

Film Studies seems to have taken a decisive historical and archival turn. The lull following the explosion of screen theory has drawn a twin response, to put it in broad strokes: a revisionist retrospection on the theory in question; and a return to historical investigation of production contexts, institutions, and audiences. The Cultural Studies orientation that became popular in between survives in some form, especially in the reception-oriented inquiries. But theoretical explorations now tend to arrive in eclectic and contextualized forms.

Indian film scholarship has responded to these developments, largely eliminating the hiatus with the West evident in its theoretical phase. It now has the particularly ambitious task of exploring both the nature of a comprehensive historical view and the archive. The essays collected in this volume of the *JMI*, a selection from the 2009 Annual Conference of the Department, reflect the excitement of that challenge. The conference, titled 'Writing Histories for Indian Cinema', held a dual focus on of historiographic contemplation and practical accounts. It was also the second in the new series of the annual event that comes in the wake of the launch of the Media Lab of the Department. The first was titled 'Future of Celluloid' (see *JMI* 8). The current theme is

connected to the digital database projects in the Lab in a more direct way. Presentations by Subhajt Chatterjee, Madhuja Mukherjee and Joppan George (the last two not represented in this volume) drew from the databases and the related activities in the Lab. But the conference explored the archival spirit in another sense. It created an occasion for historians and collectors from an older generation, mostly independent researchers, to converse with academic scholars, a not too frequent opportunity in the academia. Digital pedagogy has not only brought back to attention the immensely valuable contribution of the solitary collector/chronicler of the earlier generation, it has also exposed affinities in the very forms of historical exploration that exist between the sprawling and factually intensive work of the older variety and digital databases. Virchand Dharamsey, the author of the filmography of Indian silent cinema, probably exemplifies this convergence most clearly in this selection. But a better sense of the meeting of impulses and possible mutual reformulation of frameworks will appear from the juxtaposition of these essays – between, for instance, the remarkable tracing of a literary signifier in Gayatri Chatterjee’s pursuit of the *pari* and the exhaustive reading of newspaper sources on a single day in the history of Madras cinema by Stephen Hughes. Ravi Vasudevan and Shubhajt Chatterjee provide examples of the revisionist account that emerges from the expansion of the evidential base as well as a reconsideration of the critical fictions of nation, region, melodrama, etc. Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Theodore Baskaran, authors, respectively, of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* and *Message Bearers*, two most widely used references in Indian film research, write on the problem of resources, but with a difference that shows the other side of convergence – the essential challenge of interpreting the resources. For Baskaran, listing what is not there is as important as cataloguing available resources. For Rajadhyaksha, the incompleteness and uncertainty of evidence motivate its own form of research.

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