A world of film work existed beyond the walls of the early Bombay talkie studio. Projectionists, poster painters, costume suppliers, publicity men, exhibitors, were all equally a part of the cinematic work force. By the middle of the 1930s, a new kind of film worker started to gain visibility in Bombay (now Mumbai)—the film critic. This figure mediated a number of networks of industry, stardom, and readership and gradually became a publicly recognized breed of specialist commentator. In this chapter I look at the emergence of film journalism in the 1930s and 1940s as the creation of a motivated public discourse around cinema and the industry. Film journalism as a new kind of writing, both literally as a new journalistic genre, and metaphorically as a new discursive apparatus added immensely to the affects of cinema as an iconic emblem of the twentieth century.

Bombay in the 1930s had already consolidated its reputation as India’s foremost ‘modern’ city. One of the surest indices of a city’s relation to modernity is the nature of its public life, and nowhere was Bombay’s dynamic metropolitan life so readily apparent as in the pages of the daily newspaper. From Congress rallies to race course victories, workers’
strikes to theatre listings, the newspaper served as a digest of city life and its attitudes. By the 1930s, Bombay had a firmly entrenched newspaper culture and a mixed, cosmopolitan reading public. There existed a wide variety of journals in a number of languages like English, Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati. The nature of this reading public can be glimpsed in the ‘Letters to the Editor’ sections of dailies like The Times of India and the Bombay Chronicle. Here was a community of readers that believed it had a stake in the life of the emergent nation, a life played out in the public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere, as configured by certain English-language print media, was dominated by concerns about imperialism, civic life, and progress. The entry of cinema into this informed space of two-way production of public discourse, thus, makes for a fascinating moment. My attempt is to highlight the significance of this discursive development as an industrial and affective site which needs to be studied as an integral part of the cinematic event. This chapter argues that this companion industry not only distributed the pleasures of cinema but also sought to redefine its place in the popular consciousness. I will look at two English-language print platforms to explore how they were imbricated within networks of privilege, desire, class, and influence and how they aligned themselves with particular visions of the future nation and its cinema (Figure 7.1).

What does it mean when a mass entertainment form enters the institutions of serious public consideration? Sandeep Hazareesingh has discussed how the World War I led to a surge in the demand for daily newspapers, and vociferously nationalist papers like the Bombay Chronicle trebled in circulation (2007: 107–8). Bombay Chronicle (1910–59) was started by Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress, and staffed by a team (most famously B.G. Horniman) that passionately supported the Home Rule movement. For the purposes of this chapter, it is interesting that in the decade of the 1930s Bombay Chronicle’s investment in the movies showed a marked increase. Much of this was due to the work of its sometime film editor, K.A. Abbas. Shadowing the rapid development of Bombay Chronicle’s film coverage was filmindia magazine (1935–61), a fanzine-cum-trade journal edited by the flamboyant Baburao Patel. The respected radical newspaper and the specialized film journal present two distinct forms of cinematic inquiry, addressing two sets of readers that did not completely overlap.

Since the earliest days of cinema the links between film and class had been of foremost interest to movie producers, public commentators,
and policymakers across the world. The class background of viewers not only impacted the financial status of the industry, but also determined its social standing. Cinema technology was first introduced to Indian

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**Figure 7.1** Page from Bombay Chronicle

*Source:* Asiatic Society of Mumbai.

*Note:* A typical page from Bombay Chronicle where film advertisements jostle for space alongside local and national news. Bombay Chronicle, 15 June 1940.
audiences in 1896 and dominant social attitudes towards this new entertainment form had since remained ambivalent at best (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980: 4). The dubious status of cinema was in part due to its perceived organic relation to working class tastes and attitudes. The bourgeois press as well as the political leadership of the times expressed concern over the fact that popular films thrived on racy themes of sex and romance; that in their dramatic contests between good and evil films often carried detailed depictions of ‘immoral’ practices; the visible workforce of the industry comprised dancing girls and courtesans; and finally, that the masses were susceptible to the illusionistic and corrupting powers of the cinema. Added to these public concerns was the denigration of the movies by none other than Mahatma Gandhi. In an ‘Open Letter to Gandhi’, the film critic, K.A. Abbas tried to initiate a dialogue with the revered leader: ‘Today I bring for your scrutiny—and approval!—a new toy my generation has learnt to play with—the Cinema! ... [which] you include among evils like gambling, sutta, horseracing, etc., which you leave alone “for fear of losing caste”’ (Bandyopadhyay 1993: 141).

Neepa Majumdar (2009) and Kaushik Bhaumik (2001) have noted that the 1930s and 1940s witnessed the arrival of bourgeois entrepreneurs and film professionals who sought to make the movies a ‘respectable’ entertainment form as well as a ‘decent’ career option. The mission to transform the image of the Bombay film industry could only succeed if the growing Indian middle class, the keeper of public opinion and respectability, embraced the movies. This chapter suggests that film journalism at this juncture played a significant part in the project of legitimizing cinema. While it was definitely a conflicted field of interests, certain English-language film journalists attempted to install a hegemonic vision of an ideal film art and industry. These efforts may seem temporally contained but have had a continued impact on the way the contemporary press reviews mainstream film products. They have also created a rigid economy of access for film historians today who trawl print venues in the absence of substantial filmic evidentiary sites.

The emerging figure of the film critic is pivotal to understanding the terrain of motivations that informed film journalism during these years. A new type of urban professional, the film critic self-consciously promoted cinema as art, industry, and social document, thereby creating a valid space for the movies in everyday public consideration. Here I focus on two of the most prominent film journalists of the time—Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, chief film critic of Bombay Chronicle newspaper and Baburao
Patel, editor of *filmindia* magazine. Both constructed themselves as intellectuals through their witty and polemical writings and as public figures they also embodied aspirations concomitant to those provoked by the movies—dreams of modernity and social mobility. Through their efforts to write about films they wrote into being a particular imagination of cinema and its place in the world.

**TELL-TALE GAPS: FILM JOURNALISM AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

The Indian subcontinent got its first dedicated film journal in 1924 with the Gujarati *Mouj Majah* launched in Bombay by J.K. Dwivedi (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999: 19). Film viewership and production dramatically increased between 1921 and 1934, and the emerging parallel industry of print kept up with this pace. By 1938 there were 68 ‘leading screen journals’ in India mostly published from Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay, in Bengali, Hindi, and English (Bharucha 1939: 505). These magazines serve as an important archive of a period in Indian cinema from which very few film prints remain. Film reviews, synopses, interviews, photographs, studio notes, and letters from readers allow us to reconstruct the lost films, production practices, and attitudes towards the cinema of the time. While film journalism serves as an important counter-archive in such a situation, this chapter also makes a claim for approaching this early discursive configuration as an object of study in its own right. It is crucial that we examine the historical and ideological matrices within which these writings are embedded so that we may question the silences, contradictions, and emphases encountered therein (Figures 7.2 and 7.3).

The history of film journalism in South Asia is a story that waits to be told. This academic oversight is symptomatic of the long scholarly neglect of mainstream Bombay cinema on grounds of its perceived triviality. Apart from the occasional exception (for example, Dwyer 2004; Prakash 2008), film historians themselves have not adequately looked at the contribution of film journals to the status and dispersal of cinema and its affects. Richard Koszarski (1994: 191) speaks of a similar neglect in Hollywood film history, unfortunate because ‘the broad market penetration of American newspapers during the first decades of this century suggests that their coverage of film was of real significance in shaping the way their readers approached the phenomenon of motion pictures’. The Bombay film critics I look at in this chapter self-consciously took on the task of mediating between the film and the
audience, preparing the viewer, as it were, on ways of seeing. As part of their project to culturally validate the cinematic institution their initial attempts were to fashion cinema as one of the arts, within a framework of craft, philosophy, and creative vision. Film commentators therefore were construed as arbiters of taste. The arts discourse necessitated a privileging of the auteur, and both Abbas and Patel focused their attentions on

**Figure 7.2**  *Rang Bhumi* (Delhi), 2 July 1932

*Source: The National Film Archive of India.*
directors and producers, initiating ‘Best Film’ and ‘Best Director’ lists in 1938. Alongside these efforts at creating a regulated cultural economy, were moves to structurally organize the film journalism community by way of professional and industrial associations. These concerted efforts comprise an important moment in the history of Bombay cinema and their legacy needs to be critically analysed.
KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS AND BOMBAY CHRONICLE

... I could go to Bombay and join Bombay Chronicle, and, if possible and necessary, go to jail as a satyagrahi.

—Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, I Am Not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography (1977: 80)

In 1934, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas (1914–87) carried out the first part of his plan. He had just received a liberal arts degree at the Aligarh Muslim University and viewed himself as a nationalist writer (Abbas 1977: 75). Intoxicated by the ‘brave air of socialism’, many young intellectuals of the period seized upon literature as a key tool to critique existing social hierarchies and economic iniquities. Abbas became a member of the Progressive Writers’ Movement which brought together writers who believed in the radical, transformative potential of literature. Sajjad Zahir, one of the founders of the All India Progressive Writers’ Association (1936), summed up the spirit of the moment: ‘Writing was probably the only avenue left open to us.... We were incapable of manual labor. We had not learnt any craft and our minds revolted against serving the imperialist Government. What other field was left?’ (1952: 51). K.A. Abbas brought together his passion for writing and his anti-imperial fervour by choosing journalism as a career. Moreover: “The Old Lady of Bori Bunder”, as B.G. Horniman used to refer to The Times of India, was out of the question for a dew-eyed young patriot and socialist like me [Abbas]. It was like government service. Bombay Chronicle was the only nationalist daily’ (Abbas 1977: 123). Thus, Bombay Chronicle became symbolic of a productive form of patriotism, a form that allowed a new kind of university-educated nationalist to simultaneously construct himself as a lettered intellectual. Abbas officially joined the paper in 1935 on a stipend of Rs 20 per month.

Like most newspapers, Bombay Chronicle’s first encounter with cinema was through advertisements and simple listings of exhibition timings. By 1937, the newspaper had increased its film coverage to the lavish attention of three full film pages per week. This was the beginning of a regularized trend of reviewing the latest film releases. There was a page dedicated to ‘Indian’ films on Wednesdays, a page on ‘Foreign’ films on Fridays, and two half pages in the special Sunday edition. Apart from elaborate reviews and interviews, these pages also addressed studio activities, industry conferences, and governmental decisions. In the 1930s, film reviews generally remained anonymous because newspapers often directly printed publicity literature distributed by film studios. It
was a testament to the growing interest in film and film criticism that *Bombay Chronicle* received regular letters to the editor complaining about the quality and objectivity of many of the anonymous film reviews. By the end of the 1930s, film articles began to carry the sign-off ‘By our Film Critic’. There was now an acknowledgement of and a rubric for this new work, a change that could be wrought because of the concerted efforts to cultivate a motivated reading public for cinema.

Abbas’ journalistic interests easily straddled the realms of politics and cinema, and the ease of his travel between two apparently dissimilar modes of writing should be of some interest to us. Even as political reportage remained his primary interest, Abbas regularly wrote short film reviews for *Bombay Chronicle* and was appointed chief film critic around 1938. In consonance with the socialist approach to art of the Progressive Writers’ Association, Abbas pushed for a cinema that would accurately reflect and indeed transform social reality. This utilitarian approach to the cinematic form is clearly spelt out in Abbas’s response to a reader’s charge that his reviews were prejudiced:

> Of course, Mr. Sathe, I am prejudiced. I am prejudiced in favor of all films like *Savkari Pash* which dare to tell the truth about economic and social problems even if they are technically poor.... In fact, I am not interested in motion pictures as motion pictures, but as an art medium for the reflection, and where possible, the enrichment of life, and a means for the reconstruction of society on healthier, more just, and rational lines.

Abbas’ authoritative critical voice turned the film pages into a venue for serious ideological commentary. It is clear that Abbas saw himself as a political activist who had chosen cinema as his favoured object of inquiry. A useful comparison can be made here with Abbas’ contemporary in Hollywood, Hedda Hopper, a gossip columnist who came from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Hopper ‘used her journalistic platform to promote anticommunist campaigns during the cold war’ and her articles in the *Los Angeles Times* were instrumental in exchanging information and creating public consensus during the 1940s Red Scare and the infamous Hollywood blacklist era (Frost 2011: 44). Her attacks were often on films that did not carry direct communist propaganda but dramatized social inequalities that were fought by a ‘common man’ protagonist. Frank Capra’s *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) was therefore an abhorrent ‘leftie’ film for Hopper. And it is precisely Capra whom Abbas valorized in his columns. In a five-column article titled ‘This Man Fought Lone Battle for Democracy’, Abbas
labels Capra as one of Hollywood’s ‘most socially conscious’ directors and *Mr. Smith* ... as a testament to democracy, free speech, and the fight against capitalism. The assurance with which critics like Abbas commented upon Hollywood films is part of a historical moment in which the printed word became a highly mobile artefact and enabled debate on a transnational level. In fact, Hazareesingh credits *Bombay Chronicle* specifically for skilfully ‘construct[ing] relationships between the local and the global [which] gave the paper a unique angle of vision, necessarily subversive of the narrow colonial world view’ (Hazareesingh 2007: 116). This overlap in approach can be attributed to the fact that both cinema and newsprint are modern artefacts that promise global travel and a speedy exchange of new ideas and visions (Figure 7.4).

This approach achieves its full force in a momentous editorial written by Abbas in protest of the ban imposed by the Bengal government on *Juarez* (William Dieterle, 1939), a film about Mexico’s beloved nineteenth century leader, Benito Juarez, and his long battle against French imperialism. Many of the fiery speeches made by the fictional Juarez in the film were censored even outside Bengal. Abbas wrote furiously against censorship of this sort and even printed the excised sections in the film pages. These included lines like: ‘By what right do the great powers of Europe invade the lands of simple people, kill all who do not make them welcome, destroy their fields and take the fruit of their toil from those who survive? Is it a crime, senores, that the skin of some people is of a different colour?’ The resonance such words would have for a public fighting its own anti-colonial battles is obvious. Since the Great War years, the colonial government in India had recognized the great threat that printed words could pose to the status quo. Now, with the World War II looming on the horizon, and the quickening critiques of old hierarchies across the world, the global travel of newsprint was key to the radicalization of public opinion (Hazareesingh 2007: 122). Thus, an editorial in *Bombay Chronicle*, with its persistent demands for home rule, had serious implications.

Eventually, Abbas’s critical voice became so strident and powerful that some livid producers pressurized the publishers of *Bombay Chronicle* with threats of an advertising boycott. The paper solved the problem by transferring Abbas to the Sunday edition. It is reputedly this experience which led him to write the Bombay Talkies film *Naya Sansar* (N.R. Acharya, 1941), in which a young journalist joins a radical newspaper but is disillusioned when he sees the editor, his mentor and inspiration, gradually succumb to corruption (ibid.: 215–6).
Figure 7.4  ‘This Man Fought Lone Battle for Democracy’

Source: The Asiatic Society of Mumbai.
Note: K.A. Abbas’ glowing review of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Bombay Chronicle, 10 February 1940.
BABURAO PATEL AND FILMINDIA

Film Journalism began in 1935—when I started *filmindia*. Not before that.

—Baburao Patel (1981: 126)

It is statements such as these that made Baburao Patel. Born in the village of Maswan, Maharashtra (Konkan), to *banjara* (gypsy) parents, Patel’s formal education ended in high school (Patel 1988; Pimpale 2005). A highly ambitious autodidact, he taught himself a variety of subjects from history to philosophy. In the 1920s he moved to a Bombay that was well on its way to celebrating the cult of personality and individualism. It was by dint of his flamboyance, witty repartee, and self-taught skill in English, that Baburao Patel gained access to the closed circuits of the film industry. He tried on the various hats of screenwriter, publicist, and even director before he found his groove as a film critic and commentator-at-large (see Patel, B. 1981: 126–8; Patel, S.R. 2008).

In 1935, the same year that Abbas joined the staff of *Bombay Chronicle*, Baburao Patel launched the biggest film journalistic phenomenon the subcontinent might have ever seen. *filmindia* magazine was started up by D.K. Parker and B.P. Samant with Baburao Patel as editor. At the time, Patel was trying his luck as a film producer and was on his way to utter insolvency. The very first issue of *filmindia* became a huge success and Patel gradually took over the monthly journal. *filmindia* was a dedicated film magazine and carried trade information, gossip, reviews, interviews, short stories, and feature articles. Its highlights were the trade gossip columns (‘You’ll Hardly Believe That ...’, ‘Pictures In Making’, ‘Bombay Calling’) and the witty ‘Editor’s Mail’ section in which Patel personally responded to readers’ questions about stars and the industry. Here are some representative examples from a compilation made by *Time* magazine:

Q. Are there any raw-film manufacturers in India?
A. No. But we have directors who expose the film and make it look more raw than ever before.

Q. Why do you have two wives?
A. What is going of your father? Ram Jethmalani was asked by a person personally whether his first wife is happy despite his having a second wife. He answered—Yes my first wife is happier than your only wife.
Q. What is the exact relationship between Anuradha and Rafiq Guznawi?
A. Come, I give you the guess.

While Patel’s grand claim to be the founder of film journalism in India is hardly true, it seems certain that *filmindia* achieved an unprecedented cult status. In an early survey of Indian film magazines, Panna Shah (1950: 51) noted that ‘Hitherto hardly any film journalism was in existence. Now film journals started coming into vogue, the most important of which was *filmindia*.’ By 1937, *filmindia* became a force to reckon with, reportedly selling thousands of copies a month in India and abroad. The magazine created a sensation with its canny mix of rumour and review, observation and opinion. Writing under pseudonyms such as ‘Judas’ and ‘Hyacinth’ it was Patel and his wife, Sushila Rani, who generated all the content for the 50-page magazine. Baburao Patel’s knack for self-publicity and his irreverent writing style made the magazine a hit and turned him into a veritable star. Here is a characteristic fan:

Baburao Patel—the name had magic in it when I first heard it in college 25 years ago. Everyone in my college—from the principal to the peon—seemed to know him except for me. They said he was the most powerful writer of English prose in the country. Being tall, fair and handsome, they described him as the beau-ideal among the film stars.

It is significant that Patel was included within the celebrity sphere of ‘film stars’; it points to an understanding of the film world as encompassing diverse personages and their practices, an understanding not limited to what happens on screen. Film journalists are often credited with being star-makers and hence it is interesting to note instances where they were reputed as significant celebrities in their own right (Figure 7.5). Both Baburao Patel and K.A. Abbas were publicly recognized as important cinema commentators and experts. Moreover, their proximity to the glamour of the film industry and a simultaneous critical distance from it added to their elevated status. Readers of their critical writings were very curious about their personal lives as well, a fact that clearly marks their quasi star status. It was not uncommon to find questions posed to film journal editors like this one: ‘Will you kindly give me some information about K.A. Abbas—his job—married or not—etc.?’ Baburao Patel capitalized on this curiosity and carefully fashioned a suave, cosmopolitan persona for himself. The pages of *filmindia* were liberally sprinkled with photographs of Patel with Hollywood actresses,
details of his foreign trips, images of him in well-cut suits and sharp hats, posing with his attractive secretaries and his prize-winning race horse. Apart from the visual iconography, Patel’s powerful personality was evident in every page of his magazine especially in his risqué replies to readers’ letters. Of all the ‘stars’ he might have ‘made’ or unmade, he definitely marketed his own star persona very aggressively. The construction of this persona was only possible because there was a very real demand for role models that offered the promise of social and cultural upward mobility. The romance of the cosmopolitan, intellectual film critic surely had something to do with the promise held out by cinema itself as a mode of travel and an object of desire—the promise of modernity.
I came across *filmindia* for the first time in 1946, when I was a little chap of 16 years, studying in Intermediate in the Meerut college.... ['The Editor’s Mail'] kindled in me a desire to ask a few questions to the Editor. My questions were replied and my pleasure knew no bounds. As I continued to ask questions and read *filmindia*, my English improved. This improvement helped me in my B.A. examination. Today I have passed my M.A. in Philosophy. But what little philosophy I know was from *filmindia* and the English I learnt was from Baburao Patel.24

This heart-felt tribute allows us to enter into a peculiarly South Asian phenomenon, one that was catalyzed by the colonial presence: autodidactism, especially in the context of the English language. *filmindia* performed many functions for many people and the concept of autodidactism helps us glean an idea of its varied readership, and some of the ‘lost audiences’ of cinema (Stacey 1994).

*Bombay Chronicle* and *filmindia* were both English-language journals but there existed a marked difference in the way their readers perceived each. *Bombay Chronicle* was a serious, high-minded nationalist paper, while *filmindia* was generally considered a little frivolous as it dealt solely with popular cinema and gossip.25 *Bombay Chronicle* could garner immediate validation due to its ideological markers, but *filmindia* had to be legitimized on grounds that were particular to the times. One of these was its purported instructional value. In souvenirs and special issues published to celebrate *filmindia*’s long run, fans thank Baburao Patel and his journal for teaching them English: ‘My education was in vernacular medium [*sic*]. My mother tongue was Bhojpuri, the language Laloo Prasad Yadav speaks today.... Today I have written/edited 18 books. And all these in English. Regularly reading *filmindia* is the most important single factor behind my becoming some sort of an author’ (Singh 2005).

The figure of the autodidact is one that reveals itself across the bodies and desires of a variety of individuals impacted by film culture in this period. While it is easy to characterize this figure as overly earnest and slightly comic such a characterization would be quite inadequate. In *The Nights of Labor*, Jacques Ranciere (1989) theorizes the figure of the autodidact by looking at the poetic and philosophical writings of workers and artisans in nineteenth-century France. Thinking through a different time and world, Ranciere politicizes the drive of the automath using the framework of transgression, as the worker wrested time from
his ordained nights of rest to create a writing reserved for the leisured classes. The worker-autodidact’s enterprise worked along the boundaries of knowledge and the fringes of the power that accrued from certain types of knowledge. In the early part of the twentieth century in India, young people in vernacular-medium colleges, low-level government jobs, or mofussil homes, sought actively to train themselves in ways that would enable them to compete for the lifestyles and careers of realistic role models. The personal journey of Patel, a non-matriculate who grew up in a small village to become a film celebrity in Bombay, served as a feasible role model for those with the ambition to transcend the constraints of their backgrounds.26

Part of Baburao Patel’s star status accrued from his constant reiteration of his ‘self-taught’ erudition. ‘I was the most educated man in the film industry in those days [mid-1930s]. And I was a non-Matriculate.’27 He was immensely proud of his extensive library which housed hundreds of books across a wide range of subjects. This anxiety about formal education and need to privilege autodidactism as a superior mode of knowledge-seeking was symptomatic of the times, as a generation of young people tried to prepare themselves for independent India’s emergence onto the world stage.

There is an immediate politics in learning things you are not supposed to know, talking in a language above your place in society. Disenfranchised by the lack of adequate English language skills and aspiring to the glamour of Patel’s cosmopolitan status, many of filmindia’s readers consciously worked towards educating themselves. Francesca Orsini (2002: 13) has pointed out the complicated ways in which English in the early twentieth century had ‘become one of the symbols of colonial inequality’. English worked as an explicit marker of social status and intellectual training, thereby complicating any straightforward rejection of it as an imperial imposition. Substantial sections of the Indian bourgeois classes used English to assert their liberal values, desire for social reform and education (see also Cohn 1985; Lelyveld 1993; Rai 1991). ‘Colonial educational policies, which promoted English as the language of a cosmopolitan modernity vis-à-vis the local vernaculars, introduced new, hierarchical distinctions within this reading public, based on degrees of literacy in English … ’ (Dass 2004: 10–11). English can be seen as constituting a new kind of hegemonic public sphere, through which young Indians from elite colleges and universities picked up the language as well as its attendant values and privileges. The reader that emerges from the filmindia testimonies is clearly on the margins of
this public realm and points towards the heterogeneity of the readership at stake here. Therefore, the promise held out by Baburao Patel’s own personality becomes significant.28

The pleasure to be derived from a film magazine was layered; it worked upon the reader’s appetite for the thrills of urban life and the affective charge of the silver screen. The public sphere engendered by the film magazine was a fragmented one but was brought together by cinema’s equation with a modern culture of consumption. In the pages of *filmindia* and *Bombay Chronicle* we see an emergent address to the consumer who belongs to a fledgling middle class or has such pretensions. Indeed, the fact that they are both English-language documents is a part of that aspiration. The September 1937 issue of *filmindia* carried advertisements for Godrej Vegetable Toilet Soap, Fiat—‘the Ideal car for India,’ Remington Portable Typewriter, Travancore National Bank, and Freezite Refrigeration—‘for the small house-holder’, while *Bombay Chronicle*, in 1946, ran ads for Lux Toilet Soap, Afghan Snow, Tenor Cigarettes, and Tampax that targeted an upper-class female readership. These products might point to the primary targets of advertisers but one cannot limit the reach of these journals on the basis of class or gender. Talking about the wide circulation of English newspapers like *The Statesman* and *The Times of India* in the 1930s and 1940s, Priti Ramamurthy (2006: 199) says: ‘Although these papers and magazines were mainly read by British and Indian English-educated elites they contain a number of largely visual commodity and film advertisements and photographs. They were probably viewed by those who were not fluent in English, and they were certainly read aloud to non-English speakers.’ This striking observation shows us how the inclusion of cinema in these journals might have opened out their appeal and cut across boundaries of class, gender, and indeed, literacy. There was the devoted community of film enthusiasts who kept abreast of all latest films and the buzz around them; there were the fans who bought magazines only to cut out photographs of their idols; there were also those for whom the journals were status symbols and representative of an urbane interest.29

The following statement by A. Narayana Rao brings together many of these ideas: ‘*filmindia* is worth its weight in gold for its wealth of wit and wisdom.... A study of this has enabled scoring success in I.A.S examinations, offices, dinner tables, clubs and society parties and making boys and girls popular personalities’ (Sambasivarao 2008: 41).

The world of film journalism that I am looking at has some of the impulses of a Habermasian literary public sphere. Men like Patel and Abbas
set out to mobilize public opinion through the platform of their journals and newspapers. Such media became discursive and institutional spaces with investment in values like progress, nationhood, and respectability. At the same time, I suggest that the multiple reading publics glimpsed through this newspaper complicate any easy understanding of the reach of print culture and the everyday uses made of it.\textsuperscript{30} Foremost is the tension that the film journal embodied—a tension between reason and emotion—by casually bringing together institutional comment on industrial and state policies, gossip, star biographies, and fan feedback. From consumerist power to cultural aspiration, aesthetic delight to global travel, films offered a variety of pleasures across diverse venues. Research on film magazine readership in the United States emphasizes a highly gendered divide as only women were supposedly interested in film news, stars, and gossip. In the case of South Asia, we see a strikingly different scenario as cinema was able to inhabit venues and speak to publics across distinctions of ideology, cultural status, gender, and class. The film journal or the film pages within a political newspaper created an alternative public sphere which cohered not on terms of class, but on a desire for the movies.

ALIGNING WITH THE NATION

Many popular film magazines of the day actively aligned the futures of cinema and the nation. In the 1930s, \textit{filmindia}'s title on the magazine's cover was accompanied by the line 'Leading the Nation'. Journals such as the \textit{Mirror}, \textit{Sound}, or \textit{Filmland} carried extensive commentary on the status of Indian cinema as a national industry. A lay citizen interested in the economic progress of the country could thus be positioned as being legitimately invested in the film industry.\textsuperscript{31} There was a palpable excitement about the cinema as an art form as well as technology that would enable India to participate in the discourse of modernization heretofore reserved for industrialized nations like America, Britain, or Russia (Figure 7.6).

This concern with cinema's ties with the nation and nationalism came to the fore in the year 1938 when K.A. Abbas and Baburao Patel launched a combined drive against 'anti-Indian' films. A nationwide campaign was launched to ban 'empire films' like \textit{The Drum} (Zoltan Korda, 1938) and \textit{Gunga Din} (George Stevens, 1939), which reinforced imperialist stereotypes of the colonized as racially inferior, weak subjects.\textsuperscript{32} As Prem Chowdhry notes, these films 'paid a rousing
tribute to the British Indian army and their message was that the British were in the colonies for the protection of the native inhabitants’ (2002: 2). The matter was discussed in the central assembly, filmindia’s pages were besieged, Patel wrote telegrams to Indian ministers, and finally made a whirlwind tour of Hollywood. On 1 September 1938, hundreds came out on the streets of Bombay to protest the release of *The Drum* at the Excelsior and New Empire Theatres. The film was withdrawn by its Bombay distributors on 14 September 1938 and subsequently

![Figure 7.6 ‘Leading the Nation’](image)

*Source:* V. Shantaram Foundation.

*Note:* filmindia cover, January 1940.

tribute to the British Indian army and their message was that the British were in the colonies for the protection of the native inhabitants’ (2002: 2). The matter was discussed in the central assembly, filmindia’s pages were besieged, Patel wrote telegrams to Indian ministers, and finally made a whirlwind tour of Hollywood. On 1 September 1938, hundreds came out on the streets of Bombay to protest the release of *The Drum* at the Excelsior and New Empire Theatres. The film was withdrawn by its Bombay distributors on 14 September 1938 and subsequently
drastically censored. What was this if not a bid for political relevance? Patel and Abbas were pushing for cinema to get recognized as an arena of national significance, a theatre where the struggle for freedom and national pride could be staged. If the campaign worked, it would also be a definite validation of film journalism.

The two men did not stop there. Baburao Patel and K.A. Abbas set up the Film Journalists’ Association (FJA) in 1939, and this helped add momentum to their efforts to ban ‘anti-Indian’ films made by Hollywood. Film journalists from across the subcontinent joined forces to tackle this so-called menace. The sheer hyperbole of much of this rhetoric of solidarity begs questioning. For example, in 1946, a columnist for Sound magazine wrote about the rising popularity of foreign films and the increasing amount of foreign capital invested in the country. An exaggerated alarm and a tone of heroic purpose mark his piece: ‘Sound will not be alone in this all-out attack. There is filmindia, there is Forum, there is the Free Press, there are thousand and one other papers scattered all over India, who are just bristling for a fight of this description, and [Sound] is sure that when the clarion call for action goes round none will be found wanting.’

Such performative rhetoric routinely served as a route to ideologically validate a community notoriously riven by professional competitiveness. Rather than take this rhetoric at face value, it would be wise to remember that there was a canny economics at play here. The journalism industry’s primary loyalties lay with the film industry on which it depended for advertising revenues, subject matter, as well as a substantial readership. Casting a second look at Patel’s campaign, it is evident that each media event against ‘anti-Indian’ films or ‘foreign’ films also benefited the indigenous film industry. The competition from Hollywood for India’s film markets was a real threat. Sound’s rallying cry in 1946 against a ‘foreign invasion’ is better understood when we observe that of the 548 films released in Bombay that year, only 200 were Indian. A blow to the indigenous film industry would translate into a blow to the journalism networks around it. Besides, film magazines could hardly ignore the most popular sentiment of the day—nationalism. Be it in terms of nationalist themes of films themselves or ostensibly patriotic agendas of film magazines, the driving force for both the studios as well as critics was the race to woo maximum viewers/readers.

Nevertheless, both Patel and Abbas saw themselves as political activists and pursued blatant agendas. Much like Hedda Hopper’s denunciation of films that depicted the ills in American society, Baburao Patel was...
belligerent about ‘unpatriotic’ films like Ashok Kumar’s superhit *Kismet* (Gyan Mukherjee, 1943) that were ‘anti-social’ in their depiction of crime. Such debates wherein a film’s value is determined within a rigidly moral frame continue to this day, as does the sense of outrage when a film like *Slumdog Millionaire* showcases India’s poverty. The extremity of such positions is evidenced in the fact that unlike Abbas, Baburao Patel, was a champion for the cause of censorship of Indian films and even campaigned for the establishment of a Hollywood-style Production Code.\(^{36}\) In the light of these details, the institution of the first official film award by the FJA in 1939 takes on a political tinge. Abbas and Patel had both initiated the trend of end-of-the-year merit lists on their respective print platforms and the awards were the logical next step. This was the first time that concrete guidelines had been publicly laid down for judging cinematic art.\(^{37}\) According to an article in *filmindia*: ‘In keeping with the motto of the Association, “Pen for Progressive Pictures,” the box-office value of the pictures is not at all taken into consideration.’ The first two parameters (out of six) were, ‘Correct reproduction and interpretation of Indian life and culture,’ and second, ‘A healthy and progressive outlook on social problems’.\(^{38}\)

**KEEPING TRACK OF THE FILM INDUSTRY**

In the late 1930s, journals like *Mirror* and *Filmland* featured regular reportage about decisions taken by the film industry’s administrative bodies such as the Indian Motion Picture Producers’ Association (IMPPA). *Sound*, in the 1940s, raised questions about governmental policy in areas like regulation of raw stock, import duties, export of film, censorship, and the safeguarding of indigenous capital interests from foreign investments. *filmindia* carried news about intra-industry manoeuvres, acquisitions, and new entrants. All this invites renewed speculation about the nature of the reading audience: who was the magazine meant to serve?

We have a sense of the community of readers who used these magazines as status symbols, learning tools, and for the pleasure of cinema. But the journals were simultaneously addressing and catering to the film industry itself. Projecting themselves as sympathetic observers of the industry, magazines like *filmindia* provided the service of keeping film professionals informed about latest developments in other studios and production centres while performing editorial/critical functions. We need to look at early film journalism not simply as a satellite industry
that fed off the generative powers of film production, but as a vital link in the circuit that allowed the industry to keep track of itself.

This link between journalism and the industry is exemplified in the working of the Film Journalists’ Association. We have seen how the FJA tried to install fixed evaluative criteria for film awards, but it also had several other functions which could not be supported without some backing from those that controlled the business—the producers. Interestingly, an article in the *Mirror* in 1939 called the very idea of Baburao Patel’s FJA ‘Illegal and Unconstitutional’ because no proper invitations were sent out to invite members. The key question raised by this correspondent was about representative authority. Did the proposed FJA claim to speak for the entire country or was it limited to the Bombay Presidency? The article stated: ‘None of the brethren journalists of the other provinces were invited nor were their wishes consulted in the matter and hence the right of this bogus body to speak on behalf of their brethren and All India, is preposterous and amounts to an uncalled for insult to journalists of the other provinces.’

The resentment that the regional journalists felt towards Patel and the FJA’s clout was not unjustified. That same year, the important Indian Motion Picture Congress (IMPC) was held in Bombay to bring together different sections of the film industry together and assess the past, present, and future of cinema in the subcontinent. Of all the issues raised at this major event, one question was insistently brought up—the problem of ‘irresponsible journalism’. The rapid mushrooming of film journals was a concern for many of the speakers at the IMPC who felt that an unrestricted proliferation of journals would amplify the prevalent malpractices of scandal-mongering and blackmailing. Resolution XXV of the IMPC said: ‘This Congress views with alarm the considerable harm done by those cinema-magazines who produce irresponsible criticisms of pictures and requests the Central Board of Governors of the IMPC to take effective steps by withdrawing their support to such magazines as they tend to produce harmful effects on the Cinegoing public, especially in the mofussils’ (Motion Picture Society of India 1940: 9).

This resolution was amended on K.A. Abbas’ intervention to say the following:

The Congress recognizes the need for a larger measure of cooperation between Film Journalists and the film industry with a view to the proper development of the vocation of Cinema Criticism and film journalism. This Congress requests the Central Board of Governors of the IMPC to
take steps to cooperate with the responsible organization of the film journalists, in checking the influence of an irresponsible section of the film members.

The message was clear. Those not aligned with the FJA were likely to be penalized. Posing as the ‘responsible organization of film journalists’, the FJA sought to align with the economic power centre of the industry and thus create a normative body of discourse around cinema. A Mirror editorial on 14 May 1939, astutely summed up this collusion of interests: ‘The irony of it all was that, while on the one hand there was this constant attack on black-mailers and scandal mongers, the very person who has to his credit the “pioneering” of this sort of journalism was the confidant of the people behind the Film Congress.’

The allusion was very obviously to Baburao Patel. This ‘irony’ was at the base of the relations between the film industry and sections of the journalism industry. Despite the vehement protests at the IMPC, it is evident that the two networks worked symbiotically. While journalism needed a productive subject around which to constantly churn out content, the industry needed a publicity apparatus. Film journals with their wide and dedicated readership were very attractive venues for film advertisements. Apart from full-page ads, studios also provided a range of other material like film synopses, studio news, information about latest recruits, and gossip about their own stars. Scandal reportage aided the process of star creation in a publicity model seen also in Hollywood. In a discussion of ‘publicity’, Richard Dyer (1998: 61) has noted:

This is theoretically distinct from promotion in that it is not, or does not appear to be, deliberate image-making. It is ‘what the press finds out’, ‘what the star lets slip in an interview’, and is found in the press and magazines.... In practice, much of this too was controlled by the studios or the star’s agent, but it did not appear to be, and in certain cases it clearly was not.

Baburao Patel was the undisputed king of scandalous insinuation and his brand of star gossip often piqued spectatorial interest in a new release, but he also had the dubious distinction of being whipped by irate actresses for spreading malicious rumours.

Returning to the personal career trajectories of Abbas and Patel, we find other clues as to the nature of the relationship between certain journalists and the film industry. Around 1936, Abbas started writing publicity material for Bombay Talkies Studio on a freelance basis even as he was reviewing films. His professional ties with the industry deepened
as he wrote his first screenplay, *Naya Sansar* (N.R. Acharya, 1941) for Bombay Talkies and went on to write and direct several films alongside his journalistic career. Baburao Patel had started his film career as a publicity man. He conceptualized publicity campaigns for studios like Sagar Film Company, Krishna Film Company, and Saroj Movietone in the 1930s (Patel 1981: 127). He also tried his hand at screenwriting, production, and direction. No doubt these roles complicated their status as film critics. At the same time, they each used their print platforms to have public conversations with industry insiders and also offer a range of services. Abbas provided detailed advice on a range of topics from how to publicize films to how to counter sectarian forces in the industry. Film magazines initiated short story contests which often culminated in winning entries getting a screenwriting contract. Again, *filmindia* ran classifieds for those that wanted to advertise their availability as actors.

It was no coincidence that the expansion of film journalism paralleled the years when the new talkie studios consolidated their position. The strengthening of the studio system in Bombay drew its momentum from certain networks of class, education, and aspiration which were shared by the formative years of film criticism in India. Bourgeois entrepreneurs like Himansu Rai were not only bent on making a success of the movies but worked towards establishing their professions as culturally and morally wholesome. Bombay Talkies, New Theatres, and Rajkamal Kalamandir were studios that were invariably on Abbas and Patel’s ‘best films’ lists and it is hardly surprising that they also worked hardest to address the ascendant middle-class’s anxieties about film culture as contagion. Producers like Rai Bahadur Chuni Lall (MPSI) invested in careful publicity campaigns that were meant to demonstrate a marked shift in studio recruitment policies. Print advertisements and interviews in fanzines highlighted the fact that a new breed of film actresses were college-educated and from ‘respectable’ families. These concerns were shared by journalists like Patel who saw themselves as spokespersons of the industry. Representative is the tone of an editorial in *filmindia* titled ‘Pimps and Prostitutes?’: ‘The charge of sexual licentiousness has repeatedly been levelled at the film artistes—as if rakes and spendthrifts and profligates are not found among any other class of people! If there are such people in the studios, there are also those with sterling unblemished character, dutiful sons and daughters, loving wives and devoted mothers, loyal husbands and affectionate fathers’ (Figure 7.7).

At the same time, Patel and Abbas perpetuated their own celebrity status through trenchant critique, and often found themselves in
adversarial roles vis-à-vis sections of the film industry. According to Subhash Rele, ‘[s]o formidable was Baburao Patel that if he chose to condemn a film, it flopped’.46 There are accounts of Patel being stalked, threatened, and even stabbed by producers and distributors for
unfavourable reviews. It is another matter that many of these stories were circulated by Patel himself, for in order to ‘serve as a spokesperson for fan power it was essential that the editor not be perceived as a dupe of the moguls’ (Crafton 1994: 483). Nevertheless, it is true that Abbas lost his job as film editor due to pressure from producers and that both Chandulal Shah and V. Shantaram withdrew advertising from filmindia for a while.47

AN UNEVEN LEGACY

The complicated dual status of film journalists as insiders and outsiders, allies and adversaries cannot be stressed enough. Historians of Indian cinemas have to work against partial, fragmented archives and often it is the film journals of the period that become primary portals to the past. The journals that are available to us today have been through various accidental, biased or motivated processes of selection and preservation. Thus, the present over-reliance on a magazine like filmindia is understandable but potentially misleading.48 The existence of camps and cliques within the journalism fraternity and the direct links with particular studios and producers have decided the ways in which some companies and stars were subsequently excluded or underplayed in these journals. This in turn has guided the ways in which film historians have assessed the significance of individuals and organizations. The propagandistic power of the media has also been felt in the way in which institutions of the state have deemed certain films more worthy of archival preservation and restoration than others. Early film journalism worked not only to make some players more visible but also laid down the parameters for assessing a film’s worth. The legacy of these ideological efforts is visible today in the insidious manner in which a handful of early studios (for example, Bombay Talkies, Prabhat Studios, and New Theatres) continue to attract academic attention and several other popular and successful studios (Ranjit Film Company, Saroj Movietone, Prakash Pictures, Saraswati Cinetone, and Huns Pictures) remain undocumented. Abbas had personal and professional ties with both V. Shantaram and Bombay Talkies; Patel made no bones about his rivalry with Chandulal Shah of Ranjit Film Company. It will not be an exaggeration to suggest that these relationships and rivalries have left their traces in the ways in which we access the history of Bombay cinema. By mapping this specific node of filmic networks and cultural labour, I have tried to
draw attention to the current task of the film historian which is to question both historiographic absence and access.

The rise of film journalism as an organized critical apparatus in the 1930s is crucial to any exploration of the film industry and its publics. Staging themselves as public intellectuals, both Abbas and Patel laboured to shape the future of the Bombay film industry. They did this by creating an aesthetic, social, and political context within which the spectator was to receive the filmic text and all its paraphernalia. In this project they were ably helped by a culturally and financially influential section of the production world which harboured dreams of a ‘respectable’ national cinema. These new public men, the new film critics, definitively brought cinema into the domain of public discussion. The close connection between film and print that was established in these years might also help us interrogate the sites and movements of cinema as affect. Many historians have sought to understand how print culture configured new politicized spheres of public opinion, civil society, and active citizenship. If we try to intuit the secret promise held out by figures like Patel and Abbas, we might be able to map the modes in which cinema constructed specific imaginings of the modern city and its possibilities.

NOTES

1. From *Bombay Chronicle*, 1937: ‘Sir, Are the footpaths of Bombay not public thoroughfares? ... [I was] directed by a “White Employee” of the stores to move away. I would certainly do no such thing. I made him understand that the footpath was not his backyard’ (M.K.V., 13 January); ‘Sir, With the approach of the coming elections, the city is humming with activity.... But may I ask, what are the Muslim leaders doing? Are they satisfied with the qualifications of the candidates put up by the Muslim League Parliamentary Board or to be more exact by Mr. Jinnah and his lieutenants ...?’ (‘Muslim Graduate’, 9 January); ‘Sir, I have learnt from an authentic source that the Government have decided to sell all the Back Bay plots including those fronting Marine Drive without imposing any restriction as to the height of the buildings erected thereon’ (Mustafa, ‘Letters to the Editor’, 7 January).

2. I follow *filmindia*’s editor, Baburao Patel, in his idiosyncratic usage of lower case letters for the title of his magazine.

3. The Lumière Brothers exhibited the first ‘cinematographe’ films at Bombay’s Watson’s Hotel on 7 July 1896.

4. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy (1980: 117) report: ‘A Bombay trade paper asked Gandhi for a message of congratulation to the film industry on its anniversary and received this reply from the Mahatma’s secretary: ‘As a rule
Gandhi gives messages only on rare occasions—and these only for causes whose virtue is ever undoubtful. As for the Cinema industry he has the least interest in it and one may not expect a word of appreciation from him’ (1939). K.A. Abbas’s letter to Gandhi was printed in *filmindia*, October 1939.

5. There were women journalists in Bombay at the time but we have little record of their lives or work. We have some names, like Clare Mendonca who wrote for *The Times of India* and Frene Talyarkhan, but little else is archivally available.

6. The earliest Hollywood film magazines were the *Motion Picture Story* and *Photoplay*, both launched in 1911. These initial magazines mostly comprised short stories and capitalized on the growing attractions of the film star. Donald Crafton notes that by 1930 an entire parallel industry had developed, ‘an industry based on Americans’ movie craziness’. See Koszarski (1994: 193) and Crafton (1994: 480).

7. S. Natarajan (1962) and M. Chalapathi Rau (1968) do not mention film journalism at all in their studies of the place of journalism in the life of the nation state; R. Parthasarthy (1989: 345) mentions film writing in one line as a new employment opportunity; R.E. Wolseley (1964: 68) carries a brief section on the film critic.

8. Refer to Prakash (2008) for a serious study of a tabloid, even though *Blitz* was not a specialized film journal; Rachel Dwyer (2004) looks at a much later fan magazine phenomenon, *Stardust*; T.M. Ramachandran’s ‘Film Journalism in India’ is a highly subjective view of the history and present state of film journalism in the country from a journalist’s perspective.

9. Unarguably one of the most definitive and dynamic cultural movements of the time, the Progressive Writers’ Movement was anti-imperialist and left-leaning in its politics. Many of the Progressive writers decided to live and work in Bombay and enthusiastically embraced the film industry. There is no doubt that their presence influenced the form and aesthetics of Hindustani film. K.A. Abbas was a member of the movement along with others like Krishan Chandar, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Kaifi Azmi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Ali Sardar Jafri, Majaz, Shahid Latif, and Ismat Chughtai.

10. A quick comparison of the description of the two papers in colonial indexes of the 1940s gives us the state’s acknowledgement of this difference. *Bombay Chronicle* is characterized as, ‘The leading English political critic of Government. Pro-Congress and rightist. Has wide influence ...’, while *The Times of India* is described as ‘[t]he leading English daily of Western India. Moderate and well balanced views. Very influential’. Compiled from ‘Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals Published in India during the year 1942,’ in Home Department File No. 45/1/44-Poll (I) and ‘Guide to Prominent Newspapers and Periodicals in English and Indian Languages published in British India and Indian States’ (1944 edition), in Home Department File No. 33/35/44-Poll (I), National Archives of India.
11. The designated days for the two weekday pages sometimes had to be changed during the 1940s due to extended coverage of the World War II, the mounting heat of the Indian freedom struggle, and increasing incidents of communalism and curfews.

12. For long, these pages remained untitled but since 1940 the two weekday pages started carrying specific headings: ‘Mainly About Motion Pictures’ (Indian) and ‘Film Fare for the Week’ (Hollywood).

13. An anonymous journalist from Bombay Chronicle explains this by telling readers that ‘the views expressed in “Contributed” articles are not necessarily those of the journal. Usually, they are by studio publicity agents. Let them know how the intellectuals feel about it’ (Bombay Chronicle, 14 July 1937).


15. ‘This Man Fought Lone Battle for Democracy: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington at New Empire, Is Frank Capra’s Latest Achievement’, Bombay Chronicle, 10 February 1940.

16. ‘Here is that Speech! Cut Out from the Film, it Can Be Read in Print’, Bombay Chronicle, 3 February 1940.


18. ‘India: Such a Thing’, Time, 3 November 1941.

19. Panna Shah picked filmindia from a selection of 12 journals for a fanzine survey. Her choice was dictated by the observation that ‘[filmindia] is one of the best got up fan magazines, has been in existence probably the longest, and is read by a large number of people—it boasts of a monthly sale of about 32,000 copies. Besides being one of the few Indian fan magazines sold in Western countries ...’ (1950: 145).


22. The legendary actor Dev Anand, remembers: ‘[W]hen I first came to Bombay looking for a break in the movies, somewhere within me lurked a desire to meet the man and have a look at this magician who meant the Indian movie industry to me. [Baburao Patel] made and unmade stars. He established or destroyed a film with just a stroke of his pen. That much power he wielded then.’ See N.D. Sharma, ‘Over 1200 Intellectual Elite Led by Chief Justice Give Baburao Patel a Standing Ovation! Platinum Jubilee Celebrated with Rare Eclat!’ Mother India, December 1979, pp. 23–35, esp. p. 27.


25. Curiously, the editors of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (1999: 39) reveal a parallel prejudice. The very first entry in the *Encyclopedia* is on Abbas, whose production company, Naya Sansar (1951) has ‘provided India’s most consistent representation of social-realist film’. Baburao Patel, on the other hand, gossip-monger and writer of bombast, is not mentioned at all except in a phrase (ibid.: 141) as director of Maharashtra Film Company’s *Kismet* (1932). Abbas additionally gets separate entries for his social-realist films like *Dharti-ke-Lal* (1946), *Shehar aur Sapna* (1963), and *The Naxalites* (1979).

26. This hypothesis is most clearly enunciated in the following exchange between a reader and Patel in the ‘Editor’s Mail’ section of *filmindia*, March 1952:

Q: Is it my bad luck that I was born in a poor family?
A: I was born in a poor farmer’s family and moreover belonged to a gipsy community. I was brought up in a step-mother’s home and had scanty education. Did all that stop me? Leave your home town and neither your family nor your environment will stop you from going ahead.


28. Interestingly, Saadat Hasan Manto has pointed to a key contradiction in Patel’s use of English which still remains a source of acute anxiety to many who aspire to be fluent in the language and its attitudes: ‘[Patel] had a certain style and his use of language was different from others. He was familiar with both English and American usage and he had a natural talent for playing with words.’ And yet: ‘He was a peasant.... His accent was atrocious; he sounded as if he was speaking English in Marathi and Marathi in street Bombayese’ (2008: 554–5).

29. Dev Anand remembers his college days in Lahore where ‘all the University boys in the campus used to carry copies of *filmindia* along with their textbooks. It was their Bible.’ See N.D. Sharma, ‘Over 1200 Intellectual Elite Led by Chief Justice Give Baburao Patel a Standing Ovation! Platinum Jubilee Celebrated with Rare Eclat!’ *Mother India*, December 1979, pp. 23–35, esp. p. 27. N.D. Sharma also says: ‘*filmindia* was a status symbol with the college students’ (ibid.: 23).

30. In fact, Hazareesingh has shown how papers like *Bombay Chronicle* had a dispersed readership which cannot be ascertained through sales figures as copies were rapidly shared and circulated by buyers (2007: 110).


32. A number of commercially successful British and Hollywood films of the 1930s were set in India and depicted the ‘natives’ as exotic and essentially ‘other,’ and the colony as mysterious and bountiful. These films were mostly thrilling adventure tales with British officers and gentlemen doing their civilizational duty in the Indian colony. They have been retroactively named ‘empire films’ as they served to emphasize the necessity and glory of imperialism.


35. Statistics as per the Handbook of the Indian Film Industry (1949).

36. The Motion Picture Production Code, popularly known as the Hays Code after its creator, Will Hays, was a set of censorship guidelines that governed Hollywood film production between 1930 and 1968. It became notorious for its strictly defined restrictions on depictions of ‘immorality’ on screen including scenes involving murder and prostitution.

37. The Bengal Film Journalists’ Association was formed in 1937 but restricted membership to journalists working out of Bengal. It also instituted an awards system.

38. See ‘The Best Picture of 1939? Film Journalists’ Association of India Prepares for a Country-Wide Blind Ballot’, February 1940, p. 33. Adhikar, directed by P.C. Barua, was adjudged the ‘Best Film of 1938’. The Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema tells us that it was a ‘melodrama about lineage and property questions’.


40. In 1939 filmindia says there were 85 film journals published across the Indian subcontinent; in 1943 there were 44 film journals in Bombay alone, as per data in Home Dept, F. No. 45/1/1944–Pol (I), ‘Statement of Newspapers published in the Province of Bombay during the year 1943’, National Archives of India, Home Department Files.

41. Saadat Hasan Manto has reported that ‘Babu Rao wrote such venomous pieces about [Shanta Apte] in Filmindia that, being the true Maharashtrian that she was, she burst into Babu Rao’s office one day, dressed in her riding gear, and whipped him six or seven times with her riding crop’ (2008: 558).

42. Abbas wrote several scripts for Raj Kapoor, including Awara (1951), Shri 420 (1955), Jagte Raho (1956), and Bobby (1973).

43. Himansu Rai was the founder of the famous Bombay Talkies studio built in 1934. He produced several popular Hindustani talkie films like Achhut Kanya (Franz Osten, 1936) and Kangan (Franz Osten, 1939) and was married to the ‘First Lady of the Indian Screen’, Devika Rani Chaudhuri.

44. New Theatres, Calcutta, was a leading talkie studio of the 1930s and was set up in 1931 by B.N. Sircar. Rajkamal was set up by V. Shantaram in Bombay in 1942. Shantaram’s 1946 film Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani was a critical and popular hit written by K.A. Abbas.

45. Editorial, filmindia, May 1940, p. 4. For a detailed discussion of the anxiety about the respectability of the profession, especially the social status of actresses, please see Neepa Majumdar (2009).

47. Announcement on the Saturday film page, Bombay Chronicle, 31 August 1940: ‘Mr. K.A. Abbas is no longer conducting this page as he has been transferred for some time to the general news department of the Chronicle.’ Patel’s claim stands verified by the lack of advertising by Ranjit and Rajkamal for some time.

48. As Neepa Majumdar pointed out in a paper presented at the 2004 conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, ‘filmindia is the most easily accessible and complete film magazine from the period’. This has made it the first, and often the only, stop for many film researchers.

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