

## An Odyssey of Indian Film Posters Through The Decades

"Indian cinema, an art form that has always had a special standing in the hearts, minds and lives of the people of the Indian subcontinent, has gradually moved on to become global in its reach, aided in no small measure by a huge Indian diaspora of over 20 million spread across the world. Proving the truth of the cliché that the medium is the message, posters of Indian films have been an integral part of the cinema experience. In the early days, the posters were manually sketched and painted, and today, of course, the whole technique has changed to embrace the latest technology. This has developed into a separate art form, and the poster art relating directly to Indian cinema now stands on its own. It has been the training ground for many internationally acclaimed artists of India, including M F Hussein, who started life as a film hoarding painter. It also includes the Tamil artist Armugham.



1924/The oldest poster with the NEAI

The poster, long before television came on the scene, was the only visual medium of promoting a film, mounted hoardings on bullock-carts and rickshaws with loudspeakers were used to lure people. The posters were exquisite drawings by painters. In the initial days, the films themselves were black and white due to technological limitations but this did not bind the artists painting the posters, and the exhibition here shows how colours were used to promote a monochromatic experience. The artists painting posters eventually gained specialisation in line with different genres of film ranging from the mythological to the social to action.



1931/Original canvas painting, Lalita Pawar (Miss Ambu)

Since the early decades, poster art became more professionally organised, with leading directors like V Shantaram, Satyajit Ray and Raj Kapoor paying close attention to how their films were depicted to the public through this medium. With these and other directors having had some sort of formal or on-the-job training in art, the quality and content changed dramatically, and the posters became more than simply advertisements for films.

The prominence of a character in the film could be judged by the space given to the actor on a poster, and in an early attempt at tailoring the product to the consumer's preference, posters would proudly announce the name of a local boy/girl who had acted in a particular film. Opening lines of catchy songs from the film would be written on the posters, and while travelling through a city on a rickshaw to announce the film, these very songs would be played on the gramophone, a complete experience in itself.

Posters were also used, for some time, as an expression of dissent against colonial rule in the 1930s-1940s, with



1936/Prubhat classic won recognition at Venice Film Festival in 1937



1939/Minerva's megabudget epic known for spectacular scenes of palace grandeur

Cover poster Champakali Hindi/1957  
Dir: Nandlal Jaswanthi



Chemmeen/1965/ Ramu Kariat brought Malayalam Cinema on the world map



Premalekhana/Telugu/1953  
Dir: Raja Nawathe



Meghe Dhaka Tara/Bengali/1960  
Dir: Ritwik Ghatak



Akash Chhann/Bengali/1967  
Dir: Rajen Tarafdar



1941/A musical megahit from Lahore introduced Punjabi folk music to Bollywood

The Indian film industry, the world's most prolific, has been producing around 1000 feature films every year! According to some estimates, it is believed that over 15 million people watch films every day, either in one of the more than 13,000 cinema halls, or, increasingly, at home on video /DVD and cable. And they do so in a number of languages, including Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali, Assamese...

Despite the range of languages, the idiom of cinema has remained solidly Indian, whether reflecting reality in the



1947/Meeruthi/Gujarati, an oft-repeated theme

This exhibition curated by Shri. K. S. Sasidharan, Director, NFAI with professional assistance from Smt. Arti V. Karkhanis, is a humble attempt to take you through a journey of Indian cinema through the medium of the poster - from 1924 to 2006. It would not have been possible, but for the encouragement and support from Shri. S. K. Arora, Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and Shri. V. B. Pyarelal, Joint Secretary (Films) & Director, DFF. The poster photos in this exhibition have been arranged in terms of decades, and within this general subset, one can see the evolution of not only poster art, but also cinema; itself a microcosm of the larger currents within society at various phases of modern India's development - from a colonial territory to a strong, independent and self-confident nation. The poster, humble no more, remains an external element that seduces/informs/ lures the audience into the cinema halls across India, and this exhibition is a tribute to those unknown artists whose art continues to enchant us years later..."

motifs of 'Mother India', or the Indian flag appearing in posters, accompanied with other small symbols of the freedom struggle.

From the decade of the 1960s, posters became one among other elements - hoardings and cutouts included - to determine who the bigger/biggest star was! The prominence to a character in a poster, the height of the cutout, and space on the hoarding, all reflected perceptions of superstardom. Since the 1980s, the manual aspects of poster art have given way to technology. The posters now bear a closer likeness to the real actors, and the quality of poster paper has improved tremendously. The high-resolution images now on the hoardings compete in quality with the best in the world, and supplement the multimedia ad-blitz of Indian cinema. However, in towns and cities across India, the poster still remains one of the more tangible means of promoting cinema, a bit more hi-tech, but still as much a part of the local setting as the local cinema.

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1947/ Noted for intense nationalistic fervour



1948/This spectacular film marks the first ever initiative in Tamil targeting all-India distribution