries and having a great time making sounds.

I have also worked with the Kochi Biennale in India as an AV consultant helping them to install the audio and video components for the international artists exhibiting there.

Working with the experts and world class professionals

While tuning a film mixing studio, we use an instrument to measure sound pressure level. I used to measure the sound output of every channel in the studio with this instrument. There was a senior Mixing engineer who had mixed hundreds of films. I worked with him in Rome. I used to keep looking at the instrument and the old man behind me used say, "Its correct now." He needed no instrument. He could hear it when it sounded right.

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I have not been part of the commercial film industry. That world still does not make sense to me or excite me. I have managed to stay away!

Indian Music

In Indian music it is an individual performing and sharing his tradition with you. It is an improvised solo performance shared by the artist with the audience. In the western tradition in the classical orchestral music, multiple people perform together. In India, we can set and define our own pitch and have the accompanist tune to it. In western music, you have a defined role to play with an orchestra with your instrument. You have to match the scale and the pitch and the tempo with everybody else playing with you.

I feel that the uniqueness of Indian music of playing shrutis and improvisation is getting lost today. We don't hear the difference between shrutis in a Todi and a Multani. The other thing with music today is most of it is in 4/4 meter only. Though we have other many great taals like Zhaptal or Rupak we largely prefer 4/4. Why always Teentaal? I wonder how many young people even listen to Indian classical music nowadays! We have great instruments in our musical culture. It is very colourful. Every instrument has its own distinct tonality. Each of these produces shrutis. Our music is unique with its system of scales commonly called Ragas. When we listen to different musicians even from the same Gharana each one of them brings his own identity and experience to the music. I feel proud to be a part of that parampara.

Today what I notice, is we are not sensitive to sound in our day-to-day life. What I observe is even during religious festivities we play film songs now. I have been recording and listening to *dhol* and *tasha* for some years and enjoy those instruments. One can listen to an instrument like the *Chenda* in its' real dynamic range in a live Kathakali performance. (Dynamic range is the range between the softest and the loudest sound we can hear) Now we live in a world of mp3. Humans can hear more than 90dB of dynamic range. Today we don't even use 10dB. We have to generate the sensibility and awareness for the younger generation that we can hear so much and we don't have to crush everything down to just a few db of dynamic range! Louder is not always better. We naturally can hear different tonalities, and understand different meters. We have to hear our own music to develop these listening skills. It can be learned and enjoyed. Music has multiple functions and can be very enriching.

Leadership is taking responsibility:

Appa used to say that we need to develop leadership qualities but I don't have any. I just do a lot of hard work in my field by myself. But I teach people. And many of them have very successful careers today. I respect them and most importantly I learn from them and believe in them and in their abilities. I take responsibility for all the mistakes of my team. So, if something goes wrong or if we missed a line or two of dialogue of an actor, I am responsible for it. This is the only thing I can call a leadership quality in me.

A proud and a tolerant Hindu, a member of a global community

I came back to India in 2010 because my father was unwell. He passed away because of cancer in the same year. I was working in Europe and I was offered a job in India which expanded slowly to other regions. My work allowed me to travel to many countries and see other cultures. In my personal life sometimes feel like I am divided between two cultures, mine and my wife's. Half of my friends and family are Indian and the other half are Italian or from other parts of the world. I feel like I am home when I get off at the Marco Polo airport or the Leonardo da Vinci airport and it's a similar feeling when I land in Mumbai or Delhi or Goa. While living here in a small village in Goa, I communicate with many of my friends around the world and feel part of their world. I have a wider global community of people who work with sound because of my work with Dolby. My community is in Africa, South East Asia, the US and in Europe. We explore and discuss what is happening in our world.



with my students

with my students
there are not
enough women in
our profession
and I am trying
to change that



with FTII students



RAPID FIRE

- **Favourite book** - Sculpting in Time by Andrei Tarkovsky
- **Favourite Movie** - Subarnarekha by Ritwik Ghatak
- **Favourite place** - Chorao Island (in Goa)
- **Hobby** - recording nature sounds
- **Sound** - Dhvayaloka by Anandavardhana
- **Creativity** – for me, it is more like showing up at work every day rather than creativity
- **Composition** - Bandish
- **Dolby** - My extended family
- **Italy** - My second home
- **Appa Pendse** - His gift of music for me
- **Artist** - more like Artisan
- **FTII** - best years of my life
- **Jnana Prabodhini** - best years of my life

I would like to be a musician if I get to live a life once again.

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