CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS: EVOLUTION OF CINEMA IN DELHI

Cinema in Delhi, like any cultural expression, is a juxtaposition of varied influences and manifestations. Some of its basic features could be traced in Sanskrit drama whose legendary origin goes back to Brahma, the creator of the universe; others could be discovered in the kaleidoscopic folk media that has kept dramatic traditions alive over the centuries. Later, the interaction with Western ideas and technology also seems to have made a tremendous impact in shaping cinema's differing traits and components in Delhi. All this perhaps bears testimony to the fact that evolution of cinema in Delhi has been undoubtedly affected by its past history. The present Chapter thus makes an attempt, first and foremost, to throw light on the history of Delhi and thereafter traces the evolution of cinema in Delhi.

Historical Portrait of Delhi

Delhi has been the capital of India since prehistoric times. The Delhi triangle, a sixty-square-mile area bounded by the Aravalli hills on the west and south and the Jamuna river on the east, occupied a strategic position in upper India. It commanded the 115-mile wide corridor that, on the one hand, separated the Deccan plateau and the

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Thar desert from the Himalayas and, on the other, separated the Punjab and the lands of the Northwest from the rich unbroken flood plain of the Ganges. Touching the Jamuna at its northernmost point of year-round navigation, the Delhi triangle encompassed the major break in transportation between the two great river systems of the sub-continent, the Ganges and the Indus.

The first appearance of the name Delhi is impossible to pinpoint. According to one tradition a certain Raja Dilipa, mentioned in the Vishnu Purana, founded a city named Dilli before the time of the Mahabharata. A second tradition names Raja Dillu or Dhilu as the founder of Dilli or Dhilli sometime around the beginning of the first millennium A.D. According to the most popular theory, however, the first city was built about the middle of the eighth century A.D. by the Tomar Rajputs and was called Dilli or Dhilli or Dhillika. The earliest documentable use of the name is in an inscription of A.D. 1170 that refers to the capture of Dhillika. An inscription dated 1276 mentions Dhilli of the Hariyanaka region and another of 1316 names Dhilli of Paritana. Delhi is the modern Hindi equivalent of the Sanskrit Dhilli or Dilli.

The first evidence of settled habitation in the area dates to c. 1000 B.C. Excavations in 1955 at a site near Purana Qila (Old Fort) turned up shards of painted gray pottery, but further exploration during 1969-73 failed to discover a regular painted gray ware strata. According to local tradition this was the site of Indraprastha (Indra's District), the capital of the Pandavas, the great heroes of the Mahabharata. The arguments put forward—that painted gray ware had been found at other sites associated with the Mahabharata, that the epic mentioned Indarpat as one of the prasthas or districts
demanded by the Pandavas, that a Sanskrit inscription of A.D. 1329 placed a nearby village in the district of Indraprastha and that a village named Indarpat occupied the site until about 1900 — are no more than suggestive. They cannot support the statement that Indraprastha was the first city of the area.

A strata containing northern black polished ware and punch-marked coins and dated c. 300 B.C. is evidence of a settlement during the Mauryan period (322-185 B.C.). In fact, the recent discovery on a rock in the nearby hills of a shorter version of the Minor Rock Edicts establishes an unmistakable tie between Delhi and the great Mauryan Emperor Asoka (c. 269-232 B.C.). Coins, pottery, terracotta sealings, and figurines indicate settlements at the site during the Sunga (c. 185-173 B.C.), Kushana (c. A.D. 48-220), Gupta (c. A.D. 320-510), post-Gupta (c. A.D. 500-700), Rajput (c. A.D. 700-1200) and Sultanate (A.D. 1206-1526) periods.

A clan of Rajput warriors, the Tomars, settled in the Aravalli hills south of the Delhi triangle toward the end of the first millennium A.D. An early ruler named Surajpal, is said to have constructed a large reservoir called Surajkund in the area. Scattered here and there about the reservoir are ruins of houses, temples, walls, dams, and other buildings — evidence of a Tomar settlement of sorts.

The Tomar ruler Anangpal, a shadowy figure mentioned in a much later history of Prithviraj, is said to have built the first identifiable city in the Delhi area. *Lal Kot* (Red Fort) is the first site with remains substantial and extensive enough to be called a city. Neither the dates for Anangpal nor the date of the city are known with certainty but
Cunningham's estimate of A.D. 1052 seems reasonable. A little over a century later (according to an inscription dated A.D. 1163-64) another clan of Rajput warriors, the Chauhans, defeated the Tomars. The most famous Chauhan ruler, Prithviraj or Raj Pithora, established a new city for his followers by expanding Lal Kot. He raised a great wall that enclosed not only the old city but a much larger area besides. Called Qila Rai Pithora (Fort of Rai Pithora), the city is thought to have been founded around A.D. 1180 in response to attacks from the northwest by Muhammad Ghuri.

Prithviraj was given little time to enjoy his new capital. In 1192 he met the Afghan warriors of Muhammad Ghuri outside Delhi and was soundly defeated. In 1193 Qutb-al-Din Aibak, the Turkish slave general left in charge of Muhammad's army, captured Delhi. The Muslim conquerors, however, did not build a new city. Content to settle within the walls of Qila Rai Pithora, Qutb-al-Din and his immediate successors confined their building activities to renovation and reconstruction within the Rajput city. From the materials of twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples, Qutb-al-Din erected a great congregational mosque called Quwwat al-Islam (strength of Islam). He also founded the famous minaret, Qutb Minar (Qutb's Minaret), that was finished by Shams al-Din Iltutmish, his successor.

Until the reign of Mu'izz al-Din Kaiqubad (1287-90), the Muslim rulers of northern India kept their headquarters in Qila Rai Pithora.

Siri, the first complete Muslim city of the area, was finished by Ala al-Din Khalji (1296-1316) in about 1303. An enthusiastic builder and one of the greatest Muslim rulers
of India, Ala al-Din erected or renovated a great many structures in Qila Rai Pithora. Siri, the new city, began as military camp on a plain north of the old capital, a response to the threat of Mongol invasion. Having successfully defended the area, Ala al-Din walled the camp and ordered the building of permanent structures.

Ghiyas al-Din Tughluq (1320-25), founder of the Turkish dynasty that followed the Khaljis, threw up a walled enclosure called Tughluqabad (Home of the Tughluqs) on a site about 8 km. east of Qila Rai Pithora. Erected soon after his accession to the throne in 1321, this fortified city was divided into a citadel or palace-fortress for the ruler, his family, and retainers; an area for the houses of nobles and others; and a commercial sector laid out in a gridiron pattern. In one corner of the city Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-51), Ghiyas al-Din's successor built a palace-fortress named Adilabad (Home of Justice).

Muhammad, however, returned to the area around the original Rajput city for the major building project of his reign. Since the Mongols had plundered the heavily built-up area between Qila Rai Pithora and Siri several times, Muhammad ordered a wall to be erected around the suburbs separating the two cities. The enclosure, called Jahanpanah (World-Protector), soon became a thriving center of urban life. During this period Muhammad remained with his family and followers in Tughlugabad. In 1328-29 he led a large part of the Muslim population of the city to Devagiri (renamed Daultabad) in South India and spent over two years there. He returned in 1330-31 and was followed in 1335-37 by the rest of his North Indian followers.
Firuz Shah (1351-88), the last Tugluq ruler of note and a great builder, founded his new capital Firuzabad (Home of Firuz) in an area remote from the southern sites of the previous centers. Begun c. 1354 on the banks of the river Jamuna, this city appears to have covered a large area. Although no walls now remain, the city is said to have been about twelve miles in diameter and to have included the entire site of Shahjahanabad. Kotla Firuz Shah (Palace of Firuz Shah), near the Akbarabadi gate of Shahjahanabad and one of the few substantial structurers remaining, was the palace-fortress of the emperor. After the death of Firuz in 1388, the Delhi area fell on hard times. Timur, the great central Asian ruler, invaded North India in 1398-39 and plundered, sacked, and burned Siri, Jahanpanah, and Firuzabad.

Two Afghan dynasties, the Sayyids (1414-51) and Lodis (1451-1526), followed the Tugluqs to the throne of Delhi. After the invasion of Timur, however, Delhi no longer commanded a state of any size. The North Indian Empire of the Khaljis and Tugluqs shrank under the Sayyids to an area around Delhi of about two hundred square miles. Khizr Khan (1414-21), founder of the dynasty, defeated the last Tughaq ruler and established himself in the imperial palace in Siri. He spent most of his reign battling his neighbours, defending, and trying to enlarge, the boundaries of his small kingdom.

Mubarak Shah (1421-33) succeeded his father and spent the early years of his reign putting down rebels and rejuvenating Lahore, a city which had yet to recover from the effects of Timur's attack. On 1 November 1433 Mubarak Shah laid the foundations of a new city called Mubarakabad (Home of Mubarak) in the Delhi area. Mubarak was assassinated just over three and one-half months later and, as a result, not much work
appears to have been done on the new capital. Since no archeological remains have been found at the site (south of Shahjahanabad along the banks of the Jamuna), there is good reason to suppose that the city was never finished.

The building activities in the Delhi area of the Lodis, the Afghan dynasty that followed the Sayyids, were confined almost entirely to tombs. Bahlul Lodi (1451-89), founder of the dynasty, ruled his small North Indian principality from Delhi. Like his Afghan predecessors, Bahlul had to contend with insubordination and rebellion among his tribal followers and with attacks and invasions from the rulers of surrounding kingdoms. In 1506, in order to govern more effectively, Bahlul's successor, Sikander Lodi (1489-1517), decided to shift his headquarters to Agra. From there the Afghan leaders could deploy their forces to greater advantage in dealing with predatory Mewatis, rebellious zamindars, and ambitious rajahs.

The Mughals (1526-1739), the dynasty that succeeded the Lodis, displayed an intense interest in architecture. The emperor Babur (1526-30) laid out several gardens during his short four-year reign while Akbar and Shahjahan erected some of the most magnificent examples of Muslim architecture in India. Humanyun (1530-56), Babur's son and successor, founded a modest city called *Din Panah* (Refuge of Religion) on the banks of the Jamuna in 1533. Using bricks and stone from the remains of Siri, the walls and gates of the city were put up in about ten months. No trace of Humanyun's city remains, however, since Sher Shah Sur (1540-45), his successor, plundered and razed the settlement.
In 1540, having defeated Humanyun and driven him and his Mughal followers from India, Sher Shah began a new city called Sherghah (Sher's Place) or Delhi Sher Shah and located near the site of Din Panah, this city appears to have covered a considerable area. Sher Shah's palace fortress, known later as Purana Qila, contained a mosque and the tower from which Humayun, after he had defeated the Surs and captured the city, tumbled to his death. Islam Shah (1545-54), Sher Shah's son and successor, built a palace-fortress called Salimgarh (Residence of Salim) for his family and retainers on the banks of the Jamuna north of Sherghah. Erected sometime between 1546 and 1550 and only three-quarters of a mile around, the fort was intended, it seems clear, as a residence for Islam Shah and not as the nucleus of a new city.

In 1639, the Mughals began work on another city in the Delhi area. In the northern sector of the triangle, on a piece of ground overlooking the river, the emperor Shahjahan founded a completely new city called Shahjahanabad (Abode of Shahjahan). When finally completed in 1648, this new center contained two imposing structures of red sandstone — the imperial palace — fortress and the Jami’ Masjid — and a number of very fine but smaller buildings of marble, sandstone, and brick. Shahjahanabad served as the Mughal capital from 1648 until the effective demise of the empire in 1739.

The last city in the area was built by the British. On 12 December 1911 King George V announced that the center of government would shift from Calcutta, longtime capital of British rule in India, to Delhi. Lord Hardinge (1910-16) chose a site to the southwest of Shahjahanabad, and Edward Lutyens and Herbert Baker drew up plans for a magnificent city that took years to complete. The wide, carefully planned streets
of New Delhi, the great monuments, and the imposing government buildings spoke eloquently of the imperial impulse to dominate and order.

### TABLE 3.1

**THE CITIES OF DELHI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Builders</th>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lal Kot</td>
<td>Anang Pal</td>
<td>Tomar Rajputs</td>
<td>c.1052 A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Qila Rai Pithora</td>
<td>Prithviraj (c.1170-92)</td>
<td>Chauhan Rajputs</td>
<td>c.1180 A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Siri</td>
<td>Ala al-Din Khalji (1296-1316)</td>
<td>Khalji Turks (1290-1321)</td>
<td>c.1303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Jahanpanah</td>
<td>Muhammad ibn Tughluq (1325-51)</td>
<td>Tughluq Turks</td>
<td>c.1325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Firuzabad</td>
<td>Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-88)</td>
<td>Tughluq Turks</td>
<td>c.1354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Din Panah</td>
<td>Humanyun (1530-55)</td>
<td>Mughals (1526-1739)</td>
<td>c.1533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Shergah</td>
<td>Sher Shah (1540-45)</td>
<td>Sur Afghans (1540-55)</td>
<td>c.1540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Shahjahanabad</td>
<td>Shahjahan (1628-58)</td>
<td>Mughals</td>
<td>1639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. New Delhi</td>
<td>Lord Hardinge (1910-16)</td>
<td>British (1803-1947)</td>
<td>1911</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Beginning of Cinema

Historically, cinema came to India from the West during the close of the last century when the brothers Louis and Auguste Lumiere unveiled their *cinematographe* in the basement of the Grand Cafe in Paris on 28 December, 1895. For barely six months after the Paris demonstration, on 7 July, 1896, Indian audiences too were introduced to the moving picture. Incidentally, this very day and date also led to the first cinema advertisement in India in *The Times of India* as 'the marvel of the century', 'the wonder of the world', 'animated photographic pictures' and 'life-sized reproductions'.

To begin with, it was the city of Bombay where the moving pictures were introduced initially. The Bombay showings followed the pattern of their Western counterparts. They began at Watson’s Hotel, now Esplanade Mansions, at the admission price of Re. 1/- But the success and popularity of these shows was such that additional showings had to be started from 14 July, 1896 at the Novelty Theatre, now known as Excelsior Cinema, in Bombay. The Lumiere large stock of small films like *Arrival of a Train*, *Sea Bathers*, *London Girl Dancers*, *Watering the Garden* and *Ladies and Soldiers on Wheels* ran at Watson’s and the Novelty Theatre to full houses. By the end of July these shows which were accompanied with a music band led by one Mr. Seymour Dove came to acquire two indigenous aspects. One was reserved boxes for 'purdah ladies and their families,' the other was a broad scale of prices ranging from 25 np. for the gallery
to Rs. 2/- for Orchestra Stall and Dress Circle. This wide price range was to remain a permanent feature of Indian film exhibition, important to its future growth and range of appeal.

The Lumiere showings in Bombay ended on 15 August, 1896. But by this time the Indian audience had made it quite clear that they wanted to see more and more of this stuff and so from 4 January, 1897 there began a regular flood of imported movie shows at the Gaiety Theatre led by Mr Stewart's Vitograph, trumpeted as 'the latest scientific invention' and again, with amazing originality, as 'the wonder of the world'.

In the beginning, according to Firoze Rangoonwalla,

.... Mr. Stewart faced some unexpected competition from Signor Roberty, a self-styled American wizard showing live feats of necromancy and black art at the Tivoli, but black magic soon took a beating from black and white movie magic and the grand attraction in Bombay was The Jubilee Procession on the screen. As the blurb put it : 'to those who were unable to witness the great jubilee procession in U.K., an opportunity is offered at the Framjee Cowasjee Hall at Dhobi Talao'. At the end of the year the Tivoli itself offered 'the new improved Cinematograph' and with a 'Can Can Dance' in natural colours, too.

Thereafter, Rangoonwalla continues,

several short films followed including Mr. Gladstone's Funeral, Death of Nelson, Call on the London Fire Brigade and Scenes of the Greco-Turkish War until

some operators glanced nearer home and photographed *Our Indian Empire — Delhi, the Rome of Asia and Lucknow, Great Imambura Palace*. In 1898, Professor Anderson (with the able help of Mademoiselle Blanche) captured *A Train Arriving at Bombay Station* and *Poona Races ’98* and included them in the Christmas revels of his show called Andersonoscopograph, which he claimed to have held earlier before Her Majesty the Queen Empress Victoria. At the same time in Calcutta, Professor Stevenson’s ventures (as recorded in *Amrit Bazar Patrika*) included *A Dancing Scene from the Flower of Persia* and *A Panorama of Indian Scenes and Processions.*

Thus the rise and growth of the cinema in the West and the curiosity it aroused, did not leave India unaffected. Although these first showings mainly attracted British audiences along with some educated Indians who identified their interests and tastes with those of the British, on a few Indians the impact of these early films was invigorating. For one of them, namely, Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar, popularly known as Save Dada owned a photographic studio in Bombay in the 1880s. On seeing the Lumiere show, he immediately imported a British motion picture camera and filmed the first indigenous shorts — a specially staged bout of two wrestlers and a man training a monkey. Both were shown in the last two months of 1899. Two years later, he filmed the triumphant return of R.P. Paranjpye, an Indian student who had won special distinction in Mathematics at Cambridge University in England. The filming of this event achieved for Save Dada the honour of having made the first ‘newsreel event’ in some Indian film chronologies. This was the first of the historic and significant events that Save Dada filmed before giving up production for exhibition.

3. Rangoonwalla, *ibid.*, p. 10
The second pioneering endeavour came from F.B. Thanawalla and his Grand Kinetoscope, covering *Spendid New Views of Bombay* and *Taboot Procession*, a Muslim ceremony. In 1901, came the third, from Hiralal Sen in Calcutta, whose Royal Bioscope produced extracts from seven popular Bengali plays of the time. In 1905, J.F. Madan and his Elphinstone Bioscope Company of Calcutta created the first semblence of an industry with a regular exhibition cum production set-up.

In 1909, *Pundalik*, a story based on the life of a saint of Maharashtra, was the first attempt at making a dramatic film by R.G. Torney. But after this initial achievement, Torney did not produce anything memorable and faded into oblivion. As a result, today it is not he but his immediate successor Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, popularly known as Dadasaheb Phalke, who is celebrated as the first feature film maker of India by virtue of his film *Raja Harishchandra*.

Just as the first moving picture was screened in the city of Bombay, *Raja Harishchandra*, a four-reeler of 3,700 feature feet too was entirely filmed in Bombay and vicinity and later released in May, 1913 at the Coronation Theatre in Bombay. It was a significant coincidence that at about the same time a full length feature film on *Queen Elizabeth* was also released in the West. *Raja Harishchandra* which was based on a story from Indian mythology proved to be a great success and earned for Phalke the title of 'Father of the Indian Film Industry.' Phalke's unquestioned pioneering and fathering of the Indian feature film lie in the fact that the film was a wholly Indian

venture or Swadeshi as he preferred to call it, in keeping with the patriotic spirit of the times.

The success of Raja Harishchandra led Phalke to make more feature films inspite of many difficulties such as that of getting women for female roles. This is because the growing cinema, unlike present times, was looked down upon so much in society that even women of easy virtue refused to act in them. It is a well known fact that Phalke eventually had to take one of the stage boys, Salunke, to play the female role of Rani Taramati opposite D.D. Dabke's Raja Harishchandra. For the role of royal son, Phalke selected his own son Bhalchandra. Nonetheless, Raja Harishchandra was followed, during the next two decades, by almost a hundred other Phalke films, ranging from short items to ambitious features such as Mohini Bhasmasur, Satyawan Savitri, Lanka Dahan, Krishna Janma, Kalia Maidan, and others which were like revelations to the Indian audiences. The latter two featured his daughter Mandakini as little Krishna. She soon became a child star herself and won gold medals. Phalke being a fine craftsman all the above films were marked by technical finesse and high production values.

He thus laid the foundation of an industry in the true sense by demonstrating the economic viability of film-making in India and establishing it as a professional activity by providing the basic model for the popular film. In other words, he gave India the norms of institutionalised film-making. This is because the impact of his films was overwhelming on the audience. According to Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy,

when Rama appeared on the screen in 'Lanka Dahan', and when in 'Krishan Janama' Lord Krishna himself at last appeared, men and women in the audience prostrated themselves before the screen. This also set a trend of popular mythological films, for the first feature films to come out from Bengal in 1917 and from Madras in 1919 were both mythologicals, stories from Mahabharata. They were J.F. Madan's *Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra* and Nataraj Mudaliar's *Keechaka Vadham*. Even today mythology and tales from the epics hold for the average Indian both a vivid reality and a religious significance, a phenomenon closely associated with the psyche of Indian society.

From the beginning of cinema in India, we thus find in the words of Šāmeeduddin Mahmood

(i) a large number of foreign film teams were functioning in India;

(ii) the new medium was a sensation and it led to the opening of large number of exhibition outlets;

(iii) there was a large and regular supply of foreign-made films;

(iv) to meet the growing demand continuous efforts were made to maintain the supply of raw-material and other equipments; and

(v) with the production of first feature film in Bombay in 1913, in Calcutta in 1917, and in Madras in 1919, cinema industry in India came to be localized at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and till today continues to dominate the national scene.

These five major developments, between 1896 and 1919, according to Mahmood, heralded the emergence of a new commerce and industry, represented by:

(i) an exhibition sector;
(ii) a distribution sector;
(iii) a foreign film imports sector;
(iv) a technical imports sector (involving projection equipment, and later, raw film, cameras, studio equipment and even make-up materials); and
(v) a production sector.

A new economy was taking shape. Significantly, while production started as, and has since remained, a corporate business, exhibition and, to an extent, distribution remained individual enterprises. Also, financing of films was the only non-institutionalised and unorganised sphere of film economy. Both these were to create chaos decades later.

Unfortunately, for the period between 1896 and 1919 and a decade later, no authentic records are available for Delhi which can shed light on the initial activities related to cinema in Delhi as they are available for Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. One of the reasons for this may be that Delhi which has been the capital of India since prehistoric times and has the distinction of having several cities built one after the other by various Hindu and Muslim rulers and finally by the British was at that time reeling under political turmoil. Following the participation of Indian troops in the First War of India’s Independence in 1857, the British had deposed the titular Mughal

Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and formally annexed Delhi. Thereafter the British main effort under the Crown was to turn Delhi into a military area for stationing of British infantry and artillery. And this they did soon after because from 1859 onwards the city came to be known as the Fort of Delhi.

Prior to British rule also, the population of the city was highly mobile in character. For the city did not then boast of any important commercial or industrial development. It was only a political and cultural centre with the king as its head, and when he lost his power the city lost all its importance and a new one arose at the next political centre. Furthermore, at that time the population consisted mostly of the courtiers, the nobles and the troops of the king and when he left it for a stay of a long period elsewhere or transferred his capital, all of them followed. With them went their families and servants too. The merchants, too, had to accompany them as in their absence the brisk business in the city would reduce to nil. Bernier, the noted traveller commenting on the condition of the city, states: "The whole population of Delhi, the capital city, is in fact collected in the camp because deriving its employment and maintenance from the court and army it has no alternative but to follow them."

At the time when the city passed into the British hands - that is, in 1803 - Delhi city did not contain more than 150,000 inhabitants. During the next forty years, there was a very slow growth in the population. In 1847, the population of the city with

the suburbs was only 160,279, showing an increase of about 6.5 per cent. But the figures in the decade ending in 1868 show a decrease of the population by about 3.7 per cent. This could be due to the absence of some of the people who were expelled from the city after the Mutiny in 1857. It took some time for repopulation. In the seventies of the nineteenth century, after the introduction of railways, there was an increase of about 12 per cent.\(^9\)

In the years just before the beginning of the nineteenth century a few factories were opened on the north-western area of the city. Although this attracted the labourers from the villages and also from the contiguous provinces, it did not give definite proof of a thriving industrial centre. As the city was far away from the places of raw material, the transportation of such goods remained costly and some mills had to be closed down. Hence in 1901 the population of the city shows a slow increase of 8 per cent only. Even in the decade ending in 1911 the figures indicate a slow growth. The growth of 12 per cent in that decade was, to some extent, due to the presence of hundreds of persons who had come from the provinces to make preparations for the Imperial Durbar. On the other hand, a plague which occurred during the decade carried away many.\(^10\)

The real growth of the population in the city began only after it was declared the Imperial Capital of India in 1911. By that time, the industrial and commercial conditions also had improved, and from then onwards a steady increase of migrants flowed into the

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city. The pull exerted by the new city was very strong. It needed the services of
thousands of labourers; and they came in large numbers from the neighbouring areas. In
addition, there came in businessmen and also the Imperial Government officials who were
stationed in the former capital in Calcutta. The immigrant population in 1921 consisted
of 45 per cent of the total. Though there was a definite possibility of an increase, a
violent influenza epidemic which swept over Delhi, brought it down. At this time the city
comprised the Old Delhi City (that is, Shahajahanabad) and the New Delhi City or
Raisina. The whole area under different local bodies covered 65 square miles
approximately."

From 1921 onwards, as the city regained its importance politically, commercially
and industrially, more and more immigrants flowed in. During the decade ending in 1931
the population marked gradual increase of 47 per cent, 48 per cent of the total
population being immigrants. During the decade ending in 1941 the growth was gradual.
Even with a large number of immigrants included in it, the increase was only 5.5 per cent.
The phenomenal growth of population took place only in the decennial period ending in
1951. During this period the improvement of sanitation and health conditions brought
down the mean decennial death rate from 26.5 in 1931 to 12.6 and furthermore, there
was a great excess of immigrants over emigrants. The partition of India in 1947 brought
in a sudden wave of about four and a half lakhs of displaced persons to Delhi over-
shadowing those immigrants who had come from individual provinces for trade or for
jobs. Almost overnight the city’s population increased by 103.4 per cent. This sudden

influx of immigrants brought pressure on the living space of the city proper. Some took accommodation in the abandoned houses, some settled down in the suburbs and some in the satellite towns.\textsuperscript{12}

As already mentioned that though no authentic records are available about the beginning of cinema in the city, it is believed that there existed a few cinema houses in old Delhi by the name of Capitol (near Kashmere Gate), Elphinston (now Novelty), Gaiety Picture Palace, Majestic and Royal Cinema (now Moti). According to one view it was Jagat Narain Seth who was the founder of cinema in Delhi. He was an exhibitor who later became a distributor. He owned three cinema houses, namely Jagat, Ritz and Novelty in Old Delhi. Like all the cinema houses world over, these cinema houses too were being run as theatres till the time moving pictures came into India in the year 1896. As Delhi at this time was occupied by the British, these cinema houses mostly screened English silent films. The minimum rate of admission was four annas and highest was Re. 1/-. As in Bombay, there were separate boxes for ladies and the films were accompanied by orchestra. In some theatres they were shown as supplements to plays, concerts, or performances. Women filmgoers as compared to men were scarce. In Hindu areas mythologicals brought them out in numbers. It is believed that during Western films when a kissing scene was shown the ladies turned their heads away.

Initially cinema came to be referred as 'bioscope' by the people. With the coming of cinema, however, the old culture of Delhi declined drastically. For instance, the great \textit{musha'aras} of former days were held no more. As the character of the town changed at

\textsuperscript{12} Bopegamage, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 33-34.
the turn of the century, and it became more obviously a commercial metropolis rather than a cultural one (by contrast to Lucknow), the Delhi tradition and the Delhi language became more obscured and later people were to ask 'who is a Delhiwala?'.

To attract more and more crowd Jagat Narain Seth started a novel way of advertising films. Painted trolleys displaying scenes of the film were sent around the city with a 'Jamoora' (Clown) who told the details about the film, that is, its casting, timings etc. with the help of a 'Bhopu' (loudspeaker without electricity).

To begin with, the Delhi theatres like its counterparts had one show in the evening. But with the passage of time most theatres apparently had two or more showings a day. We learn that prices were usually in three or more classes, often 2 or 3 annas to 2 rupees. The highest price in some theatres might have been 3 rupees for "box" or "sofa" seats. The films shown often had subtitles in two or more languages. Witnesses tell us that at each subtitle a rumble swept over the theatre, as people who could read proclaimed the words for those who could not. One or two theatres had official readers known as "demonstrators" who stayed near the screen and explained the film.

Exhibitors of films during those days had to undergo many problems with local authority such as the police, the custom, the postal, telegraph, municipal etcetera. It is

believed that these people along with others had to be admitted free to avoid trouble. Exhibitors almost never saw films before booking them. Distributors said this was not "blind booking" because the exhibitors was told the titles, and could get information from trade papers. Exhibitors usually paid a much larger "fixed hire" for prints. In cases where the exhibitor could be trusted, a percentage arrangement was worked out.

Interestingly though Delhi theatres started by screening English silent films what emerged most unmistakably was the growing preference for Indian films in spite of their shortcomings. Some exhibitors wanted Indian films but could not get them or afford them because of their exorbitant rates.

Apart from political, the other reasons which may have hampered and delayed the growth of cinema activity in Delhi could be its geographical location. This is because all the three places where cinema gradually grew simultaneously, i.e. Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were on the sea surface, and, therefore, enjoyed a semi-tropical climate. In early days as the shooting of the films was mainly confined to outdoors under steady sunshine, these places freely offered these facilities with attractive backgrounds giving splendid geographical substitutes for every phenomenon required from the sand to the water. These places, being cosmopolitan cities, further offered primary advantages of cheap labour and supply of all type of persons in plenty to meet the requirements of extra artists. Persons in the show world, being 'glamorous', are accustomed to easy life. The semi-tropical climate of these places provided ample scope to them to lead such a life.
The beautiful things like sea-beach etc., created additional possibilities and extended invitation for outdoor shootings. The climate of these three places, being moderate, further helped the process of the film industry where high temperature is not required.\textsuperscript{14}

Further in spite of the fact that the raw material required in the motion picture industry, to begin with, was always imported, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras grew up to be important centres of business. All the major companies that distributed the raw-materials had their head offices at Bombay and branches at Calcutta and Madras. These places, therefore, continued to take the prompt delivery of the goods without any delay and without incurring extra charges for transport etc.\textsuperscript{15}

These cities also got due patronage of their own people which was missing in the case of Delhi which was mostly occupied by the British or floating migrants from other places as mentioned earlier. All these factors thus helped in the early growth of the motion picture industry in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. So much so that these places provide till today the major portion of the returns on the pictures at the box-office to the producers.

\textsuperscript{14} R.K. Jain, \textit{The Economic Aspects of the Film Industry in India}, Atma Ram and Sons, Delhi, 1960, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{15} Jain, \textit{ibid.}, p. 52.
It may, however, be inferred that cinema activity eventually picked up in Delhi when the British transferred the capital from Calcutta to Delhi in the year 1911 and decided to build a new capital thereafter. A new city with the name of New Delhi was thus planned by Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker to be built on a large site southwest of Old Delhi, i.e., Shahjahanbad. This city of imposing dimensions was formally inaugurated in 1931 which coincided with the release of the first Indian talkie feature film *Alam Ara* at Bombay's Majestic Cinema. Incidentally, at Delhi also, it is believed that it was the Majestic theatre where the first screening of *Alam Ara* took place.

*Alam Ara* was a fantasy based on a popular drama and featured Zubaida, Master Vithal, Prithviraj Kapoor and W.M. Khan. It was produced and directed by Ardeshir Irani of Imperial Film Company. The film was 10,000 feet long and was an instant success. Soon after, various other ‘firsts’ also began to be claimed such as the first talkie in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, etc.

At the national level, however, the talkie did not immediately supersede the silent film. On the contrary, according to records available, 200 silents were made in the first talkie year. But the sound film did replace the silent film within a couple of years. By the end of 1935, sound films became common all over the country and silent films were neither produced nor imported after this. The year 1935 also saw the introduction of playback system in Bombay.

It is thus to be seen that though with each new development in cinema, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras came to consolidate themselves in the field of produc-
tion, distribution and exhibition, Delhi came to confine itself solely to exhibition and
distribution activities. And this too when New Delhi started developing from 1931
onwards.

One of the earliest developments in New Delhi was Connaught Circus, beautifully
designed with grand shopping centre, spacious verandas, lofty white arcades,
well laid out park in the front, on a site which was originally a part of Jaipur Estate-
Madhoganj near Jai Singh Pura on one hand and Barakhamba on the other. The first
block to come up was the one from Wengers to American Express. Sardar Sobha Singh
son of Sardar Sujan Singh was the builder of the block. While the construction of the
ABCDEF Blocks was going on, Sardar Sahib acquired another piece of land near
Connaught Place and constructed the Regal theatre. The design of Regal theatre was,
however, got done by Herbert Baker. Thus the Regal theatre was one of the first
theatres to come up at New Delhi. Originally only Regal was constructed on the big
complex of land now known as Regal Building. There was a restaurant on top known
as Davicos (now Standard Restaurant).

In its very early days Regal Cinema was run by its owner S. Sobha Singh
but the Delhi wallas, as Maheshwar Dayal puts it, particularly the Chawwaniwallas
did not patronise it, as they considered sparsely built New Delhi, a 'Basti of Bhoots'
(city of ghosts). In 1938, Regal was leased out to a Company of which one
Rajeshwar Dayal was also a director. His investment then when money had some value
was Rs. 10,000/-. But the company also failed. Business was poor as bulk of the

population which was only 3 lakhs lived in the walled city. New Delhi which was being built had comparatively fewer residents. Moreover, the gentry used to shift to Simla which became the summer capital of Government of India. With it the majority of the shops in Connaught Place also used to shift. As a result, often, only ten to fifteen persons would visit the cinema hall during the summer months though the capacity was more or less the same as today. Consequently, the company had to wind up.

A year later, Rajeshwar Dayal took over the cinema and tried to make all round improvement keeping with the times. As a result most of the films shown started attracting good houses and then during the Second World War with the influx of American soldiers in 1942-43, when "old classics" or Block-busters were shown, the shows started getting full at least on weekends. In the beginning only evening and night shows used to be held. The staff used to wear Dinner Suits and on special occasions were required to wear 'bows' as well. According to Rajeshwar Dayal, Regal also used to run a bar and a peg of Scotch with Soda used to cost seven and a half annas. The ticket price was Rs. 3/-, Rs. 2/-, Re. 1/- and 8 annas and used to be given out. of a roll like that used in public buses.\(^{17}\) This was not all. Regal in those days had the best stage, the only stage in New Delhi, and was put to good use by periodically arranging shows by reputed artistes not only from India but from all over the world. Some of the well known Indian artistes to have performed in those days were Shanti Bardhan, Ram Gopal, Uday Shankar, Rukmini Devi, Sadhana Bose, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Prithivi Raj Kapoor's Prithvi Theatres. It is worth noting here that the famous Kapoor brothers, Raj, Shammi and Shashi acted in these plays before they became stars of the

\(^{17}\) Rajeshwar Dayal, "My Reminiscences of Fifty Years", Screen, 29 April, 1988, p. 21.
Hindi screen. During the war time Regal also used to be requisitioned by the army in the mornings, when secret and confidential lectures were delivered to the army personnel on war strategy. The whole building used to be made 'out of bounds' with heavy armed personnel guarding the place. Even the Managing Proprietor was not permitted to enter the premises. Nonetheless, the theatre used to be offered to the army free of charge.

Simultaneously, in the year 1939 Plaza came up in Connaught Circus. Infact till about early fifties there were cinema houses just in Chandini Chowk and Connaught Circus. After the Partition-when the residential colonies started extending beyond the walled city towards the west and the south that new cinemas like Palace, Liberty and Eros were built up. In the early sixties when the Delhi Development Authority came up with the plan of auctioning cinema plots, there was a sudden increase in the number of cinema houses. At present there are altogether 73 cinema houses in Delhi. Out of these some of the popular cinema houses are Ajanta in Subhash Nagar, Alankar in Lajpat Nagar, Batra in Dr. Mukerjee Nagar, Chanakya in Yashwant Place, Delite in Asaf Ali Road, Eros in Jangpura Extension, Golcha in Daryaganj, Janak in Janakpuri, Liberty in Gobind Singh Marg, Odeon, Regal, Rivoli and Plaza in Connaught Circus Paras in Nehru Place, Priya in Vasant Vihar, Rachna in Rajendra Place, Sapna in East of Kailash, Savitri in Greater Kailash II, Sheila in Paharganj, Uphaar in Green Park, Vishal in Najafgarh Road, Vivek in South Patel Nagar, Shakuntalam in Pragiti Maidan and Moti, Kumar, Majestic, Jubilee, Jagat, Ritz, Minerva and Novelty in Chandini Chowk. Because of the concentration of several cinema houses in Chandini Chowk along with offices of all the prominent distributors, Chandini Chowk has come to be known as the 'film colony' of Delhi.
These cinema houses are buildings ranging from small old ones to very large ultra-modern planned constructions. Robin cinema in Subzimandi and Khanna cinema in Paharganj are illustrations of the former, and Delite cinema in old Delhi and Odeon cinema in Connaught Place of the latter. At present many of the cinema houses in Delhi are renovated buildings equipped with restaurants, shopping complexes, etcetera such as Priya cinema in Vasant Vihar and Archana Mini in Greater Kailash.

All these cinema houses today hold four shows as follows: 12 noon to 3 p.m. (noon show), 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. (matinee show), 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. (evening show) and 9 p.m. to 12 (night show). There are some theatres, however, who run morning shows also from 9 a.m. to 12 noon at reduced rates. The films generally screened during these shows are English films. Barring a few, majority of these cinema houses are screening Hindi films. Although the screening of Hindi films started on Sunday mornings way back in 1931, it was really after Independence with the influx of refugees that the business of Hindi films picked up and increasingly they began to be screened in all the four shows. A few of the cinema houses, namely, Sheila, Chanakya, Priya have come to specialize themselves in screening English films. Films in regional languages like Bengali, Tamil, Telugu etcetera are generally shown on Sunday mornings by some cinema houses. Of late, art theatres opened by Government to promote good cinema, like Shankuntalam in Pragati Maidan, also screen regional films at nominal rates.

If one studies the position of these cinema houses area-wise, a dismal picture emerges. For instance, many of the localities of Delhi are bereft of cinema houses such as South Extension, Sarojini Nagar, Moti Bagh etcetera. The residents of these localities have
to visit cinemas located in neighbouring localities. This scarcity of cinema houses could probably be due to the fact that the number of cinema houses have not increased consistently with the astronomical increase in population over the years.

Location of some of the prominent cinemas are shown in a separate map (see Map 2). A closer examination of the location map shows that many of the cinema houses are concentrated around two areas of Delhi-Chandini Chowk, the main commercial centre in Old Delhi and the Connaught Place, the main retail business centre in New Delhi. There is dearth of cinema houses in the residential areas.

Another revealing feature of cinema in Delhi has been that majority of the exhibitors are not the actual owners of the cinema buildings. They took these buildings on lease from the landlords. In the beginning, landlords themselves used to run the cinemas, but the slump before the Second World War hit them hard, and mostly they found it difficult to run them as profitable ventures. They, therefore, started giving them on lease to others on a monthly or annual rent. Soon after, the war boom made the money position easy. As a result, the landlords raised the rent four to eight times, and the first tenants found it profitable further to lease the cinemas to other parties on their own terms. This trend of not owning the building and being the exhibitors as a first leaseholder or the third has not only given a setback to the film business but at the same time created many evils.

To make provision for the certification of cinematograph films for exhibition and for regulating exhibitions by means of cinematographs in the country, the Indian
Map 2: PROMINENT CINEMA HOUSES OF DELHI

Parliament enacted the Cinematograph Act, 1952. Section 3 of the Act relates to the setting up of Board of Film Censors for sanctioning films for public exhibition. Section 4 relates to classification of films for public exhibition. However, Section 5-B underlines that a film shall not be certified for public exhibition *inter alia* if the film or any part of it is against decency or morality or against public order. To give effect to the provisions of the Cinematograph Act, 1952, Delhi Administration made rules under Section 16 of the Act for Union Territory of Delhi. These rules are known as Delhi Cinematograph Rules, 1981 which are a code in itself. Under these rules provisions have been made to check granting of license to cinema halls, sale of tickets, admission rights, exits, passages and corridors, gangways, ventilations, sanitary arrangements, fire precautions, facility for parking vehicles, cleanliness, standard of vision, site of cinema soundness of the building and the prohibition of smoking in cinema halls.

However, for reasons best known to the authorities, these rules have not been given effect to in toto and are being too frequently violated by the cinema owners. A visit to any of the cinema house in Delhi is an eloquent piece of evidence of these violations since there is no provision for drinking water, toilets are filthy, eatables are substandard, etcetera.

It may thus be concluded from the above that though cinema came to India from the West, the rise and growth of cinema in the country has been strongly influenced by its own social milieu. India had a rich cultural heritage in which the depiction of mythological, social and moral stories and entertainment through dramatics was an ancient tradition. While *nautanki*, puppetry, mimicry, etcetera had been among the most popular forms of folk media, the theatre was also strongly rooted in urban areas as a communication channel,
much before the cinema technology became accessible. In fact all forms of classical arts including dance, drama and music etc. have been an integral part of the traditional social life. Thus the cinema which provided a common medium for the expression of all the fine arts found a most fertile ground for its turning into a major industry, mainly because of the rich cultural heritage, traditions and values. Delhi has been no exception to this national reality.