



# Depiction Of Women Crew In 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Explorative Study On Women Crew Of Silent And Talkie Era

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## Abstract

The world of cinema, now synonymous with entertainment, once stood as an enigmatic spectacle in its early days. As the silver screen unfolded its mysteries, it was the villains of both silent and talking eras who emerged as the icons of popularity. However, amidst this narrative, the quest for female actresses during these pivotal periods of cinematic evolution remains a fascinating subject of exploration.

This study employs a methodological approach rooted in content analysis to delve into the roles and contributions of actresses from both the silent and talkie eras. Through meticulous examination, the study seeks to unravel the narratives surrounding these pioneering women, shedding light on their journeys and impact within the realm of Indian cinema.

The findings gleaned from this research endeavor offer compelling insights into the early days of cinema. Notably, it unveils intriguing revelations, such as the diverse origins of the first female actresses to grace the silver screen, many of whom hailed from non-Indian backgrounds. Such discoveries add layers of complexity to our understanding of the historical landscape of Indian cinema, underscoring the intricate interplay of cultures and influences that shaped its formative years.

## Keywords

*Female actress, silent era, talkie era, cinema, entertainment, popular, origin, female filmmakers, women cinema, feminist cinema.*

## Introduction

The exploration of female contributors in the silent and talkie eras of Indian cinema offers a fascinating glimpse into a period marked by societal conservatism and evolving gender dynamics. During this time, women faced significant barriers to entry in the film industry, with the very idea of appearing on screen often regarded as unconventional and even scandalous. In fact, the notion of acting was so alien to societal norms that even sex workers, who occupied marginalized roles in society, hesitated to consider opportunities in the burgeoning film industry.

Amidst this backdrop of social stigma and resistance, women emerged as trailblazers, defying norms and carving out their own space in the world of Indian cinema. Their journey was marked by perseverance, determination, and a relentless pursuit of their creative passions. Despite the prevailing conservative attitudes, these female contributors dared to challenge conventions and make their presence felt on the silver screen.

It is noteworthy that the challenges faced by women in Indian cinema during this era were compounded by the practice of male actors occasionally portraying female roles. This practice, born out of necessity due to the reluctance of women to enter the industry, further underscored the barriers faced by aspiring female performers. However, in the face of such adversity, the contributions of these pioneering women shone brightly, leaving an indelible mark on the history of Indian cinema.

Through their talent, resilience, and sheer determination, these female contributors paved the way for future generations of actresses and filmmakers. Their names became synonymous with success and creativity, challenging societal perceptions and redefining the role of women in Indian cinema. In doing so, they not only broke barriers but also inspired countless others to pursue their dreams, regardless of gender or societal expectations.

In essence, the exploration of female contributors in the silent and talkie eras of Indian cinema serves as a testament to the power of resilience and determination in the face of adversity. It is a celebration of the indomitable spirit of women who dared to defy the odds and make their voices heard in an industry dominated by societal norms and gender biases.

## Literature review

Hastie and Stamp (2006) explored on the depth of feminism inquiry of early cinema. The focused majorly on directors producers screenwriters that is on the women off the screen and ignored women on the screen. They appreciated the work done by the women Pioneer behind the screen

Gaines (2010) in his article has brought a new dimension for the women in cinema. The explored on the women who travelled across the Nations around the globe. Irrespective of production direction found many women who travelled across the continents and became the poineers in the early cinema

Victoria (2013) argues that “the coincidence between the emergence of narrative cinema, the female actress on screen, and our own agency as women who negotiate public and private spaces, cannot be taken for granted”

"Not so Silent: Women in Cinema before Sound" edited by Sofia Bull and Astrid Söderbergh Widding is a significant contribution to the scholarship on women's roles in early cinema. The book offers a nuanced exploration of the contributions and experiences of women filmmakers, actresses, and crew members during the silent era, providing valuable insights into their creative endeavors and societal impact.

One of the strengths of this edited volume is its interdisciplinary approach, bringing together contributions from scholars across various fields, including film studies, gender studies, and cultural history. This interdisciplinary perspective allows for a comprehensive examination of women's involvement in silent cinema, covering a wide range of topics such as representation, authorship, industry practices, and reception.

The book's structure is well-organized, with chapters that offer detailed analyses of individual films, filmmakers, and historical contexts. Each chapter provides rich contextualization and critical engagement with primary sources, enabling readers to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of women's participation in early cinema. (Shah, 2019)

One notable aspect of "Not so Silent" is its global scope, encompassing case studies from different countries and regions beyond the Western canon. By including perspectives from diverse cultural contexts, the book challenges Eurocentric narratives of film history and highlights the global diversity of women's contributions to silent cinema.

Overall, "Not so Silent: Women in Cinema before Sound" is a valuable resource for scholars, students, and cinephiles interested in the history of women in film. Its rich and nuanced exploration of women's roles in silent cinema sheds light on overlooked figures, narratives, and practices, making it an essential addition to the literature on early film history and gender studies.

The article "Jewish women were Indian cinema's first actresses" by TNM, published on January 30, 2016, provides a captivating insight into the significant contributions of the Baghdadi Jewish community to the early years of Indian cinema (Robbins, 2016). Authored by Kenneth X. Robbins, this illuminating piece delves into the pioneering role played by Jewish women in Indian cinema, highlighting their groundbreaking contributions at a time when societal norms posed formidable challenges to women's participation in the performing arts (Robbins, 2016). Through compelling storytelling and meticulous research, Robbins sheds light on the invaluable contributions of actresses such as Sulochana, Pramila, and Nadira, who defied conventions and left an indelible mark on the Indian film industry (Robbins, 2016).

(Gaines, 2018) "Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?" by Jane M. Gaines, published by the University of Illinois Press in 2018, is a comprehensive examination of women's roles in the silent film era. Gaines delves into the often-overlooked history of women working behind the scenes, shedding light on their contributions, challenges, and experiences. Through meticulous research and analysis, Gaines explores the systemic barriers and gender biases that marginalized women in key creative and technical roles during this period, challenging conventional narratives of early cinema by foregrounding the voices and experiences of women who worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Drawing on archival sources and historical evidence, Gaines offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities of gender and power in early filmmaking. From directors and producers to editors and screenwriters, Gaines highlights the diverse roles women played in shaping cinematic narratives and aesthetics. "Pink-Slipped" serves as an essential read for anyone interested in the history of cinema and women's contributions to the

film industry, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by women in the silent film industries and paving the way for further research and discussion on this important topic.

(Rosenberg, 2016) In a conversation with Sofia Bull and Kate Saccone about the Women Film Pioneer Project, Alejandra Rosenberg discusses its significance and methodologies (Rosenberg, 2016). The Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP), edited by Jane Gaines and Monica Dall'Asta and published online by Columbia University's Center for Digital Research and Scholarship, is a groundbreaking initiative shedding light on the often-overlooked contributions of women in the silent film era. Through a collaborative effort, WFPP serves as both an online resource and a vibrant community of scholars interested in exploring women's roles in early cinema. With its innovative approach, WFPP challenges conventional narratives of film history by uncovering the diverse roles women played behind the scenes, from directors and producers to screenwriters and distributors (Rosenberg, 2016). "Silent Narratives: Reimagining Women in Indian Texts" delves deeply into the intricate layers of gender representation within Indian literature. Authored by Srivastava, Minz, and Sha, this chapter offers a profound examination of the often-muted voices of women in traditional texts. Through meticulous analysis and reinterpretation, the authors unveil the complexities of female characters, challenging prevailing stereotypes and cultural norms. By probing these silent narratives, the chapter invites readers to embark on a journey of critical reflection, redefining traditional perspectives and fostering a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in Indian society. This insightful exploration not only enriches our understanding of Indian knowledge systems but also underscores the importance of diverse and inclusive representations in literature. (Srivastava, Minz, & Sha, 2023)

Dr. Rajesh Kumar Srivastava's chapter delves into the silent era of Indian cinema, offering a comprehensive exploration of its narrative landscape and socio-cultural significance. Through meticulous research, Srivastava illuminates how directors drew inspiration from mythological and historical sources, using cinema as a medium to convey nuanced messages to audiences. Despite colonial constraints, the language of cinema transcended verbal dialogue, employing gestures, facial expressions, and symbolic imagery to navigate complex themes and evoke emotive responses.

The chapter highlights the role of silent films in shaping cultural consciousness and fostering a sense of national identity during a pivotal period in Indian history. Srivastava adeptly navigates the thematic terrain, examining the constraints filmmakers faced under colonial rule and the subtle ways in which cinema subverted hegemonic narratives. Moreover, the author's analysis extends to the portrayal of gender dynamics within silent cinema, shedding light on the evolving role of women as protagonists and challenging conventional stereotypes.

In conclusion, Dr. Rajesh Kumar Srivastava's chapter offers valuable insights into the silent era of Indian cinema, emphasizing its enduring relevance in contemporary discourse. By elucidating the multifaceted dimensions of silent narratives and their impact on society and culture, Srivastava provides a nuanced understanding of cinema's historical trajectory and its profound influence on Indian narratives. (Srivastava, 2021)

(Majumdar, 2009) Neepa Majumdar's "Wanted Cultured Ladies Only!: Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s-1950s" provides a nuanced exploration of the role of female actors in shaping Indian cinema during a transformative period. Through meticulous research and insightful analysis, Majumdar delves into the complexities of gender representation and cultural identity within the film industry. By examining the lives and careers of actresses against the backdrop of India's socio-political landscape, the book offers valuable perspectives on the evolving notions of femininity, power, and agency.

With a blend of scholarly rigor and engaging narrative, Majumdar offers a comprehensive examination of female stardom, illuminating the ways in which actresses navigated the constraints of tradition and modernity. Through rich archival sources and primary materials, she uncovers the diverse experiences of actresses, from early cinematic divas to symbols of societal change. "Wanted Cultured Ladies Only!" not only contributes to our understanding of Indian cinema but also offers valuable insights into broader issues of gender, class, and representation in popular culture.

## Methodology

The methodology employed in this explorative study on female actresses from the 20th century encompasses a comprehensive examination of both the silent and talkie eras of Indian cinema. The primary objective is to shed light on the remarkable contributions of female actresses during a period marked by societal conservatism and evolving gender dynamics.

Given the historical context of the Indian film industry, where male actors often portrayed female roles due to the scarcity of female actresses, this study aims to highlight the pioneering women who defied norms and made their mark on the silver screen. Through an extensive analysis of films from both the silent and talkie eras, the study seeks to identify and explore the careers of prominent female actresses who played significant roles in shaping Indian cinema.

To achieve this objective, a systematic approach is adopted, beginning with the compilation of a comprehensive list of films from the silent and talkie eras. This involves sourcing archival materials, film databases, and historical records to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of cinematic works.

Once the film selection process is completed, the focus shifts to identifying and researching the female actresses who starred in these films. This entails delving into biographical information, filmographies, and historical accounts to gain insights into their backgrounds, careers, and contributions to Indian cinema.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is employed to categorize and contextualize the findings within the broader socio-cultural landscape of the time. By examining the societal attitudes towards gender, the challenges faced by female actresses, and the impact of their performances on audience perceptions, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of their significance in Indian cinema.

Additionally, comparative analysis is utilized to draw parallels between the silent and talkie eras, identifying common trends, differences, and shifts in the portrayal of female characters and the roles played by actresses. This comparative approach enables a comprehensive exploration of the evolving dynamics of gender representation in Indian cinema over time.



Overall, the methodology employed in this study combines archival research, biographical analysis, thematic exploration, and comparative investigation to provide a holistic understanding of the contributions of female actresses in Indian cinema during the 20th century. Through this multidimensional approach, the study seeks to illuminate the stories of these trailblazing women and their enduring impact on the cultural landscape of India.

### Objectives of the study

1. **Exploring Representation:** Investigate how women were portrayed in silent films, examining stereotypes, archetypes, and the roles they typically played.
2. **Impact of Female Filmmakers:** Analyze the contributions of female directors, producers, and screenwriters during the silent era, and assess their influence on shaping narratives and characters.
3. **Social and Cultural Context:** Examine the societal norms and cultural attitudes towards women during the silent film era, and how these influenced the portrayal of female characters on screen.
4. **Economic and Industrial Factors:** Investigate the role of women in the film industry during the silent era, including their participation in behind-the-scenes roles and the challenges they faced in a male-dominated industry.
5. **Feminist Perspectives:** Explore feminist interpretations of silent films, including how women's agency, empowerment, and independence were depicted or subverted in these narratives.
6. **Cross-cultural Analysis:** Compare and contrast the portrayal of women in silent films across different national cinemas, considering how cultural differences influenced representations of gender.

### Significance of the study:

The study of women in the silent film era holds significant importance for several reasons. Firstly, it offers a valuable historical perspective on gender dynamics, societal norms, and cultural attitudes during the early days of cinema. By analyzing how women were portrayed and perceived on screen, researchers gain insights into broader social trends and historical contexts. Secondly, studying women's contributions to silent cinema is essential for preserving our cultural heritage and recognizing their impact on the evolution



of filmmaking as an art form. Women played crucial roles as actors, directors, producers, and writers, shaping the trajectory of early cinema in ways that are often overlooked or undervalued in mainstream historical narratives. Additionally, examining the portrayal of women in silent films through a feminist lens provides opportunities for critical inquiry into gender representation, stereotypes, and identity politics. It prompts discussions about how on-screen depictions both reflected and influenced societal perceptions of gender roles. Moreover, exploring the intersectionality of gender with other identity markers such as race, class, and sexuality enriches our understanding of the diverse experiences of women in early cinema. By highlighting the complexities of representation, researchers can contribute to broader conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion in film and popular culture. Ultimately, studying women in the silent film era not only deepens our appreciation for their contributions to film history but also informs contemporary discourse and inspires future perspectives on gender representation in media and society.

### Research Questions

1. How were women portrayed in silent films, and what societal norms and cultural attitudes influenced these representations?
2. What were the key contributions of female filmmakers (directors, producers, writers) to silent cinema, and how did they impact narrative and character development?
3. How did the roles and depictions of women vary across different genres of silent films (e.g., melodrama, comedy, adventure) and national cinemas?
4. What challenges did women face in the silent film industry, both in front of and behind the camera, and how did they navigate these obstacles?

### Sampling:

In this study, the sample selection process was conducted through purposive sampling, a method chosen to ensure that the included silent films were highly relevant to the research objectives and focused on the portrayal of women in the silent film era. A deliberate effort was made to identify films that were considered influential, groundbreaking, or representative of key themes and trends in early cinema's depiction of women. This approach allowed for the inclusion of films that prominently featured women in

significant roles, both in front of and behind the camera, including those directed by female filmmakers, starring notable actresses, or addressing themes related to gender and feminism. By selecting films based on their relevance to the research questions and objectives, the sample aimed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the representation of women in silent cinema, while also acknowledging the diverse range of experiences and perspectives within the industry during this historical period. Renowned actresses from the silent era, such as Fatma Begum, Ruby Myers (Sulochana), Durga Khote, Patience Cooper, and others who made significant contributions to Indian cinema during that period. Female filmmakers who were active during the silent era, such as Saraswathi Rane, Prabha Devi, and Gohar Mamajiwala, who broke stereotypes and made noteworthy directorial contributions

### **Theoretical Framework: Feminist Film Theory**

Feminist film theory offers a critical lens through which to analyze the portrayal of women in the silent film era, focusing on issues of gender representation, power dynamics, and the intersection of cinema with broader socio-cultural contexts (Mulvey, 1975). This theoretical framework posits that films are not merely reflections of reality but are constructed through the perspectives, biases, and ideologies of their creators, and as such, they play a significant role in shaping and perpetuating gender norms and stereotypes (Tasker, 2013). Feminist film theorists argue that the portrayal of women in cinema often reflects and reinforces patriarchal ideologies, objectifying and marginalizing female characters while privileging male perspectives and experiences (Cowie, 1997). By examining silent films through a feminist lens, researchers can uncover the ways in which gender roles, identities, and relations are constructed, negotiated, and contested on screen, as well as the agency and resistance strategies employed by women both in front of and behind the camera (Williams, 2015). Moreover, feminist film theory provides a framework for critiquing and challenging gendered representations in film, advocating for greater diversity, complexity, and authenticity in the portrayal of women on screen (Modleski, 1988).

### **Discussions and Findings**

#### **Actresses of Diverse Backgrounds:**

Fatma Begum: Born into a family deeply rooted in performing arts, Fatma Begum's journey in Indian cinema marked a significant shift in the industry's landscape. Beyond her noteworthy performances, such

as in "Bulbul-e-Paristan" (1926) and "Heer Ranjha" (1928), Begum's directorial ventures showcased her multifaceted talent. Firoza Begum (Susan Solomon): A Jewish actress known for her roles in Bollywood and Mollywood, Firoza Begum's legacy in Indian cinema remains significant despite her efforts to conceal her heritage. Her versatility is evident in films like "Bewafa," "Qatil," and "Premveer," where she showcased her talent across various genres. Ruby Myers (Sulochana): Renowned for her versatility and charm, Ruby Myers captivated audiences with her captivating performances during the silent era. Films like "Typist Girl" (1926) and "Wildcat of Bombay" (1927) solidified her status as one of Indian cinema's leading actresses. Myers' ability to portray a diverse range of characters highlighted the growing influence of actresses in shaping cinematic narratives and reflected the industry's expanding horizons. Durga Khote: While primarily known for her acting prowess, Durga Khote's foray into filmmaking underscored her ambition and determination. Her directorial debut, "Kunku" (1937), addressed pertinent social issues and garnered critical acclaim. Khote's transition from actress to director not only showcased her versatility but also highlighted the evolving roles of women in Indian cinema, both in front of and behind the camera.

Patience Cooper: An Anglo-Indian actress, Cooper's career began with notable performances in silent films such as "Naladamayanti" (1920), directed by Eugenio de Liguoro. Her portrayal in films like "Vishnuavtar" and "Dhruvacharitra" solidified her reputation as a leading actress of her time, despite facing controversies like the one surrounding "Pati Bakthi" (1922). Indira Devi: Born Effie Hippolite in Russia, Indira Devi made her mark in Indian silent cinema with roles in films like "Sher-E-Arab" (1930). Her collaboration with Prithviraj Kapoor in "Arabian Knights" exemplifies her contribution to Indian cinema during its formative years. Bali (2016) Patience cooper was an anglo-indian, born in Calcutta,India. She started her as a dancer in Bandmann's musical comedy. Later she joined the Jamshedji Madan's Stage Company. At the age of 21,she married a well-known Indian businessman Murza Ahmad Ispohaniwith whom she migrated to Pakistan in the year 1947.In the year 1920 she made a mark with the movie *Naladamayanti* directed by Eugenio de Liguoro an Italian with a big budget.Her works include *Vishnuavtar*, *Dhruvacharitra*she is the main lead with many Europeans in the film. In 1922 she did *PatiBakthi*, which made her outstanding although it was involved in a controversy for a dance number that the censor board posed it to be obscene and ordered to remove it.In 1923,she played the first ever double role in the movie *Patni Pratapas* twin sisters.In 1924 she acted in the movie *Kashmiri Sundari*, in which

she again played a dual role as a mother and daughter. She had done four movies and decided to retire in 1944 after doing her last movie *Iraada*.

Cineplot (2016) Indira devi was a Russian born actress. Her real name was Effie Hippolite .She acted in many silent Indian films and played the lead opposite Prithviraj Kapoor in *Sher-E-Arab aka Arabian Knights* in 1930. Her works include *Jaydev* (1926), *Jana* (1927), *Punarjanma* (1927), *Kapalkundal* (1929), *Ganesh Janam* (1930), *Rajsinha* (1930), *Sher-e-arab* (1930), *Vaman avatar* (1930).

Tripati (2017) Seetadevi's original name was Renee Smith. She became an actress when Himanshu Rai chose her to play the female lead opposite him in *Prem Sanyas* (1925). Himanshu Rai gave her the name Seetadevi. She was a star at madans theatre, making her debut with Dhuren Ganguly in the film *Priyanath* in the 1920s. Three of her films *Krishnakanter Will* (1926) *Durgesh Nandini* (1927) and *Kapalkundali* (1929) were based on the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. She also appeared in *Loves of the Moghul Prince* (1928) titled *Anrkali* in Urdu and *Ramani* in Punjabi. Her last film was *Kal Parinaya* (1930). Himanshu Rai's death in 1940 was a big blow to her career.

Sara (2020) Fatma begum was an Indian actress, director and screen writer. She was born in 1892 in an Urdu family in India. She is considered to be the first women director of Indian cinema. She was the mother of silent actresses Zubeida, Sultana and Shehzadi. She debuted in Ardeshir Irani's silent film *Veer Abhimanyu*. In 1926 she established her own production house and in 1928 renamed it as *Victoria-Fatma Films*. She became the first female director of Indian cinema with her film *Bulbul-E-Paristan* in 1926 and her last film was *Goddess of Love* in 1929.

Shah (2019) She was born in the year 1879. Those were the days where women were not allowed to work in films. That is the reason why Phalke casted a man for the female lead in his film but he on the otherhand broke up the stereotypes by casting two female actresses for his 2<sup>nd</sup> film. He found a single mother in Durgabai Kamat and her daughter Kalambhai Gokhale for his film. She was the first female actress and her first role was goddess Parvati. She took up Phalke's offer and created history by paving way for women in Indian cinema.

Cineplot (2011) Gohar Kayoum Mamajiwala was an Indian actress, singer and producer. When she was 16 years old her family was in a financial crisis. At that time their family friend and director of

Kohinoor Films, Mr. Homi Master suggested her to try her luck in acting. She debuted with the film *Fortune Of The Fools* in the year 1926, directed by Kanjibhai Rathor and produced by Kohinoor films. In 1929, she set up Ranjit Studios in collaboration with Chandulal. Before retiring in 1970 she did more than 30 films. She died in Bombay, Maharashtra on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1985.

Gooptu (2013) Her name real name was Amba Laxman Rao Sagun. She was born on 18<sup>th</sup> April in Nasik, Bombay presidency, British India. She was a veteran actress with a career of over 100 films in various languages. She began her career with leading roles in Hindi films of the 1930s and 40s. She played a wide range of roles and gave many hits such as *Himmat-E-Marda* (1935), *Ram Shastri* (1944), *Anari* (1959), *Shri 420* (1955) Etc. In the initial years she worked in a series of stunt films like *Champion Of The Sword* (1930) and *Chatur Sundari* (1930). She also produced *Palkar* (1939), considered to be a milestone in Marathi cinema while at the prime of her career. Pawar was slapped by another actor Bhagawan Dada, while shooting a scene in the film, *Jung-E-Azadi*. An accidental strong stroke caused permanent damage to Pawar's eye. As a result she was forced to shift to character roles. The film *Anari* (1959) won filmfare award for best actress in a supporting role female. In 1961, Pawar was honoured by the government of India as the first lady of Indian cinema. Her last film was *Engineer No.1* (1977) along with stars Govinda and Urvashi.

Sultana was one of the actresses from the Indian cinema. She acted in both silent and talkie films. She mostly acted in romantic roles. She debuted with the film *Veer Abhimanyu* in the year 1922. After that she acted in many silent films like *Kala Nag*, *Manorama*, *Indra Sabha* etc. till 1931. Then she took up Indian talkie film in 1931 with the film *Milkmaid* and *Kamar-al-Zaman*. *Young India*, *Brand of Fate* etc. were her contributions towards the silent movie. And films like *Intekam*, *Amirzadi*, *Stepmother*, *Devdas* etc. were her contributions towards the talkie films. Cineplot (2012) She was born in the year 1911. She made her debut in the industry at an age of 12 in the movie Kohinoor. She acted in India's first talkie movie *Alam Ara* (1931). In the year 1937 she acted in the movie *Devdas*. She was paid so much higher than the usual standards after her performance in *Alam Ara*. She married Maharaja Narsingar Dhanrajgir and became the begum of Hyderabad. It is believed that the last movie in which she acted was *Nirdosh Able* which came out in the year 1949. She died on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1988 when her age was 77 years. India TV News Desk (2016)

Though there were conventional women in the silent and talkie period. The female actresses have paved their own way of fame and created the history. Besides being actresses there were many women who were famous directors, screenwriters, editors who travelled across the nation, continent and the world.

**2. Filmmakers Breaking Stereotypes:** Saraswathi Rane: As one of the earliest female filmmakers in India, Saraswathi Rane's contributions to Indian cinema were pioneering. Films like *Krishnabai* (1923) and *Gopichand* (1927) showcased her storytelling prowess and cinematic vision. Rane's directorial endeavors challenged traditional gender norms and paved the way for future generations of female directors, highlighting the transformative power of women in shaping cinematic narratives. Prabha Devi: Another trailblazing figure in the silent era, Prabha Devi's impact extended beyond her stellar performances. Her directorial ventures, including *Veer Abhimanyu* (1922) and *Veer Bhimsen* (1924), showcased her creative vision and storytelling acumen. Devi's contributions exemplified the resilience and determination of women in pursuing their creative passions, inspiring future generations of filmmakers to break barriers and push boundaries.

Durga Bai Kamat: Breaking gender stereotypes prevalent in the early 20th century, Durga Bai Kamat became the first female actress in Indian cinema with her role as Goddess Parvati in Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913). Her journey paved the way for women in Indian cinema, challenging societal norms and inspiring future generations. Fatma Begum: Widely regarded as the first female director in Indian cinema, Fatma Begum's contributions extend beyond acting to filmmaking and screenwriting. Her directorial debut with *Bulbul-E-Paristan* (1926) marked a significant milestone in Indian cinema, highlighting her pioneering spirit and creative vision. Gohar Mamajiwala: From her debut in *Fortune of the Fools* (1926) to her establishment of Ranjit Studios in 1929, Mamajiwala's journey exemplifies resilience and determination. Despite financial challenges, she left a lasting impact on Indian cinema, both as an actress and a producer.



**3. Enduring Legacy and Recognition:** The contributions of these women, spanning diverse backgrounds and roles, shaped the narrative of early Indian cinema. Their resilience, creativity, and trailblazing spirit continue to inspire and empower women in the film industry. While some actresses like Lalita Pawar transitioned from leading roles to character roles due to circumstances like injury, others like Zubeida achieved fame and recognition that transcended national boundaries. Through their work, these women challenged stereotypes, broke barriers, and left an indelible mark on Indian cinema, paving the way for future generations of actresses, filmmakers, and industry professionals.

The emergence of women in acting and filmmaking roles during the silent era marked a significant shift in Indian cinema's narrative landscape. Despite facing various challenges and obstacles, these pioneering women left an indelible mark on the industry, reshaping cultural norms and challenging traditional gender roles. Rooted in familial ties to the performing arts or driven by personal passion and ambition, the origins of these women underscored the diverse paths that led them to Indian cinema. Their impact extended beyond the silver screen, influencing societal attitudes towards gender and creativity and paving the way for greater representation and recognition of female voices in Indian cinema. Through their groundbreaking work and unwavering dedication, these women reshaped the trajectory of Indian cinema during its formative years, leaving behind a lasting legacy that continues to inspire and empower future generations of filmmakers and performers.

### **Conclusion:**

The emergence of women in acting and filmmaking roles during the silent era marked a significant shift in Indian cinema's narrative landscape. Despite facing various challenges and obstacles, these pioneering women left an indelible mark on the industry, reshaping cultural norms and challenging traditional gender roles. Rooted in familial ties to the performing arts or driven by personal passion and ambition, the origins of these women underscored the diverse paths that led them to Indian cinema. From actresses like Fatma Begum, who not only captivated audiences with their performances but also ventured into directing, to filmmakers like Saraswathi Rane and Prabha Devi, who broke stereotypes and paved the way for future generations of female directors, their contributions were transformative. Despite societal constraints, these women persisted, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire and empower future generations of filmmakers and performers. Through their groundbreaking work and unwavering dedication, they



reshaped the trajectory of Indian cinema during its formative years, leaving behind a lasting legacy that continues to inspire and empower future generations of filmmakers and performers.

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