

Article

Premendra Mazumder

Film Society Movement in India

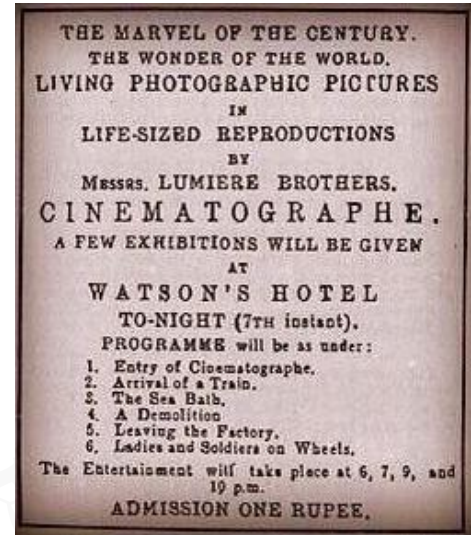


Marie Seton and Satyajit Ray

Film Society Movement is an important phenomenon in the history of cinema in India. Initiated in the middle of the last century, it went to its peak during the next three decades inspiring many filmmakers, and propagating a strong film culture in some parts of the country. Starting from Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta, many important persons have written and spoken on it in different languages at different times, but unfortunately proper archiving of it all at one place could not be done yet. Recently there is a trend in film academia to take up the film society movement as a topic of dissertation which may excogitate a way to introspect the issue in a new light. Being directly associated with the movement for about five decades from its grass root level to the regional, national, and international apex levels, and traveling extensively in home and abroad meeting the colleagues and comrades of the movement, it was my privilege to explore the issue as an insider while working on different assignments like the secretary of a big film society near Calcutta, general secretary and vice president of the national federation, and also as the Asia-Pacific secretary of the international federation. This article is mostly on the basis of my experience as an activist of the movement, and also as an ardent film enthusiast to keep a record for the posterity. The article segregated in five chapters like Perspective, Foundation, Institutions, Organization, and Conclusion probes the genesis of the movement, how it developed and influenced the film culture of the country, and finally where it stands now. Any suggestion for addition, correction, and modification will be highly appreciated.

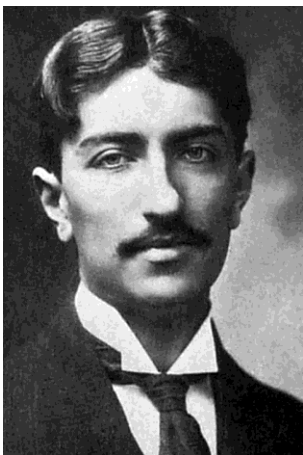
Chapter-I: Perspective

Cinema is a collective art from the very beginning. Even no one person invented it. The Edison Company successfully demonstrated a prototype of the Kinetoscope in 1891. First public demonstration of Kinetoscope took place at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on 9 May 1893. By 1894 it became a commercial success. Projected moving pictures first presented to a paying audience at Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris by the Lumière brothers on 28 December 1895. Auguste and Louis Lumières used the Cinématographe, a device of their own making. The presentation consisted of 10 short films, each of 56 feet length with a duration of maximum 50 seconds. About forty people witnessed the show. After a few months, in 1896, the Lumières went on a world tour with their Cinématographe visiting many places including Bombay in India. And thus, the history of cinema in India began on 7 July 1896, with an advertisement in the English daily the *Times of India* inviting the Bombay residents to witness “the marvel of the century, the wonder of the world” – the Lumiere films, at Watson’s Hotel.



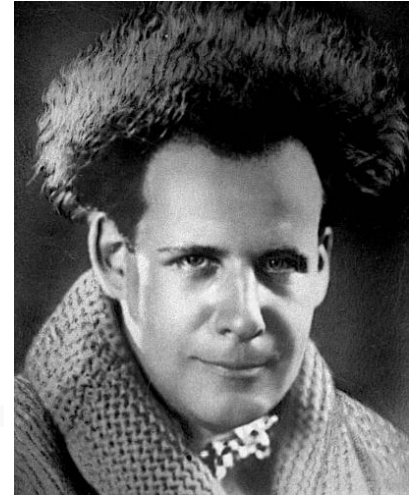
Initially film was not recognized as an art form and considered as a cheap entertainment. Also, it was too short to hold any strong narrative. The First World War (1914-18) transformed the civilization in many ways. The exhibition of films changed its form also from the short one reel shows to long feature films. D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (USA, 1915), Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1920), John Robertson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (USA, 1920), Charlie Chaplin’s *The Tramp* (USA, 1915), *The Kid* (USA, 1921) and many others proved the immense influence of cinema as an art form. At this point of time the necessity to foster the appreciation of the art of cinema and to emphasize the social dimension of film culture was felt, and the first film society was born in Paris in 1920.

Credit of forming the first **Ciné-club** in 1920 goes to the French film director, screenwriter and film critic Louis Delluc (1890-1924) [*in pic*]. He started his career as a film critic in 1917. He also published and edited *Le Journal du Ciné-club* and *Cinéa*. Before that, Edmond Benoît-Lévy, founder of the first corporate magazine *Phono-Ciné-Gazette* (1905) and manager of the first movie theater in Paris, the Omnia Pathé, founded the Société française du cinématographe for the development and progress of cinematography which was similar to the goal of the Ciné-club. In 1919 the Russian film director and actor Vladimir Gardin founded the Moscow Film School, the first film school in the world. In 1924 Cambridge Cinema Club was founded in England, and the Club des Amis du Septième Art (CASA) was merged with Ciné-Club de France established by Louis Delluc. The Ciné-Club de France

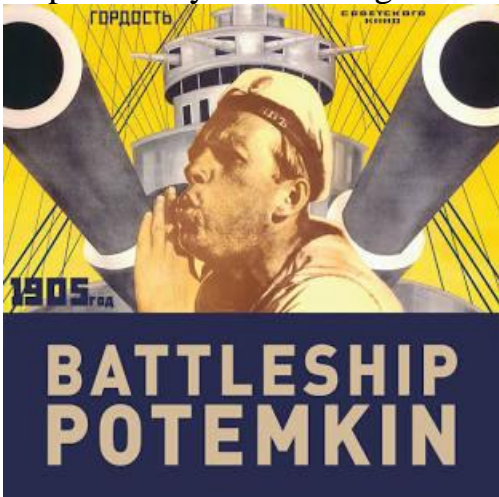


screened major works by the filmmakers like Louis Delluc, Abel Gance, Jean Renoir, Alberto Cavalcanti, Jean Epstein, Sergei Eisenstein in several theaters in Paris and organized lectures.

The **Film Society** was formed in London in 1925. Main initiators were 21 years old Ivor Montagu and Sidney Bernstein who was then 26. Out of about thirty founder members there were Anthony Asquith, H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Augustus John, John Maynard Keynes, J.B.S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, Iris Barry, Baron Bernstein, Adrian Brunel, Hugh Miller, Walter Mycroft, and several other famous persons from different field of arts and science. First meeting was held on 25 October 1925 at the New Gallery Kinema in Regent Street, London. Feature film *The Waxworks* (Germany, 1924) by Paul Leni, and *Champion Charlie* – a Chaplin short were screened in the first show. The primary objective of the Film Society was to screen avant-garde films which had not found an outlet in the commercial cinema. The Film Society announced in May 1925 on the front page of the *Daily Express* that they would encourage ‘the production of really artistic films’ by presenting those to their members which the trade considered uncommercial or which the censor refused to clear for public screening. In 1929 they hosted Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein [*in pic*].



Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898-1948) visited London in November 1929 and delivered three lectures arranged by the Film Society where he emphasized on film study and research. Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and John Grierson’s *Drifters* (1929) were shown by the Film Society. At that time there was no educational institute in England for studying cinema. Eisenstein advised the Film Society to come forward to take that responsibility. As the organizers of the Film Society were mostly left minded intellectuals,



there was a propaganda against them that it was a group of the communists to propagate the films of the Soviet Union in Europe. Commercial producers became suspicious. Even the Gainsborough Pictures asked Adrian Brunel to withdraw from the Film Society’s council. Still the movement spread and the British Federation of Film Societies was formed in 1932 with twelve film societies of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Oxford, Southampton and others. John Grierson and Anthony Asquith were present in the inaugural program held at Welwyn in England. Ellen

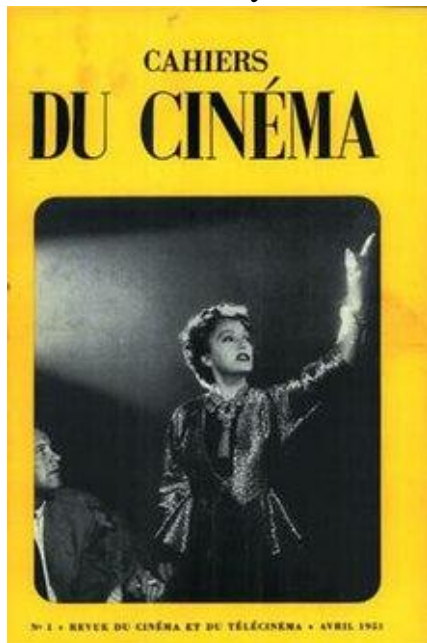
Wilkinson was one of the pioneer organizers of the Federation who became the chairperson of British Labour Party and then became the Minister of Education.

John Grierson (1898-1972) used to visit the film societies in different places of England to deliver lectures. He was a strong advocate to establish the social responsibility of cinema. He first coined the term ‘documentary’ in a review of the American silent film *Moana* (1926) by Robert J. Flaherty. He was considered father of British documentary. Under his leadership

the documentary movement became a part of the film society movement in Europe. The influence was so powerful that the renowned evolutionary biologist, and one of the founders of the Film Society Sir Julian Huxley also became interested in making documentary films.

Film society movement was spreading rapidly in Europe and America. An apex body was formed in France with about twenty film societies in 1927. Canadian Federation of Film Societies was formed in 1930. In 1932 the first film festival was organized in Venice as the International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art of Venice Biennale. The festival opened on 6 August 1932 with a screening of the film *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (USA, 1931) by Rouben Mamoulian, and continued till 21 August with a participation of nine countries. The British Institute of Adult Education started publishing *Sight and Sound* in 1932. After establishment of the British Film Institute in 1933, management of the journal was handed over to them in 1934. Moscow International Film Festival started in 1935. Last session of the Film Society in London was held on 23 April 1939. The second World War started on 1 September 1939 and the entire human civilization faced the biggest crisis of the century. Film society movement was also confounded.

After the end of second World War in 1945 there was a new rise of the film society movement. Many new film societies opened in different countries. Membership of the old film



societies also increased. London Film Society was established in England. Federation of Film Societies of France was established in Paris in 1945. Cannes Film Festival in France, Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland, and Karlovy Vary Film Festival in Czech Republic started in 1946. The International Federation of Film Societies (IFFS), also known as Federation Internationale des Cine-Clubs (FICC) was set up on 16 September 1947 in Cannes. And the Calcutta Film Society, which led the film society movement in India, was established on 5 October 1947. The Australian Council of Film Societies was established in 1948, and the Federation of Film Societies of Tunisia in 1950. The Berlin Film Festival started in 1951 in West Germany. The French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* founded in 1951

by André Bazin and others. [in pic: cover of the 1st issue, April 1951] The Federation of Film Societies of England, Wales and Northern Ireland was formed in 1952. International Film Festival of India started in 1952. And finally, the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) was established on 13 December 1959.

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Chapter-II: Foundation

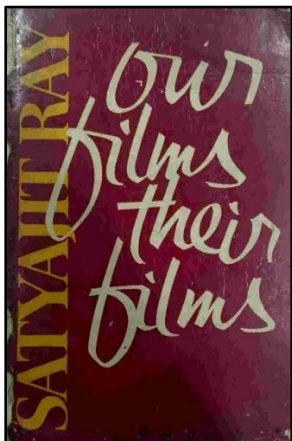
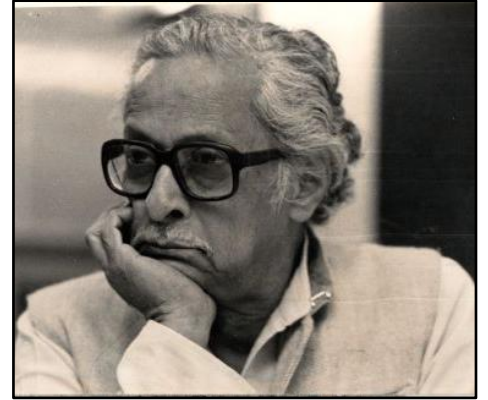
The Scientific and Educational Film Society established in Calcutta in 1929 was the first film society of India. Unfortunately, we do not have any details of its activities. Since November 1929 a bilingual weekly film journal *Bioscope* edited by Charu Roy started publishing from Calcutta [*in pic*] giving importance to the study of cinema. Another weekly cinema magazine *Film Land* edited by Chittaranjan Ghosh also started publishing from Calcutta in December 1929. Abanindra Nath Tagore inaugurated the **Cinema Library** on 29 April 1931 at 183 Dharmatala Street, Calcutta founded by Haren Ghosh. Joint secretaries of the Cinema Library, Girija Kumar Basu and Narendra Deb, published a letter in *Nabashakti* on 20 February 1931 declaring the aims and objects of the upcoming Cinema Library which emphasized on membership of any educated person irrespective of their gender, caste and religion; organizing seminars and film screening program followed by the question answer sessions with the film makers and cast & crew members; honoring the best directors, actors, cast & crew members by giving them awards; maintaining a good library with valuable publications on cinema collected from different countries; publishing a monthly film journal titled *Chhayachhabi*; and performing other activities for propagation of film culture. A film screening followed by a seminar was held in the Cinema Library on 28 August 1931. On 7 December 1931 Cinema Library published an advertisement in *Nabashakti* calling for a social story for making a two-reel film. But the Cinema Library was closed in mid-1932 and again started its activities in 1933 at a new address in 140 Surendra Nath Banerjee Street, Calcutta. Though the Cinema Library could not survive for a long time, but it was the first organized effort in India to study cinema as an art form, which was very similar to the aims and objects of the film society movement.

Rita Roy a.k.a. Kobita Sarkar started showing curated films in some cities in North India during 1935-36 to enlighten the audience about the artistic and social importance of cinema. In 1937 the **Amateur Cine Society of India** was established in Bombay by the enterprise of film critic Rudy von Leyden, documentary maker Dr P.V. Pati, Derek Jeffries and others. This society was mainly for the cine technicians. Later in 1942, the **Bombay Film Society** was founded by the documentary filmmakers Clement Baptista and Vijaykar, Hungarian photographer Ferenc Borko and commentator Samuel Baerkley. It was officially registered in 1943 with nine founder members. Governing body was formed with R.E. Hawkins of Oxford University Press as the chairman, S.T. Berkeley-Hill and V.M. Vijaykar as the joint secretaries, and V.N. Rajji as treasurer. Amongst the members there were documentary maker Clement Baptiste, K.L. Khandpur, commentator Samuel Barkley and many others. Half yearly membership subscription was twelve rupees. There was only one screening every month.



Membership strength increased to sixty by 1961. But after that it was closed. In 1962 when it was shutting down, its net asset of about 1500 rupees was transferred to Film Forum, a film society in Bombay. Though Bombay Film Society was active for about two decades, but it could not lead any movement intrinsically. The film society movement per se was initiated by the Calcutta Film Society from its second phase in the mid-fifties of the last century.

To study cinema as an art form Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) and Chidananda Dasgupta (1921-2011) [*in pic*] took initiative to establish a film society, and thus the **Calcutta Film Society** was founded on 5 October 1947. A total of 19 members were present in the first meeting. First governing body was formed with Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis as the president, Hiran Kumar Sanyal as vice president, Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta as joint secretaries, Kumar Purnendu Narayan and Manoj Majumdar as the members. Amongst the general members there were Subrata Mitra, Nemai Ghosh, Harisadhan Dasgupta, Bansi Chandragupta, Charuprakash Ghosh, Radhamohan Bhattacharya, and some other film enthusiasts of the city. Decided that the membership registration fee would be five rupees, and the membership subscription three rupees payable annually. Guest members would be allowed by paying one rupee per show. First address was 28 Panditia Place, father-in-law's house of Chidananda Dasgupta. Initially films were screened at the backside balcony of Satyajit Ray's maternal house at Triangular Park on Rashbehari Avenue. The first film shown was *The Great Waltz* (USA, 1938) by Julien Duvivier.



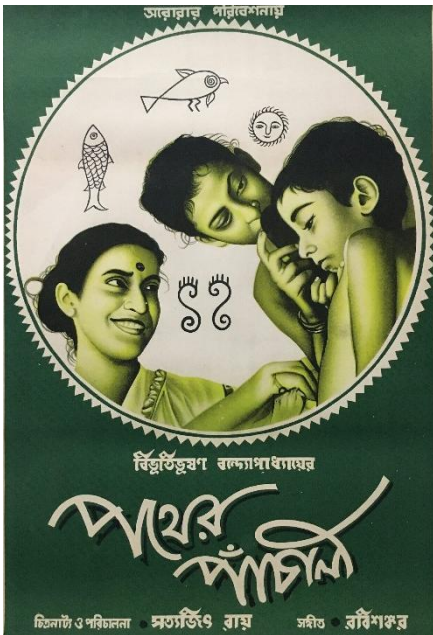
In the introduction of his book *Our Films, Their Films* Satyajit Ray described those days like this:

“In the year of India's independence we formed the first film club in Calcutta, thereby shackling ourselves willingly to the task of disseminating film culture amongst the intelligentsia... For the first two years of its existence, the membership of our club refused to go above twenty-five. Our enthusiasm was beginning to acquire a tinge of cynicism. We could see we did not have much of a field to disseminate over. We were also being subjected to a two-pronged attack. One came from the film trade, which spread the word that a group of subversive youngsters was running down Bengali films at meetings and seminars. The other came from a household which included one of our club members. It was an isolated case, but may well have been a typical one. This member had offered us the use of his drawing room for one of our meetings. Since we did not have a regular club room, members took turns to provide facilities in their own houses. On this occasion, in the middle of our discussion, our friend was summoned by the owner of the house and summarily told that he would not put up with film people spoiling the sanctity of his house. We were thrown out of place.”

The second general meeting of the Calcutta Film Society was held on 9 April 1949. By then the membership strength increased to 75. This meeting again formed the governing body with Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis as the president, Hiran Kumar Sanyal as the chairman of the executive committee, Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta as joint secretaries. An advisory council was formed with Dilip Kumar Gupta, popularly known as D.K. of Signet Press, Charuprakash Ghosh of IPTA, Claude Journot of the French Consulate, Brian Groves of British Information Service, Binoy Banerjee of the United Nations, and Paul Zils of the Documentary Unit, Govt. of India, and others.

While delivering his inaugural speech of the celebration of 25 years of *Pather Panchali* (1955) by the Cine Central Calcutta from 5 to 10 September 1980, Satyajit Ray explained why they took initiative to form a film society in the city. He told:

“... Our objective was collecting some good films in any way, watching them, discussing them, and trying to understand the art of the cinema. Besides that, another objective was to invite the successful people associated with the film industry who were well experienced for discussions so that we could learn from them. Then, personally I had no intention to make films. But I loved cinema from the core of my heart and tried to understand how to enjoy it in how many ways’.



Jean Renoir came to Calcutta in 1948 to make his film *The River* (1951). Calcutta Film Society was aware of his importance and took initiative to utilize his presence by arranging some discussions with the members in the city. Ray got the opportunity to observe Renoir's work closely. In 1950 D J Keymer & Co sent Satyajit Ray to London. He was then working in that advertisement company as an art director. After coming back from England, he decided to make films. In 1952 Govt. of India organized the first International Film Festival of India. Calcutta Film Society published a list of selected films suggesting to include those in the festival. Most of those films were included and shown in the festival. But as Satyajit Ray became engaged with making *Pather Panchali*, along with

doing a full time job in the advertisement company, he could not spare enough time for the film society works. Chidananda Dasgupta tried to keep the society alive with the support of the government and for this purpose he met the chief minister of West Bengal Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy for his help. Dr. Roy, though helped Satyajit Ray by granting a fund for making *Pather Panchali*, did not take any interest for survival of Calcutta Film Society knowing that the society had only fifty members, which was too small according to his consideration. And thus, the activities of Calcutta film Society halted.

Pather Panchali was released for theatrical screening in Calcutta on 26 August 1955 in Bina-Basusree-Sree cinema chain. It was honored in Cannes Film Festival in May 1956. Chidananda Dasgupta left the job in D J Keymer & Co in 1955 and joined Imperial Tobacco

Company (ITC) on a higher post. Satyajit Ray also left the job in D J Keymer & Co when decided to make his next film *Aparajito* (1956) and to dedicate his full time as a filmmaker. Same year Marie Seton (1910-1985) [*in pic*] came to India on prime minister Jawaharlal



Nehru's invitation to help the education department and took a leading role in the national adult literacy campaign of the government. Ministry of Education published her monograph *The Film as an Educational Force in India* in 1956. For quick improvement in adult literacy, she emphasized formation of film societies in the urban and semi-urban centers and universities. She became a friend of the Nehru family and stayed as a guest of the prime minister in his Delhi residence. Later she became a good friend of Satyajit Ray and wrote her famous book *The Portrait of a Director* (1971). She was one of the principal advisors of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) founded in 1961. NCERT published her two books – *Film Appreciation: The Art of Five Directors* (1961) and *Film as an Art and Film Appreciation* (1964). She played an important role in the formation of the Film Institute of India in Pune in 1960. She took a leading role in designing and teaching the film appreciation program of the film institute initiated in 1967 by Professor Satish Bahadur. In recognition of her huge contributions to the film culture in India, the government honored her with the civilian award Padma Bhushan in 1984.

Marie Seton brought celluloid prints of some films with her which were shown to the members of the film societies in Delhi, Agra, and Calcutta on later days. She delivered some lectures in Delhi on the British film society movement and the prospect and probability of organizing a similar movement in India. Vijaya Mulay (1921-2019), founder of the Patna Film Society (1951) was then shifted to Delhi on a job under the education department of the government, and founded Delhi Film Society (1956). Satish Bahadur (1925-2010) from Agra and Anil Srivastav from Lucknow were regular visitors in Delhi to attend Marie Seton's lectures. She came to



Calcutta in 1956 and delivered six lectures at the Indrapuri Studio. Impact of *Pather Panchali* and the lectures of Marie Seton motivated the organizers of the Calcutta Film Society again. And thus, in a meeting held on 29 January 1956 at the Society Cinema, [*in pic*] the second phase of the Calcutta Film Society started with a great vigor. Professor Nirmal Kumar Siddhanta, the then vice chancellor of the University of Calcutta presided over the meeting where Marie Seton, Swedish filmmaker Arne Sucksdorff, Dhiren Ganguly, and other dignitaries were present. Russian film *My Universities* (1940), third part of the trilogy on the

life of Maxim Gorky was shown. In her speech Marie Seton appealed to the government for establishment of an art theatre in Calcutta. Responding to her appeal Government of West Bengal took an initiative for granting Rs. 20,000 from the income of *Pather Panchali* for the art theater, but unfortunately, the file was shelved.

A new governing body was formed in the second phase of the Calcutta Film Society with Professor Nirmal Kumar Siddhanta as the president, Chidananda Dasgupta and Ram Halder as the joint secretaries, Satyajit Ray, Shova Sen, Santi Prasad Chowdhury, Ashok Mitra, Nirmal Kumar Ghosh and others in the executive committee. Birendranath Sircar [*in pic*], founder of the New Theatres (1931) provided an accommodation for the office of Calcutta



Film Society at the New Cinema building. Bengal Motion Picture Association donated some books and journals on cinema. Calcutta Film Society started publication of their journal *Indian Film Quarterly* with an editorial board consisting of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, R.P. Gupta, Chidananda Dasgupta, and Santi P. Chowdhury. Later the journal was renamed as *Indian Film Review*, and another journal in Bengali titled *Chitrapat* started publishing. They also published regular Bulletins, initially cyclostyled then printed, with reviews of Bengali, Hindi, and English films released in the city.

During this period, they possessed a 35mm print of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) which was shown by many film societies on later days. In their second phase, the Calcutta Film Society produced a documentary titled *Portrait of a City* (1961) directed by Chidananda Dasgupta with Rome Film School alumnus Barin Saha as the cinematographer. The Films Division of India (1948) purchased the documentary, and with that money the society made another documentary *Durga Puja in Calcutta* (1966) directed by Mriganka Shekhar Roy. The Calcutta Film Society got enlisted with the Films Division and made another documentary *Totos of Bengal*. But the legacy of close association of the film society movement and documentary movement initiated by the Film Society (1925) in London followed by the Calcutta Film Society with making by these important documentaries could not be continued as an organized effort though both the movements started spreading in their own ways. Chidananda Dasgupta was the secretary of Calcutta Film Society till 1967 and motivated opening of many other film societies in and around Calcutta. Membership of some societies even crossed a thousand, and thus the film society movement in the real sense of the term generated in India.

In 1951 the **Patna Film Society** was founded by Vijaya Mulay with her experience of working as the president of a film society of the Leeds University in UK while studying there with a state scholarship. First show was held in the Stephenson Hall in Patna screening *Battleship Potemkin*. First governing body was formed with Professor Devi Chatterji as the president, Vijaya Mulay and Arun Roychowdhury as the joint secretaries. The society started its journey with 15 to 20 film enthusiasts. Vijaya Mulay left Patna in 1954 to join as an officer

in the Ministry of Education in Delhi, and the Patna Film Society was closed in 1960. After a decade, a new film society was formed in the city named Cine Society Patna in 1974.

The **Delhi Film Society** started its journey in 1956 with only around 15 members showing Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. First governing body was formed only with five members including Professor Muriel Wasi, education adviser to the government, as the secretary, Vijaya Mulay [*in pic*] as joint secretary, Krishna Kripalani, S. Gopalan, and Chanchal Sarkar as the committee members. Annual membership subscription was ten rupees. Initially there was no post of the president and the system continued till Vijaya Mulay was transferred to Bombay in 1963 as the regional officer of the Censor Board. At the formative stage many important persons like Indira Gandhi [*in pic*], I.K. Gujral, Aruna Asaf Ali, Marie Seaton, and others were associated with Delhi Film Society and thus it got some support from the government including permission for twelve screenings in a year at the auditorium of Films Division at Connaught Place on a concessional rate of ten rupees per show. It helped the society a lot to expand its activities and the membership crossed a thousand by 1980 when a top-cop and film enthusiast Gautam Kaul was there in the helm of affairs. Gautam Kaul was the son of the renowned politician Sheila Kaul and notable botanist Kailas Nath Kaul, brother of Jawaharlal Nehru's wife Kamala Nehru, and thus a close relative of the Nehru family. But the activities of Delhi Film Society declined since mid-nineties along with the overall downslope of the film society movement.



The **Madras Film Society**, first film society in the southern part of India, was established on 30 October 1957 with Ammu Swaminathan [*in pic*] as the president. She was a freedom fighter, a renowned politician and a member of the Parliament. Rajammal Anantharaman was the general secretary of the first governing council with three vice presidents S. Partha Sarathy Iyengar, K. Subramanian, R. Kulandaivelu, one joint secretary T.V. Kunhi Krishnan and one treasurer T.S. Arunachalam. Annual membership subscription was twelve rupees. Many important persons were associated with this film society forming a substantial fund which supported the apex organization for several times when there was any financial crisis. After S. Mahadevan took charge of the office of the general secretary, he continued in that post for about four decades. The society celebrated its sixty years in 2006 showcasing more than 250 films throughout the year. They organized film screenings regularly attended by many celebrities like K. Balachander, Kamal Haasan, S. Sreenivasa Rao, Balu Mahendra, Suhasini Maniratnam, and others.

The journal *Indian Documentary* published the first blue-print for the film society movement in India with a five year plan in its Vol.4 No. 3&4, August 1958. In its introduction the editor of the journal Jag Mohan wrote:

“At last, here is a blue-print for ‘building’ an active film society movement in the country. It has been excerpted from a memorandum prepared by Chidananda Dasgupta and his colleagues of the Calcutta Film Society, which has been sent to the ‘powers that be’.

During the past few years, the Government expressed its desire to promote the Film Society Movement. When Marie Seaton was about to leave the country at the conclusion of her lecture tour, the Secretaries of Bombay and Calcutta Film Societies as well as other organizations met her and discussed their problems. She prepared a special note and submitted to the Government of India. During the tenure of Jehangir S. Bhowmagary at the Films Division, at the instance of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, a survey of existing film societies was made. M.V. Krishnaswamy, Director, Films Division, prepared the material and Bhowmagary made some recommendations. Still later, at the instance of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Shrimati Pupul Jayakar and Pritish Neogi went on a fact-finding mission from Delhi to Bombay and they met all those interested in the Film Society Movement. It is reported that they contacted the Delhi and Calcutta Film Societies as well.

In this context, the Five-Year Plan published here should be of interest to one and all. Nobody expects the Government would accept in Toto. Besides, the other film societies may have some suggestions to make.

In commending it to the readers of ‘Indian Documentary’, we wish to say that the Calcutta Film Society is perhaps a most competent body to have a say in all matters connected with the movement. It has a distinguished record of having arranged the screening of the classics as well as art and experimental films. During the last decade of its existence, it has arranged lectures by such varied film personalities as Jean Renoir and Marie Seaton, Arne Sucksdorff, Satyajit Ray, Pudovkin and Gremillion.

The Society has published a bulletin in the past and now brings out the ‘The Indian Film Review’. It has a membership of over 200 and a cineaste with missionary fervor as Secretary in Chidananda Dasgupta. Besides, the Calcutta Film Society can take reasonable pride in having nurtured the genius of Satyajit Ray, who was originally an art director of an advertising agency. More than competency, the Calcutta Film Society has the authority to speak about the possible way the movement could develop.”

In the blue-print, besides the detailed plan with budget projection, there were proposals for waiving the censorship fees, abolition of censorship, and discontinuation of entertainment tax for film society screenings, improvement of screening conditions by government support, formation of advisory committee with the representatives of film societies and government

agencies like Films Division, providing necessary funds with government grants, treating film societies as cultural and educational organizations, and several others.



Subsequently in a meeting held in July 1959 at the Delhi residence of Krishna Kripalani, the then chairman of the Sahitya Akademi, it was decided to form a national federation. Accordingly in a further meeting in Kripalani's residence in Delhi the **Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI)** was formed on 13 December 1959. The Memorandum of Association of FFSI was adopted by seven representatives of six film societies like Vijaya

Mulay of Delhi Film Society, Arun Roychowdhury of Patna Film Society, Tryambakal Pathak of Roorkee Film Society, Robert E. Hawkins of Bombay Film Society, E.B. Samuel of Madras Film Society, Hiran Kumar Sanyal and Chidananda Dasgupta of Calcutta Film Society. The memorandum was vetted by M.D. Bhatt, ICS who was the chairman of the Film Advisory Board of the Government of India. The very first governing body of FFSI was formed with Satyajit Ray [*in pic*] as the president, Ammu Swaminathan, Robert Hawkins and S. Gopalan as the vice presidents, Vijaya Mulay and Chidananda Dasgupta as the joint secretaries, D. Pramanick and Abul Hasan as joint treasurers, Rajammal Anantharaman, Rita Roy (Kobita Sarkar), K.L. Khandpur, Jag Mohan, A. Rehman and Arun Roychowdhury as the executive committee members. Resolved that the registered office of FFSI would be situated in Calcutta. Primary objectives of the FFSI as declared in the first memorandum were to promote the study of the film as an art and a social force, to encourage the production of films of artistic value, to promote public appreciation of films of artistic value, to show film classics and outstanding current films from all over the world, to promote research on cinema, to promote and co-ordinate the activities of film societies and to co-operate with national and international organizations having similar objects. Emphasis was given to organize and participate in film festivals, lectures, seminars, conferences etc. in India and abroad, and to promote the formation of film societies and develop the film society movement all over the country.

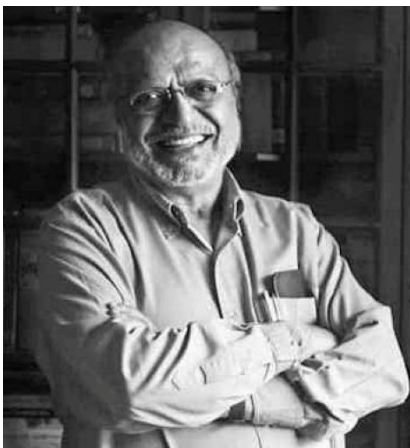
After a couple of years, FFSI informed in a report submitted to the government that:

“Today, the Federation of Film Societies of India has some fifty member societies all over the country, grouped in three zones – East, North and South-West, each zone having its office (Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay – with Calcutta as the headquarters). Any film recommended by the President of the Federation is exempted from all censorship by the Government of India for the purpose of showing it to the affiliated societies. Besides, the Federation is allowed every year to import up to 16 films free of customs duty for non-commercial screening to its members only; and when the foreign exchange situation so permits, it is given the required foreign exchange. The Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting has requested all State Governments to exempt all

members of the Federation from entertainment tax and other levies. The Federation has so far received a total of Rs.10,000 from the Union Government, Rs.5,000 from Sangeet Natak Akademi, and Rs. 3,000 from Sangeet Natak Sangam, Madras, as grants-in-aid.

So far, the Federation has held 6 seminars; published 6 issues of an occasional journal, Indian Film Culture, publishes a monthly bulletin Indian Film Society News, and circulated some 70 feature films, and a number of short films. Direct import and an exchange through Unesco have accounted for 11 of these films, the rest having been arranged with the co-operation of various foreign missions in India, notably those of France, Sweden, Mexico, Japan, West Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, UK, Yugoslavia, USSR and East Germany.

New film societies apply for the membership of the Federation every month. Not all participants or members are well organized and consistently active. Some are fitfully active others depend excessively on the drive of a single individual and becomes dormant with his departure from the scene; there are some who do not even have a clear idea of how they should function. In all these problems, the Federation helps with its advice, to the extent possible within its resources which are yet meagre, and it functions entirely on the basis of voluntary service. Yet a new ferment is beginning to be felt, and despite their teething troubles, there is no doubt that most of these societies are moving, perhaps groping, in the right direction.” (Introduction to Form-IV, submitted to the Register of Societies, Govt. of West Bengal).



Since its inception, the registered office of FFSI is in Calcutta. Central office was also in Calcutta from 1959 to 2006. Then for some period of time the central office was shifted first from Calcutta to Bombay (2006-10), and then from Bombay to Hyderabad (2010-14), but then again it came back to Calcutta in 2014, at the same premises where the office is registered at the second floor of Bharat Bhavan in Esplanade, at the heart of the city. In the same building at the first floor, the last office of Calcutta Film Society was also situated. Satyajit Ray continued as the president of FFSI for thirty two years from 13 December 1959 to 23 April 1992, till his last breath. Immediately after Ray, the then vice president Mrinal Sen took over the charge of the office of the president but soon he resigned to avoid an ongoing legal suit filed by a film society in Calcutta against FFSI. But next year he became the president of the International Federation of Film Societies (IFFS) and continued there for two terms 1993-95 and 1995-97. After Sen’s resignation from the post of the president of FFSI, the renowned actor Anil Chattopadhyay, acclaimed highly for his brilliant performance in several films of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Tapan Sinha and others, took over the charge and continued for four years (1992-96). After him, Chandran Nair (1996-2000), Vijaya Mulay (2000-01), Moinul Hasan (2001-04), Shyam Benegal (2004-10) [*in pic*], H.N. Narahari Rao (2010-12), Kiran Shantaram (2012-14), and Gautam Kaul (2014-16) were elected as the presidents one after another. After

Gautam Kaul, Kiran Shantaram, son of the legendary filmmaker V. Shantaram, was further elected as the president in 2016 and since then he is continuing in the office. At the time of formation in 1959, Vijaya Mulay and Chidananda Dasgupta took the charge of the office as the joint secretaries and they continued for two decades till 1980. After them, the charge of the office of the general secretary was vested with Arun Pramanik (1980-82), Ajay De (1982-90), S.V. Raman (1990-92), Partha Raha (1992-96), Ajay Sengupta (1996-2000), Tapas Ray (2000-02), Jayanta Dutta (2002-04), Ajay Sengupta (2004-06), Sudhir Nandgaonkar (2006-10), Mani Ramamoorthy (2010-14), Premendra Mazumder (2014-16), and Amitava Ghosh (2016-) who is still continuing.

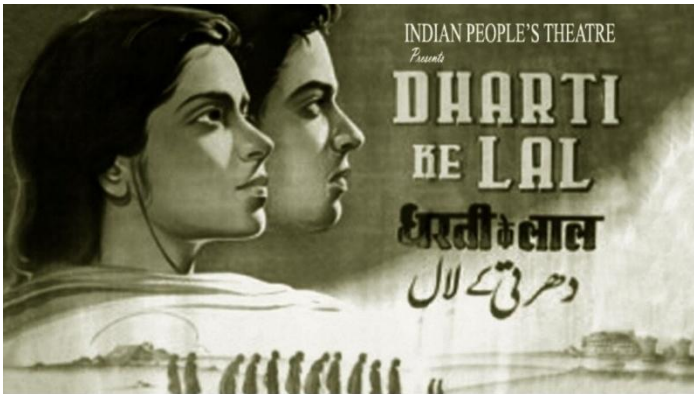
Many important intellectuals and film enthusiasts from different corners of the country joined the film society movement after the formation of FFSI, and on their initiative many film societies were founded in different cities, and even in some small towns. This trend continued till the middle of 1980s. Some noteworthy film societies established in West Bengal during this period were Midnapore Film Society (1963) [*in pic*], Cine Club of Naihati (1964), South Calcutta Film Society (1964), Berhampore Film Society (1965), Cine Central Calcutta (1965), Cine Club of Calcutta (1965), Calcutta Cine Institute (1965), North Calcutta Film Society (1965), Calcutta Film Circle (1965), Film Club Calcutta (1965), Burnpur Film Society (1965), Durgapur Film Society (1965), East Calcutta Cine Club (1966), Dum Dum Cine Club (1966), North Howrah Film Circle (1966), Cine Academy (1967), Krishnanagar Cine Club (1967), Cine Club of Asansol (1968), Cine Study Group Serampore (1969), Rupnarayanpur Cine Club (1972), Chandannagar Cine Centre (1972), Ashoknagar Cine Club (1977), Cine Society Kalna (1978), Rampurhat Cine Club (1978), Jadavpur University Film Society (1978), Barasat Cine Circle (1978), Ranaghat Cine Club (1979), Peoples Cine Society (1979), Bongaon Cine Club (1979), Cine Club of Chittaranjan (1979), Cine Club of Purulia (1980), Cine Club of Haldia (1980), Jalpaiguri Cine Society (1980), Cine South Calcutta (1981), Cine Club of Contai (1982), Film Institute Calcutta (1982), Howrah Film Club (1982), Ritwik Cine Society (1982), Sheoraphuli Cine Centre (1982), Islampur Cine Club (1982), Cine Guild Bally (1982), Alipore Film Society (1983), Bhowanipore Film Society (1983), Uttarpara Cine Club (1983), Mogra Cine Centre (1984), Jhargram Cine Club (1984), Hooghly Chinsurah Cine Club (1984), Basirhat Cine Club (1985), Coochbehar Film Society (1985), Cine Society Durgachak (1985), Katwa Cine Club (1985), Malda Cine Club (1986), and many others.



From the fact above it can be concluded that there was an organic spread in the film society movement in West Bengal during next two decades after the formation of FFSI in 1959, which was expanded beyond the urban elite cultural periphery of the city, and percolated down to the semi urban areas as an effect of the left cultural movement, which had a great influence all over the state for a long time. After the Left Front came into the power of the

state in 1977, and remained there for more than three decades till 2011, the left cultural movement gradually subverted to witness the rise of the subalterns. Obviously, in course of time, many of the film societies stopped functioning. But despite many odds, some societies survived, and a few of them are still very active to carry forward the movement in this rapidly changing time and space, particularly in the field of cinema in its form and technical aspects.

Besides West Bengal, the film society movement also spread during this period in some other states like Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Manipur, and a couple of other states sporadically with the formation of many film societies of which some are still surviving, some are closed. For instance, in Bombay Anandam (1960), Film Forum (1964), Prabhat Chitra Mandal (1968), Cine Society Mumbai (1969), Screen Unit Mulund (1974) played very important role. Prabhat is still surviving as one of the big and most active film societies of the country, while the others stopped functioning for different reasons. For Bombay, we have to travel a little back to the history.



Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), the cultural wing of the undivided Communist Party of India, founded in 1942, in the backdrop of the second World War (1939-45) and Bengal Famine (1943) in the wake of the Quit India Movement (1942) had an important role in building the base of the movement in Bombay. Some of IPTA's initial

members were the stalwarts of Indian cinema like Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Ritwik Ghatak, Utpal Dutta, Salil Chowdhury have got immense influence on the different sections of Indian cinema. *Dharti ke Lal* (Children of the Earth, 1946), a direct production of IPTA under the banner of IPTA Pictures directed by the debutant Khwaja Ahmed Abbas is considered as one of the milestones of Indian cinema. The film was highly acclaimed critically for its depiction of infamous Bengal Famine of 1943 which took lives of more than a three million people out of starvation. It is one of the most important political films which realistically portrayed the social and economic changes during the second World War. IPTA activists travelled all over the country to raise fund by performing their plays for the famine affected people of Bengal and thus they made this film *Dharti ke Lal* to depict the story of devastating humanity during the struggle to survive. This film started a new era in Indian cinema focusing the social and political reality and influenced to make further productions of this genre like *Neecha Nagar* (Lowly City, 1946) by Chetan Anand scripted by Abbas and *Do Bigha Zamin* (Two Bighas of Land, 1953) by Bimal Roy.

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, pioneer of the Indian neo-realist cinema, grandson of Khwaja Gulam Abbas, one of the chief rebels of the 1857 Rebellion Movement and first martyr blown from the mouth of the cannon, directed and wrote many socially concerned films during his long career for five decades starting from writing the screen play for *Naya Sansar* (New World, 1941) of Bombay Talkies. In 1964, a total 18 craft unions of the Bombay film industry came

together to form a very active film society Film Forum under the chairmanship of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas. Subsequently the Film Forum took a leading role to spread the film society movement in Mumbai as well as in Maharashtra. [in pic: Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Vijaya Mulay, and Hrishikesh Mukherjee]



With the rapid spread of the movement in West Bengal, some important film societies were formed in the adjacent states of eastern and north eastern India like Cine Club of Rourkela (1965), Cine Society Patna (1975), Cine Society Ranchi (1982) and Celluloid Chapter Jamshedpur (1985) in Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand; Shillong Film Society (1962), Gauhati Cine Club (1965), and Imphal Cine Club (1980) in Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur. In western India Film Cultural Center Pune (1970), View Aspect Society Pune University (1978), Solapur Film Society (1978), Cine Montage Nagpur (1978), Dadasaheb Falke Film Society Nashik (1979), and some other societies were formed in Maharashtra, and Gujrat. In north India, besides Delhi Film Society, the Agra Film Club founded by Satish Bahadur also pioneered the movement and some societies were formed like International Film Club Bhopal (1959), Lucknow Film Society (1960), Chandigarh Film Society (1966), India International Centre Film Club (1967), Film Society of Jodhpur (1967), Tasveer Film Society (1974), Bengali Film Society (1974), New Delhi Film Society (1976), Delhi Malayali Film Society (1976), Allahabad Film Society, Kanpur Film Society, Citizen Film Forum, Habitat Film Club, and others.

In southern part of India, the movement spread rapidly. In Karnataka Mysore Film Society (1965), Ninasam Chitra Samaj Heggodu (1967), Mayura Film Society Bangalore (1969), Chitra Film Society Dharwad (1970), Suchitra Film Society Bangalore (1971), Pratima Chitrakut Davanagere (1975), Bishakha Film Appreciation Society Bangalore (1976) and Bangalore Film Society (1978) performed a great role to spread the movement in the state. [in pic: H. N. Narahari Rao, B. N. Narayana, V. N. Subbarao, N. Lakshminarayan in the inaugural meeting of Suchitra Film Society Bangalore on 28 Aug 1971]



Some important film societies opened in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana like Vijayawada Film Society (1973), Hyderabad Film Club (1974), Tenali Cultural Film Society (1974), The Madras Film Society Chennai (1975), Anakapalle Film Society (1977), Karimnagar Film Society (1977), Warangal Film Society (1980), Revathi Film Society Nellore (1980), Progressive Film Society Nellore (1984), Tirupati Film Society (1985), Kurnool Classical Film Society (1989). In Tamil Nadu the ICA Foundation Madras (1977),

Chitradarshan Chennai (1978), New Look Film Society Tiruppur (1978), Navadarshan Film Society Pondicherry (1980), Yadharthaa Madurai Tamilnadu (1985) started function.

In Kerala the movement started with the formation of Chitralekha Film Society in 1965. Then many other film societies were formed in different places like Aswini Film Society Kozhikode (1967), Sarga Film Society Payyannur (1975), Chalachitra Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1976), Sumangala Film Society Kothamangalam (1977), Resmi Film Society Malappuram (1978), Free Circle Cherthala Alappuzha (1978), Soorya Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1979), Kodungallur Film Society (1980), Sparc Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1981), Spectrum Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1981), Kranthi Film Society Kannur (1981), Sanghachitra Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1984), Darsana Film Society Kattappana (1985), Cochin Film Society Ernakulam (1985), Phalke Film Society Vadakara (1986), Beam Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1986), Saparya Film Society Thiruvananthapuram (1987), Screen Film Society Vadanappally (1988), Nethi Film Society Kalpetta (1988), and others. Though started late, but the spread of film society movement in Kerala within a short period of time was the highest in comparison to other states. Very soon the number of active societies in Kerala crossed 100, and at one point of time the total number of registered film societies in the state went up to 300. So, Kerala was demanding to be declared as a separate region under FFSI for a long time.



All India Film Societies Conference of FFSI

Organised by Suchitra Film Society, Bangalore, 10-11 Feb 1979

Initially there were three zones of FFSI, East, North, and South-West with their offices in Calcutta, Delhi, and Bombay, and headquarter in Calcutta. By 1969, when number of affiliated film societies crossed a hundred, the zones were renamed as regions and four regions were created in North, East, West, and South. Due to rapid growth of film societies in Kerala, there was long demand for a separate region for the state, and finally in 2019, it was created and FFSI was extended to five regions – North, East, West, South, and Kerala with their offices in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Hyderabad, and Trivandrum, with the registered office and central

office in Calcutta. Number of film societies affiliated with FFSI was 06 in 1959, 23 in 1964, 108 in 1967, 111 in 1971, 169 in 1978, 216 in 1981, 253 in 2000, 274 in 2012, 293 in 2013, 319 in 2018, and 333 in 2024. As on 31 March 2024 there are 13 active film societies in the Northern Region affiliated to FFSI in Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana. In the Western Region out of 146 affiliated film societies in Maharashtra, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujrat, 21 are active, and most of them are in Maharashtra. Out of more than a hundred affiliated film societies in the Southern Region, 26 are active including 09 in Karnataka, 08 in Andhra Pradesh, 06 in Telangana, 02 in Tamil Nadu, and 01 in Puducherry. Number of active film societies decreased drastically in South as Kerala was taken out of this region. Now there are 151 active film societies in Kerala Region alone which is the highest in a single state. In the Eastern Region, out of 104 affiliated film societies, 45 are now active, out of which 30 are in West Bengal, 06 in Assam, 02 in Odisha, and 01 each in Andaman and Nicobar Island, Bihar, Jharkhand, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Nagaland. Also, there are 63 campus film societies affiliated to the Western Region, and 14 to the Eastern Region. Thus, as on 31 March 2024, the total number of film societies affiliated with FFSI is 333.



Central Council Meeting of FFSI, Pune, 1 September 2024

After 1980s, many film societies in different states were closed, but some new film societies were also formed. Some of these new film societies like Tamruk Cine Society (1990), Siliguri Cine Society (1996), Bardhaman Chalachitra Charcha Kendra (1996), Bidhannagar Film Society (2010), Kanchrapara Sangbartak Film Society (2012) in West Bengal; Assam Cine Art Academy (1992), Mangaldoi Cine Society (2000), Tezpur Chalachitra Mancha (2013), Cine Art Society Assam (2012), Assam Film Society (2013), Anuradha Cine Club Gauhati (2016) in Assam; Cine Delve (1994), Ritwiz- A Cine Art Society (1996) in Tripura; Andaman Island Film Society (2015) in Andaman & Nicobar Islands; Film Society of Bhubaneswar (2018) in Odisha; Film Society of Manipur (2019) in Manipur; Film Association of Nagaland (2020) in Nagaland; Navrasa Duende Movie Club (2019) in Delhi; Open Frame Film Society Payyannur (2005) in Kerala; Vizag Film Society (2003) and Srikakulam Film Society (2012) in Andhra Pradesh; Film Society of Sthambadri Khammam (1995), Moving Images Hyderabad (2004), Classic Cinema & Cultural Society Nizamabad (2009), Pingle Film

Club Hanamkonda (2011) in Telangana; Kurinji Film Society Hosur (2005), Ajanta Film Society Belgaum (2005), Nani Cinematheque & Media Society Bengaluru (2007), Sahamatha Film Society Mangalore (2009), A.V.K.C. Film Club Hasan (2011), Film Society Nipani (2014), Rolling Frames Film Society Bengaluru (2015) in Karnataka; Puthukai Film Society Pudukottai (2015), Makkal Film Society Rajapalyam (2015), Udhayam Film Society Rajapalyam (2015), Kalalya Film Society Pollachi (2015), Konangal Film Society Coimbatore (2015) in Tamil Nadu (2015); Abhijat Film Society Latur (2004), Ratnagiri Film Society (2009), Akola Film Club (2019) in Maharashtra; Cinephile Film Club Panaji (2017), Ravindra Bhawan Film Club Margao (2024) in Goa are working actively with different programs.

Besides these, there are many film societies and film clubs which are not affiliated with FFSI. Some of those societies are very active and organizing many programs regularly. FFSI is now emphasising on opening the campus film societies in the educational institutions, especially in the universities and colleges. There are many film societies in different colleges and universities which are not affiliated with FFSI. Number of film societies in all regions got increased through the decades, but the movement could not spread to all parts of the country homogenously.

Chapter-III: Institutions

Ten years before formation of FFSI (1959), Government of India appointed the **Film Enquiry Committee** in 1949 “To examine what measures should be adopted to enable films in India to develop into an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education and healthy entertainment.” (Resolution of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, dated 29 August 1949). Sadashiv Kanoji Patil, [*in pic*] the then member of the Constituent Assembly was appointed as its chairman. He was a renowned freedom fighter, scholar, and a popular political leader. He was elected mayor of Bombay for three times and was popularly known as the uncrowned king of Bombay. He was a union minister during the period of three prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi. Other members of the committee were M. Satyanarayana, also a member of the Constituent Assembly, V. Shantaram, founder of the Rajkamal Kalamandir Ltd. Bombay, B.N. Sircar founder of the New Theatres Ltd. Calcutta, Dr. R.P. Tripathi, Head of the History Department of Allahabad University, and V. Shankar, ICS, representative of the I&B ministry. S. Gopalan was the secretary of the committee. The committee submitted its report on 2 March 1951 with many recommendations including the following one which was a very important recognition at the formative stage of the film society movement in India:



“Critical appreciation of films — Under the functions of the Film Council, we have referred briefly to the need for encouraging film societies and clubs all over the country. We feel that it is very necessary to cultivate in the public a sense of critical

appreciation of films and that this can best be induced and fostered by the habit of seeing pictures generally acclaimed as good and then having their features analysed and discussed both by experts in the line as well as by lay critics. We noted with pleasure the spontaneous development of this movement at one or two centres that we visited and we feel that there is much more to be done. In view of the handicaps under which these societies are functioning such as the difficulty of finding theatres or the impossibility of securing copies either in 16 mm. or 35 mm. of famous classics made in this country or abroad, we feel that positive assistance from the Film Council is very necessary. Further encouragement of these societies can be afforded by the Council by accepting for publication in its journal criticisms from the societies which they consider both educative and helpful.” (Sec: 643, Pg.226, Report of the Film Enquiry Committee,1951, Govt. of India)

Unfortunately, the government did not pay due attention to the recommendations of the Film Enquiry Committee and kept it shelved for three years. Finally, when it was discussed in the Parliament in 1954, the government turned down most of the vital proposals to prioritize the development projects of the Five Year Plan. Even the most important recommendations of the committee to form a statutory Film Council of India, and a Film Finance Corporation (FFC) were turned down, as the government found those unacceptable in view of more urgent commitments under the Five-Year Plan and the business risks involved in the proposals. In October 1954, the government initiated the state awards for films ‘To encourage production of films of a high aesthetic and technical standard and educative and cultural value’.

Thus, the first recipient of the President’s Gold Medal was the Marathi film *Shyamchi Aai* (Shyam’s Mother, 1953) by Acharya Atre, and the Certificate of Merit was the Hindi film



Do Bigha Zamin (Two Bighas of land, 1953) by Bimal Roy [*in pic*]. After two years, on 10 December 1956, a Bill was introduced in the Upper House of the Parliament to set up the National Film Board with the present censorship organisation, a production bureau, and a film institute ‘to promote the development of film as a medium of culture,

education and healthy entertainment.’ But again, there was a long silence. Ultimately the production bureau, the **Film Finance Corporation Limited (FFC)** was established in March 1960 which started functioning in May 1960 in Bombay with an authorised capital of one crore rupees subscribed by the Government of India with the objectives to promote and assist the film industry by providing, affording, or procuring finance, and/or other facilities for the production of films of good standard and quality with a view to raising the standard of films produced. Initially the FFC was working under the Ministry of Finance, and then it was shifted under the control of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in 1964. The New

Indian Cinema was initiated by FFC with Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) [*in pic*] and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* (1969).



Advisor of the Imperial Department of Information created the Film Advisory Board (FAB) on 4 July 1940. Its objective was 'putting before the Indian public films of war subjects and others of informatory value.' Ministry of Information disbanded the FAB and established the Information Film of India (IFI) in 1943 with its main office in Bombay with a branch office in Kolkata. In September 1943 IFI launched *Indian News Parade* released every week in five languages – English, Hindusthani, Bengali, Tamil, and Telugu. FAB and IFI produced 170 short films and countless newsreels. By a government order passed in May 1943 under the Defence of India Act it was made mandatory for every cinema exhibitor to include in every programme and each performance with a minimum running time of twenty minutes. However, the Interim Government cut down funding to IFI as they found its productions anti-national and expensive. In December 1947 the Standing Finance Committee approved the proposal to establish a film producing and distributing unit under MIB and thus the Film Unit was formed which was renamed as the **Films Division of India (FD)** in April 1948. FD played an important role to support the film society movement in its formative years. Many of the visionaries of the movement were associated with FD in different capacities and their experience helped the foundation of the movement during the next decades.

Besides procuring the films, the main constraint of FFSI and the film societies under it was to get the censorship clearance from the government which was mandatory as per law of the land. The Imperial Legislative Council introduced a Bill in 1917 to ensure 'safety and protection of the public from indecent or objectionable representations' and thus the Cinematograph Act of 1918 was introduced with film censorship to control the rapid growth in the popularity of cinema in India. The Act gave the power to the district magistrates of all districts and the commissioner of police in Rangoon to issue licences to exhibitors, and to appoint inspectors to examine and certify films as 'suitable for public exhibition'. Censor Boards were set up as per Act in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Rangoon in 1920, and in Lahore in 1927 to judge the appropriateness of local and foreign films for theatrical release. In 1927 government appointed the first committee on cinema named Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) chaired by T. Rangachariar, a former judge of the Madras High Court, for a comprehensive inquiry into censorship, exhibition, and film viewing habits in the perspective of cinema's increasing popularity in India. The ICC suggested setting up a central board of censors and classifying films as U and A. After independence the regional censors were absorbed into the Bombay Board of Film Censors, and subsequently the **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)** was formed under the MIB for 'regulating the public exhibition of films under the provisions of the Indian Cinematograph Act 1952' with its head office in

Bombay. The Act empowered the CBFC to grant certificates, ban films, or recommend cuts if a film violates the prescribed standards.



Most difficult task for the film societies was to send each and every film procured from the foreign missions in Delhi to the CBFC head office in Bombay to obtain censorship clearance and that too by paying a fee of four hundred rupees per film which was a pretty big amount in those days. Often CBFC scissored out many scenes they disliked. After taking the charge of the joint secretary of FFSI Delhi office, Usha Bhagat (1924-2006) [in pic] took initiative to solve this perennial problem. She was the personal secretary of Indira Gandhi (1917-1984) since 1953 with particular responsibilities to update her about the cultural world especially in the field of art & crafts, cinema & theater, and allied issues. Marie Seaton motivated Usha Bhagat to the film society movement. In 1960, under Marie Seaton's

inspiration she organized a program of Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy* in Delhi as the general secretary of Bharatiya Natya Sangha. In 1961, when Vijaya Mulay was transferred to Bombay as the regional head of CBFC, she handed over the charge of the office of the joint secretary of FFSI to Usha Bhagat. Till that time FFSI had no permanent office in Delhi. Usha Bhagat brought I.K. Gujral, the then vice president of the Delhi Municipal Committee, to FFSI as its treasurer. When Gujral became the minister of Works and Housing Department, he helped FFSI to get their first office premises at the Theater Communication Building in New Delhi.

Sometime in 1959-60, before leaving for Bombay Vijaya Mulay requested Indira Gandhi, the then political secretary of the prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to become the vice president of FFSI. Mrs. Gandhi wanted to know who the president was. Mrs. Mulay replied 'Manik', and Indira Gandhi accepted the post immediately.

[in pic: Indira Gandhi and Satyajit Ray, Courtesy: Express Archive] She was there in the post of vice president of FFSI till 1967. Nehru died on 27 May 1964, and his daughter Indira Gandhi joined the cabinet of Lal Bahadur Shastri as the minister of I&B on 9 June 1964. Immediately Usha Bhagat took the initiative to convince the MIB not to censor the films procured by FFSI for screening to the film society members. MIB agreed to give the clearance for a specific period only on receipt of an application from Satyajit Ray, the president of FFSI. And thus, due to the persuasion of Usha Bhagat, under the patronage of Indira Gandhi, FFSI succeeded to bypass the CBFC to get censorship exemption directly from the MIB free of charges.



Further on Usha Bhagat's endeavors, supported by Indira Gandhi, the MIB also permitted FFSI to import films from foreign countries directly, bypassing the stringent government regulations. This was a very big achievement with a huge impact on the film society movement. In 1964, FFSI imported a package of films from Colombo Film Society

directly as a loan for holding a film festival in Bombay which was a landmark event in the history of the film society movement in India. The package included the classics like Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1920), Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (Germany, 1927), Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (France, 1928), René Clair's *The Italian Straw Hat* (France, 1928), *Le Million* (France, 1931), and others. Satyajit Ray inaugurated the festival in Bombay in February 1964. This was the first international film festival organized by FFSI with a grand success. In 1965-66 FFSI also imported three Swedish films from the Royal Swedish Embassy and Federico Fellini's *I Vitelloni* (1953) from London with a financial grant of Rs.5300/- received from the government with the help of MIB. After that FFSI organized many festivals in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Trivandrum, and other cities with the films procured from the foreign missions of Soviet Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East and West Germany, Poland, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, England, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Canada, and some other countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.



Nehru with the festival delegates after inauguration of 1st IFFI in Delhi (Courtesy: NFAI)

In 1950, prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru sent a note to R.R. Diwakar, the minister of I&B, to explore the possibilities for holding an international film festival in India. Nehru's idea was to project the Indian film industry to the international arena. As a result, the first **International Film Festival of India (IFFI)** was held in different cities of the country in 1952. In Bombay it was inaugurated on 24 January 1952 at the Regal Theatre by R.R. Diwakar. In New Delhi, Nehru himself inaugurated the festival on 16 February 1952 at the newly

constructed auditorium of the National Physical Laboratory. President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad invited the festival delegates for tea at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. The Taj Mahal was kept closed to public access on a particular day for the visit of the delegates of the festival. In Calcutta the festival was inaugurated on 29 February 1952 at the open ground outside the Eden Gardens. Frank Capra went from Delhi to Calcutta to attend the festival as an invited delegate. In Madras the date of opening was scheduled on 7 February 1952. Trivandrum was not there on the official schedule. But due to the protest made by the filmmakers of Kerala, MIB finally added Trivandrum as a venue of the festival. Besides India, 22 other countries including Canada, Czechoslovakia, China, East Germany, Egypt, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Malaya, Poland, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Turkey, UK, USA, USSR, West Germany and others participated in the festival showcasing forty feature films and about a hundred short fiction and documentaries. Second edition of the festival was held in 1961 in New Delhi. From its third edition held in New Delhi in 1965 chaired by Satyajit Ray, IFFI became competitive. Fourth edition was held in 1969 again in New Delhi. Since its fifth edition in 1975 the festival became a regular event and again started travelling in other major cities including Calcutta.

Film Enquiry Committee 1951 chaired by S.K. Patil also emphasized on setting up of training institutions for the development of film industry. In their recommendations they specifically said:

“In the Chapter on production, we have discussed in detail the special qualifications required both for artistes and for technicians, and after examining the facilities available for imparting such training, we have come to the conclusion that special training would need to be given in institutions that concentrate all their efforts on the needs of the film industry.” (Sec: 597, Pg.213, Report of the Film Enquiry Committee, 1951).



After ten years, the Film Institute of India was established by the government under MIB in 1960 at the premises of the erstwhile Prabhat Studios in Pune. Again, after further ten years the Television Wing located at the Mandi House in New Delhi was shifted to Pune in 1971, and the film institute was re-designated as the **Film and Television Institute of India (FTII)**, which got registered as a society in October 1974 under the Societies' Registration Act 1860. To start with, the employees of the Films Division were deputed to work at FTII. Gajanan Jagirdar became the first principal and Prof. Satish Bahadur, [*in pic*] a pioneer leader of the film society movement started teaching the students how to appreciate films by de-constructing them and analyzing the underlying structure of the individual films. Simultaneously screening of films from across the globe also started for its students bypassing the embargo of CBFC. Film appreciation and watching international films broadened the horizon of the students of FTII which helped them to enrich the film society movement on later days.

The **National Film Archive of India (NFAI)** was established as a media unit under MIB in February 1964 to collect, restore, and preserve films, documentaries, television programs, footage, and also non-film materials like stills, glass slides, posters, and others as a custodian of the heritage of Indian cinema. It was planned by Satish Bahadur and Jagat Murari, the then head of the Film Institute in Pune, and was started in a room of the institute with a budget of only fifty thousand rupees. P.K. Nair (1933-2016) [*in pic*] who joined the Film Institute as a research assistant in 1961, assisting Satish Bahadur in designing the curriculum of the institute, was appointed as an assistant curator of NFAI in November 1965. Nair led the NFAI for about three decades to make it a huge film archive of international reputation. He was promoted as the director of NFAI in 1982 where he stayed till his retirement in April 1991. During his tenure he collected more than 12,000 films of which 8,000 were Indian films by travelling extensively in home and abroad. In 1975 NFAI introduced a month-long summer film appreciation course with FTII in Pune for the film enthusiasts from all over the country which ultimately strengthened the film society movement by propagating a healthy film culture. NFAI also became an important source of supplying films to the film societies at a nominal membership fee. Besides the head office in Pune, it also had its regional offices in Calcutta, Bangalore, and Trivandrum which helped the film societies in these three places to get films for their members. Obviously, the cities enjoyed the privilege in spreading the film society movement in the respective places.



The **Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF)** was set up by the MIB in 1973 to organize the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), the National Film Awards, and the Indian Panorama along with other allied services to promote Indian cinemas worldwide. It also helped the FFSI and its affiliated film societies by providing Indian films as and when required for organizing the festivals or special screening programs. DFF also created space for FFSI by prioritizing the film society members in the admission to IFFI, and providing logistic and financial support to organize the Open Forum, a platform to discuss various aspects of cinema during IFFI since the Thiruvananthapuram Filmotsav in 1988 which continued for thirty years till the 50th edition of IFFI held in Goa in 2019.

The **National Film Development Corporation Limited (NFDC)** was set up by the government in 1975 with the primary objective of ‘planning, promoting and organizing an integrated and efficient development of the Indian film industry’ by ‘providing, affording or producing finance or other facilities for the production of films of good standard’. In 1980, the Film Finance Corporation and Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation were merged with NFDC and it was authorized to buy, import, and distribute foreign films in India. NFDC has produced and distributed more than 300 films in 21 Indian languages including many landmark films like Mrinal Sen’s *Padatik* (The Guerrilla Fighter, 1973), Mani Kaul’s *Duvidha* (Indecision, 1973), Awatar Kaul’s *27 Down* (1974), Saeed Mirza’s *Arvind Desai Ki Ajeeb*

Dastan (1978), Muzaffar Ali's *Gaman* (The Departure, 1978), Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982), Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983), Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire* (The



Home & The World, 1984), *Ganashatru* (Enemy of The People, 1989) and *Agantuk* (The Stranger, 1992), Govind Nihalani's *Party* (1984), Utpalendu Chakraborty's *Debshishu* (The Child-God, 1985), Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (Spices, 1986), Goutam Ghose's *Antarjali Yatra* (The Voyage Beyond, 1987), Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), Aparna Sen's *Sati* (Widow Immolation, 1989), Girish Kasaravalli's *Ek Ghar* (The Dwelling, 1989), Basu Chatterjee's *Kamla Ki Maut* (Kamla's Death, 1989), Tapan Sinha's *Ek Doctor Ki Maut* (Death of a Doctor, 1990), Kumar Shahani's *Char Adhyay* (Four Chapters, 1997), Sudhir Mishra's *Dharavi* (City of Dreams, 1991), Buddhadeb Dasgupta's *Tahader*

Katha (Their Story, 1992), Jabbar Patel's *Ek Hota Vidushak* (Once there was a Clown, 1992), Kalpana Lajmi's *Rudaali* (The Mourner, 1993), Shyam Benegal's *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda* (The Seventh Horse of the Sun, 1992), Aribam Syam Sarma's *Sanabi* (The Grey Mare, 1994), Chidananda Dasgupta's *Amodini* (1995), Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *Kal Sandhya* (Twilight of Death, 1997), Pamela Rooks' *Train To Pakistan* (1997) and many others which enriched the Indian cinema to a great extent. Most of these filmmakers were associated with the film society movement. Thus, NFDC worked as a facilitator to the movement not only by producing their films but also by lending the films to FFSI and its affiliated film societies for organizing festivals, retrospectives, and special screening programs.

Besides, FD (1948), IFFI (1952), Film Institute (1960) later FTII (1971), NFAI (1964), DFF (1973), and NFDC (1975) the other major film units established under MIB was the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) in 1955 in Bombay, and Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI) in 1995 in Calcutta. CFSI produced more than hundred feature films exclusively for the children and organized an International Children's Film Festival every alternate year. SRFTI ranked as one of the best film schools of the world. In the foreword of the 'Report of the Expert Committee on the Matter of Rationalization/ Closure/ Merger of Film Media Units NFDC, CFSI, FILMS DIVISION, NFAI and DFF and Review of Autonomous Bodies FTII, SRFTI and CFSI' published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), it was clearly mentioned that:

"In supersession to the MIB's order dated 8th March 2018 in connection with constitution of the Expert Committee to review functioning of SRFTI, FTII, and CFSI, the MIB decided on 14th November 2018 to re-constitute the Expert Committee under the chairmanship of Bimal Julka, ex Secretary of MIB to review the functioning of these institutions with a broad-based opinion on Rationalization/ Closure/ Merger of various film media units viz. NFDC, CFSI, FD, NFAI and DFF under MIB, the Committee had been assigned on 29th January 2019 the task of reviewing the performance and functioning of NFDC and CFSI and to recommend whether they should be closed and

explore other alternatives for these two organizations. The Committee has also been assigned the task to explore the possibility of an umbrella organization for these film media units and to finalize the organizational structure of the umbrella organization.”

The Expert Committee under the chairmanship of Bimal Julka with the filmmakers T.S. Nagabharana, Shyama Prasad, A.K. Bir, and Rahul Rawail as members categorically recommended in 2020 that all film units under MIB like FD, DFF, CFSI, NFAI, FTII, SRFTI, NFDC should be merged to come under one umbrella organization with a conclusion that:

“The Committee unanimously felt the need for an umbrella organization with following verticals to perform different activities to avoid overlapping, duplication, wastage of financial resources and for a better efficient and coordinated management of the Films Wing. This organization could be a corporation (NFDC’s mandate can be expanded through the expansion of its Article of Association) or an Autonomous body.”

Accordingly, Government of India took a decision on 23 December 2020 to merge four film media units FD, DFF, NFAI and CFSI with NFDC. The MIB in their press release issued on 30 March 2022 announced that:

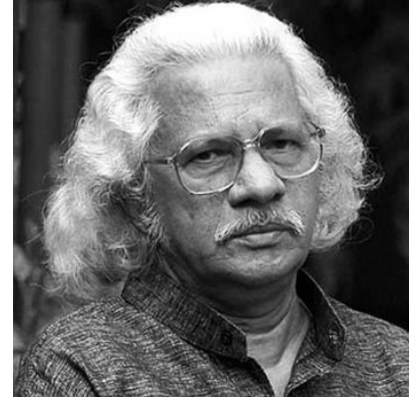
“In December, 2020, the Union Cabinet had decided to merge four of its film media units, namely Films Division, Directorate of Film Festivals, National Film Archive of India, and Children’s Film Society, India with the National Film Development Corporation Ltd. by expanding the Memorandum of Articles of Association of NFDC, which will then carry out all the activities hitherto performed by them with the objective of ensuring synergy, convergence of activities & better utilization of resources. The Ministry had shared these major policy decisions in its interaction with the film industry held in Chennai and Mumbai earlier this month.” (Release ID: 1811671 of PIB).

OPEN FORUM
Organised by
Federation of Film Societies of India
In collaboration with
International Film Festival of India-2019
&
Entertainment Society of Goa
VENUE
Old GMC Building, First Floor, Opp: INOX
23-11-2019 at 1.30 p.m.
TOPIC
**The Relevance and need for the film festivals
in the alternative eco space.**
SPEAKERS
Mr. Prakash Magdum,
Director, National Film Archive of India, Pune
Mr. Premendra Mazumder
Secretary (Asia-Pacific)
International Federation of Film Societies
Vice President, FFSI (ER), Kolkata
Mr. Pema Dhowdup Gakyil
Film-maker, The Man From Kathmandu
Los Angeles, USA
Mr. N. Vidyashankar
Artistic Director, Bengaluru International Film Festival
Ms. Michela Occhipinti
Documentary Film-maker, Italy

The process of merger was completed on 31 December 2022. And thus, the long association of FFSI with these institutions by working together for promotion of film culture in the country suffered a huge set back. NFAI’s support to FFSI by lending films for the film societies became unaffordable, as NFDC charges a huge amount for the same. DFF’s long collaboration with FFSI in organizing the Open Forum in IFFI since 1988 was stopped unilaterally after NFDC took over the charge of IFFI. Even the NFDC never replied to the repeated appeals of FFSI requesting for reopening of this prestigious event in IFFI which continued successfully for more than three decades increasing the qualitative value of the festival. [*in pic: poster of the last Open Forum in IFFI Goa held on 23 Nov 2019*].

Chapter-IV: Organization

The **Working Group on National Film Policy** formed in 1979 under the chairmanship of Dr. K.S. Karanth, with Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Adoor Gopalakrishnan [*in pic*], Tarun Majumdar, Vijaya Mulay, Tarachand Barjatya, Basu Bhattacharya, Manoj Kumar, Ramananda Sagar, D. Ramanujam, D.V.S. Raju, and others as the members submitted its report to the government in May 1980. Mrinal Sen and Manoj Kumar never attended any meeting of the committee. Following the report, the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act 1981 came into effect in June 1983, when the Cinematograph (Censorship) Rules 1958 were replaced by the Cinematograph (Certification) Rules 1983 and the Central Board of Film Censors was renamed as the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).



In a written answer to the Rajya Sabha on 15 December 1980 the then I&B minister Vasant Sathe informed:

“The Working Group on National Film Policy has expressed the view that conceptually the Directorate of Film Festival, which is a Government Department, is not an appropriate organisation for undertaking film promotional activities. As regards National Film Archive, the Group has observed that it is not adequately equipped for acquisition and storage of films. The Group has suggested that the activities of the Directorate excluding the International Film Festival, and the National Film Archive should be brought together under a Chalachitra Akademi which has been separately proposed by the Group. According to the Group, International Film Festival should be eventually transferred to the National Film Development Corporation. This has been accepted.”

The Working Group on National Film Policy thoroughly examined the status of the film society movement in the country and submitted the following observations and recommendations:

“We have surveyed the role played by the film society movement in India in the propagation of film consciousness. Though the film society movement in India is now more than 30 years old, only 200 film societies representing about 75000 members are recognized by the Federation of Film Societies of India. There are a fair number of film societies which are actively engaged in screening artistic films to their members which are not affiliated to the FFSI. According to FFSI, at present about 300 applications are pending with the Federation seeking affiliation. This, of course, does not include a large number of film clubs which show only popular entertainment films to their members. While the film society movement has made a distinct contribution in the propagation of film consciousness, the movement has remained largely confined to major urban

centres. Its expansion has been handicapped on account of non-availability of sufficient number of good films, inadequacy of exhibition facilities and lack of awareness on the part of the Government to appreciate the crucial role which this movement can play in creating audience for good cinema by changing audience taste through regular exposure of good films to a cross section of the people. The Federation has organized itself in four zones without setting up an organization at every state level. This has prevented the film society movement from obtaining financial help and support even from those State Governments which are conscious of the need for encouraging good cinema movement. (Sec.3.23)

... It is obvious that the film society movement has a very important role to play in 'initiating' audience in the appreciation of good cinema. It is in this context that we have suggested that the Akademi should be assigned the task of helping the growth of film society movement. (Sec.3.24)

... We further recommend that the local civic bodies should provide facilities by way of land at subsidised rates in the cultural complexes for setting up exhibition theatres exclusively earmarked for non-commercial exhibition of films by film societies. (Sec.3.25)

... There is also need for the film society movement to liberate itself from the constraints of commercial cinema houses. We recommend that the Central and State Governments should give grants to the film societies for purchasing mobile vans for exhibition of films. To begin with, the facilities for the purchase of these mobile vans can be given to the regional organizations of film societies which can utilise these vans for screening artistic films to the members of film societies on a regular basis. (Sec.3.26)

... We also recommend that the Federation of Film Societies should set up organisations at State level so that it can properly liaise with the State Governments for obtaining financial help and facilities for the film societies in the State. At present even when the Central Government has offered to give grants to the film society movement, it has not been possible to do so because the Federation of Film Societies was not able to finalise and furnish its annual accounts on all India basis. The Federation has a genuine difficulty in finalizing the accounts as the societies are generally managed by part time non-professionals and do not always function efficiently. In the circumstances, even those regions of the Federation which may have finalized their accounts are unable to get Government grants because of the inefficiency of some other regions. We, therefore, recommend that grants by the Central and the State Governments should not necessarily be given to the Federation on all India basis but may be directly given to the regional or State level organizations of film societies which fulfil the necessary conditions for obtaining grants. (Sec.3.27)

... In some of the States a general decision has still to be taken to exempt the film shows of film societies from entertainment tax and show tax etc. We recommend that every States should take a policy decision to exempt film society shows from

entertainment tax and show tax etc. so that the film societies are not compelled to seek exemption on each occasion. (Sec.3.28)” – (Report of The Working Group on National Film Policy 1980, Govt. of India).

Unfortunately, none of the above recommendations was duly addressed by the government, and hence, on 18 September 1986 Satyajit Ray, as the president of FFSI, wrote a letter to the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi saying that:

“To promote good cinema is an uphill task. It is more so in our country because of the huge commercial film industry. Today some Government agencies like the National Film Archive, Film & T.V. Institute, Directorate of Film Festivals etc. are engaged in the same job. It was not so thirty years ago. The film societies were the lonely walkers. That the Federation and its member Societies have done and are still doing good job is evident from fact that the Government of India entrusted the Federation with the responsibility of organizing the Documedia, the short and documentary film section of their International Film Festival held at Hyderabad in January this year.

Despite this recognition and certain facilities like censorship exemption accorded by the Central Government, I doubt very much, if the potentiality of this movement is fully realised by the Government. Otherwise, the film societies would not have been required to depend on the foreign missions in India for supply of films even after thirty years. I request you to consider if an All India movement like the film society movement can survive, let alone flourish, depending on foreign missions only. I am just mentioning this to underline the intensity of the problems which the film societies are facing now” (Letter No. FFSI/CENTRAL/CG-1, Dated, Calcutta, the 18th September 1986).

Satyajit Ray also emphasized on the formation of Chalachitra Akademi as recommended by the Working Group on National Film Policy 1980 where they categorically suggested that:

“We, therefore, recommend that a separate Akademi to be called Chalachitra Akademi should be set up exclusively with the object of promoting cinema as an art form, on the same line as the other Akademies, i.e., Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi.....” (Sec.3.10) – (Report of The Working Group on National Film Policy 1980, Govt. of India).

Satyajit Ray further wrote a letter on 24 March 1987 to the then minister of MIB Ajit Panja, saying that:

“... The basic idea behind this suggestion for a film academy is to promote film culture in our country... a huge commercial industry which to say the least, has not helped the public taste for good cinema to grow and develop since the advent of film.

The Working Group, therefore, rightly pointed out the need of Government intervention for affecting change in the situation for growth of a healthy film culture.

... Very little has been done at the Government level to cause betterment in public taste by screening films or by other promotional activities. True the Government of India organises every year an international film festival. But its impact, for understandable reasons, always remain limited in scope.

The enormous task of changing the public taste and creating a sizeable audience for good films has for long remained with the film societies... This dependence (of the film societies on foreign missions for supply of films) is neither desirable nor practical for furtherance of a living movement...

What is needed is a comprehensive film policy which should also aim at the hitherto unattended area of film appreciation by the people at large. The proposed Chalachitra Akademy can be built up suitably to meet the need... The tasks of the Akademy have already been correctly spelt out by the Working Group. One of the first tasks should be to set up a chain of art theaters in the cities and towns to start with..."

To reduce the dependence on foreign missions, and to increase the exposure of Indian cinema in different Indian languages with high artistic value FFSI took an initiative in 1980s for creating an archive of its own by procuring the prints of selected films with high artistic value. To collect the money FFSI issued a nation-wide call for crowd funding to all film societies asking their members to contribute five rupees each. A substantial amount was collected by the regions to create the **Film Fund** as it was marked for the purpose, which subsequently was spent to procure the prints of films by the regions. Eastern Region of FFSI thus procured the prints of *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road, Bengali, 1955), *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished, Bengali, 1956) and *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu, Bengali, 1959) by Satyajit Ray, *Ajantrik* (The Unmechanical, Bengali, 1958) by Ritwik Ghatak, *Chhinnamul* (The Uprooted, Bengali, 1950) by Nemai Ghosh, and *Elippathayam* (The Rat Trap, Malayalam, 1982) by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Southern Region procured *Kaadu* (Forest, Kannada, 1973) by Girish Karnad, *Aval Appadithan* (That is how She is, Tamil, 1978) by C. Rudraiah, *Pratyusha* (Before Dwan, Telugu, 1979) by Jatla Venkataswamy Naidu, North Region procured *Dooratwa* (Distance, Bengali, 1981) by Buddhadeb Dasgupta, *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, Bengali, 1964) by Satyajit Ray, *Samskara* (Funeral Rites, Kannada, 1970) by Pattabhirama Reddy, *India Cabaret* (Hindi, 1985) by Meera Nair, and the Western Region procured *Samna* (Face to Face, Marathi, 1974) by Jabbar Patel. Out of a total of 14 prints thus procured, seven were Bengali, two Kannada, and one each in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, and Hindi language. The Hindi one was the only documentary, while all others were



fiction films. As there was no proper infrastructure available with any office of FFSI in any region for archiving the celluloid prints with necessary care, most of the prints gradually got spoilt, and the rest handed over to NFAI.

Procurement of films always remained a big problem for FFSI and the film societies affiliated to it. FFSI is obliged to abide by the provisions of the Indian Cinematograph Act 1952 according to which a film can be shown only if it has a Censorship Certificate (CC) issued by the CBFC or a Censorship Exemption (CE) issued by the MIB. So, if CC is not available, FFSI is obliged to get the CE from the MIB for all films they are procuring from different sources. Primarily the foreign missions in India were the main suppliers of films to FFSI. Till the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991, the Sovexportfilm (1945) [*in pic: logo*] was a major supplier along with other countries of the Eastern Bloc like East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. Films were also available from some countries of the Western Bloc like West Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, UK and others. Foreign missions of some other countries in Asia and Latin America also used to lend films to FFSI for holding festivals or circulating amongst the film societies. After the recession and dominance of market economy, gradually most of the countries reduced their budget on cultural exchange programs and supply of films by the foreign missions decreased rapidly. Only a couple of rich countries like USA, Germany, UK, and France continued lending films free of charges. In the meantime, due to rapid advancement in the technology, problem of scarcity in getting films converted to a crisis of plenty, and films are now available in abundance for personal ingestion. Technology also changed the film viewing culture from a community experience to an individual consumption. Under such circumstances, the role of film society movement also became very challenging and got modified from an exhibitor to a curator to procure the appropriate content for their members and to exhibit those after getting the CE from MIB. As the procurement of contemporary acclaimed films costs huge amount of money as they are mostly controlled by the international distributors, it is nearly impossible for FFSI to get those unless the governments of the respective countries come forward supplying them through cultural exchange programs. Unless a film is procured with legal rights for exhibition, FFSI cannot even move for getting the CE from MIB. So, they have to depend primarily on the benevolence of the foreign missions without having any alternative.



Like procurement of films, establishment of art theaters without financial, legal, and logistic support from the government was also a very difficult task, if not impossible. We already have discussed that Marie Seton in her speech in the inaugural program of the second phase of Calcutta Film Society on 29 January 1956 at Society cinema appealed for building

an art theatre in Calcutta, and accordingly the Government of West Bengal took an initiative for granting Rs. 20,000 from the income of *Pather Panchali* for doing it. But the proposal was shelved for the reasons not known to us. Finally, in 1980 the Government of West Bengal



started building an art theater behind Rabindra Sadan (1967) near Victoria Memorial Hall (1921) at the heart of the city. By then the government's earnings from *Pather Panchali* crossed five crore rupees. It took five years to complete the construction of this art theater and it was named **Nandan** by Satyajit Ray. Ray himself inaugurated Nandan on 2

September 1985. [*in pic: Satyajit Ray inaugurating Nandan with Jyoti Basu, and Mrinal Sen*].

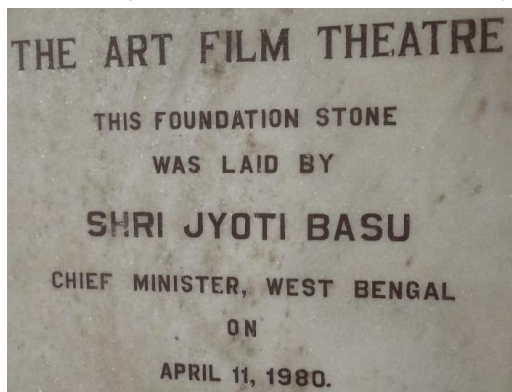
The famous logo of Nandan was also designed by Ray [*in pic*]. Gradually Nandan – the film

center of West Bengal became the most important cultural destination of the city with three theatres with three screens, one meeting hall, a library named after Ritwik Ghatak, and an archive named after Satyajit Ray in the same premises. Government always acknowledged the contributions of the film society movement to building up Nandan as an ideal art theater, but unfortunately FFSI was denied having its office in the building, and just stayed as an ordinary collaborator. Even the privilege of FFSI and



its affiliated film societies to get priority and discounts for booking all the three auditoriums of Nandan gradually reduced as the government decided to use the main two screens of Nandan with more than 900 and about 200 seats respectively, as the commercial theaters. Only the third auditorium, the smallest one with only 100 seats retained for the purpose Nandan was actually made as an art theater. Three years after Ray's death (1992) Government of West Bengal launched the Kolkata Film Festival (1995) keeping Nandan as the main venue and during the inauguration it was officially acknowledged that it was the result of the film society movement. But soon Nandan was converted to a commercial theater directly under government control. The process developed initially by releasing films like *Roja* (1992) by Mani Ratnam, *Jurassic Park* (1993) by Steven Spielberg, and *Titanic* (1997) by James Cameron which caused severe negative criticisms from the city intelligentsia for using this art theater for lousy commercial purpose which was contrary to Ray's dream. But when Kalpana Lajmi was not getting any distributor to release her film *Rudaali* (1993), and Nandan came forward to get it released, the move was highly appreciated. It was then agreed that Nandan would come forward to release the films with high artistic value which had no support from

the distributors and exhibitors of the film trade. But gradually it turned to be a multiplex releasing all kinds of films mainly for supporting the Bengali film industry.

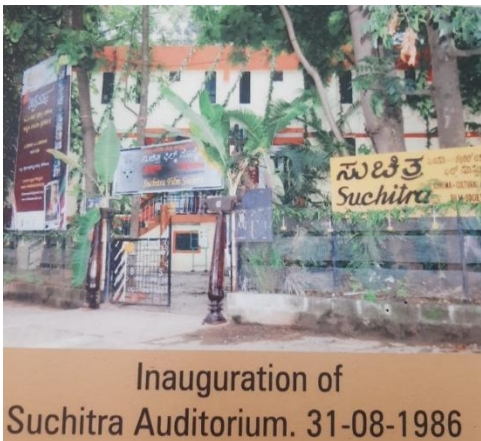


The foundation stone of Nandan was laid down by the then chief minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu on 11 April 1980 [*in pic*], and on 8th January 1980 during his Bangalore visit for attending the Filmotsav, the 11th International Film Festival of India, Satyajit Ray unveiled the curtain of the foundation stone of **Suchitra Art Theater** [*in pic*]. Suchitra Film Society (1971) in Bangalore took an

initiative to build up an art theater of their own. In 1979 the Bangalore Development Authority allotted a piece of land to Suchitra Cinema Academy Trust for building up an art theater in the city. Jean Pierre Brossard, the then general secretary of the International Federation of Film Societies, who was attending the Filmotsav as a guest of the MIB, also attended the inaugural function. Satyajit Ray said in his inaugural speech:



“We need art theaters to find outlet for good films. This is happening here in Bangalore for the first time. I feel happy to formally inaugurate here this evening the construction of art theater complex of Suchitra Cinema Academy”.



To construct the building Suchitra sold two rupees brick coupons to the film society members all over the country and thus the first phase of the project was inaugurated by the then chief minister of Karnataka R. Gundu Rao in September 1981. In 1983 Government of Karnataka allotted a fund and finally the Suchitra Art Theater was inaugurated on 31 August 1986 [*in pic*]. But Suchitra suffered a legal dispute as the control of the art theater was vested on the trust, not on the film society. As a result, when Suchitra Film Society

was celebrating its fifty years by organizing an international film festival in Bangalore in November 2022, they could not manage to get the art theater they built up for them by public fund. Finally, the dispute got resolved, and now the academy (trust) and film society are working together in this project with many activities for the promotion of film culture.

Berhampore Film Society (1964) in West Bengal also procured a piece of land near Berhampore Head Post Office in the heart of the city from the government in 1976 where they first established a library and subsequently took the initiative to build up an art theatre after the name of Ritwik Ghatak who along with his family members were shifted from Rajshahi in East Pakistan to this old township of Bengal in India after the partition in 1947. Ritwik, who

was then 22 years old, studied at the famous Krishna Nath College (1853) in this historical



town. In 1990, the then minister of cultural affairs of West Bengal Buddhadeb Bhattacharya laid the foundation stone of **Ritwik Sadan** – the art theatre of Berhampore Film Society. Construction of the theatre was completed in 1997 with 360 seats. Primarily the theatre was dedicated only to the film society programs, but subsequently it started releasing films on

commercial basis. Initially it used to release films with artistic value, but gradually it turned to be a commercial cinema hall releasing both Bengali and Hindi blockbusters, and thus became the highest entertainment tax paying single screen theatre of the district at one point of time. But due to some legal dispute the society had to stop the regular commercial screenings temporarily.

There are some other isolated efforts of running their own theatres by some film societies. Karimnagar Film Society (1977) now in Telangana procured a piece of land from the government in 1986 but again due to some legal disputes they got the right after a long time. In 2005 they built up an art theatre there named **Film Bhavan** with a financial support from the local district authority. Midnapore Film Society (1964) in West Bengal procured a piece of land from the government at the centre of the town at Rabindra Nagar in 1985 where they constructed a three storied building with a commercial complex and an air conditioned mini hall with 50 seats name Subarnarekha (opened in May 1996) at the ground floor, a big



hall with more than 300 audience capacity named Charulata (opened in October 2000) and an office at the first floor, and a small hall with a provision of guest house with a balcony at the second floor. Though this is not an art theatre per se, but still it serves the purpose of the film society screenings and other programs like organizing film festivals, seminars, workshops, and film appreciation courses as and when required. But again, for survival, most of the premises, including the auditorium itself, are booked on rental basis for different public and private activities.

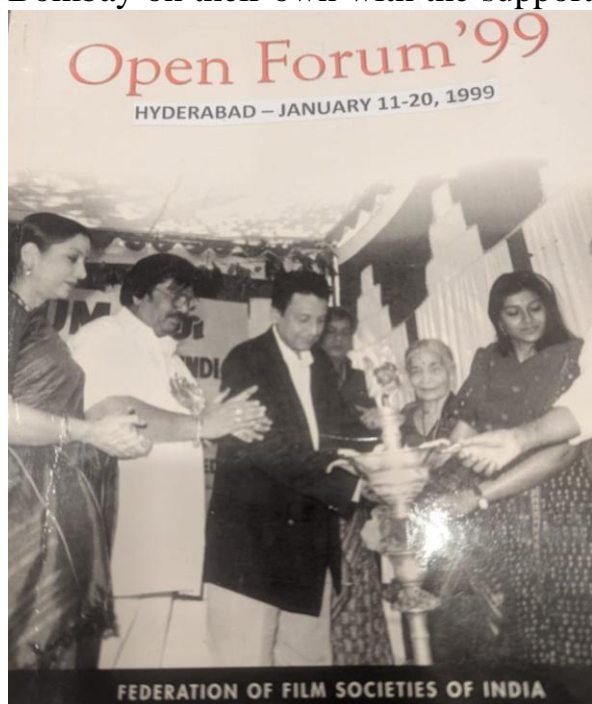
The basic ideology to promote films with artistic value was thus compromised by most of the art theatres for survival to meet up the huge cost for maintenance and upgradation to cope up with the rapid advancement of technology. Still, Nandan is promoting Bengali cinema like the seventeen theatres at different places in Kerala owned by the Kerala State Film Development Corporation (KSFDC) founded in 1975 which are promoting Malayalam cinema. Success of the film society movement in West Bengal and Kerala have an impact to convince the respective governments in taking such steps in these two states. In 1994, NFAI

constructed a 335-seater art theatre at its Law College Road premises in Pune which was available for film society screenings and other academic programs on a discounted rate, and sometimes free of charges when NFAI was an official collaborator of the respective events like a film festival, or film appreciation course. Western Region of FFSI and Aashay Film Club of Pune (1985) have conducted many programs there regularly. But after NFDC took over the property, the process became highly expensive, as the charge increased four times, which is quite unaffordable for FFSI or a film society for holding any programme there. *[in pic: NFAI art theatre in Pune]*



We have discussed that the first ever film festival was organized in Venice in 1932 as a part of the Venice Biennale. The Moscow International Film Festival started in 1935. After the second World War (1939-1945) film festivals started at Cannes in France (1946), Locarno in Switzerland (1946), Karlovy Vary in Czech Republic (1946), and Berlin in West Germany (1951). We have also discussed that International Film Festival of India (IFFI) started in 1952. Second edition of the festival was held after nine years in 1961, third edition in 1965, and the fourth in 1969. From its fifth edition held from 30 Dec 1974 to 12 Jan 1975 IFFI became a regular event. Sixth edition of IFF held in November 1975 in Calcutta first time with the name Filmotsav. Then it was decided that the festival would be held every alternate year in Delhi with the name IFFI and the other years in different cities with the name Filmotsav.

In 1964 FFSI imported a package of films from Colombo and organized a festival in Bombay on their own with the support of the MIB which was a landmark event. Since then,



FFSI performed a significant role in organizing the film festivals in the country for propagation of film culture. FFSI initiated the **Open Forum** in IFFI in January 1988 during Trivandrum Filmotsav (Trivandrum was renamed as Thiruvananthapuram in 1991). DFF gave the FFSI Open Forum an official recognition in 1989 Delhi IFFI, and since then FFSI organized the Open Forum in IFFI continuously for three decades. Even after the venue of IFFI shifted permanently from Delhi to Goa in 2004, FFSI continued presenting the Open Forum with the support of DFF. But when the IFFI was taken over by the NFDC after the merger of DFF, FFSI's appeal to conduct the Open Forum was declined.

The observations and recommendations of the Working Group on National Film Policy 1980, as we discussed earlier, have never been addressed properly to support the film society movement. Exclusive privilege of FFSI in getting censorship exemption for screening films made open to any organization applying for the same. Annual grant-in-aid given by the MIB to FFSI every year was stopped. Prerogative of the film society members to get complimentary delegate cards for attending IFFI was withdrawn. And finally, the right of FFSI to conduct the Open Forum in IFFI was denied. Thus, the government totally repudiated the contributions of the film society movement to propagate film culture in the country.

Government of West Bengal first organized a film festival in 1980. After inauguration of Nandan in September 1985, the government hosted a weeklong film festival there only with the Indian films of different languages. By then Calcutta witnessed many film festivals organized by FFSI and its affiliated film societies. So, there was already a film enthusiastic audience in the city. Nandan with three auditoriums and one meeting hall, Pashchimbanga Bangla Akademi (1986) with two auditoriums, Rabindra Sadan (1961) with a huge auditorium, Sisir Mancha (1978), Calcutta Information Centre, Abanindra Sabhaghar all in a single cultural complex in the center of the city considered ideal by the government for holding a film festival in Calcutta in the line of the festival hosted by the Government of Kerala in 1994. And thus, the West Bengal Government launched the Calcutta Film Festival (CFF),

inaugurated by Mrinal Sen on 9 November 1995 [*in pic*]. This was the third government run film festival after IFFI, and Kerala. FFSI, as a principal collaborator, took initiative in getting the audience from its affiliated film societies, displaying and selling film society publications, and conducting the Open Forum in the line of IFFI. The festival was expanded by adding eight more theaters in different parts of the city since its second edition in 1996. Initially there was no post of director to run the festival. The Open Forum of FFSI first suggested the government to appoint a festival director and accordingly a part time director took over the charge only a couple of months before the third edition. Since its fourth edition in 1998 the festival got accreditation of the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF). The festival was scheduled from 10 to 17 November every year as per FIAPF calendar. In 2001, when the city's name was changed from Calcutta to Kolkata, the festival's name also changed as Kolkata Film Festival (KFF). The Eastern Region of FFSI introduced a short and documentary segment of the festival as its sidebar in 2002 at the Jibanananda Hall of Bangla Akademi on their own arrangement which became very popular immediately. Subsequently it was taken over by the festival authorities as one of its official sections. The festival was renamed as **Kolkata International Film**



Festival (KIFF) in 2011 when it was reorganized as a competitive festival. Initially the



government acknowledged the role of film society movement by allotting a separate single screen theater at the center of the city exclusively to FFSI for the members of its affiliated societies completely free of charges, but gradually that privilege was withdrawn. Prerogative of FFSI in conducting the Open Forum in KIFF was also withdrawn since 2018 [*in pic: Open Forum, KIFF, 2018*].

Government of Kerala launched the **International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK)** in 1994. This was the second government run film festival in the country after IFFI and first by a state government. The first IFFK was held from 17 to 23 December 1994 in Kozhikode. The festival was held on the 100th anniversary of cinema when 100 films were screened as a part of the event. Initially the festival was hosted by the Kerala State Film Development Corporation (KSFDC) established in 1975 who also organized the second edition in 1995. There was no IFFK in 1996 and 1997. 28th edition of IFFI, named as Filmotsav, was held in Thiruvananthapuram from 10 to 20 January 1997. In August 1998, government formed the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy (KCA), the first government run film academy of India, and handed over the charge of conducting the festival to this autonomous body. Thus, the third edition of IFFK was organized in 1998. In 1999 the FIAPF accredited the festival and a competition section was added. Since then, KCA is conducting the IFFK in Thiruvananthapuram in the first week of December every year with the support of the government. As the film society movement was very strong in Kerala, and many leaders of the movement in the state were associated with KCA, collaboration between the film societies and film festival became very strong and effective from the beginning. As a result, the FFSI Keralam is still playing a pivotal role in the festival with many activities like conducting the Open Forum regularly at the main venue at Tagore Theater complex [*in pic: Open Forum IFFK 2022*], installing jury for FFSI KR Mohanan Award for the best Indian debut director, and others.



Government of Kerala extends its support to the film society movement and other film related activities in the state in many ways. This is the only government in the country which allocates a commendable budget of fifty lakh rupees per annum for supporting the film society movement in the state through FFSI Keralam, whereas the Government of West Bengal grants only fifty thousand rupees per year. Government of India also had a budget of six lakhs rupees per year to support the film society movement in the country at the national level, but it was stopped since 2014. Some other state governments like Maharashtra, Assam, Karnataka etc. help the film societies of the respective states for conducting film festivals or other activities,

but those are not a regular practice and depends upon the party and persons in power. Rapid progress of the Malayalam film industry both in quality and quantity proves the positive role of the government in Kerala.

Bangalore International Film Festival was launched in 2006 by Suchitra Film Society (1971). The first edition was held from 22 to 28 December 2006. After formation of the Karnataka Chalanachitra Academy (KCA) in July 2009 by the Government of Karnataka, the festival was taken over by them from its fourth edition in 2011. [in pic: Open Forum, Bangalore, 2011]



Since then, the festival is being operated by KCA with the active support of the government. Suchitra Film Society, and its leaders always played the leading roles in conducting this festival, even under the government control. When Bangalore was renamed as Bengaluru in November 2014, the festival was also renamed as **Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFes)**. In last twenty years since its inception, sixteen edition of the festival was held. Now it's a big-budget film festival with several competitions of Asian, Indian, and Kannada cinema with accreditation from FIAPF.

The city of Madras was renamed Chennai in July 1996. So, when the International Cine Appreciation Forum, popularly known as ICA Forum, a big film society founded in Madras in 1977, launched their film festival in 2003, it was named as **Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF)**. Due to some legal issues, ICA Forum converted its status by forming a trust named Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation (ICAF) and thus lost affiliation of FFSI. But in all practical purposes the ICAF acted as a film society and took over the charge of conducting the festival. Since then, the CIFF is being organised by the ICAF. In 2008 the Government of Tamil Nadu came forward to patronize the festival without taking over the control of it directly. Besides the government, the festival is also sponsored and supported by the trade bodies like South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce and the Film Federation of India.

Hyderabad Film Club (1974) first conducted Movie Mela, a unique film festival in September 1999 on the occasion of the celebration of silver jubilee of the film society. Initially it was planned for twenty five days at 1400-seater Hari Hara Kalabhavan in Secunderabad, but



on public demand it was extended for an entire month. In India no other film society or any government conducted a film festival for thirty days without any break. This experience helped Hyderabad Film Club to launch the **Hyderabad International Film Festival (HIFF)** in March 2007 [in pic]. Second edition of the festival was also held in January 2008. They included a short and

documentary section in the festival. Due to paucity of fund the main festival could not be held

after the second edition but the short and documentary festival continued for some time. Fourth and last edition of the short and documentary festival was held in 2010.

The then leaders of FFSI in the southern states – H.N. Narahari Rao, E. Thangaraj, and Prakash Reddy took initiative to launch international film festivals in Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad through their film societies Suchitra, ICA Forum, and Hyderabad Film Club being inspired by their close friend and film society colleague Sudhir Nandgaonkar, who played a significant role in organizing the independent film festivals in Maharashtra. Sudhir Nandgaonkar (1939-2023) was a popular leader of the film society movement, and also one of the pioneer organizers of the film festivals in India. He was one of the main founders of the **International Film Festival of Mumbai** organised by Mumbai Academy of Moving Images (MAMI), a trust founded in 1997 with the film industry stalwarts like Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Yash Chopra, Jaya Bachchan, Karan Johar and others. The festival started in 1997 with Nandgaonkar as the founder director. He made it immensely popular amongst the film enthusiasts. He continued as the artistic director of this festival till 2008 when he left it due to difference of opinion with the trustees. In the meantime, Nandgaonkar also founded the **Third Eye Asian Film in Mumbai (AFF)**, organised by the Asian Film Foundation Mumbai founded in 2002 with Kiran Shantharam, the then vice president of FFSI as its chairman. The festival was inaugurated on 3 August 2002 with Nandgaonkar as the founder director and he continued in his position till his last breath. Even during its 19th edition held from 12 to 18 December 2022 he monitored the festival from his hospital bed. Government of Maharashtra

came forward to support this festival with financial grant and other logistic support. Prabhat Chitra Mandal (1968), one of the biggest film societies in India with more than a thousand members was its main collaborator. Nandgaonkar was also there in the helm of affairs of this film society and one of its founders. At the apex level, he served as the general secretary and vice president of FFSI. [in pic: Aruna Vasudev, Sudhir Nandgaonkar, and H.N. Narahari Rao - felicitated by FIPRESCI-India in 12th Bengaluru International Film Festival, March 2020]



The idea of holding an Asian film festival exclusively in Mumbai was borrowed by Nandgaonkar from his longtime friend Aruna Vasudev (1936–2024) who was an eminent film scholar, critic, editor and author. She was the founder-editor of *Cinemaya: The Asian Film Quarterly* launched in 1988 in Delhi. During the 10th anniversary of *Cinemaya* she organised a festival of Asian films named Cinemaya Festival at the India International Centre in Delhi in 1998 for which Sheila Dikshit, the then chief minister of Delhi sanctioned her a grant of ten lakhs rupees. From 1999 she started the Cinefan: Festival of Asian Cinema at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi. The festival ran for seven years, and then it was handed over to Nevil Tully's

Osian's Connoisseurs of Art who ran it for two years. This festival had nothing to do with the film society movement only except giving the idea of holding an Asian film festival in Mumbai – the Third Eye Asian Film Festival which is still running for more than twenty years.

Except West Bengal, Kerala, and Karnataka, no other state government directly conducts any film festival, and that too for such a long time. Besides the Third Eye Asian Film Festival Mumbai, and several other film festivals at different places of the state run by the local film societies, the Government of Maharashtra extends its financial support to a couple of other film festivals like Pune International Film Festival (PIFF) running since 2002 and Ajanta-Ellora International Film Festival (AIFF) in Aurangabad (now Chhatrapati Shambhaji Nagar) running since 2014 which are not organised by any film society. But due to the prevailing film culture in Pune created by FTII, NFAI, FFSI and the members of different film societies for a long a time, PIFF gets a niche audience of cinephiles. Government of Assam launched Guwahati International Film Festival (GIFF) in October 2017 conducted by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Regional Government Film and Television Institute also known as Jyoti Chitrabhan. The festival continued for three years, and then it was stopped. Long before this discontinued effort of the government, Gauhati Cine Club founded by Bhupen Hazarika himself on 26 April 1965 initiated an international film festival in the city with the same name which is still continuing in collaboration with FFSI. Only due to government's takeover, the title of their festival got changed since 2017 and renamed as **International Guwahati Film Festival** which



has completed its 17th edition in December 2024 [in pic]. Earlier there was another festival called CineASA Guwahati International Film Festival which completed its 7th edition in April 2015. This festival was organised by a film society in Guwahati called CineASA which has stopped functioning now. There are several other sporadic incidents where some state governments, or other agencies conduct some film festivals but those are not any regular organised events for propagation of film culture for which the film festivals were initiated.

Documentary movement being a part of the film society movement since its inception, FFSI took a great interest in this area and came forward to collaborate with the government when MIB decided to launch the biennial Bombay International Film Festival for Documentary, Short Fiction and Animation organized by FD in 1990. Since its inception, FFSI was its main collaborator. In 1995 when Bombay was renamed as Mumbai, name of this festival was also changed as **Mumbai International Film Festival for Documentary, Short Fiction and Animation (MIFF)**. In course of time MIFF became one of the biggest festivals of shorts and documentary films in Asia. After merger of the film units under MIB, control of MIFF has also been entrusted with NFDC. Following this, the Government of Kerala also came forward to organise the annual **International Documentary and Short Film Festival**

of Kerala (**IDSFFK**) in 2007 hosted by Kerala State Chalachitra Academy. Except Kerala, no other state government organizes a separate festival for short and documentary films only. In case of West Bengal short and documentary is only a small segment under the main festival KIFF and that was also taken over from FFSI as we have discussed earlier. Kerala government also extends its support in organising the **SiGNS** [*in pic*], a pioneering festival for digital videos featuring national level



competition for documentaries and short fiction for the prestigious John Abraham National Award, instituted in 1999 by the Kerala Region of FFSI in memory of John Abraham, the filmmaker who was the guiding spirit behind radical initiatives for people's cinema. FFSI Eastern Region initially launched a Short and Documentary Film Festival in Kolkata in March 2012, and then since March 2018 they are organizing the **South Asian Short Film Festival (SASFF)** which is still running without any break at Nandan with the awards after the names of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, and V Shantaram. They also initiated the FFSI International Film Festival which opened at Nandan in August 2015 and then travelled to many other places in the country. Thereafter in September 2022 they have launched the **World Film Festival Kolkata (WFFK)** [*in pic*] with awards after the name of Bimal Roy and Chidananda Dasgupta which is running every year successfully. To promote films on sports and adventure,

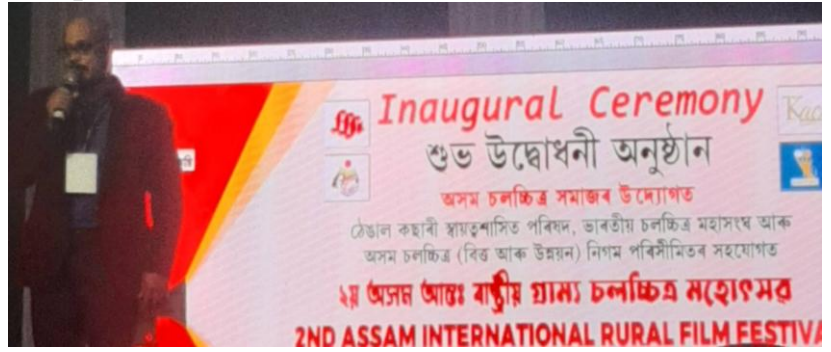


FFSI also have launched the **International Sports Film Festival (ISFF)** with several awards since June 2023 at Nandan which is now travelling to many other cities like Santiketan, Siliguri, Jamshedpur, Delhi, and Port Blair, in collaboration with the local film societies.

Different regions of FFSI, many film societies, trade bodies like Film Federation of India and its components in different states, film

schools, and several other film organizations conduct many film festivals more or less regularly at different places like Kolkata, Siliguri, Baharampur, Bardhaman, Midnapore in West Bengal; Guwahati, Nagaon, Karimganj, Jorhat, Silchar in Assam; Imphal in Manipur; Kohima in Nagaland; Gangtok in Sikkim; Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh; Shillong in Meghalaya; Agartala in Tripura; Bhubaneswar in Orissa; Jamshedpur in Jharkhand; Mumbai, Pune, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Nashik, Satara, Solapur in Maharashtra; Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh; Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh; Srinagar in Jammu-Kashmir; Jaipur in Rajasthan; Ahmedabad in Gujrat; Bangalore, Mangalore, Dharwad in Karnataka; Hyderabad, Karimnagar in Telangana; Chennai, Madurai in Tamil Nadu; Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh; Auroville

in Puducherry; Thiruvananthapuram, Ottapalam, Kochi, Thrissur in Kerala; Port Blair in Andaman and Nicobar Islands; Goa, Delhi, and others. Most of these festivals are supported by FFSI, local film societies, and by the local governments. These festivals play an important role to spread the film culture which ultimately helps



promotion of better cinema. Besides screenings of well curated films, interactions of the audience with the filmmakers, seminars, workshops, masterclasses and other programs help a lot to create an ideal ambience of film culture. Unfortunately, this ambience is being polluted worldwide for corporatization and commercialization of the film festivals. Markets are now getting more importance than artistic value of cinema. Another problem is mushrooming of fake and fraudulent film festivals. It is destroying the hard-earned film culture created by the festivals so far. Taking advantage of the social media and online platforms, thousands of fake and fraudulent film festivals are being organized as the start-up business. Being unaware of the fact and history, many filmmakers are getting trapped by these festival mafias. The problem is very serious which could only be solved by creating awareness among the filmmakers and film enthusiasts.

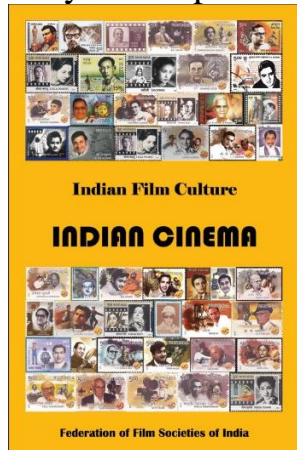
From the very beginning **writings on cinema** played a very important role in the film society movement. Louis Delluc, founder of the first Ciné-club in 1920 in Paris started his career as a film critic in 1917 by publishing a journal titled *Film*. He also published and edited *Le Journal du Ciné-club* and *Cinéa*. In 1932 the British Institute of Adult Education published *Sight and Sound*. After foundation of the British Film Institute in 1933, the management of the



journal was handed over to them in 1934. French film journal *Revue du Cinéma* was published in 1928 as the initiative of two Paris based film societies Objectif 49 and Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin. Since April 1951 *Cahiers du Cinéma* started publishing, founded by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca. Another French film journal *Positif* was founded in 1952 by Bernard Chardère. Oxford Film Society published *Sequence*. The French Federation of Film Societies published for many years the acclaimed film journal *Cinema*. The British Federation of Film Societies published *Film*. The Swedish Federation of Film Societies published *Film Rutan*. The Film Society of Lincoln Centre New York published the renowned journal *Film Comment*.

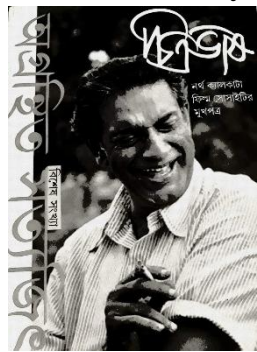
In 1950, D.K. Gupta of Signet Press Calcutta published the first edition of the Bengali film journal *Chalachchitra* with Kamal Kumar Majumdar, Chidananda Dasgupta, Naresh Guha, Radhadas Gupta, Satyajit Ray, and Subhash Sen as its editors, all of whom were associated with the newly formed Calcutta Film Society (1947). Ray was working at Signet

Press since 1943 as a visual designer and he designed the cover and illustrations of this publication. Contributors included Satyajit Ray, Radhaprasad Gupta, Supriya Dasgupta, Chidananda Dasgupta, Ritwik Ghatak, Kamal Kumar Majumdar, Hemanta Mukhopadhyay and others. Calcutta Film Society started publishing the *Indian Film Quarterly* in 1956 with Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Radhaprasad Gupta, Chidananda Dasgupta, and Shanti Prasad Chowdhury in the editorial board. Later they changed the title of the magazine and renamed as *Indian Film Review*. After foundation of FFSI in 1959 it was decided that the national apex body would publish the *Indian Film Culture* in English [*in pic*], and the Calcutta Film Society



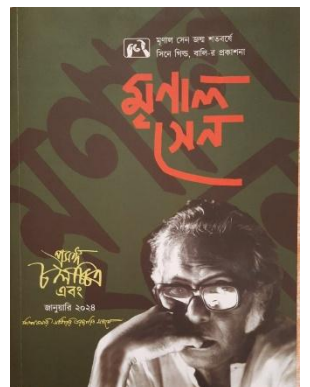
would publish *Chitrapat* in Bengali. *Chitrapat* too had prolific contributors like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Gurudas Bhattacharya, Amalendu Basu, Dhruva Gupta, Raichand Boral, B.N. Sircar, Pahari Sanyal, Charu Roy and others. FFSI started publishing the *Indian Film Society News* popularly known as *IFSON* since 1964. Eastern Region of FFSI started publishing a Bengali journal titled *Chitrabhavna*, the last issue of which was published in Dec 2022 on 75 Years of Film Society Movement in India [*in pic*].

Following the way, many other film societies started publishing their journals, some important of which in West Bengal are *Chitrabhash* by North Calcutta Film Society [*in pic*],



Chitrabikshan by Cine Central Calcutta, *Movie Montage* and *Chalachchinta* by Calcutta Cine

Institute, *Chitrakatha* by Calcutta Film Circle, *Drishyasrabya* by Dum Dum Cine Club, *Anwikshan* by Cine South, *Chitrabodh* by Cine Commune Jadavpur, *Chalachchitra Prasange* by Film Institute Calcutta, *Chitrakabya* by South Calcutta Film Society, *Cine Art* by East Calcutta Cine Club, *F* by Ritwik Cine Society, *Clapstick* by North Howrah Film Club, *Celluloid Life* by Bhawanipore Film Society, *Moviwala* by Andul Film Society, *Ajantrik* by Uttarpara Cine Club, *Chitra Bichitra* by Mogra Cine Centre Hooghly, *Chitran* by Chandannagar Cine Centre, *Chitra Lekha* by Sheoraphuli Cine Centre, *Chitra Sheelan* by Cine Study Group Sreerampore, *Cine View* by Hooghly Chinsura Cine Club, *Cine Celluloid* by Cine Club of Asansol, *Patabhumi* by Film Study Centre Asansol, *Prasanga Chalachchitra Ebong* by Cine Guild Bally [*in pic*], *Chitranweshi* by Cine Club of Chittaranjan, *Chitra Chetana* by Durgapur Film Society, *Fade In* by Rampurhat Cine Club, *Chitra Yug* by Cine Club of Purulia, *Chitrali* by Tamluk Cine Society, *Prakshepan* by Cine Club of Haldia, *Pratibimba* by Midnapore Film Society, *Swarup* by Cine Club of Contai, *Focus* by Cine Society Durgachak, *Drishya* by Cine Club of Naihati, *Chitralipi* and *Tuli O Kalam* by Barasat Cine Circle, *Chalachchhabhi* by Ranaghat Cine Club, *Chitra*



Sameeksha by Ritwik Memorial Cine Club Shantipur, *Chitra Manan* by Krishnanagar Film Society, *Chetanar Chokh* by Berhampore Film Society, *Cine Vista* by Jalpaiguri Cine Society,



Cine Looker by Cochbehar Film Society, *Chhayachitra* by Bardhaman Chalachchitra Charcha Kendra, *Cinebhash* by Siliguri Cine Society, *Ritwij* by Ritwij- A Cine Art Society, *Chitrakalpa* by Cine Club of Calcutta, *Chalachchitra Prasange* by Film Institute Calcutta, *Chitrabani* by Cine Society Kalna, *Cine Talk* by Chowrighee Cine Society, *Chitramanjari* by Bidhannagar Film Society, *Montage* by Kanchrapara Sangbartak Cine Society, and others. In Jharkhand *Motif* by Celluloid Chapter Jamshedpur; in

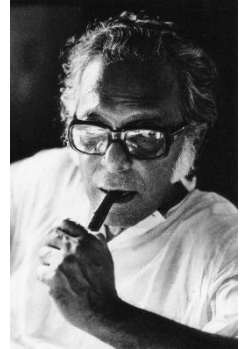
Assam *Chitra Chinta* by Gauhati Cine Club [*in pic*], *Chitrabak* by Cine Centre Silchar; in Maharashtra *Montage* by Anandam Film Society, *Close Up* by Film Forum Bombay, *Madhyam* by five film societies in Bombay, *Rupavani* by Prabhat Chitra Mandal; in Karnataka *Deep Focus* by Bangalore Film Society; in Kerala *Drishyathalam* by FFSI Keralam, *Chalachchitra Sameeksha* by Kerala State Chalachitra Academy and some others. Some of these journals already stopped publication, some are still coming out irregularly, and a few are still regular. Moreover, the FFSI, its regional offices, and several film societies also published many important books on cinema in different languages at different times. All these publications have created a huge impact on the film academia.

We already have discussed that Marie Seton played a significant role in designing and teaching the film appreciation of FTII in 1967 with Prof. Satish Bahadur, and P.K. Nair. In 1975 NFAI introduced a month-long summer **Film Appreciation Course (FAC)** with FTII in Pune for the film enthusiasts from all over the country which ultimately strengthened the film society movement by disseminating film culture across India. From the very beginning, Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta emphasized on film appreciation through many of their writings and lectures. Gradually it became one of the main activities of FFSI and film societies by conducting lecture, seminar, symposium, workshop, and short-term courses. As study of cinema was not included in formal education system, film societies acted as the film schools to study cinema as an art form. In 1980 when Satyajit Ray visited Jadavpur University in Calcutta to accept an honorary D.Lit., he proposed the study of cinema as an academic subject. In 1993, the **Department of Film Studies** at Jadavpur University was established. It was the first of its kind in India. In course of time, studying cinema as a text was included in the curriculum of many universities, colleges, and even schools. At the initial stage Prof. Mihir Ranjan Bhattacharya, founder of the film studies department of Jadavpur University, conducted many FACs at different places organised by FFSI and film societies along with other faculty members. Conducting FACs gradually turned up as one of the most important activities of FFSI. Eastern, Western, and Kerala Regions are conducting annual FACs in Bengali, Marathi, and Malayalam language to reach maximum number of young film enthusiasts. Some active film societies are also conducting such academic sessions regularly. Studying cinema as a text is a primary activity of the film society movement.

Chapter-V: Conclusion

To conclude, we may first go through the following observations of Mrinal Sen [*in pic*] made in 1972 which is still relevant:

“The movie-scene in Calcutta since *Pather Panchali* has taken an altogether different turn. Talking about the film society movement, the societies are almost always in festive mood today, screening world movies of outstanding merit and all those suffering from mediocrities, studying movies in their minutes details and being religiously critical of every bit of thing done on celluloid. Over-enthusiasm does sometimes become tiresome, but what one notices from the activities of the film societies is an acute sense of awareness. And that is a phenomenon so much linked up with things taking place in a certain section of movie-making in Calcutta since 1955.



With this growing consciousness mostly outside and partly inside the studios, the future, at least on the surface, appears to be not that bleak, but to take a practical view of things, the present state of affairs is pretty uncertain. To do the minimum good to the investor who always wants maximum return at the box-office, a large audience is required, larger than what all our film societies can mobilize. And the majority of the audiences continue to patronize, as before, anything nearer gross staff. So, here is one problem which, as in other countries, worries the conscientious artist. A constant sense of insecurity arising out of fear, fear of a possible financial crash, is liable to considerably cool down the enthusiasm of even an artist of ideological integrity.

And this what we see today among our Calcutta movie makers: more of cautiousness, more of rethinking and less of courage. The spirit of challenge is now seen to be in the process of liquidation. We see today more of conforming to the set rules rather than furthering the case of non-conformism. The trend that was built in the mid-fifties and pursued all these years in big and small proportions is now seen to be fast disintegrating. Movie-making in Calcutta is now trending to go what I would say an Establishment-way.

Whether in art, business or politics, the Establishment, to ensure its existence and growth, sets certain rules and uses its own machinery to tell others that the rules must be strictly observed. The Establishment in our trade is no exception. It has set norms for the story, prescribed rules for the application of the movie materials, of techniques and has the last word on audience reaction. It has been trying to convince others, if not itself, that the making of movies is its monopoly and not the ‘outsider’s’ business.

But the fact remains that in 1955 there emerged such an ‘outsider’ who made an aggressive infiltration and set a trend of world stature. And now, with thirteen film societies functioning in Calcutta, with seminars and symposia being held frequently on various social and academic levels, with the fascinating urbanity that has grown in fairly large proportion among the Calcuttans and with remarkable cross-fertilization of

different arts operating in the metropolitan cultural life, there is no reason why the spirit of the early fifties should not come back with greater vigour to the movie-making in Calcutta. What is needed today is challenging the authority of the Establishment as Ray did in 1955. Let the new forces defy the rules, let there be no compromise with the laws of the Establishment and let there be desperate efforts, as in 1955, to create new artistic conventions. What the movie-making in Calcutta needs today is aggressive infiltration which will open up new horizon even for the ‘insiders’.” (The Movie Makers of Calcutta – Mrinal Sen. Cultural Profile of Calcutta – ed. Surajit Sinha).



Challenging the authority of the establishment to defy the set rules was also the main objective of the film society movement. In May 1925 the Film Society announced on the front page of the *Daily Express* in London that they would encourage the production of really artistic films by presenting those to their members which the trade considered uncommercial or which the censor refused to clear for public screening. In 1929 they hosted Pudovkin and Eisenstein in London which was a challenging task at that time in UK. These challenges made by the Film Society in London initiated a ‘movement’ in Europe, popularly known as the ‘film society movement’, and the Calcutta Film Society followed the legacy since from its second phase (1956) under the influence of *Pather Panchali* and Marie Seaton. While speaking about the early film societies in Europe, Chidananda Dasgupta in his article ‘*are film societies necessary?*’ written in 1973 said:

“These early film societies invariably represented a protest against the dream factories of commercial cinema, an urge for social concern, and in consequence a crusade for documentary realism.

... Antagonism between the film society movement and the commercial cinema was so strong that Adrian Brunel, an employee of Gainsborough Pictures and a founder-member of the Film Society, London, was ordered by his employers to sever all connection with the society.

... Thus, criticism of the mores of the commercial cinema has been an integral part of film society activity, reflecting the dissatisfaction of the intellectual, the artist, and the social reformer with the pedestrian and cynical exploitation of a medium of a great artistic possibility and social power by entrepreneurs who put money before everything else.”

The movement transmitted to different parts of the country and went to its peak by 1980, and then started decaying due to vast changes in the economic policies, and rapid advancement in technology influencing the society in a drastic manner. Cinema no more remained a community culture. It converted its form as a content for individual consumption easily available on demand. Access to a desired film is a cakewalk now for a film enthusiast. Rapid development in digital technology has changed the structural pattern of new media, and it’s

changing all the time. Whatever was a surprise yesterday, is a habit today, and obsolete tomorrow to give space to a new technology.



The huge film industry of India always maintained a distance from the film society movement for its apathy towards the mainstream Indian cinema. There are many important trade bodies of the Indian film industry established before FFSI (1959) like the Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association (IMPPA) established in 1937, South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce (SIFCC) in 1939, Eastern India Motion Pictures Association (EIMPA) in 1945, Film Federation of India (FFI) in 1951 and others, but the FFSI and its component film societies always preferred to keep a distance with them mostly by discounting their activities. Trade bodies too suffered from inferiority complex with the feeling of inadequacy and insecurity which created a negative impact towards the film society movement. Though the stalwarts of the film industry like B.N. Sircar, founder of the New Theatres in 1931, came forward by providing the space for the office of Calcutta Film Society (1947) at his theater, the New Cinema building in Calcutta, and the trade body Bengal Motion Picture Association donated their books and journals on cinema to them, the relationship did not continue further. And hence, neither the film society movement benefitted by the Indian film industry, nor the film industry gained by the movement. Of course, the film society movement has motivated many filmmakers, created a film literate audience in some places of the country, but the number is negligible in comparison to the huge size of the Indian film industry which is rapidly growing keeping far behind the spread of the film society movement. [*in pic. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya lighting the lamp at Nandan to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of FFSI*]

FFSI admitted in a report submitted to the government about sixty years ago that:

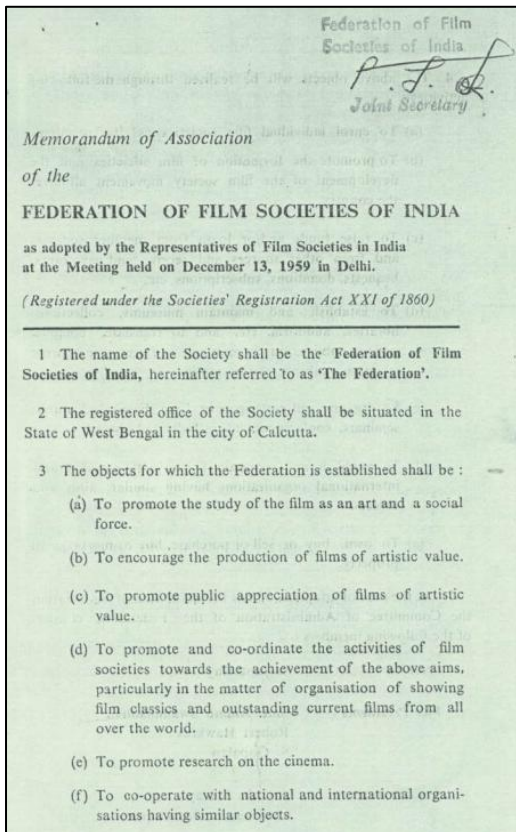
“Thus, without wishing away the difference between the ‘art audience’ and the ‘mass audience’, it is still possible to direct film appreciation at two objectives: to inject more cinematic technique and attitude into the commercial cinema and to make it raised its sights within reason; and to create the urge for and the climate in which genuine artistic expression becomes possible on a wider scale. The objectives required a continued and intensive exposure of the film industry and the intelligentsia to the best products of world cinema in all genres, ranging from the most abstruse experiments to the most popular (but good) musicals and westerns.

... It is a mistaken notion that the film societies are foreign oriented and take no interest on the country’s own cinema. The impact of good films from abroad only serves to create a renewed interest in the progress of our own cinema. The first result of our experience of outstanding foreign films through the 1952 International Film Festival of

India was reflected in films like Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* and Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*. As whole new generation of film-makers has come up in Bengal due to this contact with foreign art-films." (Introduction to Form-IV, submitted to the Register of Societies, Govt. of West Bengal).

Following observation of Chidananda Dasgupta made in 1973 in his article '*are film societies necessary*' is still relevant:

"Film societies still represent the largest body of informed people capable of appreciating outstanding international cinema. First in Bengal, then notably in Kerala and Karnataka, and Bombay, the film society movement has been involved with, and responsible for, the rise of a new, serious approach to cinema. ... The film society movement, already significant in this respect, can be made an important instrument of the large-scale spread of film appreciation, the growth of good film criticism, and thus provide the springboard for a better cinema."



The objectives of the FFSI as declared in the memorandum (1959) were to promote the study of the film as an art and a social force, to encourage the production of films of artistic value, to promote public appreciation of films of artistic value, to show film classics and outstanding current films from all over the world, to promote research on cinema, to promote and co-ordinate the activities of film societies and to co-operate with national and international organizations having similar objects through different activities especially by organizing film festivals, lectures, seminars, conferences etc. Most of these objectives addressed initially by FFSI and the film societies as far as practicable under the prevailing technical, infrastructural, logistic, and legal support, propagated to many other institutions engaged for the purpose. As a result, cinema is no more considered only as an audio visual content to entertain the mass. Now

we are studying film in universities, colleges, and even schools as a text to explore its artistic value. We are now aware of its power as a social force. We can watch film classics and outstanding current films from all over the world whenever we desire. We are encouraging and appreciating films of artistic value through different festivals, awards, and critical appraisals. We are promoting research on cinema in film schools and other educational institutions. Film festivals, lectures, seminars, conferences etc. are being organized by different government, and nongovernment organizations. Hence, we may conclude that the mission designed by the visionaries during formation of FFSI in 1959 have been accomplished, and that is the success of the Film Society Movement in India.

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