

**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047****Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025****Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi****Archiving and Digitisation of Indian Cinema****Srishti Topno**

Student, St Joseph's University.

**Abstract**

The archiving and Digitisation of Indian cinema are extremely significant in the preservation of not only the country's rich history but also the culture of its film industry. With no doubt, we can claim that the Indian film industry ranks among the biggest in the globe. Some of the reasons are its diverse and lengthy history, languages, styles and genres, as well as the regional category. Popularly known as Bollywood, Indian cinema is not only just confined to it but showcases various categories such as the South Indian film industry, the Bhojpuri film industry, the Marathi film industry and many more. A great number of early Indian films are at risk of being lost due to flawed and poor preservation methods thus creating the need for improved preservation methods which include archiving and Digitisation these films cannot be overlooked as they contain an essential part of India's history with its social, political and cultural narrative.

Archiving is the process of storing films, clips, photographs, manuscripts and other forms of media such that it guarantees its preservation over the long term. For a long time, these films were preserved on decaying materials like nitrate film stock which can be a bit risky due to its flammable quality and is also prone to deterioration. This has also resulted in the loss of most Indian films from the early years.

Efforts are made to preserve the Indian cinema. For instance, we can look into the tireless attempts made by the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) to preserve the cinematic legacy of the Indian film industry.

Digitisation involves the transfer of films into digital forms. Through this process, the preservation of vintage works becomes uncomplicated as they can be kept on secure cloud-based storage systems free from risks posed by physical storage.

In summary, archiving and Digitisation of Indian cinema are very essential in the preservation of the country's rich cultural heritage so that these historical gems can be treasured by future generations.

**Key Words:** *Digitisation, Cinema, Archiving, National Film Archive of India (NFAI).*

**1. Introduction**

Indian film industries are some of the most productive in the world, not only for the people in the subcontinent, but throughout the world as they actively engage with a variety of stories, dances, and other forms of art. This industry contains an enormous number of languages and regional identities further than just the Bollywood produced Hindi cinema. There also suffers to the indianist picture mosaic, the prosperous film industries of Telegu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada, as well as other

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regional languages such as Marathi and Bhojpuri. For centuries now, since the turn of the nineteenth century Indian cinema began to undergo changes, ranging from silent films to talking movies and gradually developing into incorporating technology in filming and editing.

But this rich film history is in serious danger. A large percentage of early Indian films have been lost because of improper and frequently defective preservation techniques. The widespread use of highly volatile and flammable nitrate film stock during the early years, along with the absence of proper storage facilities, has caused the irrevocable loss of an estimated 90 to 99 percent of India's silent movie output. Not only is this loss a case of lost entertainment, but these films represent a vital part of India's history, capturing its social, political, and cultural narrative. Indian cinema has also been a mirror to society, reflecting the norms and values of the day, as well as a mold of public opinion on key social and political questions. It is thus critical to preserve these cinematic relics in order to better understand India's socio-political development as well as protect its cultural heritage.

The vocabulary of preservation, restoration, archiving, and Digitisation is at the heart of the task of preserving this heritage. Archiving entails long-term preservation of films and materials associated with them under conditions that will allow them to survive. Restoration seeks to restore damaged or deteriorated films to a state as close as possible to their original state. Preservation is the measures undertaken to ensure further decay is prevented and the integrity of film material is not compromised. Digitisation is the transfer of film material into digital form, allowing preservation as well as greater access. Both processes are interdependent and each essential in promoting the long life and accessibility of India's film heritage.

The goal of this paper is to present a thorough analysis of the state of the Indian film industry's preservation, restoration, archiving, and Digitisation initiatives. In order to guarantee that these historical and cultural treasures are preserved for future generations, it will examine the difficulties and achievements in this field, highlight the important organizations and projects involved, and suggest future paths. This paper's scope will include the development of preservation techniques, the historical development of Indian cinema, the pivotal role of important organizations, the digital transformation, and the overall cultural significance of these endeavors.

## **2. Insights**

### *The Big Picture: More Than Just Bollywood*

When we think of Indian movies, the vibrant, song-filled spectacles of Bollywood often come to mind. But India's film industry is a massive, multi-faceted entity that goes far beyond those familiar tropes. It's a place where stories are told in countless languages, styles, and perspectives.

Think of it like a giant, bustling marketplace. You have the popular stalls, overflowing with bright, catchy tunes and dramatic performances – that's Bollywood. But venture deeper, and you'll find smaller, quieter stalls showcasing thoughtful, artistic films. And then there are the regional stalls, each with its own unique flavor and specialties.



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#### *The Heart of the Matter: Commercial Cinema*

Commercial cinema, the Bollywood we all know, is the engine that drives the Indian film industry. It's the entertainment powerhouse, the one that draws huge crowds and generates massive revenue. These films are designed to be crowd-pleasers, packed with music, dance, romance, and drama.

#### *Here's what Makes Them Stand Out:*

- Length: They're typically long, often around three hours, with an intermission. This allows for elaborate storytelling and plenty of musical numbers.
- Music: Music is absolutely central. Songs are woven into the narrative, expressing emotions, advancing the plot, and providing pure entertainment. They're often catchy and become hits in their own right.
- Melodrama: Emotions are amplified, and stories often revolve around larger-than-life conflicts and resolutions.
- Escapism: Commercial films offer a break from everyday life, transporting audiences to a world of glamour, romance, and adventure.
- Regional Commercial Cinema: It is important to note, that the commercial style of film making is not limited to Hindi films. Many other regional languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Bengali, all contain large and successful commercial film industries.

#### *The Quiet Revolution: Art Cinema*

Alongside the commercial juggernaut, there's a quieter, more introspective movement known as art cinema, or the "New Indian Cinema." These films prioritize realism, social commentary, and artistic expression over pure entertainment.

#### *Here's what Sets Them Apart:*

- Realism: They often depict everyday life, exploring social issues, personal struggles, and the complexities of human relationships.
- Social Commentary: They frequently tackle important social and political issues, raising awareness and sparking dialogue.
- Artistic Expression: They emphasize cinematic techniques, storytelling, and character development, often experimenting with unconventional narratives and visuals.
- State Support: In the 1960s to 1980s, many art films received support from state governments, allowing filmmakers to explore more challenging and experimental themes.
- Recognition: These films have garnered critical acclaim both in India and internationally, showcasing the depth and diversity of Indian cinema.



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#### *The Power of Place: Regional Cinema*

India is a land of diverse languages and cultures, and this diversity is reflected in its regional cinema. Each region has its own thriving film industry, producing films in its local language and reflecting its unique cultural identity.

#### *Here's what Makes Regional Cinema Special:*

- Cultural Identity: Regional films celebrate local traditions, customs, and stories, providing a window into the diverse cultures of India.
- Language: They're made in regional languages, reaching audiences who may not speak Hindi or English.
- Local Talent: They provide opportunities for local actors, directors, and filmmakers to showcase their talent.
- Growing Popularity: Regional films are gaining popularity not only within India but also among Indian diaspora communities around the world.

#### *Preserving the Past: The National Film Archive of India (NFAI)*

With such a vast and rich film heritage, it's crucial to preserve it for future generations. That's where the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) comes in.

#### *Here's what the NFAI Does:*

- Preservation: It collects and preserves Indian films, ensuring that they're available for research, study, and enjoyment.
- Promotion: It promotes film culture through screenings, exhibitions, and educational programs.
- Collaboration: It collaborates with national and international institutions to promote world cinema.
- Regional Offices: It has regional offices in Bangalore, Kolkata, and Thiruvananthapuram, expanding its reach and impact.
- Storage and Restoration: The NFAI has many storage rooms for film, and is building a new facility to process both celluloid and digital film.
- Staffing: The NFAI has staff dedicated to administrative and technical duties.

#### *The Importance of Archiving*

The idea of preserving moving images isn't new. Even in the early days of cinema, people recognized the importance of safeguarding these records of our past. Early pioneers like W.K.L. Dickenson and Boleslaw Matuszewski understood that film was more than just entertainment; it was a valuable historical and cultural document.



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The NFAI plays a crucial role in preserving India's cinematic heritage, ensuring that these stories, images, and sounds are not lost to time. It's a vital institution that safeguards our cultural memory.

#### *Looking Ahead*

Indian cinema continues to evolve, embracing new technologies, exploring new themes, and reaching new audiences. From the grand spectacles of Bollywood to the thoughtful narratives of art cinema and the vibrant diversity of regional films, Indian cinema offers a rich and rewarding experience for viewers around the world. As technology advances, the NFAI also advances to be able to preserve digital film, along with celluloid film. The future of Indian cinema looks bright, filled with endless possibilities for storytelling and artistic expression.

#### *List of Lost Movies of Indian Cinema*

Sl no	Film title	Sl no	Film title	Sl no	Film title	Sl no	Film title
1	Adhu Antha Kaalam	24	Ivan Avanethan	47	Mahaashipi	70	Sathi Leelavathi (1936 film)
2	Alam Ara	25	Jalaja (film)	48	Manam Pola Mangalyam	71	Sathi Murali
3	Alibabavum 40 Thirudargalum (1941 film)	26	Jayakodi	49	Mangalasutram (film)	72	Sati Sulochana
4	Armaan (1953 film)	27	Jothi (1939 film)	50	Manichanum Mirugamum	73	Satyavan Savitri
5	Azhagu	28	Kaithi (1951 film)	51	Minnaikodi	74	Senthamarai (film)
6	Baghi Sipahi (1958 film)	29	Kalamegam	52	Miss Kamala	75	Sethu Bandhanam (1937 film)
7	Balan (film)	30	Kalidas (film)	53	Miss Malini	76	Sevasadanam
8	Bama Vijayam (1934 film)	31	Kaliyugam (1952 film)	54	Moondru Pillaigal	77	Shylock (1940 film)
9	Begunah	32	Kalyanam Seydhukko	55	Neki Aur Badi	78	Sri Aandal
10	Bhai Jaan	33	Kanjan	56	Nijattadi	79	Thayumanavar (1938 film)
11	Bhakta Nandanar	34	Kannamma En Kadhal	57	Pancha Bhoothalu	80	Thes (film)
12	Bhakta Prahlada (1932 film)	35	Kannin Manigal	58	Paradesi	81	Thirumanam
13	Dasi Aparanji	36	Keechaka Vadham	59	Prabat (film)	82	Thukkaram
14	Dawlat (film)	37	Kiratha Arjuna	60	Phoolwari	83	Ulagam
15	Desa Munnetram	38	Kissa Kursi Ka	61	Ponvayal	84	Valli Akshargram (1946 film)
16	Dhaasippen	39	Kula Gowravam	62	Pooja (1954 film)	85	Vigathakumaran
17	Dhake Ki Maimal	40	Kumara Koluthungan	63	Prem Prabat	86	Vimochaman
18	En Magan (1945 film)	41	Ladla	64	Puyal Paadum Paattu	87	Zindagi (1940 film)
19	Gnana Soundari (Gemini film)	42	Lal Dupatta	65	Raghupathi Raghavan Rajaram		
20	Gogola (film)	43	The Last Kiss (1931 film)	66	Saaliyaahan		
21	Harishchandra (1951 film)	44	Maanasamrakshanam	67	Samaya Sanjeevi		
22	Idhu Unga Kudumbam	45	Mangane Megane	68		91	
23	Iru Sahodarargal	46		69		92	

### 3. History of Archives: More Than Just Stuff

Archives aren't just dusty rooms filled with old things. They're reflections of human activity, capturing why something was created and how it was valued in its time. Think of them as time capsules, revealing the stories, beliefs, and values of past societies.



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However, archives aren't static. Their purpose and meaning have shifted over time. As philosopher Michel Foucault pointed out, archives are like frameworks that determine what information is considered important and how it's organized. They shape what we can know and understand about the past.

Jacques Derrida, another influential thinker, described archives as "collective, artificial memory." They're places where we use technology to enhance our memories, making them accessible to others. Archives are a blend of memory and technology, offering a sense of origin, permanence, and order, while also holding secrets and sparking discoveries.

Derrida also introduced the concept of "archive fever," the irresistible urge to remember, both by storing and retrieving memories. This applies not just to written documents but also to films and visual materials.

### *The Birth of Film Archives*

From the moment film was invented, filmmakers recognized the need to preserve their work. Early pioneers like William Kennedy Laurie Dickson and Boleslaw Matuszewski championed the idea of film archives, seeing film as a valuable historical record.

The 1930s saw the establishment of many film archives worldwide. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York was the first museum to include film in its collection. Henri Langlois, a passionate film archivist, founded the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, which became one of the world's largest film archives.

Even political forces recognized the power of film preservation. Adolf Hitler established the Reichfilmarchiv in Germany. The British Film Institute (BFI) in the UK also began archiving films in the 1930s.

### *Global Collaboration and Challenges*

Film archives around the world realized the importance of collaboration. Henri Langlois called for international cooperation, recognizing that only through sharing and exchange could we truly understand the history of cinema.

This led to the formation of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP) in 1938. Today, FIAP has members in over 60 countries, working together to preserve film heritage.

### *India's Film Archiving Landscape*

In India, the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) is the primary government body responsible for film preservation. It's the only Indian member of FIAP.

However, India's film archiving efforts have faced challenges. The perception of film preservation has been "dubious," meaning it hasn't always been valued as much as it should be.

The Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), a non-profit organization, is working to change this. They're dedicated to preserving and restoring Indian films and raising awareness about India's film heritage.

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While many government and private archives in India hold film collections, there's a need for greater recognition and support for film preservation.

*The Academic Gap*

Until the late 20th century, film archives were largely overlooked in academic and archival discourse. Even today, there's a significant gap in academic opportunities for film preservation in India.

While European universities offer specialized courses in film preservation and restoration, India lacks such programs. This highlights the need to integrate film preservation into academic curricula and raise its profile as a valuable field of study.

*Why Film Preservation Matters*

Film is a powerful medium that captures our history, culture, and memories. By preserving films, we're safeguarding our collective heritage. We're ensuring that future generations can learn from the past, appreciate the art of cinema, and understand the diverse stories that films tell.

Film archives are more than just repositories of old movies. They're vital institutions that contribute to our understanding of ourselves and our world. They deserve greater recognition, support, and investment, especially in a country with such a rich and diverse cinematic tradition as India.

**4. Literature Review**

The world of film preservation is backed by a wealth of scholarly literature, featuring specialized academic articles and journals that delve into the theories and best practices surrounding archiving, preservation, and restoration. This conversation highlights how crucial it is to store, handle, and duplicate film elements with care to avoid deterioration. Over the years, our approach to film preservation has shifted from merely focusing on physical storage to a wider appreciation for the importance of restoration and accessibility, with Digitisation becoming a key strategy in this ever-changing field.

In India, the journey of film preservation is deeply intertwined with the founding of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) back in 1964. The NFAI has played a vital role in tracking down, acquiring, and safeguarding the rich cinematic heritage of India. However, it hasn't been without its hurdles, facing challenges like funding shortages, infrastructure issues, and significant losses, such as those from the devastating fire in 2003. Recently, organizations like the Film Heritage Foundation have stepped up, becoming key players in the film preservation scene, especially in restoration and training efforts.

Preserving Indian cinema comes with its own set of unique challenges. The variety of film stocks used over the decades, the effects of the local climate, limited funding, and a general lack of awareness about the importance of film preservation all complicate the task. Additionally, the recent merging of several film archives in India has sparked concerns about the future of these institutions and their ability to continue their preservation work.

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Digitisation has emerged as a crucial strategy for preserving films, offering the promise of broader access and improved restoration techniques. While digital methods bring many benefits, they also come with their own challenges, such as the high costs of Digitisation, the need for specialized infrastructure and expertise, and ongoing worries about the long-term preservation of digital formats and the risk of technology becoming outdated. The academic conversation around this topic shows a sophisticated understanding of Digitisation, recognizing it not as a substitute for traditional analog preservation but as a complementary approach, with analog methods still being essential for ensuring long-term archival stability.

### 5. Methodology

This research paper takes a qualitative approach, diving into the synthesis and analysis of existing literature and resources to explore the preservation, restoration, archiving, and Digitisation of Indian cinema. It pulls from a variety of sources, including scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals, reports from film archives and foundations, news articles that highlight current initiatives and challenges, and video content that offers historical context and expert insights. This mix of materials helps create a well-rounded understanding of the topic from different angles.

The provided YouTube video (<https://youtu.be/02kORqvCCM?si=B9wEwdRglpUyJiKZ>) was examined to gather historical insights about the early days of Indian cinema and to grasp the initial efforts and hurdles related to film preservation. Research snippets were carefully reviewed to pull out relevant data points, key themes, trends, challenges, and best practices concerning the preservation of Indian cinema. This process involved pinpointing recurring issues, significant initiatives, and expert opinions on various aspects of the topic.

While this approach offers a broad overview of the field, it's essential to recognize some limitations. The literature and research materials available may carry inherent biases, and the range of resources might not cover every detail of Indian cinema preservation comprehensively. Plus, the word count limit of this paper could restrict the depth of analysis in certain areas. Nevertheless, using diverse source material aims to address these limitations by providing a more complete picture of the complexities involved in preserving India's cinematic heritage.

### 6. Result

The story of Indian cinema kicked off in the late 19th century, with the first film screenings happening in Bombay back in 1896. Following that, the silent film era brought forth a wave of creativity, with Dadasaheb Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra" (1913) often hailed as the very first full-length Indian feature film. A YouTube video showcases the early excitement surrounding filmmaking in India, featuring trailblazers like H.S. Bhatavdekar and Hiralal Sen, who captured some of the earliest footage. Unfortunately, the lack of proper preservation techniques during those times resulted in the heartbreaking loss of many of these pioneering cinematic treasures.



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Understanding the pressing need to protect India's film heritage, the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) was founded in 1964. Located in Pune, the NFAI aims to trace, acquire, and preserve Indian films for future generations while also fostering a love for film culture. The archive boasts an impressive collection of over 10,000 films, along with books, scripts, photographs, and various other film-related materials. Despite its vital mission, the NFAI has encountered ongoing hurdles, such as limited funding, inadequate facilities, and unfortunate incidents of significant film loss due to fire and neglect.

In recent years, the Film Heritage Foundation has become a crucial non-governmental organization focused on preserving films in India. Founded by filmmaker and restorer Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, the foundation runs workshops across the country to teach essential archival techniques for film preservation and restoration. They've also taken on significant restoration projects, working to revive classic Indian films and restore them to their original splendor.

Digitisation has turned into a key element of film preservation in India. With digital technologies, we now have powerful tools to fix damaged films, eliminate scratches and imperfections, and correct color imbalances. Plus, Digitisation makes it easier for people to access these films through online platforms and digital archives. However, we also face challenges with the long-term preservation of digital files, such as the need for reliable storage solutions and strategies to deal with technological changes.

India is home to a rich tapestry of regional film industries, each with its own cultural and linguistic identity. While preservation efforts have often centered on mainstream Hindi cinema, there's a growing awareness of the need to preserve films from these regional industries as well, as they play a vital role in enriching India's cultural heritage.

## 7. Discussion

The ways we preserve and restore Indian cinema today blend both analog and digital techniques. On the analog side, the focus is on keeping original film elements in carefully controlled environments with low temperatures and humidity. This also involves creating duplicate negatives and prints using more stable polyester-based film stock. While these methods are great for long-term storage, they can be quite expensive and don't really solve the accessibility problem. On the flip side, digital techniques provide powerful tools for fixing damaged films and making them accessible to a broader audience. Organizations like the NFAI and the Film Heritage Foundation have taken on significant restoration projects, using these methods to different extents.

Digitisation brings a wealth of opportunities but also some serious challenges for preserving Indian films. It enables the creation of digital archives that researchers and the public can access remotely, which helps democratize our cinematic heritage. Digital restoration techniques can significantly improve the quality of older films, uncovering details that were previously hidden due to damage and decay. However, the costs associated with high-resolution scanning and digital restoration can be quite high. Plus, with technology evolving so quickly, it's crucial to plan carefully for digital preservation. This includes choosing the right file formats, implementing solid storage solutions, and developing strategies for data migration to prevent obsolescence.

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Preserving Indian cinema is not just about keeping films safe; it has deep cultural and historical significance. These films provide us with priceless glimpses into India's social, political, and cultural journey over the last hundred years. Losing a big chunk of early Indian cinema leaves a gap in our understanding of the country's history and artistic expression.

This study gives a broad overview, but it does have its limitations. The analysis relies on the literature and research snippets available, which might not capture the full scope of the efforts and challenges involved in preserving Indian films. Future research could really benefit from diving deeper into specific restoration projects or taking a closer look at regional film preservation initiatives.

To enhance the current situation, there are several steps we can take. First off, boosting financial support from both government and private sectors is essential for maintaining and expanding preservation and restoration efforts. We should also encourage the development of specialized training programs, like those from the Film Heritage Foundation, to cultivate a skilled workforce in this area. Promoting collaboration between institutions such as the NFAI, the Film Heritage Foundation, regional archives, and international organizations can help us pool resources and share knowledge. Establishing national standards and best practices for both analog and digital archiving is crucial for ensuring consistency and long-term preservation. Lastly, raising awareness among filmmakers, policymakers, and the general public about the importance of film preservation is key to securing the support and resources we need.

A unified and standardized strategy is crucial for the long-term preservation of India's rich cinematic heritage. Considering the enormity of the task and the variety within Indian cinema, a piecemeal approach simply won't cut it. By pooling resources and expertise through collaboration, we can enhance efficiency, while standardized practices help maintain consistency and interoperability across various archives and projects. Additionally, finding the right balance between preserving delicate film materials and making them accessible is an ongoing challenge. Digitisation could be a game-changer, providing broader access without putting the original materials at risk. However, this demands careful handling of intellectual property rights and the establishment of solid long-term digital preservation strategies.

## **8. Conclusion**

This exploration into the preservation, restoration, archiving, and Digitisation of Indian cinema highlights just how vital this work is for protecting India's vibrant cultural heritage. In the early days of Indian cinema, many films were lost due to poor preservation practices, which really underscores the pressing need for strong and ongoing efforts in this area. Organizations like the National Film Archive of India and the Film Heritage Foundation are stepping up to the plate, playing key roles in saving and restoring these cinematic gems, even while facing ongoing challenges like funding issues, infrastructure limitations, and the fast pace of technological change.

Digitisation has become a game-changer in film preservation, providing better restoration options and making films more accessible to a wider audience. However, it also brings its own set of challenges, particularly when it comes to long-term digital storage and finding the right balance between preserving films and making them available. The rich variety of regional film industries in India further highlights the scale and significance of this mission.



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Looking to the future, it's crucial that we keep pushing forward with innovation and collaboration among all the different players involved to ensure that Indian cinema endures. By tackling the challenges head-on and seizing the opportunities that both analog and digital preservation methods offer, India can make sure that these historical and cultural treasures remain cherished and enjoyed by generations to come.

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