

**PEN WORKERS:**

# CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

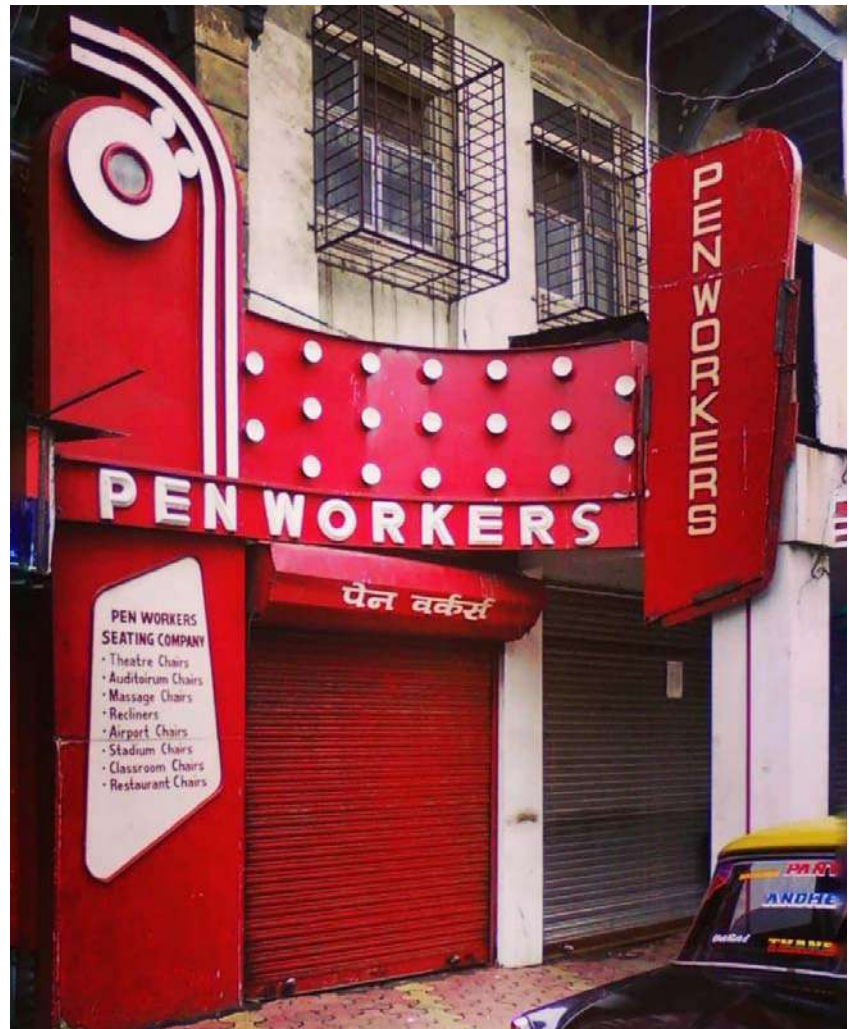
Source & Image Courtesy: Shri Hemant Chaturvedi, Eléonore Muhidine, Eranna Yekbote

From humble beginnings in 1924 to becoming an integral part of India's seating landscape, the brand today celebrates the journey of a hundred years; moulded and defined by dedication, flexibility, and a commitment towards innovation and timeless quality. In the heart of Bombay's bustling streets, their Chairs have woven a legacy of comfort and craftsmanship spanning over a century...

Picture Bombay in the 1920's: where dreams were born and destinies were forged, a melting pot of cultures and identities that made it unlike any other city in the world. For those who called it home, it was a city of contrasts and contradictions, where tradition and modernity coexisted harmoniously. True to its surroundings, it was here that a vision of comfort, elegance, and unwavering dedication to the craft of seating was born. This vision was embodied by Shri Munshi Ram Gulati, a.k.a The Turban Man, whose passion for creating high-quality chairs would pave the way for a legacy spanning a century.

## **The Birth of Pen Workers (1924-1930)**

The Pen Workers workshop first opened its doors in 1924; a modest establishment nestled in a quiet corner of the city. The name 'Pen Workers' originated from the



utilisation of penwood in their craftsmanship, reminiscent of the way teak wood is employed in modern times. Under the guidance of the visionary 'Turban Man' himself, the company embarked on a mission to redefine the very essence of seating: producing handcrafted wooden chairs inspired by classic European designs as a testament to the artistry and dedication of its makers. The endeavour grew to become more than just a business; from the silent cinema tents of the early 1930s to the tumultuous

backdrop of India's struggle for independence, the company remained steadfast in its commitment to quality and innovation.

## **Surviving the Great Depression (1930-1940)**

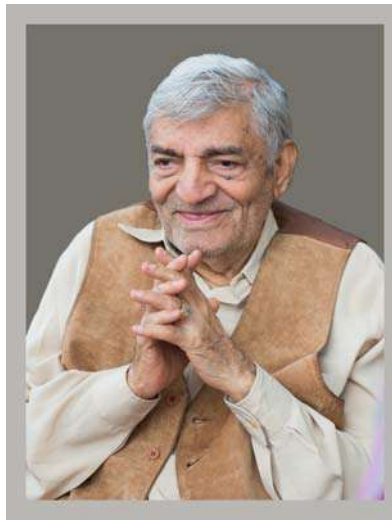
The release of Ardeshir Irani's Alam Ara in 1931, the first Indian sound film, marked a commercial triumph. During the early 1930s, Indian cinema underwent a significant transformation, evolving from silent films to sound films and transitioning from multiple reels to a single showreel format.

The country was going through economic challenges due to the East India Movement and these changes brought considerable challenges. Nevertheless, Pen Workers Seating persevered by emphasising durability and affordability. They introduced a line of simple, sturdy chairs that appealed to budget-conscious customers. Despite the economic hardships, their dedication to quality earned them a loyal customer base.

### Freedom Struggle (1941-1947)

In the 1940s, India was deeply immersed in the struggle for independence from British rule. Nationalist fervour permeated all aspects of society, including the film industry. By this time, filmmakers had become adept with the latest tools and technology in cinema. Anti-colonial sentiments ran high, and many filmmakers sought to express their opposition to British oppression through their work.

During this tumultuous period, Penworkers Seating pivoted to support the freedom movement by producing wooden crates and essential goods for freedom



Shri. G. L. Kashmiri

fighters. This shift not only kept the company operational but also instilled a profound sense of national pride among its workers.

### Post-War Prosperity and Expansion (1947-1960)

In the wake of World War II, as India embarked on its journey towards independence, Pen Workers seized the opportunity to contribute to the freedom movement by shifting its focus towards producing essential goods. This pivotal moment not only showcased the company's adaptability but also underscored its commitment to the nation's cause during a tumultuous period of history.

As the 1950s dawned, a wave of prosperity swept across the country, setting the stage for the company's expansion. It was during this era that the company introduced upholstered chairs, marking a significant departure from its traditional wooden designs. With each new offering, the company solidified its position in the market, earning the trust and loyalty of customers across the nation.

The post-war period brought prosperity and expansion, with a



*"I have known Pen Workers since the 1960's when Anmol's father, G.L. Kashmiri was running the company. They were always the premier company for cinema/auditorium seating in the country and very proactive in getting the latest technologies into India. Over time, as cinema acoustical, ergonomic and aesthetic requirement developed, it was a pleasure working with them as they introduced modern designs in keeping with the technological advancements.*

*I wish them the very best in their future business endeavours."*

*– Jal. P. Mistry, Acoustical Consultant*



forward-thinking approach, catering to the evolving tastes and preferences of its clientele.

The 1970s witnessed a significant investment in automation, revolutionising Pen Workers' production processes and enhancing efficiency. This strategic move not only streamlined operations but also positioned the company for future growth and expansion. Meanwhile, marketing campaigns emphasised the company's commitment to style and modern living, resonating with a new generation of consumers seeking contemporary seating solutions.

Despite the challenges posed by an increasingly competitive market landscape, Pen Workers remained steadfast in its pursuit of innovation. By staying attuned to the changing needs of its customers and leveraging cutting-edge technology, the company continued to push the boundaries of excellence in seating design.



### Challenges and Renewal (1981-1997)

The 1980s ushered in a new era of challenges for Pen Workers with the introduction of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR), disrupting the traditional film industry landscape. As cinemas faced competition from home entertainment options, Pen Workers navigated these turbulent waters by diversifying its product portfolio. The company expanded into manufacturing stadium, telescopic, and classroom seating solutions, demonstrating its resilience and adaptability in the face of evolving market dynamics. Despite economic and societal shifts, Pen Workers



remained committed to its core values, supporting the families associated with its operations and emerging stronger through the process of renewal.

### Comeback of Cinemas and Global Expansion (1997-2020)

The late 1990s witnessed a resurgence in the cinema industry with the emergence of multiplexes and a renewed focus on safety following tragic incidents like the 'Uphaar Cinema Fire Strategy'. June 13, 1997, marked one of the darkest days in Indian cinema history. During a screening of the 'movie Border', a fire broke out, leading to the tragic deaths of 59 people from asphyxiation and injuring 103 others in the ensuing stampede. This catastrophe prompted significant changes in cinema safety measures across the country.

In the same year, PVR pioneered the multiplex revolution in India by



opening the first multiplex in Saket, New Delhi. This was soon followed by Cinemax in Mumbai, with one of the first multiplex cinemas in the city emerging in Goregaon. These multiplexes revolutionised the industry, sparking a trend where traditional cinemas were converted into multiplexes with multiple smaller screens. This shift dramatically increased the demand for high-quality seating.

Pen Workers seized this opportunity, experiencing a surge in demand for high-quality seating solutions. The company responded by launching premium lines and ergonomic designs, catering to the evolving needs of its customers. This period also marked a bold new chapter - Global Expansion. Their reputation for quality and innovation preceded them, paving the way for a successful foray into international markets. Dubai, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and even the UK welcomed Pen Workers' seating solutions. This expansion wasn't without its challenges, with Chinese competitors offering budget-friendly alternatives. However, Pen Workers remained steadfast in their commitment to excellence, focusing on superior craftsmanship and cutting-edge design. The early 21st century saw further advancements. A landmark collaboration with Ferco Seating, a leading global player, solidified Pen Workers' position as a force to be further reckoned with. This partnership, spearheaded by a spirit of



*"Today, I proudly write, "We doubt if there is any Indian who has not sat on a chair installed by us. In your lifetime, if you have been to school, watched a movie, enjoyed a drama, or been part of any sporting event, then you have been a patron of Pen Workers Seating Company."*

– **Anmol Kashmiri, Partner, Pen Workers**

October 1930 THE MOTION PICTURE MAGAZINE

*fine PUSH-BACK chairs for fine Theatres*

The following theatres have been supplied by us:—

1. Liberty Cinema, (fitted) Bombay.
2. Strand Cinema, Bombay.
3. Minerva Cinema, Bombay.
4. Tivoli Cinema, Secunderabad.
5. Kemar Talkies, Delhi.
6. Light House, Ahmedabad.
7. Ashok Talkies, Madras.
8. Hind Vijay, Poona.
9. Yashwanth Talkies, Indore.
10. Saraswati Pictures Palace, Vizagapatnam.
11. Anand Theatres, Jodhpur.
12. Kanhaiya Chitra Mandir, Benaras.
13. Prem Prakash Talkies, Jaipur.

And now **ROXY TALKIES, BOMBAY.**

*Pen Workers*  
CINEMA FURNITURE SPECIALISTS  
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ELIMINATES STANDING TO PERMIT PASSING.  
SMOOTH, EFFORTLESS, HORIZONTAL RETRACTION.  
PROVIDES PASSAGE LIGHT.  
ADJUSTABLE TO ALL CONDITIONS AND INCLINES.



Mohit Kashmiri, Partner, Pen Workers





The Four Generations of Pen Workers: Late Shri Munshi Ram Gulati (left), Shri. G. L. Kashmiri (right), Anmol Kashmiri and Kavish Kashmiri

friendship and mutual respect, involved manufacturing Ferco products in India. With a dedication to sustainable practices, Pen Workers launched their 'Green Heritage' line, a testament to their environmental consciousness.

### A Legacy of Comfort (2021-2024)

As the brand rightfully puts it, "We doubt if there is any Indian who has not sat on a chair installed by us. In your lifetime, if you have been to school, watched a movie, enjoyed a drama, or been part of any sporting event, then you have been a patron of Pen Workers Seating Company."

A journey that celebrates a century of seating excellence today, Pen Workers Seating has undergone a transformation as impressive as its handcrafted chairs. Their former factory, a short stroll from the NESCO center, Mumbai, has been reimagined as a sleek 102-room hotel under the IHCL's Ginger brand. But this isn't just a place to rest your head - it's a full-fledged immersion into the world of Pen Workers! Across five floors, visitors can explore an experience centre showcasing the brand's vast chair collection.

For those curious about the creation process, a functioning factory

remains just a stone's throw away, offering a glimpse behind the scenes. This innovative fusion of hospitality and product exploration allows Pen Workers to connect with their valued clients and architects on a deeper level, tailoring and personalising chair designs for a truly bespoke experience. To further commemorate their centenary, Pen Workers has launched a special edition chair line that seamlessly blends timeless design elements with cutting-edge comfort features. So, prepare to embark on a journey through a century of seating innovation, all under one roof (or five, to be precise).

Additionally, this year also stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of the Gulati family's vision and dedication. Led by Mohit Kashmiri and Anmol Kashmiri, the third generation of the family, the company remains true to its founding principles while embracing modern technology and sustainable practices. With a focus on blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design, Pen Workers Chairs continues to innovate, creating seating solutions that not only provide comfort but also stand the test of time. As it looks ahead to the future, the company remains

committed to its legacy of excellence, ensuring that every chair crafted bears the hallmark of quality and comfort for generations to come.

In his own words, Anmol Kashmiri states, "As Pen Workers Chairs celebrates its centenary, it remains a family-owned business, now run by two brothers, Mohit Kashmiri and me, Anmol Kashmiri. My son, Kavish Kashmiri, has recently joined the business, proudly becoming the fourth generation of Pen Workers to enter the industry. The company continues to innovate, blending traditional craftsmanship with modern technology. To commemorate our 100th anniversary, we have launched special edition chairs that combine classic design elements with state-of-the-art comfort features."

### The Future of Pen Workers Seating

Looking ahead, Pen Workers Seating aims to lead in sustainable chair design. They plan to explore smart chairs that integrate technology for enhanced comfort and functionality. The legacy of Shri Munshi Ram Gulati lives on, as the company remains dedicated to creating chairs that stand the test of time in both quality and design.

