

revisiting the golden era of hindi cinema

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



A country of 1.2 billion people, the ancient civilisation of India is a melting pot of cultures and juxtapositions. It is a land that will assault your senses all around. The vibrant colours, exotic aromas, cacophony of sounds, and the amalgamation of flavours will both enchant and offend. Within it more than 20 native dialects are spoken. But in this diversity there is unity found in the common language of their movies. Such is the power and hold over audiences of Indian films. In the space of a darkened cinema, everyone is equal momentarily.

The social and economic divides that separate rickshaw driver from the IT engineer are broken and ignored. It provides an escape from reality, the ultimate dream factory where for those three hours, you can be whoever you want to be. The restraints of status, social standing, wealth, religion, education are for a moment forgotten as the audience are compelled to lose themselves in the world playing out before them on the large screen.

As the largest producer of films, the Indian film industry beats both Hollywood and China in terms of the number of films churned out each year. Having accrued such a status through the production of more than 2000 films in India's various languages, it is no wonder that the magical spell cast upon Indian cinema goes is a hard one to break.

The Golden Era Of Films : 1940s to 1960s

The Indian film industry is one of the most well-known film industries in the world today. Indian films are regularly being featured in the top film festivals and Indian actors/actresses are being flooded with offers from Hollywood. Much of the credit for this popularity goes to the film makers of the 1940s to

the 1960s who made some evergreen classics that made the world sit up and take notice of Indian films. This era marked the beginning of evolution of Indian Cinema through various genres. We had mainstream film makers like Raj Kapoor who, in the most conservative and formulaic era, made some of the most inventive, personal and entertaining films such as *Awara* (1951) and *Shree 420* (1955).

Mother India, which many consider the greatest movie of Indian cinema, was made in 1957. The film got India its first nomination to the Oscars as the best foreign film. Some of the other must-watch movies of this era are *Mahal* (1949), *Do Aankhein Barah Haath* (1957), *Madhumati* (1958) and *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960). Movies of various genres, including romance, drama, comedy and tragedy, were made, each with great depth in storyline, memorable characters and heart-touching narration. Another acclaimed director and writer of this era was Mr. Kamal Amrohi. His movies had an expressionist direction with a firm structure and poetic style throughout, that is missing from the modern Bollywood movies. He only made four movies altogether and seeing *Mahal* it's clear that his main career was as a poet.

The film is full of lyrical images, depth of distance and contour and characterisations that inter-relate on several levels at once — the logical, the psychological, the emotional and the metaphysical. The Golden Age of Hindi cinema that blossomed with the studio era of the 1950s and ebbed by the early 1970s is one of India's greatest artistic achievements. A lot of Hindi films made during that time, could hardly be called Hindi films.

Rather, Hindustani, a mixture of Urdu and Hindi, was the lingua franca of the silver-screen—a reflection of a country unified by a fascinatingly diverse

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heritage with linguistic influences from Sanskrit, Farsi, Bengali, Arabic, Panjabi, and a myriad of others. Urdu in films was remarkably accessible—holding a place for any viewer in every genre. True, it is unlikely the entire audience understood each word in those songs. However, in this manner, film and music could be educational for those who did not—a unique way of preserving the culture they reflected back on. As parallel cinema diva Shabana Azmi aptly quipped,

“ If you compare today’s songs with the songs of the 1960s and 1970s, then definitely today’s songs are according to the demand. But if you see, Hindi films used to protect the Urdu language as they used it, but it is slowly dying and I feel bad for it.” The legacy of Urdu will continue to add to the allure and nostalgia of old films for generations to come. For the loss of Urdu is more than the mere loss of vocabulary. Without Urdu in Hindi films, we have lost our own *andaaz* –the manner with which we once communicated our thoughts and feelings, our decorum, and a rich, meaningful ornamentation in expressing ourselves that can never be replaced. Famous movies of this era being *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Pakeeza* etc.

Some of the most critically acclaimed Hindi films of all time were produced during this period. While commercial Hindi cinema was thriving, the 1950s also saw the emergence of a new Parallel Cinema movement. Though the movement was mainly led by Bengali cinema, it also began gaining prominence in Hindi cinema. Early examples of Hindi films in this movement include Chetan Anand’s *Neecha Nagar* (1946) and Bimal Roy’s – *Do Bigha Zameen* -Two Acres of Land (1953).

Some of the internationally acclaimed Hindi filmmakers involved in the movement included Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, Ketan Mehta, Govind Nihalani, Shyam Benegal and Vijaya Mehta. These films won several awards nationally and internationally and Their critical acclaim, as well as the commercial success, paved the way for Indian neorealism and the Indian New Wave. Subrata Mitra, who debuted as a cinematographer with this film, has been a great influence on India and the world in the field of cinematography.

Ray is considered as one of the greatest directors of all-time. Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak went on to make many other great art films, and other talented directors such as Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Mani Kaul and Buddhadeb Dasgupta followed suit. In the 1960's, Indira Gandhi, as the Information and Broadcasting Minister, further promoted offbeat cinema with the official Film Finance Corporation supporting such movies. The films received great commercial success as well as critical acclaim. Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* (1957) and *Kagaz Ke Phool* (1959) are among the finest movies ever made.

This era was a golden age for Indian music as well, giving us melodious music that continues to inspire music directors till date. Playback singers such as Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhonsle, Kishore Kumar, Mohd Rafi and Manna Dey reached the zenith of their careers during this era. We had some of the most amazing and charismatic actors like Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand who cast a spell on the Indian audiences with their fresh style and acting talent. The most beautiful women ever seen on celluloid, such as Madhu Bala, Vyjayanthi Mala, Meena Kumari and Waheeda Rahman, graced

the screen during this period. They had not just beauty but great acting talent, which helped them play the most challenging roles with utmost ease and perfection.

Overall, the 1940s - 60s was a period that revolutionized Indian cinema. Prior to this period, most movies centered around mythological, historical or family related themes. Romance was portrayed in the most beautiful and sensitive manner during this period, and in a society where almost everyone had arranged marriages, it brought about a fresh wave of thought among the youth. The films depicted everyday lives as well as larger social issues in a subtle, yet highly impactful manner, and remain as inspiration for generations of film makers to come.

Parallel Cinema : Rise and Fall

What is Parallel Cinema?

The Indian New Wave, commonly known in India as Art Cinema or Parallel Cinema as an alternative to the mainstream commercial cinema, is a specific movement in Indian cinema, known for its serious content, realism and naturalism, with a keen eye on the socio-political climate of the times. This movement is distinct from main stream Bollywood cinema. The term "parallel cinema" has started being applied to off-beat films produced in Bollywood, where art films have begun experiencing resurgence. This led to the emergence of a distinct genre known as Mumbai noir, urban films reflecting social problems in the city of Mumbai. In contemporary cinema, the term "parallel cinema" is being used to describe any out of the box movie.

Parallel cinema essentially is made up of the non-mainstream films that are not made for commercial successes or garnering profits. These are usually low-budget movies, and focus on the social or political issues prevalent in our nation. The tradition of parallel cinema can be dated long back into the 1920s and 1930s. The history of Indian Cinema cannot be told without the mention of India's biggest director ever, Guru Dutt. He has been time and again accredited with ushering the golden era of Indian cinema. His work was purely artistic and lyrical in terms of content and enjoyed commercial success. He was loved by the audience despite the fact that his work was based on subjects that were considered taboo at that time.

Fall Of Parallel Cinema :

Some Hindi filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal continued to produce realistic Parallel Cinema throughout the 1970s, alongside Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, Ketan Mehta, Govind Nihalani and Vijaya Mehta. However, the 'art film' bent of the Film Finance Corporation came under criticism during a Committee on Public Undertakings investigation in 1976, which accused the body of not doing enough to encourage commercial cinema. The 1970s thus saw the rise of commercial cinema or the so called "popular cinema". Many movies from "popular cinema" never actually become popular; then why such movies are called popular? They are out of mind as soon as they are out of sight.

Cinema critics have euphemistically termed such movies, which are primarily intended to entertain and make big bucks, though commercial, as "popular". "Popular" cinema, the term used for cinema which is "less" thought provoking but is more leisurely and mellow-dramatic. Popular

cinema emerged in the '60s and '70s and since then has been successful. Popular may be less in intellectual content, but enjoys more commercial success than parallel cinema. It has always been loved by the masses for the escape it offers from the gruelling daily life. There have been fewer times when parallel cinema has enjoyed the kind of success and acceptance popular cinema does and gets. Parallel cinema has always been liked by a particular kind of audience, a trend that fortunately seems to be changing now.

"Parallel" cinema, a category of cinema very advantageously crafted for the inclusion of realistic movie; a kind of realism that doesn't get mass acceptance because of how hard hitting it can be. Parallel cinema has been in existence since the emergence of Indian cinema. It all started when no specific category existed and all kinds of movies were given equal importance. Unapologetically, the audience showed preference to a certain category which had elements of fantasy and mushiness. As a result, a new class of cinema emerged which promised to be real and thought provoking; a cinema that was proud of being "artsy".

The reason why parallel cinema is not an equally blessed child might lie in the fact that it is "real". It shows the reality and truth behind things. Cinema is considered a means to escape from reality and paying money to see that same reality in a more vivid manner doesn't appeal to many. In today's Bollywood scenario, quantity (of moolah) finds precedence over quality (of scripts) and slapstick, verging-towards-obscene comedies and typical love stories with the boo-hoos and item songs are the super-mega-blockbusters.

The films nowadays cater to multiplex audience and they are bound to make a film which sells, no matter even if it is rubbish. The advent of numerous channels, the consumerist culture and the expansion of urban India has given birth to urban-centric audiences. The cinema which once portrayed class struggles and protests against hypocrisy, has given way to more 'entertaining' cinema. The situation is rather bleak for the lover of serious and meaningful cinema. The filmmakers who make serious films have failed to make the cut in today's times and the classics are lost.

The Changing Times :

In these 100 years of cinema, one can see how society has developed because cinema in some way or another reflects society. Cinema is seen like any other industry now. The acceptance of different film genres surely doesn't seem like a big thing now as it was in its early years. Even the mindset of the audience is changing with the evolution of cinema. Film makers thus have the courage to make such movies now, and people are more than willing to see and appreciate these films for their intriguing content.

There are now a number of directors which enjoy "popular" success with films that are high on "intellectual" content too, like Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap and Dibakar Banerjee to name a few. Actors are more than willing to take the risk and be a part of the kind of cinema that has a number of constraints involved. It's not going to be long when the lines will be blurred between what is "popular" and what is "parallel" cinema. . Both commercial and parallel cinema can co-exist, but only if we want!

Today's Need :

We need a platform for both these cinemas i. e Commercial or parallel cinema to co-exist. Both these genres need equal recognition. A lot of people are not aware of the less popular, art or parallel cinema. We need to educate people about the existence/history and idea of such cinema. The common masses need to be educated about the various aspects that go behind the making of a film. To encourage and promote young talent to make more meaningful cinema : more and more youths are taking up a career in films.

They do not have a common platform to showcase their talents or get enough credit or recognition for their films. We need a common platform for an exchange of ideas to take place. We need to promote today's generation and encourage them to watch and learn from the film legends of the past, who were the pioneers of various genres of Indian cinema and brought international fame to the Indian film industry. Preserve, Promote, showcase and educate the common masses today, about the golden era of classic cinema , that brought India, international recognition back in the day.

Aim :

To design a mixed use public space showcasing, preserving and promoting the cinematic heritage of the Golden Era Of Hindi film industry i. e from 1940's- 1970's.

Objective :

To design a unique tourist attraction for all visitors coming to Mumbai to experience various aspects of Hindi cinema and understand the process of film making in an entertaining way. To bridge the gap between the film industry and the general audiences and to promote young artists and talent

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by creating a common platform for the exchange of thoughts and ideas and educating them about the rich Cinematic heritage of Hindi cinema.

To develop a Hindi Cine-museum to Preserve, Promote, showcase and educate the common masses today, about the Golden Era of classic cinema along with the parallel cinema that co-existed during that time, through exhibition, articles, posters, sets etc. To create platforms to showcase both Commercial and parallel cinema and their co-existence. We need to educate people about the existence/history and idea behind such cinema.