

## Restoring India's film heritage

Over time, thousands of films, and film accessories like posters and photographs, are being lost to decay and dereliction. However, organisations like the National Film Archive of India and the Prasad Group are doing their bit to restore and store this treasure.

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Times News Network

Even under ideal conditions, the life-span of the reels of old films is short. Does that mean that many of the films made between 1927-1980, a span of over half a century, could be lost forever? Some of them have. The prints and their negatives perished due to poor storage and neglect, leaving nothing that could be restored.

Several issues dog the archivist. Ownership, copyright, compensation, restoring and storing costs are some of them. "We are a government organisation, with very limited funds. We cannot afford to pay large sums for copyright or even mere acquisition of prints, negatives or accessories," says Urmila Joshi, Senior Librarian at National Film Archives of India (NFAI), shares.

On the issue of copyright and exploitation rights, she reveals, "This is a major hurdle. Decades after a film is made, we have no way of ascertaining who holds the rights. It could be a distributor, financier, inheritor or even the court. Permission from the right person or body is essential to obtain and restore prints."

She sites an example. "Works of Baburao Painter, a reputed film-maker of the early talkies era, were pre-

sumed lost, until we established contact with a Vankudre family in Kolhapur. They deal in household utensils and they were sitting on a badly damaged treasure of film reels unaware. They later donated them to us."

Restoring a badly damaged film could take up to a year. "You can imagine the effort and time factors involved, not to mention costs," she adds. "One dedicated NFAI technician, Kaka Rajput, spent years and years on the job. After his retirement and fail-



SAVING FILM HERITAGE: Madhubala in an old film  
Urmila's colleague, Arti Karkahanis, is

ing eyesight, his son Dilip Rajput, who now holds the mantle."

Prasad Group, the film organisation set-up by the late L.V.Prasad, has also done some work in the area of restoration. Spokesperson Mohan Krishnan recalls that their Chennai lab had restored Mughal-e-Azam and Kabhi Kabhie. "But we have been unable to obtain films made by PrasadSaahab before he set-up his own studio and banner." Being a private company, they only engage in the task when contracted to do so.

NFAI's recent restorations include a 1943 Kannada film, Vani, and seven reels of Murliwala, from 150 reels of obtained footage.

Besides films, the NFAI collects DVDs, scripts, posters and other accessories.

Urmila's colleague, Arti Karkahanis, is

happy to announce that over 15,000 film posters have been collected so far. Some 150 of them are on display at Kala Academy, as part of IFFI Goa 2008

Manoj Srivastava, CEO of ESG, narrates an experience that establishes that posters can command a high price. "Some years ago, I was walking along a road in New Delhi when I saw a poster at a stall. I asked him if it was for sale. He said it was, for Rs. 10,000! When I bargained, he said that he had bought it for Rs. 8,000. I joked with him that I could sell him three posters for Rs. 7,500. He was astounded at the deal!"

Often a thankless job, restoration can be a life threatening activity too. Urmila recalls, "In one corner of the Archives premises, there were a whole lot of film boxes lying for years. Whenever anybody thought of investigating their contents, he was warned that the nitrate content could explode! Braving such grave danger, our staff did open the boxes, but hardly anything could be saved."

Forty-four years on, NFAI continues to make untiring and thankless efforts to live up to its 3Ps motto: Procure, Preserve and Present.

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In the article 'Restoring of India's film heritage' (Goa Times, page one, issue dated 27 November) was wrongly credited to Shruti Pandit. The real writer is Siraj Syed. And Prasad Group only colour corrected Mughal-e-Azam. The error is regretted

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