



Biography as Memorabilia in the Post Digital Era: Reading Lives of Bollywood Heroines of Yesteryears; Madhubala & Meena Kumari

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Abstract

In the first part of the article, I have mapped the concept of new age archiving with respect to the collection of memorabilia, in the post-digital era. The second part deals with the lacuna in the availability of archival documents especially in Bollywood film industry and its archives. Identifying how digitization has changed the concept of archiving by introducing inclusion and association both at organizational and at individual levels. The initiative to explore archival materials and their preservation both in real time and on social media platforms proves that archiving prevails in digital era as well. Since women have been bearing the burnt in the Bollywood film industry be it direction, music or acting mostly they have been kept out of the limelight. In fact, they have been the pivotal points during scandals and rumors that lacks proper relevant documentation in this digitized age. A study done to identify life writings especially biographies as memorabilia on Bollywood heroines of yesteryears, can be a potential archival reference to fill this gap. The two biographies included for reading I this article are Meena Kumari: The Classic Biography (1972) by Vinod Mehta and 'I want to live' The story of Madhubala (1997) by Khatija Akbar.

Keywords: post-digital, memorabilia, Bollywood heroines, Madhubala, Meena Kumari

Introduction

Memory is a fleeting transitional movement in time and space, it is intangible, sublime and forever moving. The tendency of human mind on the contrary, is to think in loop revisiting the past. With momentariness of memory it is difficult to anchor the feeling of past experience or

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an event in a repeated sequence. However, artifacts related to the identified explicit memory help in anchoring the past and relive them in present. Thus, the process of preservation and documentation of these artifacts is termed as Archiving. Archives are repositories of past history secured and preserved to pass on the collective memory to future generations. These artifacts are termed as ‘Memorabilia’¹ they are collected and preserved as remanence of lived experience; they are an integral part of archival documentation as well. Both Memorabilia and Archiving play an imperative role in entertainment industry, especially for the film industry. When it comes to Indian film industry Bombay/Hindi film industry better known as Bollywood² is more prominent in terms of popularity than its other regional counterparts. The public attention and spectacle³ created by Bollywood stars are far more seeming than other entertainers from diverse fields. Hence it is expected that collection, preservation and documentation of this rich heritage would be more intense than others. In India, the process of film archiving commenced with the establishment of National Film Archive of India (NFAI)³⁷ in 1964 in Pune Maharashtra by P.K Nair³⁸ under the Indian Government by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It was an important milestone in conservation of India’s film history which is an integral part of Indian Popular Culture. When it comes to Hindi motion pictures, film memorabilia hold a special place in establishment of collective memory of Bollywood movies and its superstars. The superstars of popular Bollywood films induced immense fan following with insatiable inquisitiveness to unravel their much-guarded personal lives during pre-digital era⁴. Bollywood heroes attained high pedestal of almost God like stature in their life time, their lives were always under limelight but Bollywood heroines of yesteryears hardly attained heights of such admiration. In spite of their popularity and stardom not much is known about their personal lives, their private lives were secluded from public gaze⁵. The reason being lack of documentation and preservation both in personal as well as professional aspects. The trend of life writing in Bollywood came much later, some biographies do exist which were written post-death of these heroines. The central argument of my paper is to identify biographies of Madhubala and Meena Kumari function as artifacts of film memorabilia that can contribute to the database for archiving. This paper will try to find out whether biographies contribute to the repository of ‘living archives’ as a mode for preservation of personal memory as well as cultural history of pre-digital Bollywood stardom posing to be a counter-archive³⁹ to the existing archived film history.

The term ‘Archive’ originates from the Greek word ‘Archeion’ which means the office of the Magistrate. A secured space to hold documents, records and objects to preserve the past and make it accessible for future thus, the process of archiving is prevalent through ages. However, with the passage of time the concept of archiving has undergone a sea of change. Archiving is not merely a process of documentation with proper labeling in specific compartments, it is much more than that. Before the emergence of post-digital age, cultural theorist Stuart Hall⁶ has already discussed about the idea of living archive⁷ in his famous essay “Constituting an Archive” published in 2001. The publication year signifies the period before the post-digital age was about to begin. Coming to the essay, it was written as part of the presentation at the Living Archive Conference which was organized by the AAVAA (African and Asian Visual Artists’ Archive) in collaboration with the *Third Text* Journal where Hall’s essay was published. Hence the preconceived concept of an archive as a space to store and manage documents was already under reconstruction. As Hall depicts the concept of ‘living archive of the diaspora’, he goes on to explain “‘Living’ means present, on-going, continuing, unfinished, openended.” (Hall, 2001, p.89). Here Hall clearly deconstructs the concept of a watertight compartmented archive primarily used for storing available documents, records and references to all-inclusive ever-changing space that continue to expand and adapt with time. He could foresee the future of archival studies and adaptation to the changing times was the need of the hour. He went on explaining the diversity of archival work.

It is worth remembering how heterogeneous a practice collecting and archiving is. It is partly public, partly private. It includes those inert collections which have emerged, fortuitously, when odd individual's record or purchase works over time (Hall, 2001, p.91).

Hall justifies the varied modes and means of archival collection that cannot be contained under rigid secluded labels. The new age archiving demands better understanding of its diverse nature. Hence, the contribution of collectables can be from both from the individual's and collective's perspective. Hall concludes his essay defining the modern archive as heterogeneity along with acceptance and inclusiveness. He wrote "Archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past;" (Hall, 2001, p.92). To him archiving is an organic living movement where information is added, organized and use for further references sourced from diversified areas.

Today life has become technology driven where digitization is the new normal and the accessibility of information is just a click away. Hence the concept of archiving cannot be an isolated practice, it has to be inclusive. Biographies are documentation of life especially important for those prominent personalities who were a part of stardom. Considering the biographies of Madhubala and Meena Kumari they provide an insight into the lives of these Bollywood stars. An online survey into the contents of NFAI provided that it consists of documented and preserved rare footage, photographs, press clippings, posters and film reels of these iconic heroines of yesteryears till modern age depicting their participation in the films. However, these artifacts are mere identification of their presence showing a part of their past glory. Whereas life writing is a documented proof of their personal as well as professional memory. Their biographies reveal multidimensional aspects of their characters along with the cultural memory during their time which is impossible to know from the official film archives. The National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC)⁴⁰ Mumbai houses rich heritage and historical reference of Indian motion picture through ages, a visit to their official website reveals the contents preserved are related to the history of Indian Cinema as a subject, but it is not all inclusive. Film archives at national level preserve references and artifacts related to the history of the evolution of cinema at the thematic, subjective and technical levels. The personal film repositories both online and off line like 'Film Heritage Foundation' do have some preserved artifacts but that too are parts of film related memorabilia such as scripts, letters, lobby cards, autographs, film and star posters and postcards. Life narratives have never been considered as artifacts for archival purpose. Biographies do suffer a stigma attached about its genuinity and proven authentication however, if a well-researched biography is available it can be considered as a part of archival artifact for further reference. In this case both the biographies of Madhubala and Meena Kumari is well researched and documented, they contain interviews of contemporary personalities, excerpts of interviews sourced from film magazines that can be considered as documents of authentication. Hence, drawing from Hall's concept of 'living archive' biographies can be included as a part of this incessant journey of archiving. As Hall stated nothing is static in the world of archiving, evolving to the fact that biographies can form a counter-archive that can exist parallelly with the official film archives and it will add a new dimension to the existing corpus of reference.

Rashmi Devi Sawhney⁹ in her article titled "Uncontained" Archives of Cinema (chapter 11) in the book *Exploring Past Images in a Digital Age*¹⁰ has rightly expressed the lacuna she experienced while working on two eminent figures of Indian Cinema of yesteryears Fatma Begum¹¹ (1892-1983) and D.G Phalke¹² (1870-1944) both were the first South Asian¹³ female and male directors respectively. Her work dives deep into the primary material recording their personal lives, works, achievements and contributions towards the development of Indian Cinema during the silent film era¹⁴. In her paper Sawhney discussed that she found

discontinuity of chronological shifts in archival records. She mentioned the immense contribution of director Kamal Swaroop¹⁵ on reviving and retracing the life of Dadasaheb (D.G) Phalke, Swaroop invested years of his life on this project. She also mentioned the lack of availability of records and documents on silent films apart from a handful, especially 1900 onwards for almost three decades there is no availability of proper documents. She concluded stating “Rather, I propose a kaleidoscopic approach to historiography, whereby we are able to rearrange available bits into new patterns, showing up the world in a diversity of forms;” (Sawhney, 2023, p.229). Here too she discussed about a comprehensive approach towards archiving and reading history that includes references from varied available sources supporting Hall’s concept of ‘living archive’. During the silent film era life writing was not into practice, therefore Kamal Swaroop had to conducted workshops to trace the life of Dadasaheb Phalke. His research work is compiled in a book *Tracing Phalke* and published in May 2013 in collaboration with NFDC⁴¹ and is considered as a significant archival document on Phalke. An important point of reference, both Vinod Mehta and Khatija Akhtar followed this similar path while tracing lives of Madhubala and Meena Kumari to write their biographies and similarly there was limited archival reference found on their lives.

Memorabilia are the objects connected to an event or a person that perform as interesting collectable items. While there is a general tendency to confuse between memorabilia and souvenirs, they are different. Souvenirs are tangible objects collected to remember a specific event, date or a place of tourist attraction, whereas memorabilia have historical significance related to a particular person or an event. Spandan Bhattacharya’s¹⁸ article titled “Archive ‘Stories’: Indian Film Memorabilia in the Age of New Media Public” illustrates various forms memorabilia as an essential part of archiving and documentation sourced from people not directly associated with the world of cinema. He mainly focusses on various personal collections of film memorabilia, private archive (online and offline both) and archivists in West Bengal. He went on to discuss about photographer and film maker Arindam Saha Sardar, musicians Ashok Chakraborty and Adinath Das, visual artist Bhavani Charan Law and other collectors who personally contributed in the survival of film and art memorabilia in Bengal. Bhattacharya states “Sardar set up the Jiban Smriti Archive with a collection of numerous disc records, more than 8,000 periodicals, about 12,000 photographs of different kinds, more than 700 letters and 96 paintings by reputed artists.” (Bhattacharya, 2024, p.220). He also mentioned about the Bengali film magazine *Nachghar*¹⁹ circulated in the beginning of 1920s served as film magazines much like *Anandalok* and *Flimfare* of today. *Sobha*²⁰ and *Dipali*²¹ were fashion magazine published in and around 1926-1935 holds the same place like we have for *Sananda*²², *Femina*²³ and *Vogue India*²⁴ today. Bhattacharya also stated about the commendable effort to revive and include film memorabilia namely by *Cinemaazi*²⁵ an online archive, “Moreover, social media pages such as ‘Colonial Zamemedar’, ‘Film History Pic’ etc.” (Bhattacharya, 2021, p.226) these portals that use film memorabilia in this post-digital era as mentioned by Bhattacharya. Bhattacharya’s paper states the signification of film memorabilia in the process of film archiving especially in the Bengali film industry. It is here that biographies are entirely different from available film memorabilia. An artifact becomes memorabilia as per its value in representation of the particular event or person connected to it. Biographies of super stars are directly connected with their lives. It is as precious as film posters, autographs and artifacts used by the celebrity. More so when the celebrity has no archival records of their personal lives. Hence biographies of Madhubala and Meena Kumari can perform as significant film memorabilia and valued collectables for their fans. They depict a slice of their lives that never surfaced in public.

From the above discussion it is evident that biographies have the potential to be identified as memorabilia for archival reference. As a part of my PhD research I have been exploring related literature to identify subsequent research done on biographies of Bollywood

heroines from above-mentioned era especially on Madhubala and Meena Kumari. However, biographies of Bollywood heroines from the past especially from the 1930s is yet to be explored academically. In this section I have incorporated close textual analysis of some significant passages to support the central argument of my paper. Both these superstars were born in 1933 and their career spanned almost over two decades, in case of Meena Kumari it is over three decades. It is quite surprising that with such stardom and popularity in the world of Bollywood cinema and numerous films behind them, their personal lives are not mapped academically. My primary texts include biographies *Meena Kumari: The Classic Biography* (1972) by Vinod Mehta³¹ and *'I want to live' The story of Madhubala* (1997) by Khatija Akbar³². Both biographies are written by well-read people from the field of journalism and academia.

To begin with, in the words of Vinod Mehta 'Mahajabeen Ara Begum (Meena Kumari), Fatima Rashid (Nargis) and Mumtaz Jahan Begum Dehlavi (Madhubala) were contemporaries.' (Mehta, 1972, p. xvi). They had huge fan following, since it was the pre-digital era the scene was different, Debashree Mukherjee stated in her article "Fan magazines and tabloids were regularly swamped by letters demanding biographical information about stars." (Mukherjee, 2013. p.9). Hence it is evident that at that time the people were curious about the personal lives of celebrities especially women as a part of collective memory.

Madhubala and Meena Kumari both began their film career as child artists. Madhubala was known as 'Baby³³ Mumtaz' and Meena Kumari was called 'Baby Meena'. The primary reason for their personal lives did not come under public gaze was due to their conservative families. Both the artists' fathers were staunch patriarch who did not make their daughters' private lives public. A few excerpts from the two biographies about the fathers of these artists reveal various aspects of their personal, social and professional lives.

Mehta writes about Ali Bux father of Meena Kumari in her biography he clearly portrays the image of a strict disciplinarian conservative man who was extremely vigilant about his daughters.

I suppose I am guilty of painting a picture of Ali Bux as a pretty heartless man. It was a picture which was confirmed by all who knew him or saw him. In fact, there was never any great emotional attachment between the daughters and father. (Mehta, 2013, p.19-20)

"Bux's attitude towards his daughters continued to be stern and businesslike." (Mehta, 2013, p.19-20). From the above passages it is evident that though Mehta feels guilty of portraying the character of Ali Bux in the light being unemotional and stern, still he chose to be factual rather than imaginative for the sake of authenticity. For Ali Bux his daughters were investment plans for his future as they were the primary breadwinners of the family, especially Meena Kumari. Hence Ali Bux constantly kept them under his strict surveillance. Mehta used a harsh term 'heartless man' and 'businesslike' to portray the rigid, stern and calculative character of Ali Bux although Mehta was at the risk of being biased in his opinion. However, throughout the biography the following incidents supported Mehta's well-articulated remarks on Ali Bux.

Similar instances and parental strictness are well observed in Madhubala's biography by Khatija Akbar. "Her father was the redoubtable Ataullah Khan who moulded both her career and her life. A good-looking man, he belonged to the old school of harsh disciplinarians and is remembered by many as stubborn and headstrong." (Akbar, 1997, p.43). Akbar used words like old school, head strong, disciplinarian to describe the character of Madhubala's father who has been the greatest influence in shaping the events of her life. It is interesting to observe how

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Ataullah Khan is depicted to have rigid value system that he imposed on Madhubala in order to gain control over her life's decisions. The reason as clearly mentioned in the biography as Madhubala being the only earning member supporting her large family financially.

Night shootings were rare, undertaken only in exceptional cases like *Mughal-e-Azam*³³. While outdoor shootings were also avoided as far as possible, industry functions were out of question and she continued to be uninvolved and unaffected by the glitter and glamour of the world around her. (Akbar, 1997, p.64).

From the above passage it is clear that Ataullah Khan imposed strict rules to have full control of her professional as well personal life, especially on social interaction making her a puppet in his hands. In this passage Akbar tried to provide a clear picture of an insecure father who desperately controlled his daughter's access to stardom so that she can be moulded as per his continence. It is evident how fathers of both the superstars never let their daughters experience the spectacle of stardom. Meena Kumari resisted her father's control and eloped with the love of her life Kamal Amrohi, whereas Madhubala obeyed Ataullah Khan till her last breath. The characters of Ali Bux and Ataullah Khan represent a section of people who treated acting like any other profession with no frills attached, for them it was only mode to earn money. They went to extreme heights of authority in order to ensure the generation of income is not interrupted at any cost. Reading these biographies unravels collective memory of oppression and dominance in the actresses' personal lives through the characters of their fathers.

In this section selected passages from Mehta's Biography is used for close textual analysis.

Sensibly, said nothing about his departed wife as an actress, rather he spoke of his private loss in the form of an elegy: 'Once people took away my Manju after naming her Meena Kumari. Now this cruel Death has snatched her away from everybody. But I know she isn't dead. She is sleeping in my heart in an immortal sleep'. One doesn't necessarily have to be malicious or insensitive or both, to suggest all these carefully carved words were ritual hypocrisy. Genuine grief, for even the gifted, is difficult to express since it comes from the deep fathomless ocean of the psyche. (Mehta, 2013, p.10)

I hope I am not being chauvinistic when I claim that the most telling reaction to my heroine's death came to my sister-a passionate and long-standing admirer. On hearing the news, she closed her eyes for a few seconds and sighed, 'Bechari' (Mehta, 2013, p.11).

Both these passages are extracted from the event of Meena Kumari's death in 1972. Mehta skillfully crafted his biography beginning with her death and the reactions captured either during private interactions or at a public appearance. Mehta being a journalist has adapted his storytelling skills in a subtle manner without overshadowing the purpose of documentation. These passages are in contrast to each other depicting the fake articulated expression of Kamal Amrohi as opposed the genuine expression of shock, grief and empathy received from Mehta's sister encapsulated in a single word 'Bechari'. Meena Kumari as Mehta states was known as the 'great tragedienne' (Mehta, 2013, p. xv) of Bollywood for flawless portrayal of pain and grief in her movies. Through these paragraphs Mehta portrayed her real-life condition that perfectly matches with her onscreen character after her death. As she was empathized on screen similarly people were empathetic towards her post death. People whom she loved unconditionally faked grief even after her death however, people who admired her where genuinely grief stricken. His choice of words such as malicious and insensitive in the first passage instigate a direct attack on the broken marital relationship between Meena Kumari and

Kamal Amrohi, surprisingly in the next paragraph Mehta's usage of the word 'chauvinistic' before opening the passage indicates he was cautious expressing his biased opinion about Meena Kumari received from his sister. These two passages indicate the author's conscious choice of words to identify and express facts along with personal opinions in this biography. Mehta used a personalized narrative style placing the biographer (himself) inside the narrative. Through the corpus of this biographical work he has used the pronoun 'I' to state the author's remarks and views. He addressed Meena Kumari as 'my heroine' in order to add the empathetic personal aspect to the otherwise dry documentation of her life. Mehta has been transparent and brutally honest in his opinionated remarks especially on Kamal Amrohi's speech at his wife's death.

The characters are constructed with practical approach. Mehta was unbiased in portraying the primary as well as the secondary characters associated with the life of his heroine. He has employed simple crisp direct sentences without elaborate ornamentation to keep the flow simple and smooth. The inclusion of dialogues between the characters makes his literary work interesting. As a skilled writer he knew how to evoke empathy in his words and yet be practical without missing the facts. Mehta did not contradict or took side of his subject. He deliberately separated the two-opposite personas of his heroine, the tragedy queen on screen and the unbiased unapologetic straight forward woman in her personal life. He rather left it to his readers to find out who was the real Meena Kumari.

Khatija Akbar's biography on Madhubala on the other hand gives a completely different perspective about biographical writing. Below are the select passages.

The awesome image undoubtedly grew from and sustained itself on the characteristic aloofness, the maintaining of a distance and the consequent element of mystery. Exclusiveness and reticence are such an essential part of allure. The fervent adulation worship of fans added to the 'Star' aura. 'She was extremely popular', asserts Dilip Kumar, 'and I think the only star for whom people thronged outside the gates. (Akbar, 1997, p.73)

If Madhubala's good looks gave her an automatic edge over every other actress, it worked against her too; for even while enjoying the spontaneity and skill of her performance, people remarked on her beauty first and last, taking the acting for granted. It must have been galling. (Akbar, 1997, p.122)

From the above passages it is evident that Khatija Akbar's biography mainly revolved around Madhubala's celebrated beauty. In the first passage using words like aloofness, distance, mystery, exclusiveness and reticence she has rightly focused on the aura created by Madhubala. This is a constructed image that Madhubala held for her admirers. Only a few people in Bollywood were fortunate to experience the real Madhubala. Akbar in her biography did not challenge this image, though in some areas she has placed her opinions on Madhubala's constructed 'Star' aura (Akbar, 1997, p.73). Akbar's biography is heavily dotted with opinions and remarks on her subject by various contemporary film personalities. She primarily focused on delivering authentic information with supportive documents to construct the character of her subject. She has been direct in her approach devoid of imagination. The narrative style is formal maintaining linear format of storytelling. She used third person narrative voice, the tone is warm, understanding and empathetic. The descriptive language is formal but ornamented, there is ample use of adjectives for description as the topic demanded such treatment.

In her biography Akbar was more like a vigilant author authenticating documentation however, there are few instances where she included her point of view as a biographer. The second passage depicts this fact clearly, Akbar expressed her views on Madhubala's acting skill which has been overshadowed by her ethereal beauty. The beauty that led Madhubala to

stardom was ironically the reason for her frustration and anger. Though the audience enjoyed her acting but primarily appreciated her beauty. The usage of the word ‘galling’ by Akbar clearly depicts empathetic attitude towards her subject.

From the above textual analysis, it is apparent that biographies are not mere representation of documented lives of eminent personalities. They are in fact ‘living archive’ of life spent in multiple layers of perspectives. Both the biographers used different modes of expression yet maintained authentication of documentation fulfilling the most important criteria of life writing. They projected a holistic approach of recording lives with its highs and lows maintaining balance and emotion. The biographies provide a glimpse of work ethic, socio-cultural narratives and the position of women in Bollywood during the pre-digital era. Hence these biographies add to the existing archival information about the iconic superstars. Biographies are a potent source of information about their professional and personal memories from a historical past that can be considered as Bollywood star memorabilia.

A movie star is not made overnight, be it in any era. Especially if she happens to be a woman. While working on my article, I realized the entertainment industry especially Bollywood was not fair with them decades back, and it is still difficult to survive as a woman. Since the silent movie era where both Dadasaheb Phalke and Fatma Begum were the pioneers as film directors, Dadasaheb’s identity is associated with his film where as to name Fatima’s film we have to look for references. While working on my research I came upon an interesting fact, that these biographies do not share a space in the archives of film memorabilia. A few related topics have been researched, such as a PhD thesis titled ‘Scripting the Self: The Crafting and Performance of the Celebrity Persona in the Autobiographical Writings of Indian Actresses (1930-2000)’ by Meghna Gangadharan²⁶. Here she tried to explore the autobiographies of three eminent actresses Hansa Wadkar²⁷, Zohra Segal²⁸ and Madhur Jaffery²⁹ highlighting their professional lives through the prism of their personal selves.

While Debashree Mukhejee’s article titled ‘Notes on a Scandal: Writing Women’s Film History Against an Absent Archive’ published in 2013 by Sarai/Center for the study of Developing Societies, University of Westminster explored the critical aspect of scandals related to Bollywood film actresses during the 1930s and 1940s in the backdrop of the famous film studios³⁰ of Bombay. She depicted the syndicate like stature of the studios where the fate and publicity of an actress was made, the studios were the birth place of scandals that could make and break the film career of an aspiring actress. It is evident from these topics that there has been some research work done on the women in Bollywood be it autobiographies or archival documents to support academic research.

Some interesting finding that surfaced about Kamal Amrohi who is mainly known as Meena Kumari’s husband. Apart from this identity he was an eminent script writer (he wrote the dialogues for the film *Mughal-e-Azam*), directed the iconic movie *Pakeejah*. Unfortunately, there is no life writing on Amrohi apart from a few film scripts, Urdu poetry and information acquired from the biographies of Meena Kumari. With Amrohi’s death information about an entire generation is lost. Biographies help to retain the lost cultural history through the lives of the eminent personalities. In cultural studies there are numerous areas to explore, many a time due to lack of documentation (as it happened while conducting research on Dadasaheb Phalke’s life) the projects get shelved for years. Hence archiving biographies can become a dependable parallel source of information.

Conclusion

In this new digitized world academia and entertainment can work together. The accessibility

of information has already bridged this gap, many researchers are exploring topics beyond the prescribed forms of academia (as discussed in the result section). I have centered my research confined to Bollywood heroines of yesteryears. In this context, I have come to the conclusion that biographies of Bollywood stars are considered as books on page three gossip like any other fashion or film magazine. In reality it is entirely different, eminent scholars film journalist research relentlessly to document the lives of deceased personalities who have left a legacy of rich cultural heritage behind them. Biographies are not mere life writings of a particular personality it is the representation of the society they belonged especially women stars. In this regard both select biographies confirm the dominance of patriarchy in families even of super stars during the 1950s. The fan following of Madhubala was insane, the stardom she faced and the way she managed it reflects her disciplined upbringing, which is unimaginable in post-digital age. The fashion trends of their era and the socio-cultural structure of society they lived in is reflected in their biographies. Each biography is different yet spun with similar thread, the autobiography of Dilip Kumar also validates the strict patriarchal value system followed in Madhubala's family. Whereas the contrast of resistance shaped the individual lives of Madhubala and Meena Kumari in spite being in similar social condition. Their biographies reveal the lesser known facts about their personalities as well, especially of Meena Kumari. Lastly, these biographies are not merely documented facts but are 'living archives' of cultural heritage represented through the lives of these iconic super stars. They are a storehouse of information for further academic exploration. These biographies can contribute as a counter-archive along with the existing repository of archival documents about these Bollywood heroines. I have just touched the tip of the iceberg; biographies can be interpreted from multiple angles. Exploring them from different levels can open up potential for further academic research.

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12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansa_Wadkar
13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zohra_SehgalGb
14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madhur_Jaffrey
15. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinod_Mehta
16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamal_Amrohi
17. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._K._Nair

Endnotes

1. Memorabilia mainly refers to collectable objects treasured for their memories and historical or archival value, also check the Wikipedia link for further reference.
2. Bollywood is the unofficial term used for identifying Hindi Cinema or Bombay Cinema as it is popularly known. The studios are entirely based in Mumbai then known as Bombay.
3. Spectacle is a French word and in Latin it is *Spectaculum* means 'to show', it was introduced by Guy Debord, he was a French situationist and Marxist theorist, in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) he described the social relationship of people with showoff and consumerism.
4. Pre-digital era marks the time before the mid of 20th century Digital Revolution relying heavily on manual data processing.
5. Public Gaze is a part of the bigger word 'Gaze' intruded by Michel Foucault who explained the 'Gaze Theory' that observation is a mechanism to exercise power.

6. Stuart Henry McPail Hall (1932-2014) was a Jamaica born British Jamaican cultural theorist, sociologist and political activist who played an important role in the establishment of Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. Check the Wikipedia link.
7. An Archive is a repository where historical records, data, documents are preserved and kept for retention and reference.
8. Digitization is the process of converting information into digital format that can be read by computers, the process makes manual elaborated processing of data more organized, streamlined and compressed with less mistakes, there are more levels to this simple definition.
9. Rashmi Devi Sawhney is a cultural theorist based out of Bangalore and is an associate Professor of Cultural Studies at Christ University.
<http://www.intellectbooks.com/rashmi-sawhney>
10. Digital Age is identified with rapid growth of information technology and usage of internet it is also known as the Information Age, it identifies the change in the access and usage of information and internet by individual.
11. Fatma Begum (1892-1983) she was the first female film director in Indian cinema, she was also a screenwriter, producer and actress. She established a production house Fatma Films, her first film was *Bulbul-e-Paristan*, (1926). A woman of power and authority she has built a legacy in Bollywood, contemporary actress Rhea Pillai is her great granddaughter.
12. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke or famously known as Dadasaheb Phalke (1870-1944) was the father of Indian Cinema, he was the first Indian director, screenwriter and producer to make a full-length motion film *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) that commenced the beginning of Indian Cinema and the beginning of film industry in India.
13. South Asian includes the southern subregion of the Asian continents as listed Indian, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Maldives, people belonging to these countries, their culture and identity are collectively termed as South Asian.
14. Silent Film Era stretched from mid 1890s to early 1930s where the films produced had no coordinated record dialogue, hence the mode of entertainment highly depended on the exaggerated body language and expression by visual storytelling and usage of inter titles. For Indian cinema the silent film era began with Dadasaheb Phalke's film *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and continued till 1931.

15. Kamal Swaroop (1950-) is an acclaimed director worked with film, television and radio; he is also a screenwriter. He has invested a part of his life tracing down the life of Dadasaheb Phalke.
16. Historiography is the study the making of history, it is the critical understanding of the process of interpretation of history. Broadly historiography is divided into 4 schools of thoughts, Marxist, subaltern, Colonialist/Imperialist and Nationalist. Please look up *Historiography: Ancient Medieval and Modern* by Ernst Breisach.
17. Oral History has been a part of Aboriginal culture across the world, it is the process of preservation of past events through speech from one generation to another. it is a process of collection, interpretation and preservation of the first hand memory of the participants who have witnessed the past event.
18. Spandan Bhattacharya is an assistant professor of Film Studies at BITS Pilani (Hyderabad Campus) Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.
19. The quintessential Bengali magazine *Nachghar* published in 1924 has been the earliest cultural and film magazine of Bengal. Edited by literary personalities Hemendra Kumar Roy and Premankur Atarhi, the digitized form is preserved and available at the Bengal Film Archive.
20. Bhavani Charan Law (1880-1946) was an acclaimed artist for Bengal published a book in 1926 titled *Sobha* that comprised a compilation of photographs of women in sensuous poses modelled for the book along with couplets written by Rabindranath Tagore.
21. In the earlier part of 1930s, a fashion magazine was launched titled *Dipali* following the pattern of *Sobha*. It was probably the first bilingual fashion and film magazine in Bengal.
22. A women's fortnightly magazine *Sananda* has been circulation since 1968 it is published by the ABP group Kolkata. It has been consistently present in the household of Bengali families, here too the template of *Sobha* can be observed in earlier issues. Please check the Wikipedia link for further reference.
23. A pan India leading women's English magazine *Femina* was first published in 1959, published by the Times Group.
24. The *Vogue India* was first published in 2007, it is one of the internationally published women's fashion and lifestyle magazine. <https://www.vogue.in/>
25. Cinemaazi is a private non-profit digital archive of cinema memorabilia housing more than hundred years of archival and cultural artifacts across language and cultures.

Source: Google Arts & Culture

<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/cinemaazi?source=sh%2Fx%2Fsrp%2Fwr%2Fm1%2F0&kgs=93924f15552ae377>

26. Meghna Gangadharan from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Indore in the department of Humanities and Social Sciences she was awarded PhD in June 2025.
27. Hansa Wadkar (1924-1971) was a bilingual (Marathi and Hindi) stage as well as film actress. She has authored her autobiography published in 1970, initially in Marathi then edited and translated in English.
28. Zohra Sehgal (1912-2014) as she was famously known, was an eminent actress, choreographer, dancer and a Plasmasphere awardee 1998. Her autobiography was published in 2010.
29. Madhur Jaffrey (1933-) she is a multitalented person, a travel and cook book writer, an actress and a television personality famously known for cookery shows. She has been showered with numerous awards. Her autobiography was published in 2006.
30. Film Studios are companies that produce and distributes motion pictures, they act like companies looking over every detail of film making.
31. Vinod Mehta (1941-2015) was one of the prominent journalists, a political commentator and an editor. Apart from being associated with famous publishing house he has authored several books; he also wrote the biography of Meena Kumari (1972).
32. Khatija Akbar an M.A in English from Osmania University Hyderabad, is an educator and as authored the biography of Madhubala published in 1997.
33. The term 'Baby' was used as a prefix for any child artist in Indian Cinema. The reason was initially to hide the real identity still keep the real name prefixed with 'baby', later became a marketing strategy for endorsements. Hence Madhubala and Meena Kumari were named as 'Baby Mumtaz and Baby Meena' respectively.
34. *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) produced under the banner of Sterling Investment Corporation was an epic historical drama that was the most expensive motion picture produced during that period. K. Asif directed and produced it, while Kamal Amrohi wrote the screenplay, Madhubala and Dilip Kumar starred apposite to each other with other prominent actors of that time. It was a milestone movie for both actors.
35. *Pakeejah* (1972) was a musical and romantic drama from Mahal production house. It was produced, written and directed by the famous writer director Kamal Amrohi. It took 15 years to complete. Starred by Meena Kumari. Ashok Kumar and Raj Kumar, A big budget successful film, but it was the last film of Meena Kumari as unfortunately she died a month after its release.

36. Kamal Amrohi was a scriptwriter, Director and Urdu poet, he was also Meena Kumari's husband. Born in Amroha Uttar Pradesh he left a rich legacy of Hindi Films like Mahal, Pakeejah and many more, he established Kamal Amrohi Studios known as Kamalistan Studios.
37. National Film Archive of India.
38. Paramesh Krishnan Nair was the founder of NFAI an Indian film archivist.
39. Counter-archive is a community-based repository of records primarily created to challenge the existing official archival narratives.
40. National Museum of Indian Cinema.
41. National Film Development Corporation of India.

Bio-note

Debaroti Sarkar, is a Ph.D. scholar in the Department of English at Tripura University. She holds an M.A. and an M.Phil. in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University, with research focusing on gender and genre in the poetic voice of Urdu ghazals. She has taught English Language and Communication at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, and later serving as an Assistant Professor of English at ICFAI University Tripura. She has moderated an FDP on Research Methodologies and NEP conference at Tripura University. She also participated in the summer course "Bodies at the Border," jointly conducted by Jadavpur University and Cornell University, the CLAI Conference at Jadavpur University and many National/International conferences. Her research interests include comparative literature, gender studies, Indian English literature, and cultural studies.

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