



The National Film Archive of India (Heritage and History)

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INTRODUCTION

As the world will celebrate 'World Heritage Day' on the 18th of April, this paper emphasizes on one of India's unique heritages i.e., Indian cinema, which has completed 100 years on the 3rd of May in 2018. Cinema was introduced in India, as soon as it came to be known in the world owing to the Lumiere brothers from France who screened a series of silent short films such as "Arrival of a Train", "Leaving the Factory" and others at the Watson Hotel in Bombay (modern day Mumbai) on 7th July, 1896. It was the Coronation Theatre where India's first silent feature film "*Raja Harishchandra*" was played on 3rd May, 1913 and the Majestic Cinema where its first talkie "*Alam Ara*" was screened on 14th of March, 1931 – both faced a worse fate and have disappeared.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The need for preserving film as art and historical documents has been recognized not only in India but all over the world. The task of preserving cinema in all its varied expressions and forms is best entrusted to a national organization with adequate resources, a permanent set-up and the confidence of the local film industry. And, the apparent lack of preservation culture in central and in state governments are now leading to loss of historic cinema landmarks in cities across India.

The **National Film Archive of India (NFAI)** was established as a media unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in February 1964 as a media unit of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India with the primary objective of acquiring and preserving Indian cinematic heritage. This includes preservation of film and non-film material including but not limited to celluloid, stills, glass slides,

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posters, lobby cards, scripts and song booklets. It is was a member of the International Federation of Film Archives. In March 2022, it was merged with National Film Development Corporation.

Objectives of NFAI

Being the national custodian for preservation of audio-visual heritage with over four decades of experience, NFAI is committed to acquisition, preservation, restoration and dissemination of India's socio-cultural heritage. This heritage may be in the form of film and non-film content, including but not limited to celluloid films, still photographs, wall posters, song booklets, posters, lobby cards, documentaries and VHS tapes. We can broadly state that the following are the chief objectives of the NFAI –

- Trace, Acquire and Preserve the National Cinematic Heritage as well as a representative collection of world cinema for posterity
- Classify and document data pertaining to films
- Undertake and encourage research on cinema
- Act as a center for the dissemination of film culture in the country
- Promote Indian cinema across the globe

The NFAI's archive kept a stock of films, video cassettes, DVDs, books, posters, stills, press clippings, slides, audio CDs, and disc records of Indian cinema dating back to the 1910s. The archive holds rare collections of silent films like "*Jamai Babu*", Ashok Kumar and Devika Rani-starrer "*Achhut Kanya* (1936)", V Shantaram's "*Duniya Na Mane*" (1937), second oldest Malayalam film "*Marthanda Varma*" (1933), and so on which we will discuss in the paper further. NFAI often collaborates with national and international institutes to not only promote Indian cinema but also to bring world cinema home in the form of film festivals, seminars and workshops.

Organizational Structure

With headquarters at Pune, Maharashtra, NFAI had three regional offices at Bangalore, Calcutta and Thiruvananthapuram. Developed from scratch by P. K. Nair, NFAI's activities related to the dissemination of film culture were manifold. Since then, its staff has had the arduous task of tracking down and acquiring any film and related material, which has a particular focus on the history and heritage of Indian cinema. All major funding comes from the Indian government and through services provided (outlined later in this paper). Over the years, NFAI's mission has developed into the following:

- To trace, acquire and preserve for posterity the heritage of national cinema and a representative collection of world cinema
- To classify and document data related to film and undertake and encourage research on cinema
- To act as a center for the dissemination of film culture in the country, and to promote Indian cinema abroad³

³ National Film Archive of India,

By 1991, NFAI had 12,000 films in its collection, out of which 9000 were in Indian languages, the majority being black and white. Included in the Indian category were films made by foreign studios in India or by Europeans living in India.

Its Distribution Library had about 25 active members throughout the country and it also organized joint screening programmes on a weekly, fortnightly and monthly basis in six important centres. It had over 10,000 films, over 10,000 books, over 10,000 film scripts, and over 50,000 photographs. Another important programme was the film teaching scheme comprising long and short-term Film Appreciation courses conducted in collaboration with the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and other educational and cultural institutions. At the International level, NFAI supplied several Indian classics for major screening programmes.⁴

Film Archive and Preservation

As earlier discussed in the paper, the main purpose for the formation of the institutional body is the preservation of old celluloids - gems of the Indian Cinema. NFAI, Pune houses 19 State-of-the-Art film preservation facilities/vaults as per international standards and specifications. These vaults have the capacity of storing nearly 2 lakh film reels. There are 3 vaults in the Main building, 16 vaults at Phase-II facility and 8 small vaults/cubicles (Nitrate base film). NFAI focuses attention to the following categories of films:

- National and State Award-winning films
- Indian Panorama Films (a specially-selected group of films from the International Film Festival in India—considered, for many, the “best” films made in India)
- Box-office hits
- Films shown in international film festivals
- Film adaptations of literary works
- Films representing different genres of Indian cinema
- Newsreels
- Documentaries

Initially, the film collection by NFAI was stored in improvised film vaults in the premises of the Film & Television Institute of India. Since the inauguration of its new building in 1994, NFAI has its own film vaults designed according to international film preservation standards. The films are stored in a controlled environment with temperature of about 15°C and relative humidity of 50 % which is ideally suited to preserve black and white films. In future the archive would construct additional vaults for storage of colour films which require cooler and drier conditions. The small but invaluable nitrate collection has been transferred to safety base. Printing and duplication work is done in different laboratories in Pune, Mumbai and other centres. But in the long run, NFAI is planning to have its own restoration laboratory for specialized work on shrunk and decomposed material and to ensure superior quality.

⁴ NFAI Official website

The film vaults are maintained with following temperature for Black & White Films, Colour Films and Nitrate based Films;

Type of films	Temperatures	Relative Humidity
Nitrate Films	12 to 14°C	40%
Black & White Films	12 to 14°C	40 to 50%
Colour Films	2 to 4°C (+/- 1° C)	25 to 30 %

(Credit: NFAI official Website⁵)

The major thrust of work in this section is to take care of the film material by periodic checking. This helps to identify the decaying material which requires immediate attention.

Research and Documentation Section

Film archiving comprises the collection of films and associated material for the purpose of preservation and permanent access in the broadest sense – research, re-use, re-release. Here at NFAI, the emphasis is on archiving for cultural purposes, to ensure the preservation and accessibility of films and related material as part of the national cultural heritage.

In compliance with the objectives of NFAI, the Documentation Section strives to trace, acquire, collect and preserve, for posterity the heritage of Indian Cinema, in the form of supportive documents including photographs, posters, song booklets, etc. apart from the films. The collection of ancillary material in the Archive forms part of the visual culture of Indian Cinema, apart from the films which flicker on the screen.

The Research Documentation Section of NFAI houses a precious collection of material relating to every period of Indian cinema. It contains 1,57,687 still photographs. Prints of all unique photographs have been made so that they are available to researchers, authors etc. Among the publicity items are 23,748 film posters of various sizes, 14,210 song booklets, lobby cards, over 1,00,000 press clippings and old disc records. NFAI digitized its collection to avoid handling of the original material. Besides it has created a database which enables Scholars to retrieve a relevant information at the click of button. Moreover, the section accepts donations, and also accepts ancillary material against nominal compensation.

Methodical housekeeping and cataloguing enables the section to manage the collection and facilitate its retrieval. The archive supplies stills / photographs / soft copies to research scholars, journalists, festival organizers after the completion of administrative formalities. Researchers and students from India and abroad have access to the film and video collection, documentation section and the library. NFAI organizes Exhibitions of its ancillary material from time to time. Thematic Exhibitions, Exhibitions highlighting the works of Pioneers are also held. E.g. Multimedia Exhibition on Film Heritage / Classical of Indian Cinema, Rhythm, Ragas and

⁵<https://www.nfai.gov.in/introduction.php?rootId=VFdjOVB RPT0=&catId=VFZSSIBRPT0=&patId=VFdjOVB RPT0=&childId=VFdjOVB RPT0=>

Melody, Indian Panorama Films, Music and Songs in Indian Cinema, D.G. Phalke Awardees, Women in Indian Cinema and many more.

Library

A treasure of information for cinema – lovers! With well-stocked books and periodicals on films, NFAI library is delighted space to go back in time. NFAI library holds about 29,000 books on cinema published across the globe. It has more than 100 periodicals on Cinema published in various languages. 31,000 film scripts received from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) are also available. Censor records going back to the 1920s and bound volumes of Indian film magazines from the 1930s onwards are among the other important materials available for reference and study. The library also extends services to students, research workers, journalists and anyone interested in Cinema. Most of the old periodicals, rare books and scripts are digitized. The Library is open for all, for research purpose only. The material from the library is not for lending. Research worker has to visit personally to collect data. Most of the old periodicals and new books has been digitized and are available for browsing in-house, different type of index like films, personality, reviews are available

NFAI as a Heritage Site – Jayakar Bungalow: A brief History

The newly rehabilitated, iconic heritage structure Jayakar Bungalow, was inaugurated by Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar on the premises of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) in September 2019. The bungalow, built in the Tudor architectural style and classified as a Grade I heritage structure, was built in the 1940s by eminent jurist and educationist Dr. M. R. Jayakar, the first vice-chancellor of Pune University. The exquisitely designed bungalow has wooden flooring, a narrow wooden staircase, typical of British architecture and massive bookshelves that stretch on almost to the roof. The two-storied bungalow is built in a load-bearing system with the use of coursed Stone Ashlars Masonry with lime mortar. Serene Interiors, complete with ceramic tiles and wooden ceiling. While maintaining the heritage status of the structure, new technology was introduced considering the current times and future usages. The bungalow has been restored to it's most possible original form and put in adaptive reuse. Jayakar Bungalow has a special place in the art and architecture of Pune and now after restoration this is being put in use for the benefit of film researchers.

A special booklet – '*Parampara: An ode to Jayakar Bungalow*' that chronicles the history of bungalow along with the story of its restoration was released by Shri Prakash Javadekar, in the same event. A special feature of the booklet is the experiences shared by some of the renowned film artists including Shabana Azmi and Rehana Sultan among others, who had stayed in Jayakar Bungalow as part of FTII girl's hostel. The Minister also launched a mobile app for booking the slot for viewing films at NFAI. He felicitated Ms Prasanna Gokhale, the great-granddaughter of Barrister M.R. Jayakar, a renowned national leader, member of the Constituent Assembly and first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Pune. Over the years, the ownership of the bungalow changed hands from Br Jayakar to Indian Law Society to FTII and then to NFAI. From 1973, NFAI functioned from its premises. The objective was to conserve the heritage structure and make it contemporary so that it can be accessible for citizens and film lovers. The digital library and personalised viewing spaces are the steps in

this direction. We want this place to be a hub of cultural activities where film lovers can come and engage into meaningful conversations,” said Prakash Magdum, Director NFAI.⁶

CONCLUSION

The NFAI holds the responsible task of preserving and conserving our cinematic history, that history which is an audio-visual source of our past. It is not an archive which houses historical documents but an archive which houses the cinema that we can see as a source of human progress and development. Cinema as generally understood is not just a means of entertainment but a heritage and history in its own standard. For filmmakers NFAI is nothing less than a place of worship. The uniqueness of NFAI lies in the fact, that although, unlike other museums and archives, it is not accessible to the public, but it houses the rarest gems available to us on celluloid.

It was rightly said by P.K. Nair, “The current generation does not even bother about losing its heritage apart from few sensitive souls who feel for the loss and want its preservation. Only blaming the government will not help anybody in saving our heritage, cinematic or otherwise, cinema is India's history and should be preserved as heritage for posterity but the love for cinema has been replaced today with pure business. And we anyway do not have a culture of archiving or preservation in our country,” said the founder and ex-director of NFAI.⁷

Given the rapidly perishing condition of films and ancillary material in India, it was imperative that the process of Preservation, Conservation, Digitization and Restoration be fast-tracked. It was envisaged that the task be carried out in mission-mode, thus giving birth to the National Film Heritage Mission (NFHM) by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. The objectives of NFHM are:

- Condition assessment of film reels to ascertain the remaining life of the film,
- 2K/4K picture and sound restoration of landmark films of Indian and recording of new picture and sound inter-negatives of each film,
- Digitization of films,
- Construction of archival and preservation facilities called vaults,
- Trainings and workshops for in-house capacity building, and
- Web-based end to end IT solution.

To achieve these objectives, NFAI seeks to bring in industry perspective and expertise, as the success of the mission depends on an effective synergy with the industry. Accordingly, so far, NFAI has organized stakeholder consultation meetings across 8 locations in India – Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Kolkata, Bengaluru,

⁶ Excerpted from Press Release by Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Restored Jayakar Bungalow inaugurated by Shri Prakash Javadekar at NFAI, September 15. 2019.
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1585117>

⁷ Read more at https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/media/entertainment/loss-of-rare-cinematic-heritage-stares-india-in-face/articleshow/19611644.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram. Consultations were held with key players of the industry; including producers, production houses, content owners, representatives of various film associations and film historians. These consultation meetings shall act as a guiding force for NFAI, so as to implement the mission as per global standards. A Strategy Roadmap for the NFHM is also under preparation. A Film Preservation and Restoration Workshop was organized in 2016 in association with FIAF, Film Heritage Foundation, George Eastman Museum and L'Immagine Ritrovata, and had 61 students from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The topics included lectures on film curatorship, preservation practices and ethics, film scanning, projection and exhibition, cataloguing and documentation, preservation of posters, documents and photographs, preservation of digital assets, disaster recovery, etc. Practical classes covered film identification, film repair, archival equipment care, film comparison, film projection, digitization of documents and an archive tour. NFAI has envisaged a skill development program in Film Archiving and a travelling film festival in association with DFF. NFAI has also launched fellowship scheme of 10 fellowships per year.

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