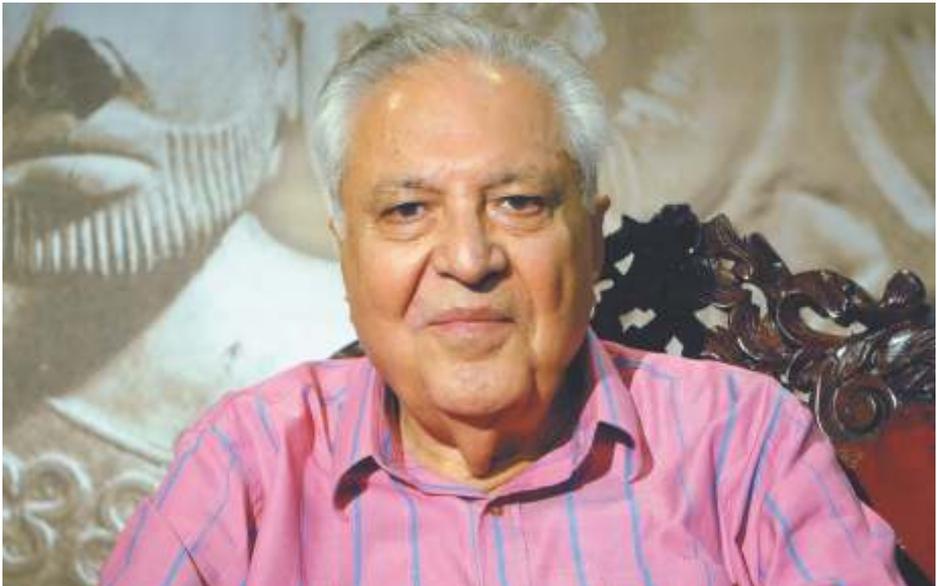


N. N. Sippy

Eminent Film Producer and Distributor



India occupies an important place in the International Film Industry today. Only the talented, knowledgeable and dedicated can find their foothold in this competitive Industry. The need of the hour is specialists and experts in any field - be it direction, production, cinematography etc.

One person who has provided entertainment and relief in the stressful life today by way of message oriented films presented with a discerning eye is our dear brother N. N. Sippy, whose name is taken with awe and admiration in the Indian Film Industry.

Jawhrani: Sippiji, we welcome you to our programme. Kindly tell us how you became Sippy from Sipahimalani?

N. N. Sippy: It was way back in Sindh. My father, uncle and our entire family was known as Sippy, but I was the only exception, who registered in school as Sipahimalani, and even my passport states my name as Sipahimalani.

Jawhrani: To which part of Sindh do you belong?

N. N. Sippy: I was born in Hyderabad. My elders were from there although my uncle lived in Karachi. We lived in Hyderabad till 1945 and thereafter for 3 years in Karachi.

Jawhrani: What was your age in 1947?

N. N. Sippy: I was about 14/15 years and we came to India when I was 16.

Jawhrani: Can you recollect the harrowing days of the freedom movement?

N. N. Sippy: To some extent. When we were in Hyderabad, my sister's father-in-law was in jail. Hemu Kalani was sentenced to be hanged. We kids used to congregate and pray for Hemu Kalani's pardon. We used to take part in such type of activities in Hyderabad, Sindh. But, it was a different story in Karachi where, just like Bombay, people were more self-centered.

Jawhrani: At that time could you imagine that a catastrophe like partition would befall Sindhi Hindus?

N. N. Sippy: It worked both ways. We lost our ancestral homes, business and the luxuries of our motherland, but migration pumped a new spirit into Sindhis. They worked hard and you can see for yourself that we have prospered. Some of us are producers, some doctors and many more have established themselves in various fields in India.

Jawhrani: Couldn't this have been achieved in Karachi, too?

N. N. Sippy: One can't say with certainty, though we were involved in the business of film distribution and exhibition, in Karachi, too.

Jawhrani: Were Sindhi films made in Sindh by Sindhi Hindus before Partition?

N. N. Sippy: I personally don't know but I'm sure some must have been produced. But, there were many Sindhi names to feel proud of. Well known among them were Hari Shivdasani and Gope Kamlani, who were a top notch Hindi comedians. And whenever they visited us in Hyderabad, we felt a tremendous sense of pride in meeting these artists from Bombay.

Jawhrani: Are you aware about the production of any Sindhi film in Bombay, during pre-partition days?

N.N.Sippy: Probably one, that is EKTA.

Jawhrani: When did you migrate to India?

N.N.Sippy: In 1947. We lived at Bunder Road Extention, near Plaza Cinema, in Karachi. Some people were murdered due to communal hatred. We were very much frightened at that time. Our elders advised us not to venture out after evenings and remain inside the confines of our homes. Ultimately, we decided to migrate. A friend of mine stayed in Bombay at that time and he invited me to visit him. Another friend was coming in a chartered plane. I accepted his invitation to join him on his return and flew to Bombay in 1947. When I reached Bombay, the bus took me to Metro cinema. I boarded a train at Churchgate and headed for Andheri as my friend lived in a bungalow at Versova.

Jawhrani: When did the rest of your family members join you?

N.N.Sippy: They came within two to three months. They had to undergo some tense moments at that time.

Jawhrani: Were you able to transfer your assets to India?

N.N.Sippy: We literally came empty handed. My father was concerned about the safety of the family. How could we shift our cinema or take film reels with us? I was also interested in the film business at that time. My father began with the establishment of a film distribution office named 'Narain Film Distributors' at Bombay.

Jawhrani: Where did you study in Bombay?

N.N.Sippy: I studied at Jai Hind College. We used to see movies often. There was a director, Shahid Latif and he had made many films like 'Arzoo' etc. I became friendly with him. One of my friends told me that his father wanted to produce a film, and I recommended the name of Shahid Latif to him. I began working in a distribution office along side my studies. Early in the mornings, I attended college from 7 to 10 and after that, I went to my distribution office from 11 to 6. The distributor was my father's friend and his daughter was Tina Munim, who became a heroine and is presently married to the industrialist Anil Ambani. On arrival, my father couldn't find suitable accommodation and he shifted to Bhusawal and established a distribution office, 'Sippy Brothers', over there.

Jawhrani: So you left for Bhusawal?

N. N. Sippy: Not all of us. But around that time, half the family members left for Bhusawal. I worked with Babu Bhai Munim, the father of Tina Munim. I introduced my friend to director Shahid Latif, who made a film with him. But unfortunately that didn't succeed. It bombed at the box office. Later on, Shahid Latif opened his own concern, where I joined him as a General Manager.

Jawhrani: Which was your first film as an assistant director?

N. N. Sippy: It was 'Buzdil', made by Film Arts. Then, I joined Guru Dutt and made 'Jaal'. I was closely associated with Guru Dutt who was very fond of me.

Jawhrani: Wasn't Guru Dutt introduced by Nav Ketan Pictures?

N. N. Sippy: Yes, It was in 'Baazi'. Then we signed him for our movie 'Jaal'. S. D. Burman was our music director. Burman Da was also fond of me. I married early in life, at the age of nineteen and my wife was seventeen. Many big shots graced our marriage; S. D. Burman, Guru Dutt, Shahid Latif, Majrooh Sultanpuri etc. The venue was Akberallys at Flora Fountain. People said it was a marriage of dolls.

Jawhrani: Due to your tender age?

N. N. Sippy: Absolutely. People had to stand in a queue from West End Tower to Akberallys. It was in December, 1951. Responsibilities increased, and after the birth of my first child in 1953, I started my own production house in 1959.

Jawhrani: Which was your first film?

N. N. Sippy: It was 'Qatil'.

Jawhrani: Wasn't Prem Nath, the hero?

N. N. Sippy: Yes. He had already worked with us in 'Buzdil'.

Jawhrani: I can recollect a song, 'Manzil Bhi Door Hai, Jaana Bhi Zaroor Hai'.

N. N. Sippy: Yes Ram, it became a superhit and also the film. It was my first movie with director Mahmood Hussain. I learnt a lot from him, production, editing etc. Then, I made another movie 'Rooplekha' with him and fortunately that also turned out to be a successful film. Initially, no one wanted to touch my film 'Qatil', so I had to open my own distribution office in Bombay. Luckily, both my films did well, and in the process I got established as a producer as well

as a distributor. Then, I thought of doing something big. Small films were our bread and butter, but I wanted to grow big. Then, I thought of 'Woh Kaun Thi'.

Jawhrani: Wasn't it India's first suspense movie?

N.N.Sippy: Absolutely right. Raj Khosla was assistant to Guru Dutt and in that way, he was my colleague. We were on very good terms. Though he had made two films independently, both had bombed at the box office. He was notorious for being a lazy person, and labelled an alcoholic. He was considered a white elephant. Even my dad tried to dissuade me from employing him, but I had complete faith in myself as well as Raj Khosla. I convinced dad that everything would be alright. It was a historical moment, though my father could not witness it as he had passed away by then.

'Woh Kaun Thi' was premiered in Metro Cinema of Bombay. Everyone or anyone who mattered in the film industry came for the premiere of the movie. I had specifically requested the legendary director Mehboob, to see my movie. Though he had promised to see only half the movie, as he had another engagement, he stayed uptill the end. He had come with his wife Sardar Akhtar. A new genre of suspense thrillers was introduced in the Indian film industry.

Jawhrani: Did you make any more suspense films?

N.N.Sippy: Yes. I made another suspense movie, 'Gumnaam'. No one wanted to touch it with a bargepole. Everyone said, there was murder after murder. I was killing every character in the film and that it would never click with the audience. I had the conviction that my film would prove to be a superhit. Raj Khosla wriggled out of the project. Pramod Chakravarti refused. I thought of Raja Navate. He was assistant to Raj Kapoor. He had made some three or four films and all of them had flopped miserably. He had been unemployed for twelve years. But he had the talent. When I told him to direct my film, he had tears in his eyes. He asked me, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes! You will direct it. We are there and you should not worry". I just instructed him not to play with the script. I concentrated heavily on the scripts of my movies. And thus 'Gumnaam' was made.

Jawhrani: How many films have you made till date?

N.N.Sippy: Around twenty.

Jawhrani: Wasn't it you, who presented Shatrughan Sinha as the main hero in a big budget movie, 'Kali Charan'?

N. N. Sippy: I had given a break to two artists in that film. Shatrughan and Subhash Ghai. The latter had come to me for narrating a story. My daughter persuaded me to listen to his narration. I listened to his story. He told me about another story, but he wanted to direct it himself. I asked him, whether he had any experience in direction, to which he replied in the negative. He had completed the acting course from Pune Film Institute, but he wanted to be a director. I asked him to narrate that story, once again. After he completed, I said it was okay and he would direct it for me. He has been acknowledging this break, since then. Wherever there is a talk about him being a director, he always gives me the credit. Whether it is in the print media, radio or T.V., he says "Thanks to Mr. Nari Sippy". Then he directed another movie of mine, "Meri Jung", which also turned out to be a superhit. 'Kali Charan' established many names, Shatrughan as a hero, Reena Roy as a heroine and Prem Nath as a villain.

Jawhrani: Do you take care of production only, or take interest in other departments of film-making, also?

N. N. Sippy: You will find the mark of Nari Sippy in each and every department of film making in my films.

Jawhrani: If required do you make any changes during the making?

N. N. Sippy: I don't interfere with the job of the director, but look into scripting, dialogues, music, costumes and finally editing wherever necessary. I learnt editing from M.V. Patkar. He had edited our movie 'Gumnaam'. Since the 'Gumnaam' days, I always sat with the editor of all my films.

Jawhrani: You have given many successful films to the Indian film industry. Have you ever thought of producing a Sindhi movie?

N. N. Sippy: By the grace of God, 80% of my movies became hits. They celebrated silver or golden jubilees. I had financed a Sindhi film, which had my nephew Rajan Sippy as its hero, but the film proved to be a drain on our finances. It dampened my enthusiasm for making any more Sindhi films.

Jawhrani: This is the era of electronic media. A T.V. channel can promote our language, civilization and culture. Any plans for a Sindhi T.V. serial?

N.N.Sippy: I would love to, if someone approaches me and I feel it is in the interests of the community I would certainly produce, provided it is within a manageable budget.

Jawhrani: Our Sindhi children have simply stopped conversing in our mother tongue, isn't it so?

N.N.Sippy: I can very well see it even in my own home.

Jawhrani: How can we rectify this state of affairs? Don't you think that the demise of our language will lead to losing our very own identity?

N.N.Sippy: My children are now grown up and now they try their best to speak in Sindhi, but my grandchildren cannot, though I emphasize upon them to do so.

Jawhrani: What are the various posts in the film industry that you have occupied?

N.N.Sippy: I had been on the Executive Committee of 'Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association', for twelve years consecutively. I was committee member of Indian Motion Pictures Distributors Association and presently, I am its President since the last twenty years. I have been requesting them to let me take a break, but they won't let me go. I want to pass on the baton to the younger generation.

Jawhrani: Have you noticed any change in the film industry in the last ten to fifteen years?

N.N.Sippy: No. Not in the last 10-15 years, but in the last five years. Now, they don't care about proper scripting. They only want a financier and a saleable cast to make a movie. I asked one such person, as to how could he go ahead with film making in such a haphazard way? He said, "Sir, I am standing on a footpath and my financier is on the 12th floor. If my film clicks, I will be on the 13th floor and if not, he will be alongside me, on the footpath. It won't have any impact on me." This is the new mindset!

Jawhrani: Explicit scenes are rampant in present day films. Won't they affect our younger generation?

N.N.Sippy: This is the precise reason I have stopped making films. My films would stick to some code of morality. My films have always been ideal for all people, who could see them in the presence of the entire family.

Jawhrani: Will our new music last long?

N. N. Sippy: 'Char Din Ki Chandani, Phir Andheri Raat Hai'! It has got a very short life span in the public mind. Compare it to our music, which is evergreen and still fetches handsome royalty for us. Music should have melody. It should touch the chords of our spirit. New films only provide stop gap music for cabaret scenes of these films. This is the age of Rap Music, Disco Music and the incessant use of high decibel Punjabi Music. It is ruining our rich cultural heritage.

Jawhrani: Should we not attempt to preserve our cultural heritage through movies?

N. N. Sippy: Yes. In this vein, I made 'Sargam', which gave our audience 'Dafli Wale, Dafli Baja'. But we have to await the right opportunity.

Jawhrani: There are many Sindhis who feel shy of calling themselves Sindhi, what is your reaction?

N. N. Sippy: There might be few but I have never felt this way. I am very much proud of being a Sindhi. I have taken birth in Sindh.

Jawhrani: In case of having to take rebirth, which community would be your preference?

N. N. Sippy: I don't know whether reincarnation is a reality or not. But certainly, to take rebirth in a respectable Sindhi family would be a blessing of God.

Jawhrani: We are thankful to you for conveying your thoughts.

N. N. Sippy: Thank you.