



BEFORE MIDNIGHT – A PORTRAIT OF INDIA ON FILM, 1899 – 1947

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE MEDIATHEQUE
ON BFI SOUTHBANK FOR AUGUST

Before Midnight is an exceptional collection of films which document India prior to partition in 1947 and the vast majority are being made available to the public for the first time at the Mediatheque on BFI Southbank from 6th August 2007 celebrating the 60th anniversary of independence.

At the stroke of midnight on 14/15 August 1947, India finally achieved independence from Britain. These films from the holdings of the BFI National Archive offer astonishing and unparalleled insights into life in India during the period of British rule.

Among the highlights of the collection are the Maharajah of Jodhpur's home movies providing an epic portrait of princely power in the 30s and 40s. The Viceroy of India Lord Linlithgow's films reveal intimate family scenes alongside major state occasions. Tiger hunts, festivals and lavish hospitality are recorded alongside scenes of everyday life from boat repairs to girl guides by way of Gandhi.

These and other documentary records offer an unretouched picture of the many and unexpected faces of India revealed in films such as **Hillmen go to War** (1944) or **In Rural Maharashtra** (1940). Nowhere else in the world can you experience such a collection. Some are clearly intended as British government propaganda but on the whole these films are remote from the manicured nostalgia of so many recreations of the British in India. This is early 20th century India up-close and real as seen by a wide range of professional and amateur film-makers.

There are also rarely seen dramas such as the BBC's adaptation of Paul (Jewel in the Crown) Scott's **The Alien Sky** (1956) and Waris Hussein's dramatisation of **A Passage to India** (1965) starring Sybil Thorndike and Zia Mohyeddin. The collection also features films and television dramas that helped to shape the mythologies of British India including **Elephant Boy** (1937) starring Sabu, **North West Frontier** (1959) starring Lauren Bacall and Kenneth More and the much loved television epic **The Far Pavilions** (1984).

The collection is essential viewing for anyone who wants to know more about Britain's imperial past and everyday life amid the dazzling variety of cultures across India.

Ten to try

***Panorama of Calcutta* (1899)**

A boat trip along the Ganges – one of the earliest films shot in India

***Delhi Durbar* (1911)**

A cast of thousands appear at the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as Emperor and Empress of India

***A Punjab Village* (1925)**

Working in the rice fields, spinning, baking, washing...daily life in a Punjab village

***Wedding of the Maharaj Kumar Shri Meghraj Saheb of Kutch...*(1933)**

Indian princes arrive by yacht for a lavish wedding

***Lahore –Badshahi Mosque* (1933)**

Amateur footage of prayers at the mosque.

***The Craster Family at Jotwara* (1934)**

Home movie of garden parties and tiger hunts

***Temples of India* (1938)**

Gods, dancers and the Taj Mahal by moonlight. Glorious Technicolor film shot by Jack Cardiff.

***Tins for India* (1941)**

Short documentary made by Bimal Roy, the director of *Parineeta* (1953) and *Devdas* (1955)

***Black Narcissus* (1947)**

Rumer Godden's sensual tale of frustrated nuns in the Himalayas as conveyed by Powell & Pressburger.

***An Indian Affair* (2001)**

Historian Maria Misra offers a fresh perspective on Britain's long and complex relationship with India

The Mediatheque

Since it opened to the public on 14th March 2007 almost 3,000 people a month have visited the Mediatheque at BFI Southbank, enjoying unprecedented access to the BFI National Archive.

Robin Baker, Curator, BFI Mediatheque said,

“We have managed to create an appetite for archive film among people who may never have thought they had any interest in the subject. Whenever people are introduced to the collection they seem overwhelmed and delighted by the amount of material and its sheer diversity.

“ Some of our visitors are discovering the joys of a computer mouse for the first time. But all of them seem to take immense pleasure in films which were once only available to specialist researchers.”

All of the material on offer is British and drawn from the BFI National Archive. Over 400 hours of digitised material is viewable at 14 stations, seating a maximum of 26 people. Each month approximately 50 additional hours of material is added. We expect to have almost 800 hours by the end of the year. Digitisation for this project has been funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

What is a Mediatheque?

A Mediatheque is a place to enjoy hundreds of British films and television programmes from the BFI National Archive, totally free, at the click of a mouse. Most are not available on DVD, and a mediatheque is the only place you can enjoy many of these well loved classics.

The Mediatheque offers a window on the collections of the BFI National Archive, the most significant film and television archive in the world. The Mediatheque allows unprecedented access to our film and television heritage. From July a special section of film and television just for kids will offer a great new family-friendly addition to the collection.

You can watch as much or as little as you like at a mediatheque: sit back and enjoy an entire feature film or take a quick look at fondly remembered advertisements; use the database to search on a variety of subjects or browse to discover unexpected delights.

The BFI Mediatheque is open daily Tuesday 13.00 – 20.00; Wednesday – Sunday 11.00 – 20.00. Book in advance for a viewing station which can seat between one to four people, or simply turn up. Book for as little as 15 minutes or as much as two hours.

Tel: 020 7928 3535 or simply turn up.

What films can I see?

Research what you'd like to view in advance www.bfi.org.uk/mediatheque

Mediatheque curator **Robin Baker** is available for interview.

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