

Lumière to Independence: Exploring the Dawn of Indian Cinema's Legacy

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Abstract: *This research paper delves into the historical journey of Indian cinema from its inception until India gained independence in 1947. From its humble beginnings as a series of flickering images to the grand spectacles of modern blockbusters, the trajectory of cinema represents a captivating exploration of art, culture, and human imagination. This paper examines the global origins of cinema and underscores its introduction to India. The arrival of cinema in India was not merely a technological innovation; it marked a cultural phenomenon that revolutionized the way people perceived themselves and the world around them. Through the medium of cinema, India discovered a platform to articulate its rich heritage, traditions, and aspirations, thus integrating cinema into the fabric of the nation's cultural identity.*

Key Words: *Cinema, Devika Rani, Dada Saab Phalke, AlamAra, Raja Harishchandra,*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Indian cinema has traversed a remarkable path from its silent film origins in the late 19th century to its current status as a global cultural phenomenon. This paper explores this journey, highlighting pivotal moments such as the transition to talkies in the 1930s and the intertwining of cinema with India's socio-political landscape, particularly during the pre-independence era. Despite challenges like the Second World War, Indian cinema thrived, shaping cultural identity and fostering a new generation of filmmakers. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical archives, filmography, and critical discourse, this research paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolution of Indian cinema.

2. OBJECTIVES :

The research aims to investigate the historical and socio-political conditions that facilitated the establishment of the indigenous Indian film industry. It seeks to delve into the challenges confronted by the Indian cinema during its early development, particularly under the constraints of colonial rule and the absence of sufficient resources and governmental support. Additionally, the study endeavors to explore the genesis and evolution of Indian cinema, tracing its origins and early stages of development. It aims to analyze the various methods and circumstances that shaped the production of the earliest Indian films, providing insights into the nascent industry's growth trajectory.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & ANALYSIS :

The research utilizes qualitative methods to analyze the evolution of Indian cinema from its inception to the pre-independence era. This involves examining historical archives, early Indian films, and critical literature to understand the industry's development within its socio-cultural context. The study aims to identify key milestones, trends, and thematic elements shaping Indian cinema's trajectory, providing insights into its broader significance and societal impact.

ORIGIN OF CINEMA

The remarkable journey of Indian cinema commenced on July 7th, 1896, when Marius Sestier, an operator for the Lumière brothers, showcased six short films at Watson's Hotel in Bombay. These screenings, however, featured mere clips depicting real-life events, rather than what we commonly recognize as films. While historically, this event is often cited as the screening of the first film, it's essential to recognize that no single event can be pinpointed as the birth

of cinema, nor can any single individual or nation claim its invention. Both preceding and succeeding the Lumière screenings, numerous events played pivotal roles in shaping the cinema landscape we know today. To grasp the evolution of cinema as we know it, it's crucial to delve into its early phases.

Before the realization of motion pictures, efforts to analyze motion indirectly contributed to cinema's development. One significant experiment was conducted by photographer Eadweard Muybridge in 1878 to study horse movement. Commissioned by Leland Stanford, former governor of California, Muybridge aimed to settle the debate regarding whether all four hooves of a trotting horse are simultaneously off the ground. Muybridge positioned a series of cameras alongside a racetrack, each connected to a wire thread stretched across the track. As the horse galloped, it broke the thread, triggering the shutters of each camera sequentially. The outcome was a sequence of photographs capturing the horse in motion. While Muybridge did not invent motion pictures, his success in capturing movement covertly marked a significant stride toward the birth of cinema.

ARRIVAL OF CINEMA IN INDIA

Before the advent of cinema, India had its own forms of visual entertainment, such as plays and precursors to motion pictures. Ancient arts like shadow puppetry and the folk tradition of pat painting served as early prototypes of moving images. Photography arrived in India in 1840, and by the late nineteenth century, it had become widespread in major cities. Additionally, the Indian version of magic lantern shows, known as Shambarik Kharolikawas, was introduced by Mahadeo Gopal Patwardhan in 1892, featuring stories from Hindu epics.

Following the success of Cinématographe shows in Paris, the Lumière brothers dispatched their operators globally. Marius Sestier, one such operator, exhibited Lumière films in Bombay on July 7th, 1896. Initially intended for three days, the program's popularity extended its duration to over a month. Despite technical flaws in Sestier's own films, these shows sparked the initial interest in cinema in India, catering primarily to European residents but captivating Indian audiences as well.

Indian pioneers like Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatvadekar, known as Save Dada, and Hiralal Sen from Calcutta emerged as the first Indian filmmakers. Save Dada, already involved in film exhibition, was inspired by Lumière films to create indigenous productions. His films, "The Wrestlers" and "Man and Monkeys," shot in 1899, marked the beginning of Indian cinema. Hiralal Sen's contributions, though debated among historians, are recognized for his work in "The Flower of Persia" in 1898.

Within four years, cinema in India progressed significantly, evolving from supplementary entertainment to independent film programs. The success of Save Dada and Hiralal Sen, alongside an increasing number of foreign and native exhibitors, solidified cinema's roots in India, sowing the seeds for its flourishing industry.

In the early 1900s, Indian cinema began to take its initial steps towards establishing itself as a significant cultural force. At the turn of the century, Tivoli Theatre in Bombay showcased 25 pictures, marking a notable milestone in the public presentation of films. Thanawalla, an Indian filmmaker, further contributed to this burgeoning industry by presenting his own production, "Thanawalla's Grand Kinetoscope," at the same venue. His film, "Splendid Views of Bombay," provided audiences with glimpses of the city's landmarks. Another pivotal moment occurred on December 7th, 1901, when Save Dada captured the public reception of Raghunath Paranjape, celebrated for his achievement as a Sir Wrangler in Mathematics at Cambridge. This film, titled "Sir Wrangler Mr. R.P. Paranjape," is widely regarded as India's first newsreel.

While "Raja Harishchandra" is commonly recognized as India's first feature film, it's important to note that attempts at narrative features preceded it. "Pundalik," crafted by Narayan Govind Chitre and Ramchandra Gopal Torney, members of a Marathi theatrical club, stands as an early example. Shot at Seth Mangaldas Gardens in Bombay and released on May 18th, 1912, at Coronation Cinema, "Pundalik" demonstrates India's early engagement with cinematic storytelling. These developments underscore India's swift integration into the global cinematic landscape. Following the inaugural film screening in 1896, India emerged as a promising market for foreign films. Audiences, accustomed to theatrical performances, embraced this new form of entertainment eagerly. Pioneers like Save Dada, Hiralal Sen, and Jamsetji Madan ventured into film production, laying the groundwork for the industry's growth. However, it would take time for these early filmmakers to realize the creative potential of the camera as a storytelling medium.

ERA OF SILENT MOVIES

The culmination of Indian filmmaking efforts led to the creation of "Raja Harishchandra," released in 1913. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, known as Dadasaheb Phalke, is credited with crafting this pioneering indigenous feature film, which premiered on May 3, 1913, at the Coronation Cinema in Bombay. Following the success of "Raja Harishchandra," Phalke relocated to Nashik, drawn by its favorable climate and picturesque surroundings. Establishing his studio there, Phalke involved his entire family in the filmmaking process. Within three months, he completed two more mythological features, "Mohini Bhasmasur" and "Satyavan Savitri," alongside a short comedy and scenic footage of Nashik. Despite

using hand-driven machinery, Phalke's dedication enabled him to produce three successful feature films within a year, supported by financial assistance from a friend who believed in the project's potential returns. Phalke persevered in his quest for financial backing and, despite despair, managed to produce films with borrowed funds, including "Lanka Dahan" and a revamped version of "Raja Harishchandra." "Lanka Dahan," based on the burning of Lanka from the Ramayana, became a notable success, featuring Anna Salunke in the first double role in Indian cinema as Ram and Sita. This triumph showcased Phalke's filmmaking prowess and garnered widespread acclaim. In parallel, S.N. Patankar, A.P. Karandikar, and V.P. Divekar formed the Patankar Union and released the mythological film "Jaimini and Vyas" in 1913. Notably, Narmada Mande appeared as one of the earliest actresses in Indian films. Concurrently, South India witnessed the emergence of cinema with Natraja Mudaliar's Indian Film Company producing "Gopal Krishna" in Madras. Subsequent releases like "Keechak Vatham" (1916) and "Draupathi Vastrapaharanam" (1917) further bolstered the South Indian film industry. While imported foreign films continued to be popular, Phalke's success inspired other pioneers to enter filmmaking across different regions of India. To make filmmaking economically sustainable, several film companies were established with backing from Indian entrepreneurs. These companies would dominate indigenous filmmaking in the following decade, producing films on diverse themes and contributing to the flourishing silent era of Indian cinema amidst competition from foreign films. In 1918, two new film companies, the Kohinoor Film Company established by Dwarkadas Sampat and the Hindustan Cinema Films Company founded by Dadasaheb Phalke, emerged on the scene. By 1920, filmmaking had evolved into a burgeoning industry, with the number of films produced increasing dramatically to 207 from a mere three feature films. Notable companies during the silent era included The Maharashtra Film Company founded by Baburao Painter, Prabhat Film Company led by V. Shantaram, Madan Theatres established by Jamsetji Framji Madan, and Sharda Film Company. This progression highlights how the Indian film industry, starting from the vision of one individual to create indigenous cinema, had blossomed into a significant enterprise by the end of the silent era. From just three feature films in 1913, the industry witnessed a remarkable expansion, with over two hundred feature films produced by 1931. Even with the advent of sound, silent film production continued until 1934, albeit at a reduced rate. Despite facing obstacles such as lack of support from the British government and challenges posed by censorship, the industry continued to thrive. Indigenous film production flourished, accompanied by substantial growth in distribution and exhibition businesses, marking a period of significant development for Indian cinema.

The journey of Indian cinema from its inception in 1896 to the flourishing industry it became by the end of the silent era is a testament to the perseverance and creativity of its pioneers. Beginning with the Lumière brothers' screenings in Bombay, early efforts by Indian filmmakers like Thanawalla and Save Dada laid the groundwork for indigenous storytelling on screen. However, it was Dadasaheb Phalke who truly spearheaded the industry with his groundbreaking work, including the production of India's first feature film, "Raja Harishchandra," in 1913. Phalke's success inspired the establishment of new film companies, such as the Kohinoor Film Company and Hindustan Cinema Films Company, marking a pivotal moment in the industry's growth. Throughout the silent era, companies like The Maharashtra Film Company and Prabhat Film Company contributed to the expanding landscape of Indian cinema. Despite challenges such as censorship and limited support, the industry continued to thrive, with a focus on indigenous storytelling and the growth of distribution and exhibition networks. This period of evolution laid the foundation for Indian cinema's enduring legacy as a cultural and economic force.

ERA OF TALKIES

The making of India's first feature film, "Raja Harishchandra," by Dadasaheb Phalke in 1913 marked the genesis of an indigenous film industry in the country. This development paved the way for a significant milestone in Indian cinema in 1931 when silent images on the silver screen were replaced by the revolutionary advent of talkie films. "Alam Ara," directed by Ardeshir Irani, achieved distinction as the First Indian Talkie Film. The history of talkie films mirrors the broader narrative of cinema itself, with early attempts to synchronize visual images with sound. In the West, scientists endeavored to perfect this combination, leading to breakthroughs such as Dr. Lee DeForest's Phonogram device in 1923, which recorded synchronized sound directly onto film. However, it was the Western Electric company's Vitaphone system, introduced in 1926, that heralded the commercial launch of the sound era. Warner Brothers further propelled this evolution with the release of "Don Juan" in 1926, featuring synchronized music, followed by "The Jazz Singer" in 1927, widely regarded as the first talkie feature film, complete with synchronized speech and songs.

In May 1927, the earliest demonstration of De Forest's Phonofilm in India was given at the Royal Opera House, Bombay by R. B. Salsbury, featuring scenes from Julius Caesar and a comedy skit entitled As We Lie. The first sound feature film exhibited in India was Universal's Melody of Love, shown in 1929 at the Elphinstone Picture Palace, Calcutta. In Bombay, the first talkie was shown at the Excelsior Theatre on February 21, 1929, garnering widespread attention. The earliest Indian attempt at a talkie program was in September 1930 at Bombay's Krishna Cinema, featuring two synchronized films, one depicting a Khadi Exhibition with Mahatma Gandhi, and the other a dance scene from the

silent film Madhuri. Madan Theatres, under the leadership of Madan, presented the first Indian Talking Pictures in Calcutta, comprising selected dramatic excerpts, songs, dances, and recitations, with the first program released on February 14, 1931, at the Crown Theatre. Additionally, in March 1931, a Bengali speech by I.A. Hafeesjee was recorded and released at the Chitra Cinema, Calcutta. These efforts marked the transition to sound in Indian cinema, with Ardeshir Irani's Imperial Film Company leading the way with the release of the first Indian Feature Film, Alam Ara, in March 1931.

Alam Ara, released in March 1931, marked a significant turning point in Indian cinema as the first Indian talkie film. Produced by the Imperial Film Company and directed by Ardeshir Irani, it received widespread acclaim and established the dominance of talkies in the industry. Despite attempts by competitors, Alam Ara's success signaled the future of Indian cinema. This success paved the way for subsequent talkie films, including Madan Theatres' "Shirin Farhad" in May 1931, which further emphasized the importance of music and songs in shaping the direction of early talkie films. The introduction of sound films revolutionized Indian cinema, leading to a surge in production across major languages. Hindi, being the most widely spoken and understood language, spearheaded the trend, with regional cinemas following suit. In 1931, immediately after the release of Alam Ara, twenty-seven talkie films hit the screens, with twenty-three in Hindi, four in Bengali, and one in Tamil. This production boom continued, with around eighty-four talkie films released in 1932, marking a significant increase within a year. The trend quickly spread to other regional languages, with Jamai Sashti (1931) becoming the first Bengali talkie film, and subsequent milestones in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, and Kannada languages. Early talkie films heavily reflected theatrical influences, featuring music, songs, and dramatic dialogues often laden with Urdu couplets. The excessive use of songs sometimes overshadowed the narrative, with many films merely serving as vehicles for musical performances. Despite initial challenges, the talkie era propelled the modernization of the industry, including theatres, laboratories, and studios. The industry witnessed significant growth, with the number of theatres increasing from 148 to 675 between 1921 and 1932. With investments exceeding 30 million rupees and providing employment to about 65,000 people, the film industry had become a booming sector. During the pre-independence era, major film studios such as Bombay Talkies, New Theatres, and Prabhat Film Company dominated the Hindi cinema landscape, further solidifying the industry's status as a thriving force.

Madan Theatre pioneered the introduction of color to the Indian screen with its film "Bilwamangal" (1932), which was sent abroad for colorization, supervised by foreign technicians, and popularized as the Madan color process. Similarly, under the leadership of Ardeshir Irani, the Imperial Film Company embarked on the ambitious project of India's first color film, "Kisan Kanya" (1937), directed by Moti Gidwani and starring Padma Devi and Nissar, made using the Cinecolour process acquired by the company. Although earlier attempts at color films had been made, "Kisan Kanya" was distinguished as all technical processing was conducted in India, earning it the credit as India's first color film. However, widespread adoption of color films didn't occur until the 1960s. Meanwhile, Himansu Rai, known for international co-productions in the silent era, ventured into another joint project called "Karma" (1933) with an English company. Following its success, Rai and Devika Rani returned to India and established Bombay Talkies, a production house synonymous with excellence in Indian cinema. With backing from local businessmen and support from eminent figures, Bombay Talkies produced its debut film "Jawani Ki Hawa" (1935), starring Devika Rani and Najmul Hussain. The success of subsequent films like "Jeevan Naiyya" (1936) and "Achhut Kanya" (1936), featuring Rani and Ashok Kumar, further solidified Bombay Talkies' reputation. "Kismet" (1943), directed by Gyan Mukherjee and starring Ashok Kumar and Mumtaz Shanti, emerged as the first classic Indian thriller, propelling Kumar to stardom. Even after a split in the company, Rani continued to nurture talent, introducing Dilip Kumar in "Jwar Bhata" (1944) and featuring Madhubala's debut in "Basant" (1942). The legacy of Bombay Talkies continued to influence the industry, evident in the homage paid by directors Zoya Akhtar, Karan Johar, Anurag Kashyap, and Dibakar Banerjee in their 2013 film "Bombay Talkies" commemorating 100 years of Indian cinema. Additionally, the National Studios emerged with Sagar joining forces with the Fazalbhoy and the Tatas, commencing operations in 1940. Mehboob Khan's production unit joined the company, resulting in significant films such as "Aurat" (1940), "Bahen" (1941), and "Roti" (1942). "Aurat," starring Sardar Akhtar, portrayed the story of a peasant woman facing numerous challenges, later remade as "Mother India" (1957).

The onset of the Second World War brought significant challenges to the Indian film industry, which had been steadily growing, ranking third globally in terms of average film output with 200 films produced annually. However, wartime restrictions imposed constraints on the industry's growth. Despite these challenges, the war period saw the emergence of several films of high artistic value. By the mid-1940s, major studios dominating film production began to decline, paving the way for newcomers in the industry. This period also marked the debut of a new generation of filmmakers, actors, directors, and singers poised to make their mark in cinema. Additionally, the pre-independence era witnessed the rise of films imbued with patriotic sentiments, reflecting the ongoing freedom struggle. Mythological films, popular at the time, tapped into national pride, while the birth of the indigenous film industry was intricately linked to the political landscape of the country. Many filmmakers viewed it as their patriotic duty to contribute to the

freedom movement through cinema, albeit often through veiled political messages to evade censorship. These films, alongside those depicting India's rich historical heritage and social issues, served as vehicles for social reform, aligning with the broader societal movements of the time. While the precise impact of these films on the audience psyche is challenging to quantify, they undoubtedly played a role in inspiring sentiments of freedom and resistance against colonial rule.

4. CONCLUSION :

The journey of Indian cinema from its inception to the pre-independence era represents a rich tapestry of artistic, cultural, and historical significance. From humble beginnings with the Lumière brothers' screenings in 1896 to the advent of talkies and the emergence of major studios like Bombay Talkies, the industry experienced rapid evolution and growth. Pioneers like Dadasaheb Phalke and Ardeshir Irani paved the way for future filmmakers, while the impact of the Second World War posed challenges but also spurred creativity. Films of this era not only entertained but also reflected the patriotic fervor of the freedom struggle, often weaving political messages into their narratives. Additionally, the era witnessed a blossoming of social consciousness, with films addressing social issues and historical heroes, contributing to the broader social reform movement. As India approached independence, its film industry stood on the cusp of transition, poised to embrace the dawn of a new era, reflecting the nation's aspirations and spirit of resilience

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