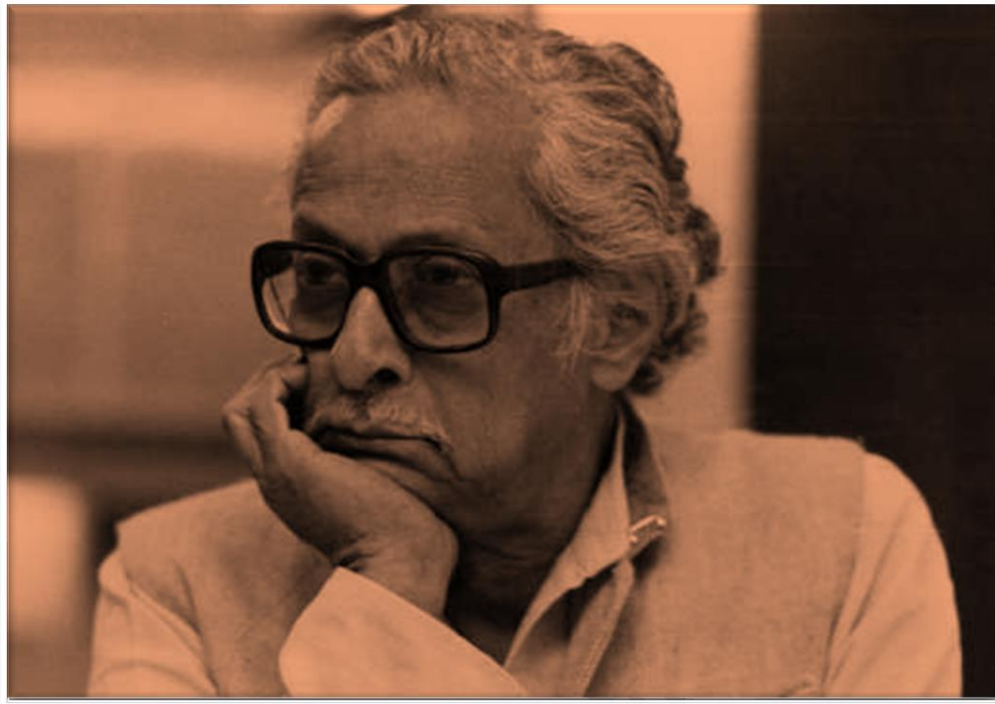


## Chidananda Dasgupta Memorial Award for Best Film Criticism



**FIPRESCI-India organised the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Competition for Chidananda Dasgupta Memorial Award for Best Film Criticism 2021. More than 50 participants took part in the contest. A Jury comprised of Prof. N. Manu Chakravarthy (Chairman), Dr. Minakshi Dutta (Member) and Mr. Narendra Bandabe (Member) evaluated the submissions and declared the Awards on 20 Nov 2021 – on the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Chidananda Dasgupta, the Founder President of FIPRESCI-India. Following is the Jury Observation declared by the Chairman on that date. In this issue of E-CineIndia we are publishing the Best and 2<sup>nd</sup> Best Award winning criticisms. Seven Certificate of Merit winning criticisms will be published in our upcoming issues.**

I am thankful to my two colleagues, Ms. Meenakshi Dutta and Mr. Narendra Bhandabe. What was heartening for us was the diversity of linguistic and cultural traditions that the reviews presented us with. In fact, there were writings based on films made in Assamese, Bengali, Gochiri, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, and Malayalam. What was quite interesting was that there were quite a few pieces on Malayali cinema. Pieces on Malayali cinema were considerably more. More fascinating was the fact that they came from several non-Malayalis, staying far away from Kerala, and that was a very important thing for us. It was also a bit of a revelation that in 2021, there were many pieces that took us back to the masters like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Adoor

Gopalakrishnan. There were also pieces on Shyam Benegal and several on almost forgotten films. It was also gratifying that there were number of pieces on both what we call popular, commercial mainstream cinema and the non-mainstream ones. It was very important for us to have the whole range before us.

We began by making it clear to ourselves that it was necessary to ensure that the writings were not mere summaries and that they were not routine newspaper reviews but we had to make that distinction. We looked for a rigorous and an analytical piece that had to recommend itself through its rigorous and analytical sense with a strong emphasis on analysis. And when I say this, I must make clear that whatever the cinematic text was, we

never made disparaging comments about popular, commercial mainstream cinema and the art cinema. But the mode of analysis mattered to us. In this we made sure that the film text had to find its proper contextualization, both in cinematic and cultural terms. We were quite clear that the analysis did not mean using the cinematic text as a mere pretext on which theory drawn from all kinds of sources could be dumped. Dumped to the extent of erasing the layers of the primary cinematic text. We were quite cautious when it came to the use of theoretical jargon and the use of theory. What mattered to us what a proper contextualization and conceptualization of the films and if theory mattered, it mattered to the extent, it helped extrapolate the expansive nature of the cinematic text. It had to dwell on the complex layers of the text. When theorization was attempted by the writers, we took care to see the use of theory was done in close relation to the structures of the film text and that they would foreground the multiple dimensions of the film and so it meant for us looking at theory, that theory did not treat the Indian film (because this was on Indian cinema) in an instrumentalist manner to parade the power of Western theory. There were many pieces that used theory quite effectively. But we always made sure that they brought out the layers of the cinematic text. In fact, there were a couple of pieces that were not heavily theoretical. But they did very seriously engage themselves in a competent manner using comparative methods, using questions of history, culture and politics and without becoming academic in a narrow manner. We were able to recognize the worth of such pieces too that did not depend heavily on theory. In fact, it was a learning experience for us. We thank the executive committee of FIPRESCI for giving us this very significant experience. It was a great responsibility and I think I can say, without making it look like a claim that we did take out duty very seriously and with some sincerity. A special word of thanks is due to Mr. Premendra Mazumdar for his excellent coordination. There were fifty-one pieces in all. It was very difficult for us to arrive at the final list of seven. In fact, the

earlier stipulated number was seven, but we managed to convince the executive committee and we increased it to nine. The executive committee very graciously accommodated two more pieces. The essays that eventually got the first two awards integrated theory and concrete textual analysis in an imaginative manner and in fact I would say that they furthered the frontiers of cinema. They were also unanimous choices and there was a fine balance between theory and textual analysis. The same was also true of the five pieces that finally got the certificate of merit. It was here that five became seven because the committee felt that it was quite necessary to include two more pieces, bringing the number up to seven to receive the certificate of merit. For the simple reason that they were organic and holistic in their views in the films they had taken up for analysis.

We are truly glad that the executive committee accommodated seven and bringing the total list to nine. I wish to add this number of seven in no way negates the value and importance of contribution of other contributions, but we had to stick to a certain number, and we chose what we thought were the better ones, if that's the word.

I would only now move on to announce the awards, the first one is by Soumik Hazra writing on the film *Ludo* and the second-best award goes to Rohit Saha whose essay was on the *Santoshathinte Onnam Rahasyam*. As far as the pieces that got the certificate of merit, the first is by Anik Sarkaar on *E. Ma Yau*, Anju Devadas on *The Great Indian Kitchen*, Ankita Rathore on *No one Killed Jessica*, Debanjan Dhar on *Laila aur Sat Geet*, after that N Ramachandran on *Kumbalangi Nights*, followed by Rekha Datta on *Once upon a Time* (Ondanada Kaladalli in Kannada), Vaisakh Madhavan on *Santhoshathinte Onam Rahasyam*. These nine with two best awards and seven with certificates of merit were our unanimous choice and as I mentioned earlier it was very tough to choose out of 51 pieces. That was the great constraint that the number was limited but I think we were open and receptive to all kinds of essays.

**Text of the speech delivered by Prof. N Manu Chakravarthy, Chairman of the Jury, transcribed by Ms. Bhagyalakshmi Makam.**