



Sight and Sound

2026

Sight and Sound



Bambaiwali, 1941

A film in Hindi by Homi Wadia, this innovative still graphically represents the conflation of the Nation with the iconic figure of the protective and nurturing woman/mother.

Photos courtesy: National Film Archive of India, Pune

Cover Image

Durga Khote, c. 1930s

Durga Khote reigned supreme in the film world for a period of 50 years as director, producer and, of course, actress. She was one of the first to break through middle-class orthodoxy and enter the male bastion of films. Her unique career started around the tail end of the silent era with the film *Farebi Jaal* in 1931. Her first talkie was the bilingual *Ayodhyecha Raja* (Hindi and Marathi), produced in 1932. She acted in over 200 films and as early as 1937, was one of the first women to produce and direct a feature film (*Saathi*). She was influenced by Avantika Bai Gokhale who helped put feminist issues onto the nationalist agenda. For over 25 years Durga Khote ran her own company that made short films, advertisements and documentaries.

Photos courtesy: Omar Khan, San Francisco, USA



Centre for Women's Development Studies

An autonomous research institute supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

Curation & Research: Malavika Karlekar & Indrani Majumdar

Design: Sundaresh

Sources: Holidays <https://documents.doptcirculars.nic.in>

Moon phases: <https://www.timeanddate.com>

Sight and Sound

The year 1912 marked a turning point in Indian cinema. Gopal Torney produced *Pundalik*, the country's first feature film, released on 18 May 1912. A year later came Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (3 May 1913) that laid the foundation of Indian filmmaking. Phalke's challenge was recruiting actresses, since acting was considered disreputable for women. A reason was the belief that exposure to the camera could harm one's health. Prostitutes who answered Phalke's advertisements failed to meet his expectations of beauty, and in the end, he cast a young male cook, Anna Salunke, in the lead female role. While the film was a success, for his next production, *Mohini Bhasmasur*, Phalke finally found female actors, Kamlabai Gokhale, then only thirteen, and her mother, Durgabai Kamat. However, as both were ostracised by conservative Brahmin community, the practice of men playing women on screen continued for some time. Some filmmakers like Nataraja Murlidhar, brought in European actresses, while in south India, early female performers, such as Marien Hill, who took the screen name Vilochana, and Mrs Aelliot, were of Anglo-Indian origin.

Though women were often denied acting roles, they were cast as part of dance sequences. When women initially appeared as actors, they were from more liberal Bene Israeli and Baghdadi Jewish communities. Lighter complexioned stars like Ruby Meyers (Sulochana), Patience Cooper, Pramila (born Esther Abrahams), Rose Ezra, and later Nadira (Florence Ezekiel) became icons of the silent era. They were soon joined by Gulab, Bibbo, Gohar, Zubeida, and Lalita Pawar, then known as Amboo. The heroes of this period were often *pehelwans*, their muscular physiques meeting the requirements of mythological and stunt films popular then. Among early studios, Dwarkadass Sampat's Kohinoor Film Co. (1919) stood out, producing the largest number of silent films and introducing stars such as Raja Sandow, Gohar, Sulochana, and Fatma Begum—India's first woman director. The 1920s were liberal years: on-screen intimacy, even kissing, was common.

Sulochana emerged as India's first sex symbol, paired opposite Dinshaw Billimoria in *Anarkali* and *Heer Ranjha*.

With the arrival of the talkies, Indian cinema took a step forward. Ardeshir Irani's *Alam Ara*, which premiered in Bombay in 1931, was promoted as “All living, breathing, 100% talking drama” and became an instant hit. Soon after, in 1932, V. Shantaram directed *Ayodhya Raja*, also based on the legend of Harishchandra. This time, the female lead, Taramati, was played by Durga Khote (see cover image), a young Brahmin woman from Kolhapur. Her success helped lend respectability to women in films and paved the way to their eventual acceptance. The 1930s saw the professionalization of the industry with the establishment of major studios in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, and Poona. Visionary filmmakers like Himanshu Rai and Devika Rani, V. Shantaram, V. Damle, and S. Fatehlal brought people from different religions, regions, and castes together, making cinema an outstanding example of collaboration and cultural harmony. P.C. Barua's *Devdas* (1935), in both Hindi and Bengali, established the love triangle as a lasting theme. Shantaram's socially conscious works, *Amar Jyoti* (1936), *Duniya Na Mane* (1937), *Aadmi* (1937), and *Padosi* (1941), explored justice, women's rights, and communal friendship. Later works, such as *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946) and *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (1957) cemented this legacy. Meanwhile, *Achhut Kanya* (1936), directed by Franz Osten and starring Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar, addressed the issue of untouchability.

Despite these advances, until the mid-20th century, women in popular cinema were largely visualised through three archetypes: the sacrificial mother, the victimised sister, or the westernised woman who needed to be tamed. With the coming of Independence, as the nation reshaped its identity, filmmakers began questioning these narrow roles and explored new possibilities.

Indrani Majumdar



Nadia, 1935

'Fearless' Nadia - of Anglo-Greek parentage - was discovered by the Wadia Brothers and appeared in a series of stunt films made in Bombay. She was known as Hunterwali, and featured in fantasy versions of Hollywood gangster films as well as action movies such as *Tarzanland* that were very popular in the 1930s and 40s. Nadia in jacket, breeches and riding boots, cracking her whip over many a man's back, swinging from one chandelier to another, running the length of a moving train, leaping from a tree onto a horse, or entering a lion's cage bare-handed became the motifs that soon could not be dissociated from her. Not once did she use a double for her feats.

Courtesy: Cinemaya, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
				<i>New Year's Day</i>		<i>Hazrat Ali's Birthday</i>
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
			<i>Makar Sankranti Magha Bihu/ Pongal/</i>			
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
					<i>Sri Panchami/ Basant Panchami</i>	
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<i>Republic Day</i>						

December

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

February

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

January 2026



Sadhona Bose in *The Court Dancer*, 1941

Well-known stage and screen actress of the 1930s and 40s, Sadhona Bose became a household name with her role as Morjina in *Ali Baba*. Her husband, Modhu Bose played the role of Abdullah. Sadhona later acted in the English film *The Court Dancer*. What made her a very special actress was her ability to both sing and dance proficiently. She was skilled in both Kathak and Manipuri styles of dancing and worked with Anna Pavalova.

Courtesy: Cinemaya, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 <i>Guru Ravi Das's Birthday</i>	○ 2	3	4	5	6	7
8	● 9	10	11	12 <i>Birthday of Swamy Dayananda Saraswati</i>	13	14
15 <i>Maha Shivaratri</i>	16	● 17	18	19 <i>Shivaji Jayanti</i>	20	21
22	23	☾ 24	25	26	27	28

February 2026

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

March

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				



Ruby Myers (Sulochana) with Dinshaw Billimoria

Here, Ruby Myers (Sulochana) and Dinshaw Billimoria are seen in a still from one of the several films in which they were popular romantic partners. They acted together in films such as Mohan Bhavnani's *Wildcat of Bombay* (1927) and R. S. Choudhury's *Anarkali* (1928). From very different backgrounds – Myers was a Baghdadi Jew and Billimoria, a Parsi, the duo soon became among the highest paid actors of the silent era. Though cinema was regarded as an unsuitable profession for most Indian women, Ruby Myers took a Hindu stage name so as to be more acceptable to the audience. Interestingly her non-Indianess did not stand in the way of her becoming a spectacular success.

Photo courtesy: Omar Khan, San Francisco, USA

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	○ 3 <i>Holika Dahan Dolyatra</i>	4 Holi	5	6	7
8	9	10	☾ 11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	● 19 <i>Chaitra Sukladi/ Gudi Padava/ Ugadi/ Cheti Chand</i>	20 <i>Jamat-UI-Vida</i>	21 Id-ul-Fitr
22	23	24	25	☾ 26 Ram Navami	27	28
29	30	31 Mahavir Jayanti				

February

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

March 2026



Kanan Devi in *Vidyapati*

Born Kananbala, she made her debut as a child artiste in *Joydev* (1926). She was among the early singing stars and her style was instrumental in producing some of New Theatres' biggest hits. P.C. Barua was unable to cast her as Paro in *Devdas*, but Kanan Devi played the lead in *Mukti* (1937). Her outstanding performance in *Vidyapati* (in Bengali and Hindi, 1937) made her a star. She remained with New Theatres till 1941 and thereafter began working bilingually on her own in Hindi and Bengali films. Perhaps one of the most popular film songs ever was her rendering of 'Duniya ye duniya hai Toofan Mail' in *Jawab*.

Courtesy: National Film Archive of India, Pune

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 ○	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	● Good Friday	11
Easter Sunday	13	14	15	16	●	18
12		Vaisakhi/ Visu/Meshadi (Tamil New Year's Day)	Vaisakhadi(Bengal)/Bahag Bihu (Assam)	23	●	25
19	20	21	22	23	●	24
26	27	28	29	30		

March

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

May

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

April 2026



Devdas, 1935

Saratchandra Chattopdhyay's novel was first brought to the screen in 1935 by P.C. Baruah with the legendary K.L. Saigal portraying the tragic anti-hero. Barua's treatment slotted the film into a new genre. Instead of depending on the written form, he transformed it into the visual medium, avoiding stereotypical clichés, melodrama and loaded dialogues. In an orthodox, rigid society, Devdas is portrayed as a character without any heroic dimension. Baruah rightly focuses on his weaknesses and his humanity by the use of natural and well-modulated dialogues and underplayed acting. This complete departure became Baruah's hallmark. With *Devdas*, Baruah became a top-ranking filmmaker and New Theatres, a major studio.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
○ 31					○ 1 Buddha Purnima	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Birthday of Guru Rabindranath Tagore
● 10	11	12	13	14	15	16
● 17	18	19	20	21	22	● 23
24	25	26	27 Id-ul-Zuha (Bakrid)	28	29	30

April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

May 2026



Sant Tukaram, 1936

Sant Tukaram (Marathi) is an outstanding achievement of the early sound period of Indian cinema. The relationship between Tukaram and his wife Jijai are portrayed most convincingly. As far as she is concerned, a husband must provide for the family, yet her devotion to Tukaram is in no way less than those who regard him a saint. Gauri (above) plays the role of Jijai with such natural flair that it becomes hard to believe she had joined the Prabhat Film Company as a mere menial. With Keshav Rao Bhole's outstanding music, *Sant Tukaram* smashed all box office records, particularly in Maharashtra, and went on to become the first Indian film to win an award at the Venice Film Festival in 1937.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	●	8	9	10	11	12
14	●	15	16	17	18	19
21	●	22	23	24	25	26
					Muharram	
28	29	○	30			

June 2026

May

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

July

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



Duniya Na Mane (Kunku in Marathi), 1937

The protagonist, Nirmala (reminiscent of Nora in *A Doll's House*), aroused vehement protests from the orthodoxy. Having been tricked into marrying an old widower, this young woman gathers courage to assert her individuality by refusing to consummate the marriage, leading the husband to commit suicide. Though left as a widow, she was set free with her dignity duly restored. Shanta Apte's (above) performance as the heroine displayed a freshness and conviction that was ahead of its times, establishing her as a 'rebel star'. She even sings a combative song in English ('In the world's broad field of battle... Be not like dumb, driven cattle') written by H.W. Longfellow.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7 ●	8 ○	9	10	11
12	13 ●	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 ●	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28 ○	29	30	31	

Rath Yatra

July 2026

June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

August

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29



Achhut Kanya, 1936

Directed by Franz Osten, this Hindi film belongs to the genre of the 'classic'. It made Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar the most famous screen pair of the times. In a period of political and social unrest, the pertinent theme of tragic love between an untouchable girl and a Brahmin youth touched a chord of sympathy amongst the audience.

Photo: National Film Archive of India, Pune

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	☾	6	7
9	10	11	●	12	13	14
16	17	18	19	☾	20	21
23	24	25	26	27	○	28
			Milad-un-Nabi or Id-e-Milad (Birthday of Prophet Mohammad <i>Onam or Thiru Onam Day</i>)		Raksha Bandhan	
						15
						Independence Day
						22

August 2026

July

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

September

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			



Shakuntala, 1943

V. Shantaram's first film for his newly-formed company Rajkamal Studios was *Shakuntala*, adapted from Kalidas's classic. It was a huge success and ran for 104 weeks in Bombay alone. Shantram married its heroine Jayshree even while he remained married to his first wife.

Photo: National Film Archive of India, Pune

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	● 4	5
6	7	8	9	10	● Janmashtami	11
13	14	15	16	17	18	● 19
20	Vinayaka Chaturthi/ Ganesh Chaturthi	21	22	23	24	○ 25
27	28	29	30	31		

September 2026

August

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

October

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



Khurshid

Born in Lahore, Khurshid acted in over thirty films in pre-Partition India. She found her way to Calcutta in 1931 – her mother was a Bengali Christian - and was briefly with Madan Theatres. Khurshid was Meena Kumari's older sister and both girls played a significant role in supporting their family. Interestingly, while the younger, and clearly far more successful sister, chose to take on a Hindu identity, Khurshid did not. Till 1942, she commuted between the two cities, and though Khurshid was both a singer and an actor, her early films did not make much of an impact. She came into her own after her move to Bombay where she acted opposite the legendary K.L. Saigal in Bhukt Surdas and Tansen. After her highly successful Papeeha Re, Khurshid migrated to Pakistan.

Photo courtesy: Omar Khan, San Francisco, USA

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
					Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday	●
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
						●
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
●	18	19	20	21	22	23
Dussehra (Saptami)	Dussehra (Mahashtami)	Dussehra Dussehra (Mahanavmi)				
25	○	26	27	28	29	30
	Maharshi Valmiki's Birthday					
						31

September

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

November

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

October 2026



Bal Gandharva

Narayan Shripad Rajhans, popularly known as Bal Gandharva (1888 - 1967) was a singing star who, in the first half of the twentieth century, excelled in feminine roles on the Marathi stage. He started his career with Kirloskar Natak Mandali in 1905. Bal Gandharva won the hearts of his audience with his very first performance as Sakuntala at *Miraj* in 1906. All of 18 then, he never looked back. Bal Gandharva introduced the ideal of the new woman - tastefully dressed, hair coiffed, well groomed, uncluttered with ornaments; sarees and jewellery designed by him were custom made. He wore ten-yard sarees for extra effect and was perhaps one of the first fashionistas of cinema costumes. Bal Gandharva played the role of women in over 27 original plays and 5000 stage shows.

From So Many Cinemas: The Motion Picture in India by B.D. Garga

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	☾ 2	3	4	5	6	7
8	● 9	10	11	12	13	14
Diwali (Deepavali) <i>Naraka Chaturdasi</i>	<i>Govardhan Puja</i>		<i>Bhai Duj</i>			
15	16	☾ 17	18	19	20	21
<i>Pratihar Sashthi / Surya Sashthi (Chhat Puja)</i>						
22	23	○ 24	25	26	27	28
		Guru Nanak's Birthday <i>Guru Teg Bahadur's Martyrdom Day</i>				
29	30					

November 2026

October

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

December

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



Meera aka Meerabai (in Tamil and Hindi), 1945

A film about the life of Meera (*Meerabai*), it featured the noted singer M.S. Subbulakshmi. Kalki wrote the songs for this film. Originally made in Tamil, it became a very big hit in Hindi as well. In the Hindi version, Sarojini Naidu introduced Subbulakshmi to the North Indian audience.

Courtesy: National Film Archive of India, Pune

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		☉ 1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	● 9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	☽ 17	18	19
20	21	22	23	☽ 24 <i>Christmas Eve</i>	25 <i>Christmas Day</i>	26
27	28	29	30	☽ 31		

December 2026

November

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



Centre for Women's Development Studies

An autonomous research institute supported by the
Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)
25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi-110001
Phone +91 11 23345530/ 23365541 Fax +91 11 23346044
E.mail cwds@cwds.ac.in
Website <https://www.cwds.ac.in>