

Cinema in India

Introduction

Indian cinema is one of the most influential and popular film industries in the world, releasing roughly 1600 movies every year, more films than Hollywood. Today, Indian movies are screened across the world, and have won awards at various international film festivals.

While Indian cinema is often considered synonymous with Bollywood, that is far from the truth. The regional film industries, the most prominent of which are the Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada film industries, are prominent, prolific and very popular.

Humble Beginnings

In 1897 Professor Stevenson demonstrated a film screening at Star Theatre (Kolkata). In 1898, inspired by Prof. Stevenson, photographer Hiralal Sen made a film of scenes from that show and titled it *'The Flower of Persia'* (1898). Similarly, H.S. Bhatavdekar's *'The Wrestlers'* (1899), showing a wrestling match in Bombay, was the first film to be shot by an Indian and could be considered as the first Indian documentary film. While Dadasaheb Torne released a film titled *'Shree Pundalik'* in 1912, it is not considered to be the first Indian film because the cameraman was a Britisher named Johnson and the film itself was processed in London.



Dadasaheb Phalke- Father of Indian Cinema

If there is one person who can be credited with the advent of movies in India, it is Dadasaheb Phalke. A visionary, he wanted India to have its own film industry to produce

movies post-independence from the British. His studio at Dadar was the first Indian film studio to produce an entire film – *Raja Harishchandra*. It was released in 1913 and is now considered to be the first Indian movie ever made. It gained not only commercial success, but also critical acclaim.

Phalke wanted to showcase Indian traditions through his movies, which is why a majority of his movies hinge upon spirituality at their core. Dadasaheb laid the founding stone for the Indian film industry, which is why he is fondly known as the ‘Father of Indian Cinema’. Today, the Government of India awards the Dada Saheb Phalke Awards to individuals with great contribution to Indian cinema, a fitting tribute to the legendary director.



While Dadasaheb undoubtedly gave birth to the Indian film landscape, it truly gained widespread exposure due to the efforts of one man: Satyajit Ray. One of the greatest filmmakers, Satyajit Ray barely needs any introduction. The person who took Indian cinema on an international level, Satyajit Ray won many accolades for his direction. He began a new era in Indian film industry. A movie synonymous with Ray’s genius is ‘*Pathar Panchali*’, based on a 1929 Bengali novel of the same name by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay.

Satyajit Ray won numerous awards, including a Golden Globe and a Bharat Ratna, India’s highest civilian honour. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded Ray an Honorary Oscar in 1992 for Lifetime Achievement.

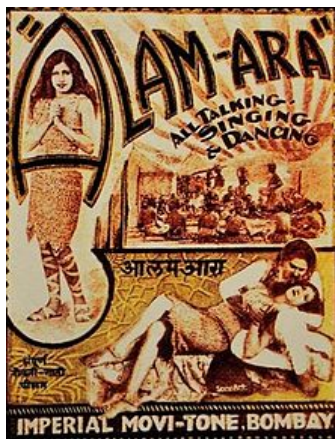
Ray’s work was prominently in Bengali, yet he captured the attention of the world with his work, and the Indian film industry finally got the exposure it so badly needed.

Bombay Will Wait

Even though India was still a British colony in the 1930s, Indian film industries, and particularly Bollywood, quickly gained widespread popularity. More than a means of entertainment, films produced in India were becoming the symbol of Indian independence. By the 1930s, there were more than 200 films being made in Bollywood alone. However, it wasn't called Bollywood yet, and it wasn't the largest film industry in India: the Bengali film industry was larger and had more exposure.

The 1920s saw the creation of the now infamous Censor Board. Initially, it was meant to be a tool used by the British to check for movies that would increase tensions amongst the Indians against the colonial power. When established, the police chiefs of Bombay, Madras, Lahore and Kolkata were members of the Censor Board.

Ardeshir Irani was the next pioneer in Bollywood after Phalke, who, in a span of 7 years, made the first 'talkie' Hindi film '*Alam Ara*', as well as the first Indian coloured film '*Kisan Kanhaiya*'. Among other prominent directors was V. Shantaram, who used his films to make a statement, and to raise voice against the injustice taking place in the society. He made films such as '*Amarjyoti*', which brought to the fore the oppression of women.



Meri aawaz hi pehchaan hai – Alam Ara was the movie to give a voice to the industry

An independent Indian Cinema (1947 – 1960s)

Post-independence, Indian cinema had one of its many golden eras. In Hindi cinema, this period saw the growth of Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor, two of the biggest icons of the Indian movie history, who have led to lineages of actors in Bollywood. It was in the 1950s that Bollywood started gaining prominence over regional film industries in terms of popularity and income.

Dev Anand, Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor formed the '*Trimurti*' of India cinema, while many legendary actresses such as Nargis, Madhubala and Waheeda Rahman also made their cinematic debuts in this time. Dilip Kumar is considered to be one of the most influential actors amongst all, and got praise even from the legendary Satyajit Ray, who called him the 'ultimate method actor'.

Many ground-breaking movies were made in the 1950s and 60s, the most notable of which was the 1957 release '*Mother India*', which did for the Bollywood industry what '*Pather Panchali*' did for the Bengali film industry – it caught the attention of the whole world. This film directed by Mehboob Khan was the first Indian film to be nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Language Film category in 1958.

Another epic which was released in this period was '*Mughal-e-Azam*', one of the grandest movies Bollywood has ever produced. It narrated a grand saga of duty versus love; against the opulent backdrop of Mughal History; with stalwarts Prithviraj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar essaying the roles of Emperor Akbar and Crown Prince Salim (Jahangir) respectively; while Madhubala played the unforgettable courtesan Anarkali.



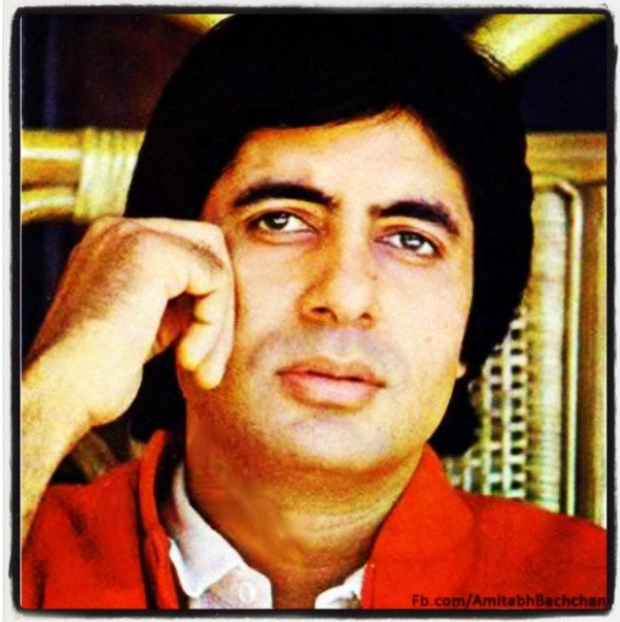
Where it all began – the very first heartthrobs of Bollywood

Films made in the 1950s and 1960s either portrayed the injustices faced by people in society or were simple romantic movies. The late 1960s saw the rise of India's first superstar, Rajesh Khanna. Loved for his movies such as '*Anand*' and '*Aradhana*', Rajesh Khanna still holds the record for having 15 consecutive hit movies as a solo actor. The 1960s also saw the birth of lineages in Bollywood, with one of Raj Kapoor's sons, Shammi Kapoor, making his film debut. Other notable actors to debut around this time were Dharmendra and Jeetendra Kapoor.

Bollywood (1970s – 1990s)

Soon, film makers started to deviate from classic story lines, into action and suspense movies. Movies made post the 1970s were heavily influenced by underworld crime. Movies now were focusing on the people who had settled in cities, looking for livelihood, and their discontent. Films started to have more violence and more emphasis was now paid to music. As a result, very few movies in this era saw the actress playing a major role, unlike in the previous era.

The initial phase of this era was a period of transition, as many new actors made way into the industry as demanded by the new scripts. While actors like Dharmendra would fit into action roles, others would not be able to do so always. Enter Amitabh Bachchan.



The superstar who beat all superstars!

Initially known for his work in *'Saat Hindustani'*, Bachchan was hardly the man for an action role – a lanky man with a slim build. After a series of movies which did not set the box office on fire, Salim-Javed, a duo of story-writers who ushered in this new era in Bollywood, cast him in *Zanjeer* in an “angry young man” role. The rest, as they say, is history.

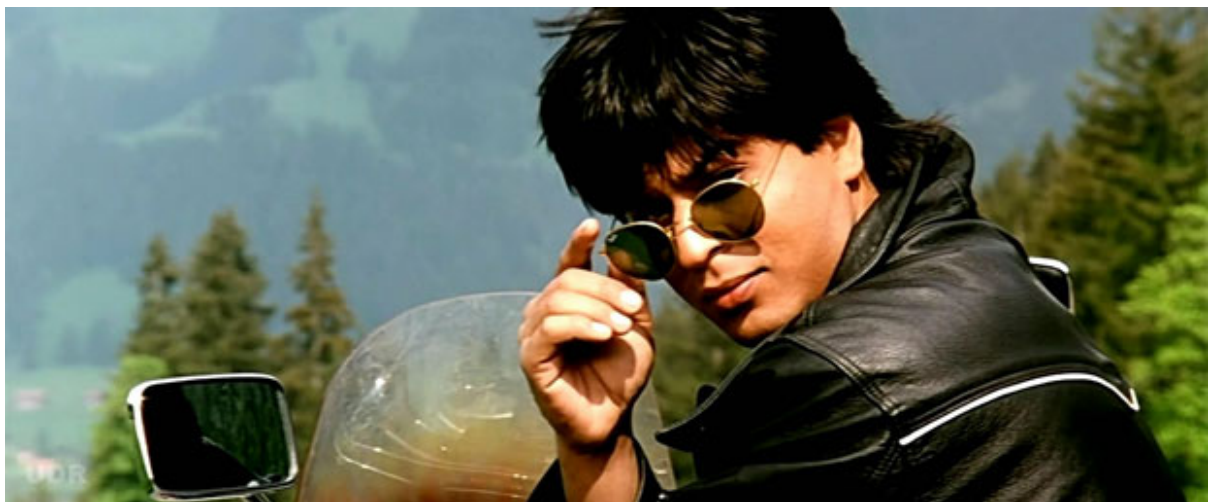
Movies such as *'Anand'* (drama) and *'Amar Akbar Anthony'* (comedy) also belong to this decade. However, the most famous film of this era was a movie heralding the advent of the curry western genre – *'Sholay'* – a film whose dialogues have become clichés that are still mouthed by countless Indians across generations. A movie which mixed the best elements of Indian cinema with western influences, it celebrated a 40th anniversary re-run in 2015.

While directors such as Shyam Benegal continued making movies with offbeat themes, the 1970s gave rise to films that depended more on their entertainment quotient rather than

the script or narrative. Incidentally the 1970s was also the time when the term “Bollywood” was first used, and slowly gained widespread appeal.

Modern Day Bollywood (1990s – present)

As with all ideas, movies on crime and violence slowly reached saturation point, and new ideas were needed to keep movies afloat. Thus, directors started to approach romantic movies again, but from a fresh, young point of view. They focused their movies on the youth of the country, and this reflected in the movies made in the early 90s. Aamir Khan’s debut film ‘*Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*’, Salman Khan’s ‘*Maine Pyar Kiya*’ and Shahrukh Khan starrers such as ‘*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge*’ and ‘*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*’ brought in large masses to theatres. The third of these, popularly abbreviated to DDLJ has become a cult classic of sorts, with a run at Mumbai’s Maratha Mandir cinema for over 20 years.



Naam toh suna hi hoga!

Bollywood post the 1990s has seen a plethora of influences and frequent changes and there is no fixed theme or genre that directors tend to. While romantic movies like ‘*Dil Toh Paagal Hai*’ established Shah Rukh Khan as a heartthrob to all women, Akshay Kumar set a name for himself in action movies like *Khiladi*, as well as comedy movies, such as *Hera Pheri*. Also, the late 1990’s saw a massive increase in independent movies in Bollywood, led by directors such as Anurag Kashyap.

Bollywood quickly expanded its reach in the 2000s, with films being shot, and released, in various countries throughout the world, in order to gain exposure as well as to cater to NRI audience. Use of technology, such as VFX and green screen, also meant that Bollywood movies were at par with other international released in terms of action. Bollywood movies post 2010 even started to earn more than 100 crore rupees at the box office, a feat unthinkable of a few years ago.



When it comes to pure entertainment, "Salman Khan" stands out from the rest.

As such, the Bollywood movie industry has evolved from being a one-dimensional formulaic movie industry to something which has space for both commercial and niche movies.

Regional Cinema

India is a large country where many languages are spoken. Many of the larger languages support their own film industry. Some of the popular regional film industries in India are Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Punjabi. Since the Hindi film industry, based in Mumbai, formerly Bombay, is called Bollywood, similar neologisms have been coined for other film industries. The Tamil film industry is called Kollywood (from the Kodambakkam neighbourhood that is the hub of the industry) and the Bengali film industry is called Tollywood, since the Bengali film industry was long centered in the Tollygunge district of Kolkata. Other similar monikers include another Tollywood (Telugu), Mollywood (Malayalam), Sandalwood (Kannada), Pollywood (Punjabi) and Gollywood (Gujarati).

Assamese Cinema

The Assamese film industry traces its roots to the year 1935, when the pioneer of Assamese cinema, Ruponkar Jyotiprasad Agarwala produced the first Assamese movie, '*Joymati*'. That movie faced several hurdles including a lack of talent, which made Jyotiprasad Agarwala don multiple hats in the production of the movie, and was a failure at the box office. In spite of his initial failure, he came back with his second production in the year 1939 and paved the way for the establishment of the Assamese film industry.

Following the initial work of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, the Assamese industry went into a brief lull before springing back to life following the second world war along with the emergence of eminent composer and singer, Bhupen Hazarika. The highlight of the 1950s was the movie '*Piyali Phukan*' that went on to win the National Award. Throughout 1950s and 1960s, the Assamese cinema saw emergence of new talent as well as the consolidation of Bhupen Hazarika as the face of the industry. Also, around that time Assamese movies began to be made more consistently.

The first colour film, '*Bhaiti*' was made in 1972 and the frequency of production of movies saw a further spike during this era. Towards the end of the 20th century, the industry started imitating Bollywood and produced commercial movies- a trend that has continued to this century with many critics lamenting the gradual decline of the industry.

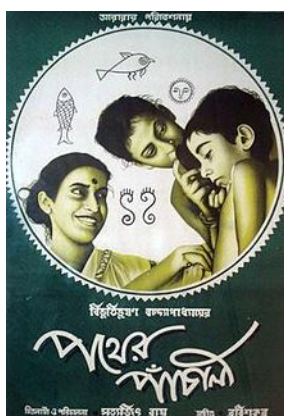
The years from 2012 onwards have marked somewhat of a rebirth for Assamese cinema with over 70 films being released, including *'Mission China'* – the highest grossing Assamese film ever.

Bengali Cinema (Tollywood)

Bengali cinema has always been a pioneer in the Indian film scene in terms of experimentation and diversification. Recently the industry has delved into science fiction and issue films.

Bengali cinema dates back to the 1890s when the first bioscopes were shown in the theatres of Calcutta. Soon after the first bioscope company was set up by Hiralal Sen followed by Dharendra Nath Ganguly's Indo-British Film Company (IBFC) the first Bengali-owned production company, in 1918. However, the first Bengali feature film, *'Billwamangal'*, was produced in 1919, under the banner of Madan Theatre. *'Bilal Ferat'* was the IBFC's first production in 1921. The Madan Theatre production of *'Jamai Shashthi'* was the first Bengali talkie film.

From there on, the film industry has kept churning great movies as well as producing some flag bearers of Indian cinema such as Satyajit Ray.



The golden era of Bengali cinema was the from the 1950s to 1970s. This era was dominated by path breaking directors such as Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen who created parallel cinema

that was critically appreciated worldwide. Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen – hailing from this era- are still regarded as the greatest actors to grace Bengali films.

Some of the greatest movies of the period were '*Nagarik*' (1952), *The Apu Trilogy* (1955–1959), '*Jalsaghar*' (1958), '*Ajantrik*' (1958), '*Neel Akasher Neechey*' (1959), '*Devdas*', '*Devi*' (1960), '*Meghe Dhaka Tara*' (1960), the Calcutta trilogies (1971–1976), etc.

Following a brief lull, Bengali cinema re-emerged as a force to reckon with in the 1990s with the rise of directors such as Rituparna Ghose, Gautam Ghose and Aparna Sen. Today, Tollywood continues to produce pathbreaking titles, several of which are adapted into Bollywood movies as well. Bengali artists too have enjoyed critical and commercial success in Bollywood.

Bhojpuri Cinema

Compared to other film industries, Bhojpuri cinema made a fairly late entry with the release of '*Ganga Maiyya Tohe Piyari Chadhaibo*' in 1963. However, in spite of a delayed start it enjoys widespread popularity in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, as well catering to a specific set of audience in the rest of the country.

The start of the Bhojpuri cinema industry was delayed as well as slow, with the industry not producing a substantial number of movies till the 1980s. However, the spike did not last long and the industry was practically dead until its revival in the early parts of this century with movies such as '*Saiyaan Hamaar*' and '*Sasura Bada Paisawala*' along with the emergence of new age stars such as Ravi Kisan and Manoj Tiwari. Following this, the industry as a whole kicked off and has regularly outstripped Bollywood movies in terms of regional box office collections.

Gujarati Cinema

With over 1000 releases, Gujarati cinema is one of the major vernacular film industries of the country. It has its roots in the early parts of the 19th century in the era of silent movies. However, in the early days, the production work was concentrated in Mumbai and in a sense, the first true Gujarati movie was '*Narsinh Mehta*' released in 1932. The first colour film was '*Leeludi Dharti*' released in 1968.

The golden period of the industry ranged from the 1960s to 1980s, where Gujarati cinema truly flourished. This was followed by a period of lull. However, in recent times it has witnessed a revival. While earlier, it used to cater to primarily rural audience, these days, Gujarati cinema has expanded to cater to urban audience as well.

Kannada Cinema

The Kannada cinema industry is based in Bangalore and caters to the Kannada speaking communities in Karnataka and the diaspora worldwide. The industry traces its origins to its pioneer Gubbi Veerana who produced the series of first Kannada feature films during the 1930s and 1940s. Some of these movies were '*Sadarama*', '*Subhadra*' and '*Jeevan Nataka*'. He established Karnataka films co. which can be credited with kickstarting the Kannada film industry as well as launching the careers of early Kannada movie stars such as Rajkumar.

In the year 1957, Kannada films gained widespread acclaim with '*Premada Puthri*' winning the National award for best feature film. From that point on the Kannada film industry has not looked back. Eminent actors of the industry include Vishnuvardhan, Rajkumar, Ambarish, Anant Nag, Shankar Nag, Prakash Raj, Charan Raj, Aarathi, Jaimala, Tara, Umashri and Ramya. Kannada directors include Girish Karnad and Girish Kasaravalli.



Prakash Raj has slowly established himself as a favourite villain of Bollywood.

Konkani Cinema

Konkani cinema industry is one of the smaller vernacular film industries producing only a handful of movies every year. The industry caters to the Konkani speaking communities of Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. The first full length Konkani movie was 'Mogacho Anvddo' released in the year 1950. Ever since, sporadically a few Konkani movies have been produced. Most Konkani movies are largely produced in Goa. However, a few movies are also produced in the Konkani speaking community of Mangalore.

Malayalam Cinema

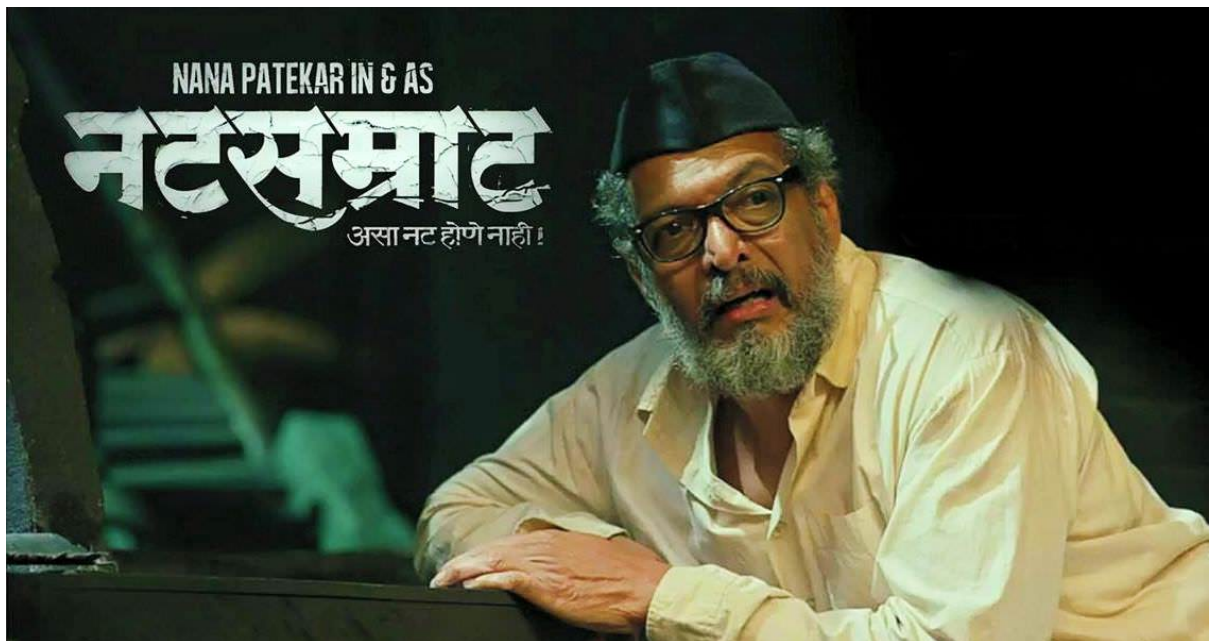
The first Malayalam movie was 'Vigathakumaran' produced in the year 1928 by C.J. Daniels. The movie was acclaimed as belonging to a special genre now called the social drama feature film. Ever since, Malayalam movies have successfully managed to portray social issues within the premise of commercial movies as well producing parallel cinema. In 1954, 'Neelakuyil' won the National Award for Best Feature Film and earned wide acclaim.

Malayalam movies continued to produce off beat movies with the release of *'Newspaper boy'*, in 1950, which was a neo-realistic movie.

The golden generation of Malayalam cinema however was during the 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of stars such as Mohanlal, Mammooty and Suresh Gopi. The industry has continued to sustain that popularity. Today, it is the 4th largest film industry in the country with a large chunk of the movies being produced in Kochi.

Marathi Cinema

Marathi cinema caters to the large Marathi speaking community of the state of Maharashtra, and a growing diaspora especially in North America and UK. It is one of the oldest film industries with a pioneering role in kickstarting the production of feature films in India. In fact, Dadashaheb Phalke produced the first Hindi film *'Raja Harishchandra'* using a Marathi crew in 1913, with the first truly Marathi movie being produced a year after. The first Marathi talkie film *'Ayodhyacha Raja'* was produced in 1932. This along with *'Shwaas'* (2004) and *'Court'* (2015) have been nominated for Oscars.



A 9.3 IMDB rating speaks for itself – Natsamrat is one of the many gems Marathi film industry has produced.

Historically, Marathi movies have faced a lot of competition from Hindi movies. However, in recent times, Marathi cinema has undergone a mini revolution of sorts with the production of high quality movies such as *'Court'* and emergence of artists such as Radhika Apte. Marathi Cinema also has a free flow of talent with Bollywood with artists such as Nana Patekar, Sonali Bendre, and Mamta Kulkarni contributing immensely to Hindi cinema.

Odiya Cinema

Odiya cinema has existed since the 1936, when the first Odiya Talkie, *Sita Bibaha* was released. In its early days, Odiya cinema was known for its artistic style as well as raising social issues in commercial movies. Such movies characterised its golden phase between the 1970s and 1980s along with the rise of stars such as Uttam Mohanty, Mihir Das and Aparajita Mohanty.

Punjabi Cinema

Cinema in Punjab had its beginnings in 1928, with the release of *'Daughters of Today'*. Since then it has made rapid strides to reach its current status as one of the premier vernacular language film industry in India.

Following the release of the first silent movie in 1928, the industry delved into making sound films in the early 1930s. Production faced a major hurdle after India's independence and the partition of Punjab as the audience was split into two. However, before the end of the century, Punjabi cinema had recovered sufficiently to produce a significant number of films every year. At the same time, it had also expanded its reach overseas, with the large population of Punjabis settled abroad forming a significant audience and contributing to its rise.

ਖੁੱਤੀਆਂ ਪੈਣਗੀਆਂ 29TH JUNE ਨੂੰ



Punjabi movies are known for their entertainment quotient, and have transcended language barriers.

The current generation can rightly be termed as the golden generation of Punjabi cinema. A large number of well-known stars such as Diljit Dosanjh and Honey Singh also emerged during this time and also made a mark in Bollywood. Similarly, several established Bollywood stars have also worked in Punjabi movies.

Tamil Cinema

Tamil cinema was the pioneer of filmmaking in south. At one point it was the hub of all South-based production. The hub of the Tamil film industry was once located in the Kodambakkam neighbourhood of Chennai. Kollywood is a colloquial term used to describe this industry, the word being a portmanteau of Kodambakkam and Hollywood.

Tamil cinema has given birth to some of the most eminent personalities of the Indian film industry such as Rajinikanth, C N Annadurai, M G Ramachandran, M Karunanidhi, J. Jayalalitha and Kamal Hassan. These stars are not merely actors and they have enjoyed God-like reverence among fans.

Their popularity can be gauged from the fact that many Tamil movie personalities have gone on to enjoy a successful career in politics. Jayalalithaa went on to become the chief minister of the state repeatedly and recently Rajnikanth and Kamal Hassan too have entered the political arena.

Kamal Hassan and more recently A.R Rahman have broken through regional barriers and have managed to gain acclaim throughout India and the world. Today, Tamil movies are distributed in various parts of Asia, Southern Africa, Northern America, Europe and Oceania. The industry inspired Tamil film-making in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and Canada.

Some of the best-known Tamil films over the ages are '*Parasakhti*', '*Roja*', '*Nayagan*' and '*Moondram Pirai*'.

Telugu Cinema

Telugu cinema has made rapid strides over the last couple of decades, and particularly in the last few years.

The '*Bahubali*' series of movies have made the record books as the highest grossing Indian movie of all time. Some of the greatest stars of Telugu cinema include Prabhas, Allu Arjun, Chiranjeevi and Nagarjuna.

The Telugu film industry has also started to outstrip its southern counterparts. It is known to have the highest number of theatres in the country, producing the highest number of movies per year as well as having access to the great film making infrastructure in the form of the Ramoji Film City.