

Critique

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**Nostalgia, Nuance, Emotional Resonance and Visual Symphony:
A Reflection on Pan Nalin's *The Last Film Show***



Samay: *Fazal Brother, how are films made?*

Fazal: *Films...! Its about telling stories. Stories.....and films.... Have a long relationship. Politicians tell stories to win votes...Shopkeepers tell stories to sell their goods...The rich tell stories ...to hide their wealth. Future belongs to storytellers. The game is to tell stories...To know how to tell lies.*

Samay: *To tell you the truth, I'm very good at lying*

Any cinephile who fell under the spell of 'Cinema Paradiso' will undoubtedly experience a Bloomian anxiety while watching 'The Last Film Show'. 'Cinema Paradiso' marked a pivotal moment in international film, delivering a deeply moving, poignant and unforgettable cinematic experience. In contrast, Pan Nalin's self-confessed semi- autobiographical film

'The Last Film Show' is concise yet impactful, offering a charming and melancholic trip down memory lane. "The Last Film Show" is a captivating Gujarati film that immerses viewers in a somewhat hypnotic exploration of nostalgia. Despite its 120-minute duration, the film succeeds in holding the attention of its viewers throughout, creating a lasting impact that

lingers well beyond the final credits. The film was selected as India's official entry to the 95th Academy Awards 2022 and made the cut to the final sixteen films in the fray for the coveted award.

Pan Nalin, in his semi-autobiographical *Last Film Show* narrates the tale of Samay, a nine year-old boy residing in a remote village in Gujarat. Samay's sudden introduction to films sparks a profound fascination, leading him to defy his father's objections and frequent the cinema to immerse himself in this newfound passion. Establishing an unexpected friendship with the projectionist Fazal, Samay bargains his lunch box for free access to movies. As Samay grasps the concept that stories transform into light, light evolves into films, and films manifest as dreams, he, along with his spirited group of friends, endeavours to capture and project light for a 35mm film projection. In their determined pursuit, Samay and his friends employ an inventive strategy, ultimately succeeding in crafting a film projection apparatus. The film aims to evoke nostalgia for the celluloid era, recalling a time when movies were shot on 35mm stock, stored in cans, and sent to single-screen theatres for screening. The choice of the protagonist's name, Samay, serves as a poignant nod to the impending disappearance of the analogue world. The narrative underscores the bittersweet reality that pursuing one's dreams often necessitates leaving crucial aspects of the past behind, as eloquently depicted in the film.

One of the most striking aspects of 'The Last Film Show' is its visually stunning cinematography. Nalin, known for his keen eye for detail, makes the most of his talented

cinematographer Swapnil S Sonwane's creative skills to masterfully capture the essence of rural Gujarat in the 2000s. The film's colour palette, predominantly warm and earthy tones, transports viewers to a recently bygone era, evoking a sense of nostalgia and authenticity. The use of natural lighting further enhances the film's visual appeal, creating a realistic and immersive experience. The framing and composition of each shot in 'The Last Film Show' are meticulously crafted, exhibiting Nalin's and Swapnil's expertise in visual storytelling. Wide shots of the picturesque countryside, with its lush green fields and rustic villages, provide a breathtaking backdrop for the narrative. Close-ups of the characters' faces, capturing their emotions and expressions, add depth and intimacy to the storytelling. The attention to detail in the set design and costumes further enhances the film's authenticity, making it a visual treat for cinephiles.

The film's sound design plays a crucial role in immersing the audience in the film's world. The ambient sounds of chirping birds, rustling leaves, and other such realistic sound sequences transport viewers to the setting, creating a multisensory experience. The film's soundscapes mingled and mixed subtly with suitably designed metaphorical sound are carefully crafted to complement the visuals, enhancing the overall atmosphere and emotional impact of each scene. However, the sound, at times, tends to go a bit over board culminating in a jarring effect. The film's music perfectly complements the narrative, evoking a range of emotions.

The film's narrative structure is a testament to Nalin's storytelling prowess. It

follows the journey of a young boy, who, against all odds, embarks on a quest to watch his first and possibly last film before the local cinema shuts down. Nalin skilfully weaves together the past and present, seamlessly transitioning between timelines. This narrative technique not only adds depth to the characters but also allows the audience to experience the protagonist's nostalgia firsthand. The film's pacing is deliberate, allowing the audience to savour each moment and immerse themselves in the protagonist's journey

The screenplay, written by Nalin himself, is again a great piece bearing testimony to his ability to capture the nuances of human emotions. The dialogues are poignant, cerebral and colloquial as the situations call for, reflecting the innocence and curiosity of childhood in particular. The film's narrative arc is well-crafted, with each scene contributing to the overall story, leading to a satisfying and emotionally resonant conclusion. Another forte of Nalin's film is definitely the top-notch performance of his cast. Bhavin Rabari as Samay is simply brilliant and puts up a highly spectacular performance making Samay an unforgettable character.

'The Last Film Show' is more than just a compelling and fulfilling cinematic experience; it is a celebration of the power of storytelling and the magic of cinema. Through the eyes of the young protagonist, the film explores themes of dreams,

aspirations, and the transformative power of art. It serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and the impact of globalization on local communities. The film's universal themes and relatable characters make it accessible to a wide range of audiences, transcending language and cultural barriers. 'The Last Film Show' serves as a poignant reminder of the role cinema plays in shaping our lives, igniting our imagination, and connecting us to our roots. Even after having sung such a highly eulogised panegyric for Pan Nalin's film, a humble 'Indian' cinephile like me is tempted to feel deep within that despite the cinematically astute and impressive exterior, Pan Nalin's film is a somewhat patchy and inconsistent and even 'soulless' diegesis on certain vital fronts lacking both social and psychological 'Verite'. A tinge of artificiality mars his narrative and treatment at times disappointing at least a discerning cinephile of 'Indian' sensibility. Yet, the film's aesthetics, from its splendid cinematography to its immersive sound design and spiffy music, create a multisensory experience that transports viewers to a bygone era. Nalin's storytelling techniques, coupled with a well-crafted screenplay, make 'The Last Film Show' a poignant and emotionally resonant journey through nostalgia. His film epitomises the power of cinema, reminding us of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and the impact of storytelling on our lives.

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