

## BFI South Asian Britain on Film

*Mahatma Gandhi's 1931 trip to the UK*

*Britain's first purpose built mosque*

*Gurinder Chadha's first film I'm British But... (1990)*

*Asif Kapadia's student film Indian Tales (1994)*

**NEWLY AVAILABLE FOR FREE THROUGH BFI PLAYER**

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/collections/south-asian-britain-on-film>

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**Friday 28 July, London** – BFI today releases **South Asian Britain on Film**, a collection of **80 newly digitised films**, spanning **nearly 100 years**, celebrating South Asian culture and communities across Britain. The films date back to **1914**, tracing multiple generations and exploring a variety of news stories and events, from colonial troops to the introduction of the UK's Race Relation Act of 1968. Highlights include news footage of **Mahatma Gandhi's** 1931 trip to the UK, **Britain's first purpose-built mosque** and early work from Oscar®-winning director **Asif Kapadia** (*Amy*, *Senna*) and award-winning director **Gurinder Chadha** (*Bend it Like Beckham*, *Bride and Prejudice*). These films are being made available **online via BFI Player**, mostly for free as part of Britain on Film and are drawn from the BFI National Archive and the UK's Regional and National Film Archives. The Independent Cinema Office (ICO) will tour a special South Asian Britain on Film compilation to cinemas across the UK later in the year.

South Asian Britain on Film marks groundbreaking events in the history of British South Asians on a global and local scale. *Gandhi in England* (BFI, 1931) records his attendance of the second India Round Table Conference in St James' Palace to decide on the future status of India as he leads the India Independence movement. On a more local level, *Oriental Atmosphere* (BFI, 1928) offers a rare look at **Britain's first purpose-built mosque**, the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, which is still open today.

### COMMUNITY

The collection documents South Asian British communities across the UK, in Bolton, Southall, Birmingham and more. *The Bradford Godfather* (BFI, 1976) is a portrait of **one of the first immigrants** from what is now Pakistan to settle in Bradford. Mohamed Fazal Hussain, who was 73 when the film was made, had moved to the UK over 40 years before. As a result he was often referred to as 'the godfather' due to being the oldest person in the Bradford's Muslim community. He was also, it emerges, a film mogul in the making.

Films in the collection show South Asians Britons at the heart of the community. *Asian Pub Landlord* (Media Archive for Central England, 1968) records **the first Indian pub owner** – Hans Raj Dhanjal – in Wolverhampton. Like a typical pub landlord Hans is not just there to pull pints but to offer a friendly ear to regulars, which often proves a challenge through thick Black Country dialect. *Indian Businessman* (Media Archive for Central England, 1975) tells the tale of a penniless young tailor from Dehli who turned the £3 that he arrived with into a half-a-million pound business – the Natraj Entertainment complex in Leicester. In just 14 years Mr Parmar became **one of the richest businessmen in the Midlands**. He explains how after a failed venture, he seized the opportunity of buying Villa Cross cinema. He attracted immigrant audiences by showing Indian cinema every night. This proved so successful that he started to import Indian films to his own cinemas and others across the UK.

### SOUTH ASIAN BRITISH FILMMAKERS

Work of British South Asian filmmakers feature in the collection, from the early work of award-winning directors **Asif Kapadia** and **Gurinder Chadha** to the first Hindi-language film made in Britain. Gurinder Chadha is arguably the most successful of the new wave of Asian-British filmmakers in the 1990s, recently directing *Viceroy's House* which featured the late, great **Om Puri** – who also starred in *Brothers in Trouble* (1995) and *East is East* (1999) both available on BFI Player. *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and her first film *I'm British But...* (BFI, 1989) are available in the collection. *I'm British But...* explores the complex issue of identity for second generation British Asians. This fascinating documentary is underscored by Bhangra and Bangla

music as interviews with young people from across the UK discuss the extent to which Asian culture has both been absorbed and influenced Western culture, including fashion and music.

**Gurinder Chadha** says “I cannot wait to sit and watch the new collection of South Asian films on BFI player. As someone who has spent my career recording our lives as British Asians on film I know first hand how critical it is to be visible as part of our national heritage. I am delighted to be part of such an important collection.”

*Indian Tales* (BFI, 1994), is the **student film of Asif Kapadia**, best known for documentaries *Amy* (2015) and *Senna* (2010). This again explores the influence of Asian culture on Britain through Indian folklore, and how this seeps into the lives of modern Brits. The film stars **Amita Dhiri**, who later starred in the cult 90s drama *This Life*, alongside Andrew Lincoln and Jack Davenport. Also in the collection are groundbreaking works by lesser-known filmmakers. *Pasand Apni Apni* (BFI, 1969) is believed to be the **first Hindi-language film** to be made in Britain. An all-singing, all-dancing Bollywood romance transposed to England, it explores the tension between traditional Indian values and the lure of Western freedoms for first-generation British Asians, with Simi Garewal in a dual role as Western Rita and traditional Sita. Also made in Hindi is the fascinating documentary *London Me Bharat* (BFI, 1972) directed by Vinod Pande, which shines a light on the daily lives of Asian Britons in London's suburbs. The film opens with traditional Indian music playing over iconic London landmarks before moving on to the less familiar Southall, home to one of the largest Indian communities in London.

#### **PUBLIC INFORMATION FILMS**

The collection contains a selection of public information films explaining both the **Race Relation Act of 1968**, which marks its 50 years next year, and the **Race Relations Act of 1976**. These Acts made it illegal to refuse housing, employment or public services on the grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origins. Two of the public information films on this subject – *Race Relations Board* (BFI, 1969) and *The Referee* (BFI, 1976) – draw comparisons between the law and Britain's tradition of sportsmanship and 'fair play'. *The Referee* uses wrestling as a metaphor for race relations: the referee being the Race Relations Board enforcing the rules to ensure fair play. *Insaaf* (BFI, 1971) is a public information film with a difference, partly filmed in Urdu, it provides an example of the board's role in enforcing the 1968 Act. The film is a story of a qualified young man denied a job due to his race. The film intercuts between English and Urdu in the man's family life, referencing the different experiences of first and second generation British Asians.

#### **UGANDAN ASIANS**

*See For Yourself!* (BFI, 1972), an edition of the esteemed current affairs strand *World in Action*, sees debates surrounding immigration and housing crisis voiced by the butchers at the Smithfield Market. These debates are catalysed by **President Idi Amin's expulsion of the South Asian-descended population from Uganda** (whose ancestors were placed there by the British Empire). The film takes one outspoken trade unionist to Uganda in a groundbreaking experiment, where he witnesses the reality facing individuals being exiled from the country. The expulsion is addressed by a number of other films, including *Uganda Asians* (BFI, 1972) and *Exodus – Uganda* (BFI, 1972), which take a more orthodox approach. In the latter, made for ITV's *This Week*, Jonathan Dimbleby seeks out the view on the Ugandan streets from both Asians and Africans. A series of local news reports held by the South West Film and Television Archive show resettlement camps in the West Country and feature interviews with refugees, who explain how they are adjusting to life in Britain in *Ugandan Asians at Houndstone Camp* (1972), *Ugandan Asians at Heathfield Camp* (1972) and *Ugandan Asians at Plasterdown Camp* (1972).

#### **MILITARY**

Early films in the collection feature South Asian contributions to the British Empire's armed forces. In 1924 and 1925 the British government held the British Empire Exhibition, a chance to demonstrate the full glory of the Empire on a world stage. *Indian Bands for Wembley* (BFI, 1924) shows a military band of Indian musicians being inspected as they prepare for the exhibition. A newsreel from mid-WWII - *British News No. 53* (BFI, 1941) - presents trainees invited from India to learn to build aeroplanes in Britain.

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Images are available via – [www.image.net](http://www.image.net) | BFI > Britain on Film > South Asian Britain on Film

#### **ABOUT BRITAIN ON FILM AND UNLOCKING FILM HERITAGE**

Britain on Film is one of the largest and most complex archival projects ever undertaken and is part of the BFI's Unlocking Film Heritage programme (2013-17). Unlocking film heritage for everyone in the UK to enjoy is a key strategic priority for the BFI, and Britain on Film is the public launch of a vast programme of work, which has been ongoing for over three years. Bringing together a partnership with Regional and National Film Archives and rights holder collections across the UK, this work has included a sophisticated programme of data capture, cataloguing, copying to archival standards, meticulous preservation of original materials, thorough searching of archives across the country, new state-of-the-art equipment and digital storage facilities and the transfer of films to the BFI's online video platform, BFI Player.

Unlocking Film Heritage and Britain on Film are thanks to £15 million funding from the National Lottery and the additional support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

#### **BRITAIN ON FILM ONLINE ELSEWHERE**

- Selections from Britain On Film will also be hosted on the BFI's YouTube channel, Facebook and Twitter, so audiences can find and experience it in the easiest way possible
- BFI and regional and national film archive curators will be writing features highlighting important films and themes on the BFI website. Their expertise will add context and provide new ways in for the British public to find films that illuminate the places they know and love
- Join the conversation at **#BritainOnFilm**

**Britain on Film is a project from the BFI National Archive and the UK's Regional and National Film Archives**

#### **ABOUT THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVES**

The English Regional Film Archives and other National Film Archives (listed below) hold significant collections of film and video material specifically relevant to their regions or hold dedicated collections such as Imperial War Museums, preserved in specialised storage facilities and made widely available for education, research, communities and the wider public.

East Anglian Film Archive  
Imperial War Museums  
London's Screen Archives  
Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln  
North East Film Archive  
North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University  
Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive  
National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive  
Screen Archive South East  
South West Film & Television Archive  
National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales  
Wessex Film and Sound Archive  
Yorkshire Film Archive

#### **ABOUT THE BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

#### **ABOUT THE BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE**

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. For over 80 years the BFI has been an international leader in film preservation and guardian of Britain's unparalleled film and TV heritage. The BFI is an innovator in presenting films to audiences in new and dynamic ways, from cinemas to film festivals, outdoor events to online video-on-demand. At the heart of all its activities is the BFI's central aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to the widest possible range of film and their own film heritage.

That heritage includes all time great British directors Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean and Powell and Pressburger; and the rich vein of documentary filmmaking, in which Britain led the world, including the lyrical work of Humphrey Jennings. The archive also boasts a significant collection of filmmakers' papers as well as extensive stills, posters and production and costume designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera.

Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films at the BFI John Paul Getty Jr Conservation Centre in Hertfordshire. The BFI's most precious film materials are kept in optimum conditions in the world-leading Master Film Store in Warwickshire.

#### **ABOUT BFI PLAYER**

BFI Player is a ground-breaking video on demand service which offers a uniquely diverse range of films, from the latest releases to the rarest silent cinema classics, giving UK audiences a rich and rewarding digital film experience. The Britain on Film collections are accessible through the BFI Player. <http://player.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film>