# MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY OF FILM STUDIES IN INDIA - CHARTING THE GROWTH AND A WAY FORWARD

# Abstract

This paper conducts thorough а examination of the development of film studies in India, commencing with the early days of Indian cinema and tracing the evolution of this discipline as a distinct field. Recognizing the contemporary challenges that confront film studies, this paper investigates issues related to the impact of digital technologies and evolving viewing habits on various aspects of film, including production, distribution, and consumption. It emphasizes the necessity for innovative approaches within the realm of film studies.

As the paper advances, it explores the expansion of film studies as an academic discipline within Indian universities and institutions. It also delves into the establishment of film schools and the significant contributions made by scholars, filmmakers, and critics who have played pivotal roles in shaping the discourse surrounding Indian cinema.

In essence, this comprehensive examination of the trajectory of film studies in India underscores the ongoing importance of scholarly inquiry and engagement in order to gain a deeper understanding of the evolving cinematic landscape in India and its global significance.

In conclusion, this paper serves as a guide for comprehending the dynamic growth of film studies in India and offers a forward-looking perspective on how this discipline can adapt and evolve to address the challenges and opportunities arising from the ever-changing world of cinema.

**Keywords:** Film studies, Cinema Studies, Film Technology, Globalisation, Digitization, Film Research, Film Academics.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Film studies is a formalized academic field that concentrates on the in-depth examination of movies, the evolution of cinema, and the broader cultural context of film, primarily influenced by film theory. It diverges from filmmaking and the technical aspects of production, resembling the scholarly approach taken with art or literature. This discipline encompasses not only the scrutiny of a film's content but also delves into its structure, storytelling, methods, stylistic features, and the historical, socio-political, economic, and cultural milieu in which it exists. In other words, it is an academic discipline that focuses on analyzing, interpreting, and understanding films as cultural artifacts and artistic expressions. (D, 2020)

Film studies help to uncover the intricate layers of filmmaking – from the visionary directors who shape narratives, to the talented actors who breathe life into characters, and the myriad of artists and technicians who collaborate behind the scenes. Beyond mere entertainment, films are windows into our shared dreams, fears, and aspirations, offering insights into different societies, historical periods, and diverse perspectives and rightly so, Film studies are not just about watching movies; it is about unravelling the layers of meaning woven into each frame, understanding the context that shapes cinematic creations, and developing a critical eye to appreciate the subtleties that often escape casual viewers.

The main key focus areas that fall under the gambit of film studies are film history, analysis of film narratives, understanding film theories, the various genres and styles of films, the societal and cultural context in which the films were made, how the audience received a particular film, the aesthetics and the cinematography of a film, and lastly, how the industry works and the business of it.

This article aims to map the trajectory of film studies in India with respect to how it has grown so far, where it presently stands and what futuristic trends can one expect to see and is witnessing in the field of film studies.

# **II. HISTORY OF FILM STUDIES - AN OVERVIEW**

1. Global Context: The development of film technology and the inception of motion pictures mark a relatively recent phase in human history. A scholarly approach to the world of cinema emerged shortly thereafter. The earliest substantial writings on film and cinema began to surface in the wake of the medium's creation, and during the 1920s, the first historical accounts of cinema were published, alongside the launch of some critical journals. Towards the conclusion of the 1930s, the notion of incorporating film appreciation into school curricula was put into action in the UK, the US, and other regions. A fundamental aim behind introducing popular media such as film into classrooms was to educate students in their discernment of the sounds and visuals that constituted their everyday experiences.(Kuhn, 2019)

Efforts to incorporate the study of films and cinema into higher education commenced before the inclusion of film education in schools. In the United States, for instance, a course titled 'Photoplay Composition' was introduced at Columbia University in 1915, marking one of the initial endeavors in this direction. However, it wasn't until the

1950s that the concept of establishing a new academic discipline, complete with its own body of knowledge and formal presence within academia, gained broader recognition. The genesis of film theory and the notion of film studies as an institutionalized field initially emerged in France during the late 1940s when the filmologie movement advocated for the rigorous examination of cinema. In the 1950s, there were several attempts to christen this field; one suggestion was 'cinematology'. Nevertheless, by the 1970s, 'film studies' had become the most widely accepted term for this discipline.(Kuhn, 2019)

During this era, film studies had a dedicated focus on treating popular cinema with the utmost gravity, with the objectives of generating fresh insights, establishing a methodical approach to theory-building, and fostering a critical examination of the structures, aesthetics, and topics within Hollywood cinema, notably. Beyond Hollywood, the discipline also explored various film movements and national cinemas, encompassing the avant-garde works from the early years of Soviet cinema and the films associated with the German Expressionism movement of the 1920s.(Kuhn, 2019)

"What Is Cinema?" is an English translation of the writings by André Bazin, a critic from Cahiers du cinéma, and it was released in 1971. This publication laid the foundation for significant contributions in the realm of medium specificity, realism, and the study of cinema. During the 1980s, a more confrontational branch of film theory and analysis emerged, generating methods for interpreting Hollywood films that went against the conventional grain and focused on symptomatic readings. This trend became notably connected with the journal Screen, and it sparked controversy within the field.(Kuhn, 2019)

Starting in the 1990s, there has been a noticeable shift in focus away from Hollywood and towards global cinema, often coupled with a heightened interest in area studies and modern language studies. The advent of the digital revolution, along with media convergence and the emergence of digital cinema, has led to the resurgence of fundamental inquiries within film studies. Questions like "What is cinema?" and "What is the connection between cinema and reality?" have returned to the forefront, and new discussions have arisen concerning the potential 'demise' of cinema. These discussions have been invigorated by fresh perspectives from film philosophy.(Kuhn, 2019)

2. Indian Context: The evolution of film studies in India is a fascinating journey that reflects the country's rich cinematic heritage and changing social, cultural, and technological landscapes. Film as an academic subject in India has a history that dates back several decades. The formal study of film began to gain recognition as an academic discipline around the mid-20th century. The early years (1920s-1940s) of Indian cinema saw a lack of formalized film studies. Films were primarily viewed as entertainment, and discussions around them were mostly limited to popular culture. However, some intellectuals and writers did recognize the potential of cinema as an art form and started writing critical analyses of films. The next decades from the 1950s to 1970s saw the establishment of film institute's that marked a significant turning point in the evolution of film studies in India. The Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) was founded in 1960 in Pune. FTII played a crucial role in shaping film education in the country, offering courses on various aspects of filmmaking and film analysis. It contributed to the growth

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of a more structured approach to studying cinema. The early 1980s to 90s saw film gaining academic recognition even before it got industry status from the government. During this period, universities began offering courses and programs related to film studies, and the study of cinema became a legitimate academic discipline. Scholars started to explore Indian cinema from different perspectives, including historical, cultural, sociopolitical, and aesthetic. The opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s led to increased exposure to global cinema. This exposure influenced the study of cinema, introducing students and scholars to a broader range of cinematic traditions and theories. The postmodern turn in academia also influenced film studies, leading to explorations of narrative structures, intertextuality, and identity in Indian cinema. In 2001, film fraternity got the industry status from the government and simultaneously, the advent of digital technology transformed filmmaking and film consumption in India. This shift also impacted film studies by providing new avenues for research and distribution. Online platforms, digital archives, and streaming services made it easier to access and study a wide array of films from India and around the world. Contemporary film studies in India often take an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from fields such as sociology, anthropology, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and more. Scholars analyze films not only as artistic products but also as reflections of society, culture, and ideology. Indian cinema's role in shaping and reflecting cultural narratives, identities, and political debates continues to be a key focus of research.

While Hindi cinema (Bollywood) often receives significant attention, film studies in India also explore regional cinemas in languages like Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, and Malayalam. These regional cinemas have distinct storytelling traditions and cultural contexts, contributing to the diversity of film studies in the country. Furthermore, Film festivals like the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), Mumbai Film Festival (MAMI), and numerous regional festivals provide platforms for showcasing and discussing films from India and abroad. These events serve as spaces for scholars, filmmakers, critics, and enthusiasts to engage in meaningful discussions about cinema. Overall, the evolution of film studies in India reflects a growing recognition of cinema as a complex and influential art form. It has moved from a focus on entertainment to a multidisciplinary field that encompasses aesthetics, culture, history, politics, and more, contributing to a deeper understanding of both Indian and global cinema.

# **III. EVOLUTION AND THE PRESENT STATUS OF FILM STUDIES IN INDIA**

Film research and studies are getting the academic recognition that they demand. Since films take from the social and cultural context of the real world and also shape the way the audience thinks and understands social, cultural, and political phenomena through them, it becomes very important to study what is being shown on screen and also to explore how can be improved more and that is where the role of the scholars, academicians, theorists, and researchers come into play. Film studies have also embraced interdisciplinary approaches, connecting cinema with fields such as literature, history, gender studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies which has allowed for a deeper exploration of the socio-cultural implications of Indian cinema. The onset of the digital era has also opened up new avenues for research and study. Online streaming platforms, digital archives, and online databases allow for easier access to a wide range of films and scholarly resources. This has influenced film consumption habits and has started to shape new areas of research within film studies. Scholars are now exploring the impact of digital platforms on film distribution, audience behavior, and content creation.

- 1. Evolution in Film Formats: Film formats in India have evolved significantly over the years, driven by advancements in technology, and changes in audience preferences. One of the most significant changes was the transition from shooting on celluloid film to digital formats wherein Digital filmmaking has become the norm due to its costeffectiveness, flexibility, and ease of post-production. With the advent of digital filmmaking, higher resolutions like Full HD (1080p) and 4K (2160p) have become standard which results in sharper images and more detailed visuals on screen. Various aspect ratios have also been experimented with wherein, filmmakers have gone beyond the traditional 4:3 or 16:9, such as the widescreen Cinemascope ratio (2.39:1), to create different visual experiences. The use of visual effects and computer-generated imagery (CGI) has become more prevalent, allowing filmmakers to create spectacular scenes and impossible visuals that were once difficult to achieve. Furthermore, Virtual production techniques, where digital environments and characters are integrated with live-action footage in real-time, have started gaining traction in India as well, enabling filmmakers to visualize complex scenes during production. With the growth of digital platforms, interactive and immersive storytelling experiences have emerged, where viewers can make choices that affect the narrative direction, blurring the lines between film and video games. While still in its nascent stages, VR and AR technologies are being explored to create immersive experiences and alternate realities for audiences. Filmmakers are exploring experimental formats, such as found footage, mockumentaries, and screen recordings, to create unique and unconventional storytelling experiences. With the rise of digital streaming platforms, the creation of content is now specifically tailored for online consumption - web series, short films, and episodic content have gained popularity, influencing storytelling formats. The popularity of platforms like TikTok (now banned in India) and Instagram has led to the rise of short-form content, influencing how stories are told within very limited time frames. Stories are being integrated across different media, such as films, web series, games, and more, creating a more cohesive and expansive storytelling universe.
- 2. Evolution in Storytelling: Storytelling through films in India has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting changes in societal norms, technological advancements, and creative approaches. Indian cinema content has significantly moved beyond traditional linear storytelling structures. Non-linear narratives, multiple timelines, and complex plot structures have become more common, allowing for more intricate and layered storytelling. While Indian cinema has a rich history of melodrama and musicals, filmmakers are now exploring a wider range of genres, including thriller, science fiction, horror, fantasy, and/or an amalgamation of two or more genres. This has led to a more diverse cinematic landscape with varied storytelling styles. New-age narratives are increasingly focused on depicting and addressing topics such as gender inequality, caste discrimination, mental health, and more, contributing to meaningful conversations, awareness, and normalization of them in society. The content nowadays has characters that are more nuanced and multi-dimensional. Filmmakers are delving deeper into character backgrounds, motivations, and internal conflicts, making the audience more emotionally invested in their journeys. Along with this, there's a noticeable shift towards stories centered around female protagonists. These films often challenge stereotypes and

explore the experiences and perspectives of women in different societal contexts and also set them in the context of globalization, urbanization, and changing lifestyles. Films explore the tensions between tradition and modernity, rural and urban life, and the influence of technology. Apart from this, regional cinemas in India have gained prominence in the past few years, telling stories rooted in specific cultures and languages. This has enriched the storytelling landscape by bringing forth a wide range of narratives and perspectives and audiences are accepting of this.

- 3. Emergence of Short Narratives: Short films have gained popularity for their ability to convey impactful stories in a concise format, often offering unique perspectives and experimental narratives. It is evolving day by day as digital platforms and technology continue to influence the way stories are shared and consumed. The rise of digital platforms and social media has provided a convenient and accessible way for filmmakers to showcase their work. Platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, and later the surge of OTT allowed short films to reach a wide audience without the traditional constraints of theatrical releases. Short films offer filmmakers more creative freedom due to their shorter duration and mostly require lower budgets compared to feature-length films. This has democratized filmmaking to some extent, allowing emerging filmmakers to tell their stories with limited resources. This has allowed filmmakers to focus on niche or unconventional themes that might not find a place in mainstream cinema, such as providing a platform for discussions on topics like gender roles, mental health, LGBTQ+ rights, and more. Short narratives have become a platform for emerging talent, enabling young directors, writers, actors, and technicians to showcase their skills and make their mark in the industry. It also helps them collaborate with other filmmakers on anthology projects that feature multiple short films under a common theme.
- 4. Film Institutes: India is home to some of the best film institute's where one can easily delve into the film academia and learn both the technical and the theoretical aspects of it. One of the oldest and most renowned film schools in India, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) offers courses in various disciplines including direction, cinematography, sound design, editing, and more. Named after the legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray, SRFTI offers postgraduate programs in various specializations such as film direction, cinematography, sound recording, and editing. Founded by filmmaker Subhash Ghai, this private film school offers a range of programs including bachelor's and master's degrees in filmmaking, acting, animation, and more. While known for its design programs, NID also offers a Film and Video Communication program that focuses on visual storytelling, film production and last but not least, AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi offers programs in filmmaking, animation, and media production at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- **5. Diversity of Research:** Indian film studies have become more diverse, with scholars exploring not only Bollywood but also regional cinemas in languages like Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Malayalam, and more. With the coming up of actors and technicians from regional industries to the mainstream Hindi film industry and the resultant amalgamation of all the artists from all over the country, irrespective of the language, there has been growing interest among film students and scholars in analyzing films from different linguistic and cultural contexts. They are examining the unique narratives, aesthetics, and cultural nuances of films produced in different states and languages. In addition to this,

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scholars and students are also exploring global cinema, by engaging with international film theories, and global film festivals which are providing them with a platform for diverse cinematic traditions. However, India also has had some premier film theorists of its own, who contributed and continue contributing to theoretical frameworks that address the Indian psychology and social context. Besides being a legendary filmmaker, Satyajit Ray also wrote extensively on cinema. His writings, including essays and critiques, offer insights into his own filmmaking process and reflections on cinema as an art form. A film critic and scholar, Chidananda Dasgupta was one of the early proponents of film studies in India. He co-founded the Calcutta Film Society and wrote extensively on Indian and international cinema. An author, film historian, and curator, Amrit Gangar has written extensively on Indian cinema and experimental films. His work delves into various facets of Indian cinema, including alternative and regional cinema. A professor of cinema studies, Ranjani Mazumdar has written extensively on Indian cinema, particularly focusing on urban experiences, the representation of women, and issues of modernity and globalization. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, a prominent film scholar has contributed to film studies through his work on Indian cinema, media theory, and cultural studies. He coauthored the influential book "Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema." Madhava Prasad's work focuses on the intersection of cinema, politics, and society. His writings delve into issues of ideology, representation, and regional cinemas in India. Another prominent scholar Ravi Vasudevan's research encompasses areas such as early cinema, film archives, and urban culture. He has contributed significantly to the study of Indian cinema's historical and archival aspects. An academic and author, Gayatri Chatterjee has explored gender and feminism in Indian cinema. Her work sheds light on the representation of women and the evolution of female characters in Indian films. A film critic and theorist, M.K. Raghavendra's work spans Indian and international cinema. He has written extensively on various aspects of film theory and aesthetics. Sudhir Mishra, a filmmaker and writer has penned thought-provoking articles and essays on cinema, touching on both his own experiences as a filmmaker and broader industry trends.

- 6. Film Archives and Libraries: India is home to several film archives and libraries that play a crucial role in preserving, documenting, and promoting the country's rich cinematic heritage. These institutions are vital for researchers, filmmakers, students, and enthusiasts who want to explore the history, culture, and evolution of Indian cinema. National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune, is the premier institution responsible for collecting, preserving, and archiving Indian films. It holds an extensive collection of films, posters, photographs, scripts, and other related materials. Film Division Library, Mumbai, operated by the Government of India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, this library holds a vast collection of films, documentaries, and other audiovisual materials. Satyajit Ray Preservation Project, Kolkata, established by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in collaboration with SRFTI aims to preserve and restore the films of Satyajit Ray. Apart from this, several states in India have their own film archives and libraries dedicated to preserving regional cinema and cultural history. For example, the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy in Thiruvananthapuram is known for preserving Malayalam cinema.
- **7. Film Festivals and Cultural Events:** India hosts a variety of film festivals that celebrate and showcase both national and international cinema. These festivals provide platforms for filmmakers, actors, and film enthusiasts to come together, exchange ideas, and

celebrate the art of filmmaking. It also provides opportunities for scholars, students, and enthusiasts to engage with new films, interact with filmmakers, and participate in discussions. International Film Festival of India (IFFI), Goa, is one of the oldest and most prestigious film festivals in India. It showcases a diverse selection of films from around the world and often hosts prominent filmmakers and actors as guests. IFFI also includes retrospectives, master classes, and panel discussions. The Mumbai Film Festival (MAMI), organized by the Mumbai Academy of Moving Image, is a prominent event that features a wide range of international and Indian films, including premieres and critically acclaimed works. Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF) is an annual event held in Kolkata that screens a mix of contemporary world cinema and classic films. It often pays tribute to a notable film personality and celebrates cinema's cultural impact. The International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala (IDSFFK) focuses on documentary and short films, providing a platform for filmmakers to showcase their nonfiction works. It also hosts discussions and workshops on documentary filmmaking. Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF) focuses on showcasing films from various countries, including mainstream and independent cinema. It aims to promote a deeper understanding of different cultures through cinema.

# IV.POST-COVID STATUS OF FILMS AS AN INDUSTRY AS WELL AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT IN INDIA

1. As Industry: The pandemic and its societal impacts prompted filmmakers and scholars to explore themes related to isolation, resilience, health, technology, and social change. Film studies programs may have focused on analyzing how cinema responded to and reflected the pandemic experience. Moreover, Film production faced significant challenges due to safety protocols, lockdowns, and restrictions on gatherings. This could have affected practical filmmaking components of film studies programs, requiring innovative solutions for hands-on training.

The film industry itself underwent transformations, with changes in distribution models and audience behavior. This could have influenced discussions within film studies about the evolving landscape of filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition. Documentaries and films capturing the pandemic experience emerged. These works could have become subjects of analysis within film studies programs, exploring how filmmakers interpreted and represented this historical moment.

2. As An Academic Subject: The pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to online learning and remote teaching. Film studies programs, like many other academic disciplines, transitioned to virtual classrooms, video conferencing, and online resources. This digital shift highlighted the importance of digital literacy and multimedia skills in film studies. Students and scholars had to navigate online resources, virtual screenings, and digital archives, emphasizing the need for proficiency in these areas. However, this shift presented challenges in delivering hands-on practical experiences but also offered new ways to engage with content. Film festivals and screenings adapted to the digital landscape, offering online platforms for showcasing films and facilitating discussions. This made it possible for a broader audience to access films and participate in discussions, transcending geographical barriers. Furthermore, the virtual nature of events and classes facilitated global collaboration. Film studies programs could have engaged

with international scholars, filmmakers, and festivals more easily, enriching the learning experience with diverse perspectives. Some institutions also adopted hybrid teaching models, combining online and in-person instruction. This approach accommodated safety concerns while allowing for some level of practical engagement.

# V. WAY FORWARD

As technology continues to evolve, the study of digital cinema, virtual reality, augmented reality, and other emerging forms of visual storytelling is becoming more prominent. Scholars are exploring how these technologies impact narrative structures, viewer engagement, and the overall cinematic experience. Some of the futuristic ideas that are coming up and delving into film studies are:

- **1. Globalization and Diversity**: The globalization of media consumption means that film studies are likely to continue to expand its focus on global cinema. As scholars and students engage with films from diverse cultures, there will be an increased emphasis on understanding cross-cultural influences and representations.
- 2. Transmedia Storytelling: With media convergence blurring the lines between different forms of media, film studies might delve into transmedia storytelling, where narratives unfold across multiple platforms such as films, TV shows, video games, and interactive experiences.
- **3. Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Film studies could further integrate with other academic disciplines, such as neuroscience, data science, and environmental studies. This interdisciplinary approach might lead to innovative ways of analyzing films and understanding their impact on various aspects of society.
- **4.** Environmental Concerns: Given the growing emphasis on environmental issues, film studies might explore how cinema represents ecological themes, sustainability, and the relationship between humans and the natural world.
- **5. Intersectionality and Identity:** Film studies could continue to examine how cinema represents various identities, including gender, race, sexuality, and disability. This might involve deeper analyses of representation, inclusivity, and the role of cinema in shaping identity politics.
- 6. Virtual Learning and Online Platforms: The integration of virtual learning platforms and online resources could enable wider accessibility to film studies. This might involve the creation of online courses, virtual film screenings, and digital archives for research.
- **7.** AI and Computational Analysis: As artificial intelligence and computational tools advance, film studies might incorporate data-driven analysis to uncover patterns in filmmaking, audience reactions, and cinematic trends.
- 8. New Forms of Production and Distribution: Film studies may need to adapt to changes in how films are produced and distributed, including the rise of independent filmmaking, streaming platforms, and alternative exhibition formats.

**9.** The future of film studies is influenced by a dynamic interplay between cultural shifts, technological innovations, and academic inquiries. Film studies will continue to adapt and evolve to provide insights into the changing landscape of visual storytelling and its impact on society.

# **VI. CONCLUSION**

Film studies offer a rich and multidisciplinary approach to understanding one of the most influential forms of artistic expression in modern society. It combines elements of art, history, sociology, psychology, and more to provide a comprehensive perspective on the world of cinema.

Currently, universities and colleges worldwide provide a multitude of film studies programs and courses, which can be standalone programs or integral parts of media studies. Film studies don't have a standardized curriculum, as it has evolved and taken shape through scholarly examinations, cinematic analyses, and contributions of academics, film critics, and industry professionals. Nonetheless, the foundational components essential for students encompass diverse aspects like different film movements, cinematic eras, genres, recurring themes, analytical approaches, the language of film, production techniques, filmmaking processes, and various theoretical frameworks.

Film studies courses are beneficial not only for individuals aspiring to work in the film industry but also for those pursuing subjects like philosophy, cultural studies, or sociology, who possess a profound interest in cinema and seek to delve into it from these interdisciplinary perspectives. Additionally, the practice of filmmaking as a form of academic research has gained widespread acceptance within the field.

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