

## *Filmindia* and Its Publics

### *Magazine Culture, the Expert, and the Industry*

Darshana Sreedhar Mini

In a 1947 review of V. Shantaram's *Shakuntala*, the first film produced in India and commercially released in the United States, *The Film Daily* reviewer Jayashree writes how Indian film culture for the West was mediated via *filmindia*—"a sort of Bombay version of The Hollywood Reporter [. . .] frequently impassioned, vehement, and funny."<sup>1</sup> While *The Hollywood Reporter* began as a daily trade periodical in the 1930s capitalizing on W. R. Wilkerson's "Tradeviews" as a main attraction, *filmindia*'s popularity was shouldered by its editor Baburao Patel, renowned for his powerful control over Indian film journalism in the 1940s and '50s. *Filmindia* was established in 1935, and in 1939, Patel, alongside K. A. Abbas, brought together film journalists as a collective to form the Film Journalists Association of India. Until the 1960s, Patel's residence, "Girnar" in Pali Hills, and his office in the Mubarak building on Apollo Street in Bombay became a stronghold of influence in Indian cinema, bringing tabloid-style information about stars, trade news, and film reviews under one umbrella.

In its early days, *filmindia*'s business potential was integrally connected to the film production enterprise. This was the time when Pune-based Prabhat Film Company was garnering a lot of popularity and success with films such as *Amrit Manthan* (V. Shantaram, 1934), *Sant Tukaram* (V. Shantaram, 1936), and *Amar Jyoti* (V. Shantaram, 1936). This led Prabhat to expand its operations through three sister concerns: Famous Pictures as the sole distribution agency; B.B. Samant & Company, in charge of the printing and production of publicity material; and New Jack Printing Press, which printed posters and pamphlets.<sup>2</sup> Financial support for *filmindia* comprised a combination of contributions from D. N. Parker, who owned New Jack Printing Press, and advertisement revenue from Prabhat

Film Company publicity, which gave it an initial foothold.<sup>3</sup> *Filmindia* was initially edited by D. N. Parker and B. B. Samant, but the job went to Baburao Patel when he was invited by Parker to take over the day-to-day operations. Despite his lack of formal education, Patel was an avid reader and had a gift with words. He started his career at the trilingual film magazine *Cinema Samachar* in 1926, and he had an entrepreneurial spirit that led him to buy the Urdu magazine *Karwan* after *filmindia* started to gain profits.<sup>4</sup> He also had a background in film production and dabbled as a script writer and director for films such as *Kismet* (1929), *Sati Mahananda* (1933), and *Chand Ka Tukda* (1933–35). While Patel initially handled most columns, *filmindia* soon became a family business when his wife Sushila Rani started to pen several popular columns, including “Bombay Calling,” which she wrote under the pseudonym Judas, who, as the preface put it, was “a man who knows his job.” After 1961, *filmindia* became a political magazine, under the new title *Mother India*. After Patel’s death in 1982, Rani ran the periodical until it was shut down in 1985.

Starting with Patel’s own position as an “expert,” and through an examination of advertisements, trade discourses, and columns, I discuss Patel’s strategies for carving out a heterogeneous readership base of upwardly mobile, financially well-off patrons, female readers, and cinephiles who were excited by the affordances and cosmopolitan potentialities of the medium. More than just a lifestyle or entertainment magazine, *filmindia* became a mediator between the film industry and the public—a *trade journal* in the truest sense of the term. Further, I also examine how, in its later phase, *filmindia*’s cosmopolitan veneer began to peel off with Patel increasingly turning towards right-wing rhetoric.

## FORM AND CONTENT

*Filmindia* was printed on art-quality paper, featured hand-painted front covers that doubled as advertisements, and interspersed film production details with columns that catered to astrology and palmistry. It had content for all kinds of readers—from cinephiles, to prospective filmmakers, to casual readers—and brought together “varied formats, styles, and story types.”<sup>5</sup> *Filmindia* was known for its resplendent cover images. For instance, the hand-painted front cover of the inaugural issue in April 1935 had a box image of actress Nalini Tarkhad (who starred in Shantaram’s film *Chandrasena*) at the center, and elephants and Indian street scenes as its backdrop. The front cover also prominently displays the price of the issue, “4 annas,” and the details of D. B. Neroy, a block maker from the New Jack Press who helped with transferring the work to the printed page. The details that went into the cover image—from scenic wonders and elephant processions to the center image of Tarkhad and details of the block maker—encapsulate how the journal’s mode of production was addressed alongside the distinct Indian sensibility that *filmindia* provided for the reader. In the editorial, Baburao Patel

underscores the journal's stated commitment to Indian cinema, writing that *film-india* emerged from the aspiration "to create new readers for Indian pictures . . . representative of Indian culture and tradition."<sup>6</sup>

This urge for an Indian contribution to film journalism seeped into the way *filmindia* addressed accountability in filmic representations and challenged the institutional practices followed by Hollywood and British films that relegated Indian lives by resorting to stereotypes. This can be seen in the campaign mooted by *filmindia* against anti-India representations in Empire films. While Patel fought for representations that would veer away from colonial visualizations of India as a series of timeless images, the April 1935 cover features images of Maharajas, caparisoned elephants, and snake charmers. As iconic images that emplaced India as an exotic space, the images partook in the way mysticism was used to enwrap colonized spaces as discrete units to be consumed by the West. Part and parcel of the magazine's colonial imagery were the images of actresses whose details were presented in the editorial page under the heading "girl on the cover." In addition to elaborate imagery, in 1937 the covers began boasting of monthly readership figures ("over 1,25,000 readers every month," equivalent to 125,000) to showcase the growing popularity of the subscription base. The cover image and illustrations designed by the painter Sambanand Monappa Pandit draw heavily from the calendar art tradition of painters such as Raja Ravi Verma, who popularized images of gods as realistic renderings. Pandit started off painting MGM showcards in Bombay's Metro Studio before he turned to designing publicity posters for *Bhabi* (Franz Osten, 1938) and subsequently took up advertising for Prabhat Studios.<sup>7</sup> If the cover images contributed to the popularity of *filmindia* and allowed for an aesthetic continuity with the preexisting calendar art tradition, from the 1950s onwards, the magazine drew on another visual tradition, the cartoon, for its column "Questions and Answers." One of the cartoonists who freelanced for them was Bal Thackeray, who subsequently floated Shiv Sena, a right-wing Marathi political party, in 1966.

Although *filmindia* was about the film industry in India, Hollywood's presence was marked through columns such as "Harrison's Reports," which featured reviews by Philadelphia-based film reviewer P. S. Harrison. Such columns were meant exclusively to provide exhibitors with information about unreleased films so they could make decisions about programming and potential profits. As Eric Hoyt argues, "Harrison's Reports" were promoted as observations that were free from the influence of film advertising.<sup>8</sup> Such distancing from purported conflicts of interest uniquely favored *filmindia*'s positioning as a serious platform for gauging potential gains and risks entailed in committing to projects. The "advance publication" strategy allowed *filmindia* to perform the role of a trade journal that catered to exhibitors and distributors as much as to cinephiles. In fact, in response to a writer's query on why *filmindia* published "foreign content," Patel responded that the periodical's focus on Indian cinema did not exclude attention to foreign films, which, according to him, were very much a part of Indian film culture.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the journal addressed many types of viewers simultaneously. A typical *filmindia* issue in the late 1930s contained the editorial, “Bombay Calling,” “Editor’s Mail,” “News from Across,” “Round the Town,” “Studio Close-Ups,” “Foreign Pictures of the Month,” and “Howlers for the Month.” Such columns addressed a mix of topics framed somewhere between fact and fiction, gossip, and hearsay, which excited and attracted readers. The column “Round the Town” imagined its target constituency as the “average cine-goer and the exhibitor,” and included technical details that were of importance to the exhibitor which could also interest the casual reader. “Round the Town” featured a range of material, including credits, listings of films’ Bombay distributors, performance commentary, suggestions for successful publicity strategies, and “box office value,” which offered tips on marketing specific films. Running up to five pages, the “Editor’s Mail” section had questions ranging from queries about actresses and their offscreen lives to advice about acting schools and film industry careers. Some regular readers wrote in asking for the editor’s advice about career prospects in the film industry, to which, in one instance, Patel responded: “If you are reading ‘filmindia’ your training has already begun . . . [T]he primary qualifications are: a good education, tact, and common-sense.”<sup>10</sup> Letters submitted to this section were considered for a contest in which the best letters were awarded cash prizes. Such participatory readership strategies were in tune with the global film magazine ethos that allowed cinephile letter writers to emerge as a community.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that Patel’s trajectory and *filmindia*’s columns draw heavily from *The Hollywood Reporter*, which also made similar attempts to showcase the production schedules of studios through snapshots of the films at different stages of production.

#### THE CRITIC AS CULTURAL EXPERT

One of *filmindia*’s most distinctive discursive projects was the elevation of the film critic as a professional. The expert emerges through the relationship forged between experts and nonexperts as well as in the attribution by others. It also accrues from the socialization and membership that is cultivated through professional exchanges. In a 1941 issue of the journal, Patel asserted his position as a film critic by stating that “my opinion is based on experience and given as a bona-fide criticism of a picture released for public approval.”<sup>12</sup> This posturing is crucial, considering that *filmindia*’s role as a power broker was widely acknowledged, and it was believed to have had the potential to make and break careers. This kind of posturing can be seen in special features such as “Confessions of Rita Carlyle: Down South with Baburao Patel,” which was written by Patel’s secretary Rita Carlyle, detailing their trip to Madras.<sup>13</sup> Alongside diary-like coverage of visits organized by the South Indian Chamber of Commerce, readers were provided a glimpse of the life of a film journal editor. Patel’s carefully crafted persona in *filmindia*’s columns and articles includes information on his private life; he addresses his

female fans, whom he claims have been writing love letters to him, by stating his married status (despite the fact that there were rumors of him having love interests elsewhere). These rumors were widely known in the film circles and elevated his profile as a film critic who could rise up to the status of a celebrity by constantly peddling gossip and news stories pertaining to his personal affairs and actively contributing to speculative narratives centered around his life. While he promoted professionalism and expertise as defining aspects of a film critic, he was also the willing subject and purveyor of celebrity gossip. Under Patel's leadership, the film critic acquired the patina of a professional in an expanding and complex industry, but also that of a celebrity, capable of eliciting romantic interest and circulating gossip. In many ways, Patel's posturing as a jack-of-all-trades shared similarity with W. R. Wilkerson's self-assuredness and authority as an expert with something to say about every topic.<sup>14</sup>

A different dimension of this expertise can be seen in Patel's five-month trip to Hollywood in 1939. Periodicals such as *The Film Daily* reported in 1939 that Patel was visiting in his official capacity as a member of the Central Board of Governors of the Indian Motion Picture Congress. His expertise as a commentator on the Indian film industry was acknowledged in his speech, in which he talked about the future of Indian exhibition and distribution markets with the outbreak of the war.<sup>15</sup> Patel sent regular dispatches from Budapest, Berlin, Rome, and Los Angeles, giving detailed accounts of his experiences meeting film personalities. One of the crucial tasks he aimed to achieve in the tour was to convey the need to avoid unwarranted stereotyping of India. The trip to the US included a meeting with the members of the Hays office, which showcases *filmindia's* praxis-driven imperative to resolve issues through deliberation. The meetings involved him expressing his discomfort with the way Hollywood represented India and the need to make amends through careful and proactive ways to understand the local realities of filmmaking in colonies.<sup>16</sup>

This effort to demonstrate the problematics behind representations pertaining to Hollywood can be seen in the move by Patel in 1939 when he commissioned a guest column from K. A. Abbas, a film critic who worked for the *Bombay Chronicle*. Abbas, who was in the same bandwagon as Patel in his critique of the Orientalist portrayals by the West, went on to demonstrate the problematic nature of representations of Indian lives in films such as *Gunga Din* (George Stevens, 1939), which he saw as an imperialistic worldview that posited Indians as barbarians.<sup>17</sup> In his preface to the article, Patel situated Abbas's firsthand knowledge of the film, stating that Abbas had seen the shooting script of *Gunga Din* during his Hollywood visit and had interacted with the RKO studio personnel, which made him qualified to write on the subject. In the course of the article, Abbas referred to the tradition followed in Hollywood of contacting the British embassy, which then would provide an expert who could guide the studio as an advisor. The expert figure who was in a position to advise the studio in most instances was someone who

had some experience in British India but was bereft of any holistic understanding of either Indian cinema or culture in general. Thus, the category of the “insider” was constructed by colonial institutions to justify colonial knowledge production that suited white settlers and to mine and extract selectively from cultures of the colonies. The basis of *filmindia*’s charge against the use of Westerners as experts was the fact that their association with India was at best marginal or touristy. Thus, *filmindia* also questioned the way Hollywood research teams procured the services of British functionaries who had partaken in the colonial enterprise as beacons of insider knowledge of Indian culture.

Another instance in which *filmindia* highlighted the arbitrary way contracts were delegated to British filmmakers under the guise of public programming was its critique of the British policy of bringing in an outsider to render services as an expert. In the articles published in the 1940s, *filmindia* engaged with policy-level lapses on the part of the government bodies that sabotaged the prospects of the local film industry. In a series of articles published in 1941, Patel critiqued the arbitrary ways in which director of information Claude Scott was mismanaging the commissioning of 16mm British propaganda films to boost war efforts. Highlighting the waste of resources and money this entailed, Patel writes about how the money spent on ineffectively made propaganda films could ideally have been directed at supporting the Indian film industry.<sup>18</sup> This was also the time when British documentary filmmaker Alexander Shaw was appointed as head of production of the Film Advisory Board. While acknowledging Shaw’s potential as a documentary filmmaker, *filmindia* railed against the way he was handpicked for the job, as he lacked an understanding of local realities, making him most undeserving of the job compared to many qualified Indians who were not considered for the position.<sup>19</sup>

Keeping up with the policy of allowing a space for hearing from the people at the receiving end of the attacks, *filmindia* also commissioned a special article by Shaw titled “Propaganda as Documentary,” the main point of which was to showcase what constituted a film text as propaganda; according to Shaw, all films have an underlying propagandistic tendency, as they inevitably foreground hidden messages through persuasion.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it ultimately boiled down to the conditions of reception that contributed to the mobilizing of efforts to build consensus around certain issues that might not work under a different set of circumstances. The articles published on the propaganda films created immediate impact and Reginald Maxwell, the home member of the government of India, had to respond to the allegations at the Central Assembly. Needless to say, *filmindia* reproduced the transcript of the hearing in their next issue as a veritable example to showcase the stakes film journalism could have in dictating policy and outlining corrective measures.<sup>21</sup>

In the examples above, we can observe *filmindia*’s deeply wedged position that coalesced (sometimes contradictory) forces of nationalist overtures and anticolonial sentiments. On the one hand, as a proponent of protectionist

practices, *filmindia* mobilized support to advocate for protectionist measures to safeguard the Indian film industry from being taken over by foreign companies. Whether it was the Shaw controversy or the propaganda films commissioned by Scott, the main line of attack by *filmindia* was that the local film industry didn't benefit at all from any of the commissions. On the other hand, *filmindia* was at the forefront in supporting British war efforts during World War II and allowed free advertisements for Defend India flags to collect money for the Royal Air Force. But this support for the British didn't stop Patel from writing against how the government was arm-twisting the Defense of India rules that were in vogue to prevent dissent against war efforts, to get back at him for his critique against the arbitrary actions of the Film Advisory Board. In his own defense, Patel wrote, "I am a militant nationalist," and that he wanted Britain to win the war.<sup>22</sup>

### LIFESTYLES AND AUDIENCES

While film reviews in the 1930s were also covered in Urdu periodicals such as *Afaq*, *Mussawar*, and *Director*, *filmindia*'s novelty was its combination of the lifestyle magazine format with film content. *Filmindia* offered broad coverage including film posters, publicity stills, beauty columns, advertisements, film reviews, features on film-related technical equipment, technical institutes providing courses on radio and cinema, and columns like "Bombay Calling" that narrated inside stories of film production and the lives of stars. Advertisements by Bombay Telephone and G.I.P. Railway's All India Tour were very much part of the periodical, as were advertisements for household products like talcum powder, silk sarees, and soap. Apart from advertisements related to film equipment and publicity posters, *filmindia* also featured advertisements related to sexual health, including remedies for beautifying breasts and delayed menstruation, tonics for sexual vigor for men, and coital techniques that were available only for married couples who would have to provide a bona fide certificate to avail themselves of such products and services.<sup>23</sup>

### SUBSCRIPTION AND ADVERTISING

In the 1940s, *filmindia* started to feature hand-drawn sketches as advertisements outlining facilities such as film laboratories—for example, Bombay's Famous Cine Laboratory was featured on its cover, showcasing a bird's-eye view of its different departments and services.<sup>24</sup> *Filmindia*'s inland subscription rate in 1941 was eight rupees, which rose to twenty-four rupees in 1948, and there were options to pay in British shillings as well. Advertisement rates in 1948 varied from 400 rupees for a full page inside or 210 rupees for a half page inside, to 1,000 rupees for its first cover. In the 1940s, Ranjit Cinetone bought the back-cover advertisement for their films on a long-term contract. The importance of advertisement revenue



**YOUR RUPEE WILL GO A LONG WAY THIS**

# Easter

**G.I.P. CHEAP FARES**

**FIRST & SECOND CLASS**  
Between any two stations over 100 miles apart: ONE and ONE-THIRD single fares for the Return journey.

**INTER & THIRD CLASS**  
From Bombay Victoria Terminus, Byculla, Dadar and Kurla to ALL stations and vice beyond Kalyan and vice versa: ONE AND ONE-HALF single fares for the Return journey.

**TICKETS ISSUED FROM 4th to 14th April, available for completion of return journey upto the midnight of 28th April, 1941.**

For every rupee the G.I.P. Railway will give you approximately six annas worth of extra travel in 1st and 2nd class and four annas worth in Inter and third. Take advantage of this generous concession and visit those delightful holiday resorts and other places of interest during the Easter Holidays.

Full particulars from **STATION MASTERS or the INFORMATION BUREAU, Victoria Terminus, Bombay.**

**G.I.P.**

FIGURE 2.1. G.I.P. Railway advertisement, *filmindia*, March 1941.

was addressed head-on by Patel, as evidenced by a statement in a 1941 issue that claimed that, without advertisements, it would be impossible to give readers “a profusely illustrated and well got up magazine every month at a small price of eight annas.”<sup>25</sup>

The appeal of advertisements in *filmindia* bespeaks the readership constituency that was imagined both by its columns and by its advertisers. While in the 1940s



## BEAUTIFY YOUR BUST

Don't be embarrassed by a flat, undeveloped bust—by a flabby, sagging bust—or by a heavy oversized bust. Hollywood fashion considers a firm and moulded bust as the quintessence of a woman's charm. Hardly ten per cent of modern movie stars can pride themselves that they possess a stunning and gorgeous bust and a streamlined figure. Even a simple-looking, homely woman can acquire glamour and attract men by developing her form. No matter how flat your figure may be, you can now transform its appearance into feminine full curvesome lines! **EVERY WOMAN** can now do it—easily, instantly!



### METHODS ENDORSED BY HOLLYWOOD STARS

You've always wanted to be beautiful, attractive, glamorous. Now you can be! For the very same method which glamorous stars of screen and stage use to acquire and maintain their gorgeous form are now available to you. It is you to beautify your bust contour—in the privacy of your own home—without any costly expense—and at your convenience. This method has been endorsed by eminent actors and beauty specialists in Hollywood, London and Paris. This truly amazing methods will add inches to your bust in a few weeks. Simply use this method for a few weeks and look into your mirror. You'll be thrilled to see the lovely, manly curves and the smart lines your dresses acquire. You will be startled to see yourself transformed into an "A-1 Girl" of Hollywood.

### AMAZING LIFETIME RESULTS

There is absolutely nothing like **MADAME POMPADOUR BUST DEVELOPER** for instantaneously beautifying the bust contour. No method in the world to compare with it in making unattractive busts, whatever their type, appear most charming and irresistible. If you long for that enticing bust contour which women with firm, rounded, shapely busts naturally possess, you should exercise your bust with **MADAME POMPADOUR BUST DEVELOPER** daily for a few minutes and use **GYNEXIFORM SALVE** (a hormone-vitamin concentrate for external use) and take internally, one dragee, thrice daily of "**GYNEXIFORM DRAGEES**" (hormone-vitamin food concentrate—fills out flat forms and makes the whole body supple, vigorous, vital, charming by rejuvenating the glands of internal secretion).

**Madam Pompadour Bust Developer**, super de luxe model, in a life-time, packed in a luxurious velvet box, costs Rs. 48 per jar; **GYNEXIFORM SALVE** costs Rs. 48 per jar; **GYNEXIFORM DRAGEES** (Hormone-Vitamin Food Concentrate—works of 60 regain figure like 20—transforms health, looks, vitality and mental powers), costs Rs. 15 per container of 30 dragees. **GYNEXIFORM AMPOULES**, fastest working busting injection treatment, per box of 24 ampoules Rs. 80.

Exhaustive literature on beautifying the bust contour is sent on receipt of 8 as. Money Order.

Expert medical advice and treatment available for development, reducing or strengthening your figure. For free consultation ring up "24297" for appointment.

# KENT

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7th Floor, Opp. Lloyds Bank,  
Hornby Road, Fort. BOMBAY  
Telephone No. 24297

## IDEAL BOOK FOR THE NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES

### COITAL TECHNIQUE IN MARRIAGE

It is the completely revised and enlarged new edition (3 times the size of the previous editions) of our daring, exotically illustrated, privately printed monograph—brimful of naked truth, unashamed facts, frank discussions and about 100 thrilling, original illustrations, including the coital technique postures, illustrated with male and female poses of the various positions to be assumed during sexual union—to enjoy the acme of wedlock bliss and to prevent conception. This edition also includes a profusely illustrated chapter on birth control and an appendix on latest scientific remedies for sexual debilities. This latest edition surpasses in thrill all the previous ones. The illustrations alone may make your eyes pop out in wonder.



"Sexual Union is a Science", says Balzac and whoever is not thoroughly conversant with the basis of this science, should not be surprised if an unhappy marriage or divorce results. A recent confidential survey among the physicians' wives revealed the surprising fact that even among these women, more than 50% confessed dissatisfaction in their love lives. A noted Solicitor whose practice is largely concerned with matrimonial cases, has given it as his opinion that as many as eighty per cent of divorces are due to ignorance of Coital Technique in Marriage.

This thrilling new edition contains everything the curious inexperienced, just married might want to know from the first awakening of youthful love to the full consummation of this grand passion in the privacy of the bridal chamber. It is an endless source of intimate, intriguing information—in the frank words of the present day youth, answering the questions you might even hesitate to ask your closest friend.

This monograph will not be sold under any circumstances or at any price, except to a bonafide married person. A declaration on oath duly signed with full name and address, written in ink in the purchasers own handwriting (typewritten or printed one, will not do) must accompany every order, viz. "I hereby solemnly declare on oath that I am married and am subscribing to this monograph for my sole personal use only and will not directly or indirectly make or cause to be made, copy or cause to be copied, sell or cause to be sold, advertise or cause to be advertised in any form, vend or offer for sale, or in anywise be connected in loaning, vending or giving away all or any part of the instructions contained in the Coital Technique in Marriage." Unless this declaration with marriage certificate (or any other positive proof of marriage) accompanies every order, with full remittance, viz., Rs. 3- (plus 8 annas for postage), this monograph will not be sent under any circumstances.

FIGURE 2.2. Columns addressing sexual health and pleasure, *filmindia*, June 1941.

and '50s film posters on the cover doubled as advertisements, there were also times when merchandise advertisements made it to the cover. A good example is the Panama cigarettes cover-page advertisement that appeared in different versions throughout 1946. The timing of the advertisement on the cover also coincided with Golden Tobacco Company's (manufacturer of Panama cigarettes) self-promotion as the "first cigarette made with Indian capital."<sup>26</sup> Technically speaking, it was not

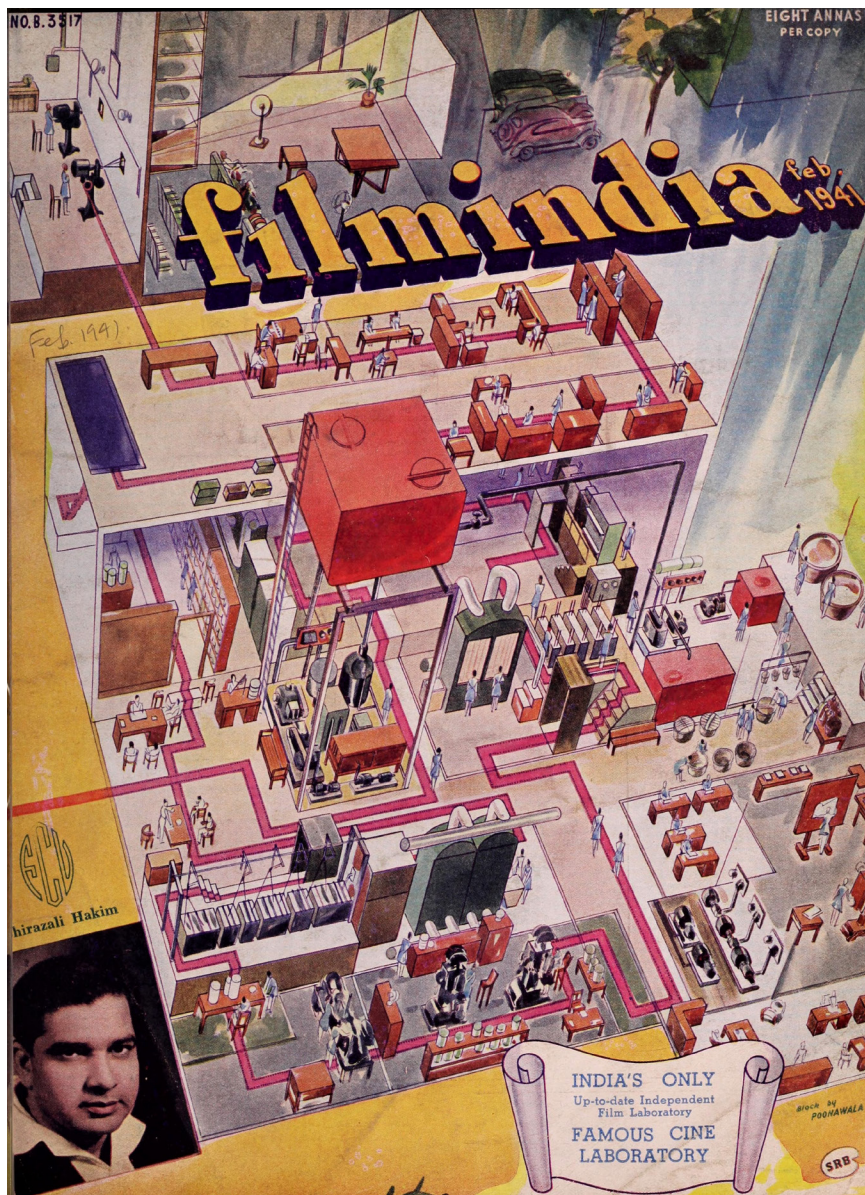


FIGURE 2.3. Front cover of *filmindia* featuring Bombay Famous Cine Labs, February 1941.

the first Indian company to venture into the cigarette business—Gauhar be Baha, a local brand manufactured by Bukhsh Ellahie & Co., was the first to enter into cigarette manufacturing, in 1885.<sup>27</sup> But the advertising strategies that Golden Tobacco resorted to in featuring regular cover-page advertisements in *filmindia* reflected its efforts to occupy the status of a local brand. Just as *filmindia* was promoted as





FIGURE 2.4. Panama cigarettes advertisement on the cover of *filmindia*, April 1946.

an Indian iteration of film journalism, the wares publicized in the magazine also responded to popular audience/consumer expectations by stating their strategic brand image upfront.

Such advertisements can give us a sense of the target audiences imagined by Patel. This can also be extended to the advertisement of films. For instance, *Duniya*

*Kya Hai* (G. P. Pawar, 1938), which was adapted from Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and starred Lalita Pawar, was advertised as "running to packaged cosmopolitan audiences."<sup>28</sup> This reference to a "cosmopolitan audience" testifies to the expectations that an English-speaking constituency fired by aspirations for upward mobility were ideal viewers of social films that demanded intellectual engagement. In fact, Patel was quite proactive when it came to discerning *filmindia's* readership. To carve out an engaging readership whose expertise could be mobilized through the columns, *filmindia* came out with a "Reader's Research Questionnaire in 1941," which asked readers to partake in the task of improving the monthly by expressing their concerns and suggestions for improvement. The winners of the best suggestions were offered free subscriptions to the periodical.

The pan-Indian and transnational readership of *filmindia* was addressed right from its inaugural issue, in which there was a concerted effort to mobilize readership beyond the Bombay Province. This is indicative of the responses that appear in "Editor's Mail." In one of the queries on what the film industry has done towards the development of vernaculars, Patel casually responded that "even people from the South have started talking Hindi."<sup>29</sup> While one could read this as a statement that reflects the growing subscription base of *filmindia*, it also meant that the film culture of the rest of India was deemed important enough only when it intersected directly with Bombay cinema, either production-wise or through distribution networks. Occasionally, one can see advertisements for films released in South India, as in the case of the Telugu film *Dharma Patni* (P. Pullaiah, 1941) made by Famous Films at Shalini Cinetone Kolhapur, based on the work of Marathi writer Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar.<sup>30</sup>

In subsequent years, the vast reach of its patron base was recognized in the "Editor's Mail" column, which featured letters sent from Fiji, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, and the Persian Gulf. This segment was expanded to a readers' forum titled "Woes and Echoes" in the late 1940s; upon selection for publication, letter writers were paid for their contribution. The interactive space offered through rewards and benefits made the readers' forum function as sample research to study the reading practices of the community. It also uplifted *filmindia* as a serious publication that was constantly looking for improvements based on the feedback received from its readers and thereby acting as a mediator between the film industry and the readership base. This was seen in the issue-driven campaigns initiated by *filmindia*, which were put before the readers as "impact reports" tracking the development of cases such as the controversies around the formation of the Film Advisory Board (1941), the Iraq agitation (1939), or the issue of anti-India representations in foreign films. In the case of what was subsequently referred to in the film journals of the time as the Iraq agitation, *filmindia* published a series of reports in support of the release of the film *Punjab Mail* (Homi Wadia, 1939)—starring Fearless Nadia—which was initially banned in Baghdad. *Filmindia's* mission to garner support from other news portals was successful, and the magazine ceded its efforts to

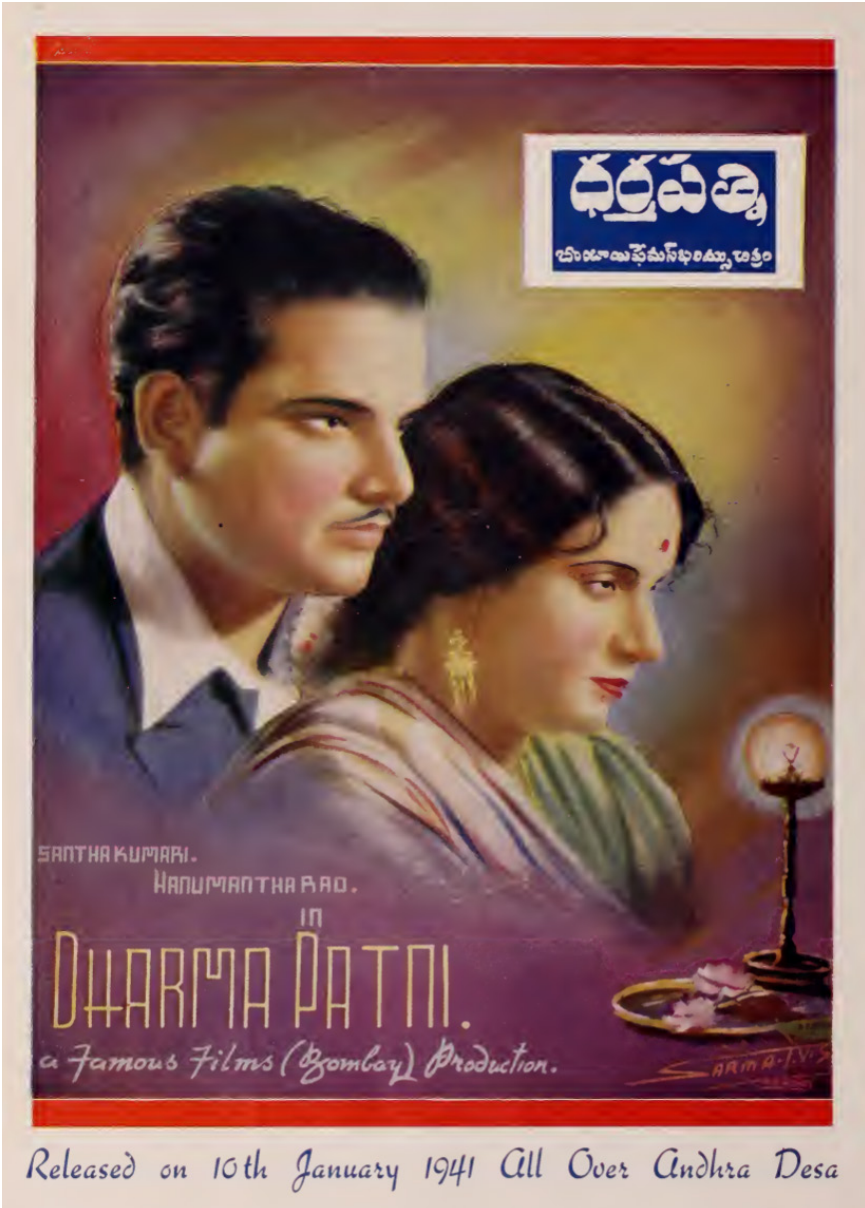


FIGURE 2.5. Advertisement for *Dharma Patni* in *filmindia*, January 1941, upon its release by Andhra Desa—one of the few instances in which a film released for South Indian markets was announced in *filmindia*. The title of the film appears in Telugu in the top right corner.

government-mediated deputation headed by G. F. Reardon, the chief of British Distributors, India, to negotiate on behalf of the Indian producers whose films were banned in Iraq. When the ban was lifted and *Punjab Mail* was released, a copy of the telegram sent from Baghdad thanking *filmindia* was published as a note of gratitude.<sup>31</sup>

The transnational aspects of its patron base were consciously woven into the way *filmindia* structured its columns. The column "At Home and Abroad," started in the mid-1940s, brought national and international news together, giving wide coverage of film industries based in Madras and Calcutta, alongside news from the USSR and Hollywood. Debashree Mukherjee locates the role of the film critic as a commentator in the context of the emergence of film journalism as a specialized trade in Bombay.<sup>32</sup> As Mukherjee notes, *filmindia* tried to frame its contribution by engaging with the cinematic publics around it and thereby define what film journalism could become by initiating change in industry patterns. It is in this context that Patel's response to readers' queries about film reviews published in other newspapers of the time should be read. To a disgruntled reader who expressed disappointment in the reviews that appeared in *The Times of India*, an English-language newspaper, Patel responded that as the employee of a commercial newspaper relying on advertisements, the critic had restrictions that placed their job in jeopardy; he states, "the best thing for a film fan to do is not to be guided by these reviews as the paper doesn't boast of any specialization in this particular job."<sup>33</sup> Occasionally, letters were published critiquing the editor's take on a film, offering a different perspective. In one letter, one Debi Singh from Durban wanted the voice of the fan to be inserted as a crucial way of gauging the film's success, writing: "To the director it is the opinion of the ordinary cinema-goer which matters more than that of the high-brow and pedantic critic . . . it's not the review in a film journal that makes a picture-goer decide to see or not see a picture; it is the comment of his fellow film fan who has already seen the picture."<sup>34</sup>

#### FILM CRITICISM AND THE FILM TRADE

Patel shared a conflicted relationship with the film industry. On the one hand, he attempted to distance himself from the industry to avoid *filmindia* being perceived as a vehicle for unconditional praise of films. This was despite the fact that while managing *filmindia* as an editor, Patel himself went on to direct films such as *Draupadi* (1945) and *Gwalan* (1946), both starring Sushila Rani. This was not an anomaly, as Ray Lewis, editor of *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, had also ventured into the exhibition business, inviting a lot of criticism.<sup>35</sup> Patel's caustic, sharp comments on the industry, production process, and film reviews made the monthly distinct from other film-related columns covered in the newspapers and magazines of the time. On the other hand, there were also times when he aligned himself with the film industry as its representative. In addressing a reception held



by the Film Artistes' Association of India in 1941, he called for a united front, calling himself a "spokesperson of the industry."<sup>36</sup> Patel's writing also showed sympathies for the working class. The reports on accidents happening in cinema-halls were part of the series of articles that Patel wrote on labor conditions in the film industry. In February 1950, in an article directly addressed to the health minister Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Patel detailed the condition of defunct electrical installations and safety concerns that could endanger the lives of filmgoers.<sup>37</sup> Another article explored the conditions of labor of cinema operators and their long, fourteen-plus-hour workdays in unfavorable conditions, as for instance projectionists who worked in unventilated booths.<sup>38</sup>

Simultaneously, we see gestures in *filmindia* that highlight a critical distance from the film industry on the part of the critic, in order to offer honest reviews undiluted by commercial interests. In his review of *Afsar*, after warning the readers to avoid the film, Patel goes on to reveal the fact that the film has been publicized in *filmindia*. He further states that he decided to publish a negative review despite the producer spending around 3,200 rupees on publicity.<sup>39</sup> Needless to say, there were concerns and rebuttals to such strategies from people who were mentioned in the columns, some of which were even published by *filmindia* in an attempt to offer a different perspective. For instance, when he was accused of blackmailing producers at a hearing of the Film Enquiry Committee in Bombay in 1950, Patel came up with an article titled "Am I a Blackmailer?" He circulated a question to all leading producers, including Chuni Lall, managing director of Filmistan Studios and president of the Indian Motion Picture Association—"Have I at any time during your association with you ever asked you for any blackmail money threatening a bad review or an adverse comment on your picture if such a demand was not complied with?"<sup>40</sup> He also published in *filmindia* the letters written by producers who testified in favor of him and sent these to the Film Enquiry Committee as evidence of his good standing.<sup>41</sup> *Filmindia* also gave actors a chance to respond to the allegations through columns; actress Snehapradha Pradhan responded to a reader who countered her previous article, and she used it to clarify and elucidate her stance as a career woman.<sup>42</sup>

*Filmindia* also catered directly to the filmmaking constituency, both current and prospective, who were updated on the technical infrastructures that came with the market for imported film equipment, including sound projectors such as Micron XIB and RCA Photophone sound equipment, speaker systems like Itec's "The Voice of the Theatre" and the "Lansing Shearer Horn Sound System," and cameras such as Cine-Kodak, among others. There were also regular advertisements by Gramophone record companies on their latest offerings. One of the strategies used in the advertisement for cine-equipment was to collate the testimonies by different studios on their experience using these machineries. Despite being staged and commissioned with possible payment from the product manufacturers, such testimonies gave readers an overarching picture of the

landscape of film production and updates on the studios that were embracing new technologies.

*Filmindia* columns were also central to the creation of public discussion about film culture and policy. Patel lobbied for strict standards and fair conditions for film censorship. *Filmindia*'s official policy on censorship was that objectionable material that impacted the taste and morality of the readers should be cleansed, while censors should behave like friendly and ethical guardians rather than despots.<sup>43</sup> One of the sections that started to appear in the late 1940s was the detailed list of cuts recommended by the Bombay censor, alongside the objections and the length of each cut. In this way, *filmindia* also functioned as a government gazette, by including details of government circulars related to the film industry, updates about film employee strikes, and notifications on the appointment of government nominees to the censor board committees, among others.

#### MOTHER INDIA AND THE TURN TO THE RIGHT

Film reviews in *filmindia* were often very acerbic. While it was reflective of Patel's personality and showcased his assertiveness in running the periodical, it was a masculine performance peppered by jocular remarks mixed with anti-Muslim and sexist jokes.<sup>44</sup> The Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto defined Patel's style as an "inimitable sense of humor, often barbed," which, when combined with a "guy assertiveness about his writing," deteriorated when *filmindia* became politicized.<sup>45</sup> Patel's Hindutva leanings and anti-Muslim sentiments became much more strongly pronounced when *filmindia* was converted to a new political journal called *Mother India* in 1965.

In fact, we can see traces of this political edge from the late 1940s and 1950s onwards when *filmindia* began including sharp critiques of Jawaharlal Nehru, alleging neglect of the Hindu communities and what he thought to be the government's attempt to play the secular card. Such right-leaning political commentary was evident in *filmindia*'s reports from 1947–48 in the context of the partition. Patel's editorials dealt with partition as an emotional issue and squarely blamed Pakistan for the bloodshed. In the editorial for the January 1948 issue, Patel blamed Jinnah as the "biggest criminal of history" and mourned the Indian film industry's loss of Karachi and Lahore, which were key film markets.<sup>46</sup> Another instance that showcases such tendencies in *filmindia* is Patel's review of *Arzoo* (Shahid Lateef, 1950), a film dealing with Hindu marriage. Titled "The Lateefs Make a Mess of *Arzoo*: Distortions of Hindu Married Life," Patel takes offense at the way Lateef and his scriptwriter-wife Ismat Chughtai use the plotline, which showcases a married Hindu woman pining for her lover after marriage. Patel's contention was that Hindu marriage was a "sacred bond inviolable through births to come . . . [and] once a Hindu woman marries, she is expected to identify herself with her husband completely mentally, physically, and spiritually."<sup>47</sup>

In the post-partition period, *filmindia* expanded its range beyond just film, with one 1948 job advertisement requesting applications for editorial staff and writers specializing in subjects as varied as history, medicine, international affairs, sociology, sport, music, and human relations.<sup>48</sup> In 1960, *filmindia* published an announcement asking readers for suggestions for a name change reflecting its focus on “political commentary, views on many national problems of the day,” and the fact that it “no longer deals film reviews and film industry exclusively.”<sup>49</sup> After its conversion to *Mother India* in 1967, the price per issue became one rupee, with an Inland edition for three rupees and a Foreign edition for six shillings, and it started to be printed on newsprint, as opposed to the art paper that had been associated with *filmindia*. Hindu mythologicals like Ramayana began to be featured in *Mother India*’s content, alongside a profusion of anti-Muslim articles. Patel’s Hindutva leanings became clear when, in 1967, he contested Lok Sabha elections supported by Jan Sangh, the party that preceded Bharatiya Janata Party. Notably, Patel was also jailed in 1975 during the National Emergency for his anti-Congress content.

## CONCLUSION

*Filmindia* is one of the few early Indian film magazines that is easily accessible in digital form. The journal’s availability in the Media History Digital Library is a rarity; film periodicals from the 1930s and ’40s are often dispersed, fragmented, in archives and personal collections. Digitization efforts to preserve archival material mean bringing the dispersed sources to a centralized data base, while acknowledging that what has been preserved is fragmentary at best. Did Patel at any point think of *filmindia* as an archivable or collectible item shedding light on the history of the 1940s and ’50s?

In *filmindia* we can, in fact, see a keen interest in cultivating in its readers a taste for archival material. From 1941 onwards, regular advertisements appeared in the periodical announcing that the old issues were available for the reader to buy in bound format.<sup>50</sup> The popularity of this format was reified in the October 1941 issue that announced that bound copies had all been sold, and purchasers were requested not to remit money, as no more copies were available. The film critic K. A. Abbas also wrote about the pervasive presence of *filmindia* as a popular entertainment magazine, a fact that he noticed during his travels throughout the country, even in rural outskirts that didn’t have basic amenities. For instance, in a 1941 issue of *filmindia*, Abbas recounted how he watched a film in a tin shack in Panipat, and of his visit to an adjoining juice stall which had paper cuttings and photos of stars from *filmindia* decorating the wall.<sup>51</sup> Secondhand issues of *filmindia* were bought by the shop owner from Delhi to capitalize on the proximity that he shared with the cinema hall, whose patrons were part of his clientele as well. Thus, while it is true that *filmindia* catered to a cosmopolitan audience,

Abbas demystifies the perception that *filmindia* catered to *only* this segment of readership. Instead, *filmindia* catered to casual readers, diasporic audiences, filmmakers, and technicians, as well as a range of other readers. Or, as Abbas puts it, *filmindia*'s constituency included "intellectuals," the "semi-literate," "school-boys," and "professors," as well as those on the lookout for erotic thrills.<sup>52</sup>

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