

Celluloid in Transit: Film Society Cultures in India

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2012

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled “**Celluloid in Transit: Film Society Cultures in India**” submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Cinema Studies**, is an original work and has not been submitted by me so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution.

Abhija Ghosh

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Celluloid in Transit: Film Society Cultures in India**” submitted by Abhija Ghosh at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Cinema Studies**, is her work, and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before examiners for evaluation.

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Supervisor

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27th July, 2012

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Acknowledgements

My supervisor, Dr. Ira Bhaskar has been the critical and emotional guardian of this dissertation. This endeavour would have been impossible without her detailed comments, notes, extensive editing and affection. I am deeply grateful to her for sharing her personal experiences, observations, records and resources related to the film society movement which have enriched my writing in great measure. Her passion for the subject has been nothing less than inspirational.

I am thankful to Dr. Ranjani Mazumdar without whose enthusiasm regarding the topic, my dissertation would not have materialized. Her classes, discussions, writings and constant encouragement have deeply informed my critical perspectives towards cinema and it was on her insistence that the idea for this project developed. I am humbled by her keen interest and support in these two years.

I am immensely grateful to Prof. Christine Gledhill for her intense course on 'Melodrama and Popular Culture' which radically altered some of my critical modes of thinking about the cinematic form. She has been generously supportive by personally guiding me to several resources and critical material which have been used in this project. I am indebted to her for her time and concern. I would also like to thank Prof. Parul Dave Mukherji, Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt, Dr. Kavita Singh, Smita Mitra and Shikha Jhingan for their comments and suggestions during the early stages of conceptualizing my work.

The Department of English at Ramjas College, University of Delhi has been my active academic learning ground which introduced me to concepts of cultural and critical theory during my undergraduate education. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Vinita Chandra, Dr. Roopa Dhawan, Debraj Mookerjee, Benu Mohanlal and Rajendra Parihar for the many roles of teachers, colleagues, friends and confidantes that they have played in different points of my life. Special thanks are due to Mukul Manglik and Mihir Pandey for sharing their experiences of the university film society, *Celluloid*. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Brinda Bose and Prof. Udaya Kumar for their guidance and encouragement.

This dissertation could not have been written without the support of the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI), Eastern Region, who not only welcomed my project with enthusiasm but also gave me an opportunity to speak at their discussion forum at the 17th Kolkata Film Festival, 2011. I am deeply thankful to Premendra Mazumdar, Bijan Sen Sarma, Biplob Ghosh, Sankar Pal, Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Tapas Roy and other members for the glimpse into their film society days and informal intellectual cultural associations over relished rounds of *cha* and *jhalmudi*. Thanks are due to *Cine Central* and *Suchitra Film Society* for generous archival support upon just one request. I would especially like to convey my gratitude to H.N. Narhari Rao for his trust, kindness and swift replies to all my queries. I am also thankful to Ashok Jha of FFSI (Delhi) and Reghu Devraj and Rajpal Sharma of the French Embassy in India, New Delhi, for narrating their experiences of the film society movement.

I am deeply grateful to P.K. Nair, Gayatri Chatterjee, Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Sunny Joseph, Samik Bandyopadhyay and Someswar Bhowmick for informing me about the early cultural specificities of the film society movement in India. I am thankful to Sudhir Mishra, Anurag Kashyap and Bikas Mishra for illuminating me on the sites of new cinephilia and changing independent film practices. Shankhajeet De and Lawrence Liang gave me useful leads for research which have proven crucial for this project.

The archival work at the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune was made possible by the SPEAR Project grant of the School of Arts and Aesthetics. I would like to thank Mrs. Joshi and Lakshmi of the NFAI for helping me to locate important resources. I am also thankful to the SAA staff, Jagdish Vidyarthi, Diwan Ram, Satish, Harsh, Vinayak, Savita, Gulam Rasool and Meenakshi Sharma for their expertise on procedural matters of the university. I would specially like to acknowledge the support of the Charles Wallace India Trust and the optimism of Richard Alford for the interest they have shown in the future scope and continuation of this research.

Kuhu, Debjani, Shaunak, Pallavi, Koel, Nikhil, Spandan, Sukhpreet, Ananya, Vebhuti, Ramna, Ramesh, Joni and Balachander are the friends I have formed during the

program and it is through their brilliance, sense of fun and our shared love for cinema that I will always remember this university space. I am indebted to Agnitra who provided me with his enviable research and critical material on cinephilia discourses which got my project started. Also, Sumit was the first person to listen to my ideas during our hunt for dissertation topics and has remained a constant presence throughout the course of my research. Likewise, the encouragement, affection and generous supply of home cooked food that I have received from Anugyan have helped me survive the ups and downs of research and writing. I am thankful for their wonderful friendship, love and kindness. I would like to express my gratitude to Chandrani, Kaushalya, Emon, Aniruddha, Mughni and Avanindra for the precious moments of fun, laughter and songs which have constituted my hostel life. Vijayta, Abhimanyu, Mihir, Avrati and Suprpto deserve special mention for being patient listeners at times of crises.

With Siddharth Pandey, I have charted my academic journey in the last seven years and this dissertation marks another step forward towards our explorations of fantasy and reality. He and Binoy Bhushan Agarwal, with his earnestness and warmth, are my constant source of happiness. Life in Delhi would have still been lonely if not for the love and companionship of Asru and Sumit Basu, who form my family in Delhi. I am immensely grateful to all of them for their understanding and affection even during the time spent away from them for this research.

Lastly, in many ways this dissertation is a personal history of memories and experiences of my parents and my childhood. While growing up, for years *Celluloid Chapter* had been jokingly referred to as my elder sister due to my father's devotion to the film society. Almost twenty five years later, I have returned to trace that personal history within a larger context. This dissertation is dedicated to family; my mother, Srabani Ghosh, who is the foundation of my existence, my father, Amitava Ghosh, whose love and activism informs every aspect of my being and my brother, Amartya Ghosh for binding us together with humour and music.

Introduction: Crest and Trough Journeys

Abstract

This dissertation intends to journey into the largely unexplored history of the film society movement in India in an attempt to revisit this organized form of cinephilia that was primarily centered on the appreciation of International and Indian art cinemas as well as the Indian New Wave movement. The period from the early 1960s through the 1970s is referred to as the high moment of such cultural activity marked by debates on the art and craft of cinema, institutional support from the government combined with increasing success in terms of screenings and memberships, which eventually waned out by the mid 1980s. However, this historiographic quest will attempt to complicate the very nature of such a compartmentalized ‘history of the film society movement’ that records the diverse and dispersed emergence of film societies within a causal narrative of a singular movement for ‘good cinema’ and ‘healthy film culture’. Instead by examining their discourses on film culture, film exhibition and reception practices such as film screenings and discussions, film festivals, film appreciation courses and publications; as well as the collaborations and networks through which films were accessed and circulated, this dissertation intends to generate the variant film cultures engendered by film societies as they endeavored to make meaning of cinema and its relationship to modern society.

The Film Society Movement

The emergence of film societies or cine clubs around the world is enmeshed with the histories of early experiments with cinema as a form of expression. Cine Clubs were spaces where amateur and experimental cinema found audiences and intellectual contemplation on the form was possible. The very first attempts that were made in France provide an interesting insight into this historical relationship; for instance in 1920, a group called *The Friends of the Seventh Art* was formed by Ricciotto Canudo in Paris as an independent initiative that could not last long, but the sense of interest in the form and empathy with aspiring craftsmen is evident from the title. In 1922, Louis Delluc, filmmaker and journalist, founded *Cine Club* which similarly could not sustain itself but fashioned a name which has continued for subsequent formations. Alternatively, in 1925, an organization called *The Film Society* was founded by the likes of Anthony Asquith, Ivor Montague, Sidney Bernstein, H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw which wielded the cause of intelligent art house cinema. The practice of these groups was to independently hire theatre spaces and organize screenings of experimental and avant garde films that regular distributors would not promote or appreciate. Given the small size of these groups and the financial crisis followed by the 1929 Wall Street crash, such exclusive endeavors could not be sustained. However, a possibility for an alternative film viewing practice had been envisioned which did not die out, because by the 1930s, film societies had become common cultural formations in several countries like Canada, United States, Australia and Germany.

The sustenance of the cine club movement became difficult as radical transformations occurred in European societies reeling under the two World Wars and

cinema moved on from the silent to sound film. In his survey of the formation of film societies across the world, Thorold Dickinson lists these changes as early frustrations;

The film by 1939 was only forty years old and the silent film was only ten years past; in the language of the furniture trade, it was secondhand and not yet antique. Ten years of the sound film's early struggles with primitive recording equipment had produced as yet few memorable films. Nazism had killed the stimulating flourish of the German silent film and the early amazing promise of the German sound film. The beauty of Italian cinema had been put to sleep for the prior seventeen years by the witch of Fascism. The five-year plans of Soviet Communism had emasculated the strength and originality of Soviet silent cinema. Outside North America, free Europe, and Japan the sound film had scarcely shown its promise (Dickinson, 1969: 88)

Later emerging from the atmosphere of trauma, displacement, processes of decolonization and the changing dynamics of the cinematic form, cine club movements again surfaced around the world during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Yet again, France led the way with the formation of the *Federation Internationale des Cine Clubs* in 1947 and soon similar organizations of film societies followed in England, Ireland, Australia, Africa, India and Latin America. However, these film clubs were different from their predecessors in their cultural objectives. Although these societies still upheld the importance of the artistic medium of cinema, they invested actively in the participation and dissemination of film culture across audiences. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Chile, the film society movement spread mainly across universities. Moreover, film society formations in post colonial countries were also political initiatives to challenge commercial exhibitions and represented social encounters and thought brought about by the understanding of cinema.

Thorold Dickinson summarizes the significance of film societies in terms of creative achievements for both, the individual and the collective, in these words.

The heart of the movement is the focus on individual choice, the right of the individual members of each club or society to choose their own programs within the financial means to which they limit themselves. The success of each club depends

entirely on the measure of its collective knowledge or judgment which it has acquired and continues to acquire by self-education (Dickinson, 1969: 95).

Despite severe situations, communities across the world harbored a special interest in cinema, continued to envision modes of realizing their desires and established a tradition of intellectual as well as emotional engagement with cinema that resonated, albeit in different measures, across geographical borders. Just as this brief history of film societies demonstrates how these social formations emerged against the changing backdrop of political, cultural and technological conditions, it also needs to be indicated that these cine club formations were the earliest stirrings of cinephilia which later consolidated into a much more powerful force in the sixties and seventies, promoting several alternative cinema movements.

Emergence of Film Societies in India

In India, film society formations emerged out of the sporadic youthful enthusiasm surrounding cinema as a global art form and collective dissatisfaction with the prevalent cultural effects of cinema within the country in the early 1940s. The diverse film cultures of film societies can only be traced following an elaboration of the social, political, cultural and technological background against which they flourished. In India, the earliest film societies were formed at the metropolitan cities but with differing aims and objectives. It was only steadily that connections between societies developed. The first film society in India was a group called *Amateur Cine Society of India*, which was formed on April, 1937 by filmmaker P.V.Pathy and editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Stanley Jepson. Their prime interest was not only to view films of value but also to make amateur films. This effort was significantly different from the *Bombay Film Society* which specifically met to watch and discuss

international as well as national cinema. In 1943, *Bombay Film Society* was a registered organization with a membership fee of twelve rupees and comprised photographer Ferenc Borko, Clement Bapitsta, R.E. Hawkins of Oxford University Press and K.L. Khandpur, who later became part of Films Division. Alternatively in October, 1947, the *Calcutta Film Society* was founded by Satyajit Ray, Chidananda Dasgupta and a few other intellectually inclined professionals in order to watch and engage with international cinemas of artistic worth that were unavailable in the regular film exhibition circuit. Although different impulses and social groups constituted these dispersed societies, their common aspirations involving film cultures soon led to collective participation.

In 1952, the first International Film Festival of India provided a significant creative impetus to filmmakers as well as the nascent cinephilia that was emerging with film societies. While on one hand, Italian neo realism which was introduced through the festival influenced a tradition of realist Indian Cinemas with Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953) and Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955) as landmark narrative explorations; on the other hand, a sense of the possibility and demands for alternative exhibition and reception was increasingly felt in several corners of the country. Consequently, in 1959, six film societies of Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Patna and Roorkee came together to form the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) in order to address the cultural (cinephiliac) need of the moment. Therefore, recognizing the lack of any institutional or creative forums for intellectually engaging with the cinematic form as well as an attempt to disseminate an internationally resonant film culture locally, film societies came together as communities of cinephiles to define their role and objectives, thus officially announcing the beginning of a movement.

This historiographic attempt charts the trajectory of the movement from this institutional formation to a span of almost thirty years. The timeline beginning from 1959, through the early sixties to the late eighties was the most influential period for film societies because they spread, consolidated their cultural impact across significant cities and small towns across India and culminated into a socio-cultural movement.¹ This period also incorporates two characteristic features of the film society movement; firstly, it marks the high phase of alternative celluloid cultures in India which were intrinsic to film society cinephilia, and secondly, it contains issues of intermittent existence, strategies of survival and political transformations that affected the movement. Moreover, this temporality is also determined by the keen collaborations which film societies developed with foreign consulates such as Alliance Francais, Goethe Institute (Max Mueller Bhavan), United States Information Service (USIS), Sovexport, British Council, German Cultural Center, Italian Cultural Center, Hungarian Cultural Centre and several others for procuring films for reception and accessing exhibition spaces.

During the 1960s when governmental and institutional support followed with the establishment of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) and its later version, the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), the film society movement was one of the chief forces to promote and support the New Cinema

¹Although few film societies existed prior to this period, the development of a 'movement' as a significant institutional force in the social and cultural spheres gained momentum during the aforementioned years. Similarly even today few scattered film societies operate in different cities, suburbs and college campuses but these are now secluded communities with localized impact. Apart from few DVD screenings and small film festivals, today these societies mostly reproduce stories from their past, days of passionate interactions and reception of cinemas from the world over, thereby articulating the basis of their existence. It is the association with the successful phase of the film society movement as an attractive cultural phenomenon invested in the promotion of 'good cinema' and film appreciation that sustains their belief system to this date.

Movement or the Indian New Wave. Mira Reym Binford positions film societies as one of the “catalyzing” elements in the development of the New Wave and sketches the cultural matrix of alternative film culture thus,

(m)asures such as support from film societies, sponsorship of film festivals, state and national awards, professional film training, and promotion of Indian films abroad encouraged an alternative film culture which provided fertile ground for the development of artists and a receptive minority audience. (Binford, 1987: 150)

Hence, for film societies, local cinematic content and context had been injected with fresh spirit which supplemented the global nature of their cinephilia.

Therefore, historically the movement is identified by its opposition to the dominance of mainstream cinema, the formation of zealous circuits of alternative film exhibition and appreciation that had moments of deep cultural impact in specific locations, and finally, the movement also witnessed prolonged struggles for sustenance coupled with internal inconsistencies. These cultural specificities of the film society movement form the body of this dissertation. Moreover, this is an undertaking which is informed by the significance of revisiting the phenomenon as an exercise in film history as well as a consciousness of the near absence of this knowledge from contemporary memory. Hence, before proceeding into narrating the details of the movement, it is important to address what was meant by the term ‘film society’. Film societies were registered organizations under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 and defined their main objective as the “study of film as an art and social force”² which would “encourage the production of films of artistic value”³ as well as promote appreciation of the cinematic form. However, this is an institutional and functional definition that does not justify the scope of this project or the peculiar position of the movement in the public domain, wherein the need for its existence,

² See Memorandum of Association, Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI), December 13, 1959.

³ Ibid.

activities and initiatives had to be continually articulated at several points in time. Considering this as a working definition, the underlining intention of this dissertation is to narrate the various meanings of these organizations not only through institutional histories, but also through personal biographies and articulations, in order to grasp their significance in the lives of people who participated. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to unravel a cultural history of the film society movement that does not reduce it to a frozen occurrence in time; but instead hopes to evoke its affective significance in Indian film history.

The Film Society Movement in Indian Cinema Studies

In the emerging field of Indian Cinema Studies there has been substantial critical engagement with popular cinema and a ubiquitous visual culture that has on the one hand, generated scope for deeper critical interrogations of the film industries in India, while on the other, has overshadowed alternative film practices and interests. Indian Cinema debates have moved beyond the frameworks of national cinemas and ideology (Prasad, 1998) to assessing the filmic as material sites where popular anxieties and experiences are conceived, contested, articulated and archived (Mazumdar, 2007). Moreover the historical contexts of production, distribution and exhibition of Indian cinemas have been emphasized through distinctly different works on the cinema industry, namely Priya Jaikumar's *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (2006) and Ashish Rajadhyaksha's *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid* (2009). It can be argued therefore that the field of Indian Cinema Studies is at a historiographic cusp gesturing towards missing histories, neglected forms as well as uneven film cultures. In such a context, my

project to write a cultural history of the film society movement hopes to contribute as well as complicate the matrix of cinematic culture in the Indian context.

Before proceeding to reconstruct a trajectory of this cultural movement, I need to address the existing knowledge about the film society movement, specifically how the moment and its discourses have been documented. The idea of passion for ‘good cinema’ has been an undercurrent influencing the discourse about film societies in India, which has been institutionally written into the history of the movement in which people from different parts of the country participated with fervor for the sake of cinema as an artistic experience that could not be produced by the dominant mainstream cinemas. This idea of film activism and thought gained urgency as it intermingled with two prime modes of investment in film practices, namely journalistic⁴ and academic pursuits, along with the emergence of parallel cinemas. So in order to induce momentum into such practices around film, regular reviews of films, reports and surveys regarding the successes, failures and even the relevance of film societies were a consistent preoccupation with the participants and members. For instance Chidananda Das Gupta, a founder member of the Calcutta Film Society, one of the earliest film societies in the country, wrote many articles in English and Bengali, which appeared in film society journals as well as mainstream magazines like *Filmfare*, assessing the condition and aesthetic project of film societies. During the 1970s regular articles reviewing the role and condition of the movement appeared in the mainstream and alternative publications, matched in intensity by the heated disputes or accolades surrounding the emergence of the Indian New Wave.

⁴ B.K. Karanjia as Editor of *Filmfare* and chairperson of the FFC regularly promoted alternative cinema in his editorials.

The film society movement is a ‘happening’ (Radstone 2000: 15) that lies sidelined into the peripheries of the works on the New Wave. Aruna Vasudev’s *The New Indian Cinema* (1986), Throraval’s *The Cinemas of India* (2000) and John Hood’s specific compilation on directors, *The Essential Mystery: Major Filmmakers of Indian Art Cinema* (2000) track the emergence of the parallel cinema filmmakers, discuss their films and narrate their impact. However, the histories of film societies which promoted and exhibited these experimental and art cinemas have remained unexplored.

Satyajit Ray, in his Introduction to *Our Films, Their Films* (1976), which is a collection of his articles on cinema, published in various newspapers, journals and film society newsletters, credits film societies for sustaining a culture of writing on films. For Ray, his particular investment in writing on films relates back to “the zeal to spread film culture that brought our film club into being” (Ray 1976: 12). Alternatively Gaston Roberge, another prolific writer on the condition of cinema and society, repeatedly argued in impassioned texts such as *Another Cinema for Another Society* (1984) in favor of formulating theoretical and conceptual programs to work towards this film culture. Most of these positions can be found in narrative compilations or internal documentations about film society formations, either undertaken by or supported by the federation or groups of societies, specifically in states like Bengal and Kerala where the movement was widespread. For instance, regional publications such as Calcutta Film Society’s *Chitrapat* (2007), which is a compilation of selected articles and essays from back issues of their journal of the same name, is an attempt to keep the memory of the movement alive while it is circulated as a collector’s edition. Similarly, a thick compilation of articles and interviews from film society journals as well as popular magazines, along with short

inception histories of registered societies in India and elsewhere was released under the title, *The Film Society Movement in India (2009)* by the Federation of Film Societies. Such publications have served as the primary archival resources for my investigation of film society cultures.

Significantly, Ashish Rajadhyaksha in *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency (2009)* captures these debates and explicates how in the intensely charged social and political climate of the 1970s, such articulations by filmmakers affected film aesthetics, control and policy, but the association of cinephilia is restricted, by Rajadhyaksha, to the filmmakers. However, I have navigated through both documented as well as remembered intellectual articulations, tracing not only the activities of filmmakers but also that of film society members and activists whose efforts, preferences and practices were constitutive of the cinephilia that underlined the movement.

The film society movement as one of the “civil-social organizations in post colonial India” (Majumdar, 2011: 1) embodies a historical significance that Rochona Majumdar has tried to capture in her recent essay “Debating Radical Cinema: A History of the Film Society Movement in India”. Majumdar retrieves film society histories through articulations of members but focuses on the ideological current of the movement through the filmography of the three auteurs, Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. Although utilizing similar resources, this dissertation significantly differs in approach and disciplinary methods from Majumdar’s historical investigation since as a cultural history of the movement, its interest lies in examining the phenomenon as a widespread people’s participation whose social identities were transformed by their relationship to cinema.

Lastly, the cultural and historiographic impulse of this project recognizes the lack of theorization and critical assessment of the organized form of cinephilia produced by the film society movement. The word cinephilia, itself evokes a range of historical narratives that has been the issue of much classical cinephilia debates. However, my objective has not been to look back nostalgically at any lost form of celluloid experience (Sontag 1996); instead, I have attempted to find the registers of pleasures and anxieties (Elsaesser 2005) that informed this historical moment, using cinephilia as “an umbrella term for a number of different affective engagements with the moving image” (de Valck and Hagner 2005). Therefore, my dissertation is an attempt to coalesce cinephilia with film history to produce a more plural narrative of film culture and practice in the country.

Reading Strategies

My dissertation is concerned with revisiting the circuits and networks that were formed due to the demands and desires of film society cinephilia. The metaphor of a ‘journey’ acquires a special intervening quality for this project, which is about presenting a past moment of cultural impact such as the film society movement in the contemporary context of Cinema Studies. Consequently, the spatial and temporal dimensions that inform the idea of a journey have been crucial to this process of writing about such cinephiliac activity which either exists within the pages of archived articles, newsletters, journals and memorandums or as intangible personal reminiscences of collective actions and events undertaken for the love of celluloid culture. Moreover the movement's imbrications with global art cinema and new wave movements is not the only course that has been indicated, but since the films as

cultural objects themselves travelled to various societies, the intuitive attempt of my writing has been to retrieve and analyze these imagined cartographies initiated by the journey of the material film object.

Following Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description', Igor Kopytoff's suggested approach of writing 'a cultural biography of things', in which objects are not simply defined by their economic value but the specific cultural connotations and temporal values they acquire in a chain of movement has been inspirational for this project. In fact, it is the crucial idea supporting the logic of my dissertation since film society culture developed surrounding, in a manner, the material object of film, redefining both its cultural and its commodity forms by initiating a travelling journey for the films, through their circulation and exhibition networks.

Similarly, James Clifford's method of observing cultures as 'traversed sites' which shifts the perspective on culture from a spatially localized phenomenon to one 'in transit', is the titular idea informing my approach. The ideas of space and location, physical and imagined, have a critical value for this writing about a movement effected by people from the margins who creatively tried to connect with cinematic cultures beyond their regional and national boundaries. However, their position as 'minority audiences', but with dominating influences on the discourses and pedagogy of cinema within India, complicates any application of the center-periphery binary. Therefore, I have found Thomas Elsaesser's concept of "detours and deferrals"⁵ characterizing the origins of cinephilia in various parts of the world, a useful organizing principle for evaluating the specific celluloid cinephiliac cultures of the film society movement.

⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia and the Uses of Disenchantment"; *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*; Ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagner.

My methodological approach had depended heavily on available archival records, interviews of related people as well as personal collections and memorabilia. The archival nature of this project is deeply entwined with the tensions between memory and history. Susannah Radstone explicates how memory has a problematic relation to any writing of history, since on the one hand it can be simplified as transparent reflections on a past, while on the other, given the mediated nature of both history and memory, it has a *disruptive* quality within knowledge production. I have adopted Radstone's use of 'memory as methodology' to decipher the mesh of remembrances that I have gathered from interviews and written articulations of various film society activists, members, participants, and patrons.

Finally, Partha Chatterjee has raised questions on the closed boundaries of history that need to be realigned in order to be able to investigate the entwined elements of memory, popular culture and history (Chatterjee, 2002). These questions have not only informed this history writing, but Chatterjee's problematizing of the discipline of History in the present has been critically useful to think about the significance of revisiting the ideas and the people of the film society movement.

Chapterization

In the first chapter, "Celluloid in Transit: Film Society Networks", I map the film society movement by narrating stories about the formation of film society networks through the travelling journey of the films which made the activities around cinema possible. The access to international cinema and art cinemas was initiated through a network of circulation and exhibition that film societies spanning across India were able to create separately from the mainstream networks of Bombay

cinema. This is a chapter that evokes what was perhaps one of the most significant achievements of these societies, but my examination has been about the journeys made by films as cultural objects, in a way radically shifting the film object's identification with the commodity form. Moreover, this chapter has not only observed urban film societies where alternative film culture developed, but has also traced some successful and innovative societies like *Ninasam Chitra Samaja*, Heggodu and *Celluloid Chapter*, Jamshedpur which made the most of these circuits of film travel reaching out to non metropolitan centers, transforming backyards into screening spaces, thereby giving newer meanings to spectators' relation to the cinematic form.

The second chapter titled "Memories of Action" involves the stories of individual cinephiles or cineastes who participated in these intellectual society formations, pushed for alternative film viewing practices other than the offered mainstream and worked towards creating an awareness of the art form of cinema. Through memories of a range of activities like travelling with film prints, composing programme notes and organizing film festivals, this chapter has tracked the stories of the range of people who participated – along with filmmakers, critics, academics and writers, there were also students, artists, bureaucrats and professionals. A template of the cultural experience surrounding films and film societies has been, I hope, generated based on their experiences, anxieties and memories, both creative as well as administrative. The interactions and friendships of film society members provide interesting links to ideas of culture, identity, preference, taste and lifestyles. Most importantly, this chapter has traced the emergence of figures such as the film society activist, the film society cinephile and some other figures who were involved in the actual laborious acts of procuring, screening and loading films for film societies. Moreover, these experiences of film society members and audiences are pertinent in

understanding the internal inconsistencies within society formations, anxieties of sustenance, advantages and disadvantages of institutionalization alongside debates of emergent cinemas and censorship, membership and expansion.

“Disseminating Film Culture” is the third chapter of this dissertation which delves into the heart of film society cinephilia through a discussion of a wide range of film society activities. It uses articles, journals, reports and reviews of screenings, discussions and publications of influential film societies that articulated a need for a specific kind of film culture, thus contributing to the dominance of a ‘high’ discourse on film. The primary sources for this chapter have been memorandums, brochures and film society journals such as *Indian Film Culture*, *Close Up*, *Deep Focus*, *Chitrakalpa* and *Chitrapat*. Archival work has been the backbone of this chapter which has contributed to analyses of the institutional and governmental networks of knowledge production. This chapter has also contemplated on the epistemological values that these discursive and exhibition sites such as film society journals, discussions and appreciation courses created in the absence of any academic or intellectual spaces for engaging with film culture. Moreover, the excitement and efforts surrounding the organization of screenings and discussions, designing and publishing journals or brochures has been explored in this chapter as a crucial creative aspect of cinephilia. Therefore this chapter has emphasized different kinds of dissemination, dealing with the contests of the people, who attempted to construct film history through the movement in the absence of the discipline of Cinema Studies.

The conclusion contemplates on the extinction, transformations and the sustenance of surviving film societies in India. Following the reconstructing of film society history through the prism of film travel, memories and articulations, it has attempted to generate a debate with forms of new cinephilia. The explorations of the

changed nature of cine community formations reveal their investments in film cultures as well as the distinct reconfiguration of spaces of cinematic reception in the present context. The diffused and fragmented spaces provided by the virtual world of the internet and advancing digital technologies are fundamentally different from celluloid cultures of film societies but embody alternative sites of film culture in the contemporary. Since my history writing has been informed by the cultural influences of cinematic and technological transformations of another time, an interface with practices of new cinephilia in the Conclusion, has been seen by me as signaling interesting possibilities for further studies.

Celluloid in Transit: Film Society Networks

Why are you standing here? ... Oh! That thing, film society! For that you have come all the way from Calcutta. .. – Jawaharlal Nehru

The thought of a journey from Calcutta¹ to Delhi undertaken especially for the purpose of a film society elicited this remark of wonder and disbelief from Jawaharlal Nehru. Ram Halder, veteran film society organizer, recounts this incident from the early 1960s when he had a chance encounter with Nehru at Teen Murti Bhavan while waiting for a meeting with Indira Gandhi, the then Information and Broadcasting Minister and also one of the Vice Presidents of the Federation of Film Societies of India (Halder, 2011). Around this time when Nehru expressed his amazement at ‘that thing’ called ‘film society’, young film enthusiasts across cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Patna, Chandigarh and Agra had already begun organizing themselves as societies in order to watch as well as discuss international and art cinemas which were not available at their regular local theatres. Hence, film society cultures not only emerged out of the collective desire to engage with cinema as an art form but were also driven by the inaccessibility and unavailability of such films in the mainstream exhibition and distribution network. However, these young cinephiles formed alliances with foreign consulates, embassies, independent distributors, theatre owners and booksellers to establish alternative exhibition and reception practices through the framework of film societies which facilitated a unique circulation of international cinemas within the country. Therefore, the meaning of a journey for film societies was twofold; first in the form of the physical endeavors made by film society

¹ Since this dissertation deals with almost thirty years of the film society movement, earlier names of cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Bangalore have been used because these names signify the historical association they had with the people as well as the films in the movement.

organizers to trace and procure films and second, the arrival of the film objects around which the movement steadily developed.

In this chapter I intend to delve into the inception histories of film societies to extract tales of how films, both, international and Indian art cinemas- travelled to different societies which made the emergence of the film society movement possible. Enveloped within these origin stories of film societies are incidents that tell tales of collective formations, the establishing of connections with other film societies, and the efforts that were made to access film prints and organize screenings. Moreover, the physical endeavors undertaken for such alternative film circulation and exhibition practices generated a sense of responsibility owing to the fragility of film prints, knowledge of the mechanics of screening and the understanding of light and space. But, most importantly these inception details of film societies contain histories of reception (screenings), around which the entire experience of alternative film culture evolved. Furthermore, tracing the expanse of this movement through the travel of the films will also lead me to film cultures of smaller towns and rural areas which will help me rethink the urbanity associated with cinema and cine club cultures.

Before proceeding to the history of the movement, it is important to address the relationship of a cultural phenomenon like cinephilia with the ideas of travel and journey. The trajectory of the film society movement was affected by a period of cinephilia that was sincerely invested in the aesthetic possibilities of cinema, and equally informed by the celluloid materiality of the form they engaged with. Hence, the qualitative aspects of film society cinephilia were derived from two levels of experience. On the one hand, art cinema consisting of inherent structural negotiations with time, cinema, spectatorship and authorship (Betz, 2009; 4), was avidly promoted by film societies as an aesthetic project, which accentuated imaginative associations

with a global film culture. And, on the other hand, the rare opportunities of watching international and art cinemas combined with the consciousness of the transitory nature of the celluloid image, significantly transformed the viewer/member's temporal and spatial relationship to cinema. That the celluloid cinephiliac cultures of the film society movement in India imaginatively attempted to recreate an international experience of film culture is evidenced in Andrew Sarris's recollection that follows:-

By the late fifties Paris had become the undeniable center of world cinema, and the Cinematheque was at the heart of it. We were both in Paris in 1961 and experienced the heady atmosphere of cinephilia racing up and down both the Right and Left banks during our separate sojourns. (We did not meet until the mid-sixties when the combined influence of the French Film Office, the New York Film Festival, The Museum of Modern Art created in New York the kind of film fever we had felt in 1961.) In a sense, therefore, we were singly and collectively children of the Cinematheque, the Nouvelle Vague and the Parisian passion for all the things cultural and intellectual. –*Molly Haskell and Andrew Sarris, Memories of the Cinematheque* (1996, 10)

American critics, Molly Haskell and Andrew Sarris recounted their personalized experience of the Parisian cinephiliac fervor during the 1960s at the sixtieth anniversary celebration for the Cinematheque Francaise. Narrating instances of cross cultural exchange between America and France that facilitated such cinephilia, Haskell and Sarris pointed towards the institutional centers such as the Cinematheque (Paris), French Film Office, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York as well as the collaborations of people like Henri Langlois, Francois Truffant, Jean Luc-Godard and other directors of the Nouvelle Vague along with critics like themselves, that contributed to the transaction and resonating influence of cinephilia. Another crucial factor underlining the heady participation in watching world cinema was the event of the arrival of the films, as Sarris remarked “the movies (American) all came in a rush” to France after five years and the difficulty in acquiring them contributed to the enthusiasm and significance of the Cinematheque. Thus, cinephilia was defined by the

shift from the moment of inaccessibility to the period of availability that led to an organized and spontaneous experience of cinema.

Incidentally, in the same year as *Memories of the Cinematheque* (1996), Susan Sontag in “The Decay of Cinema” proclaimed the end of that special cine-love called cinephilia because of the crucial transformation of cinematic practices with the coming of video technology. According to her, the relationship that cinephiles developed by ‘going to the movies’, selecting the seat with the best view of the screen and most importantly with the memory of cinema in darkened theatre spaces, had come to an end because the need for such religiosity and wonder had faded. The ephemeral experience of celluloid had been replaced by the material possession of video. What Sontag claimed to have disintegrated then, was the American version of cinephilia that was influenced by the most celebrated cinephiliac culture of post-war France during the fifties and sixties. Sontag’s essay marks a moment of historical transformation in film reception practices which is imperative to grasp in order to develop any material understanding of cinephiliac cultures. However, there is a need to observe this period beyond her declaration of loss, to figure out the cultural markers of such cinephilia. Therefore, I return to *Memories of the Cinematheque* (1996) to identify cultural activities specific to early cinephilia. Unlike “The Decay of Cinema”, what is evoked in the *Memories of the Cinematheque* (1996) then, is not only a sense of cinephilia as cultural lineage that travelled across nations, and was invested with shared passions, a romance of the larger than life screen and distinguished critical attention, but also the efforts and practices that marked specific cities as centers of cinematic cultures and made this collective enterprise revered.

Since cine club formations were part of this moment, it is possible to draw parallels with the organized cinephilia exhibited by the film society movement in

India; however that is not the purpose behind citing these two references to classical cinephilia. Instead of tracing any direct lineage to the influential cross cultural moment, I intend to grasp three underlining concepts that can be gathered from the above reminiscences: first the act of ‘going to the cinemas’; second, the event of ‘arrival or coming of the films’; and third, the city as the cultural center for cinema, which can be crucial with respect to examining the practices of film societies and the places in India where they transpired. I begin this chapter with the history of the Indian film society movement’s relationship with the city of Calcutta.

Calcutta: A Prelude

My first visit to the *Calcutta Film Society* led me to the front arches of a regal white building that even in its renovated state embodied the memory of the old city of Calcutta. The ground floor of the building housed a bank, and bewildered and obstructed by its iron gates as it shut for the day, and jostled by an intimidating crowd leaving after office hours in the evening, I searched for another entry into the building. Alongside was a street lined with wholesale shops and stalls of fruit sellers who were unaware of the society’s existence, but pointed me to another entrance which was so pitch dark that it made me doubt if I had the correct address. Nevertheless stepping into the building, under a dim light I found a spiraling stairway leading upstairs. Marveling at this sample architecture of early twentieth century modernity, and somewhat intrigued by the thin waves of cobwebs that covered its iron railings, I found the assurance of having come to the right place :- an old, slightly cracked wooden letter box hung from the side wall with the letters marked in white

paint- Calcutta Film Society, 1st Floor.² When I returned to continue my research two months later, the newspapers³ were full of a recent initiative to revive the *Calcutta Film Society*. A group of filmmakers, Goutam Ghose, Suman Mukhopadhyay, Srijit Mukherjee, and Aparna Sen and Sandip Ray whose fathers were founder members of the *Calcutta Film Society*⁴, had come together to return it to its former state of glory with plans of master classes, memorial lectures and even a proposal to confer heritage status on it. The announcement⁵ also came at a time when the city was alive with the excitement of a week of cinema and cinephilia since it was about to host the 17th Annual Kolkata Film Festival, thus making it a perfect occasion to recall one of the most famous film societies of the country that had “contributed a great deal in developing some sort of film culture in our state”⁶. Interestingly, like the allusions to the cultural and intellectual heritage of the city evoked by this revival initiative, tales of stagnant and struggling film societies across the country are enveloped in nostalgia narratives. Yet, hidden within the folds of remembrances are inception histories, experiences of acquiring and watching films as well as the enthusiasm and tribulations of managing film societies that a critical revisiting can reveal.

² Although their office was shut that day, I proceeded to meet with few members from film societies in and around Calcutta at the Office of the Federation of Film Societies of India, Eastern Region, which shares office space in the same building as Calcutta Film Society (Bharat Bhavan, 3, Chittaranjan Avenue, Kolkata -72).

³ See “New Lease of Life Being Infused into dying Kolkata Film Societies”, *The Economic Times*, October 20, 2011, as accessed from <http://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com> on May, 5, 2012.; “Old Camps for New”, *The Indian Express*, September 22, 2011, as accessed from <http://www.indianexpress.com> on February 14, 2012.

⁴ Director Aparna Sen is the daughter of film critic Chidananda Dasgupta and Sandip Ray, also a filmmaker is the son of Satyajit Ray.

⁵ See Sakti Basu, Editor’s Note in *Chitrakalpa*: Journal by Cine Club of Calcutta, November 2011. The announcement was received with enthusiasm even within the film society circuit. The editor’s note reiterates a sense of history as well as an unfinished mission. “I read in the newspapers recently that efforts are being made to revive Calcutta Film Society. The people behind such efforts are reputed filmmakers. It felt good to know this. The film societies which were at the peak of their activities through the seventies to the eighties and nineties seem to have disappeared into thin air in the 2000s. Any initiative to revive that moment is indeed praiseworthy. We extend our best wishes.” (Translation from Bengali by the author)

⁶ See “New Lease of Life Being Infused into dying Kolkata Film Societies”, *The Economic Times*, October 20, 2011, as accessed from <http://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com> on May, 5, 2012.

The *Calcutta Film Society* was formed on October 5, 1947 by a young group of film enthusiasts as a club that would screen and discuss good feature films and documentaries that were not shown in the regular commercial film circuit. The twenty five members who met for their first meeting at a room on someone's terrace in South Calcutta, were an assorted crowd of individuals like painter and future art director Bansi Chandra Gupta, Hari Sadhan Dasgupta, graduate from the University of South California looking for a future in film direction, theatre artist Charukumar Ghosh, and most significantly, the initiators of the society, Satyajit Ray, then an advertising artist, and later film critic Chidananda Dasgupta. Within its first two years of existence, the members had managed to access and watch a diverse range of international cinema, which included the Mexican film, *Portrait of Maria*(1944) by Emilio Fernandez;, French directors' Jean Dreville's *A Cage of Nightingales* (1945) and Jean Renoir's *This Land is Mine* (1943)-; (they even managed a special discussion with the director when he visited Calcutta related to his film *The River*; 1951); English documentaries and films such as David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945) and Carol Reed's *The Way Ahead*(1944) and with special support from the British Film Institute, Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*(1925), Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (1928) and Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) (Rao, 2009: 21-24). In his memoir, *My Years with Apu*, Ray classifies the founding of the *Calcutta Film Society* as one of the significant events of 1947, albeit of a personal nature because he had hoped for such a group since college, but the impetus and thought behind it was concerned with the general state of Indian Cinema. In an article titled "What is Wrong with Indian Films?" published in *The Statesman*, Ray commented, "What Indian Cinema needs today is not more gloss, but more imagination, more integrity, and more intelligent appreciation of the limitations of the medium." This not only coincided with the first

screening of the film society but also hinted at the sensibility that the *Calcutta Film Society* sought to espouse (Ray, 1994: 15).

Yet in the early days the *Calcutta Film Society* was still a small group which met at the homes of members for screenings as well as discussions with all activities covered in the membership fee ranging from rupees one to five. They were supported by colleagues, friends and acquaintances who were publishers, booksellers, distributors, theatre owners, and cultural advisors of embassies, with books, journals, projectors and even screening spaces.

...the Coffee House adda among other things, helped to broaden our interests, particularly in the visual and the performing arts. In the days before the film society movement came to India, we learnt to look beyond the Hollywood and British films to Soviet, French and the Italian Cinemas. And when the movement came to Calcutta, our Coffee House group had a large role to play in it. - Radha Prasad Gupta, "Satyajit Ray: The Coffee House Days" (1988, 2004: 6)

Despite the eclectic choice of films that were watched and the encouraging responses from audience members as suggested in the above statement, the *Calcutta Film Society* went through a stagnant period soon after the first International Film Festival of India in 1952, only to be revived again in 1956 with several new cinephiles joining in and reinvigorating it with films, talks and most significantly, the publication of *Indian Film Quarterly*, the English journal of the society. The pattern of closure and revival that has been a recurrent feature in the history of the society (also the movement) was determined by the inability to procure prints or lack of films in circulation, apart from instances of membership concerns and organizational disputes. However, the act of acquiring films for regular screenings was never an easy task since it required selecting and locating the source of the print which was a combination of monetary, physical and emotional investment. Further, once a film was acquired and exhibited for members, there was the underlining pact of returning it on time to the respective institutional source.

One of the earliest screenings of the *Calcutta Film Society* exemplifies such a task of persuasion. Sergei Eisenstein's epochal film on revolution and revolt, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) was chosen by members for screening and the British Film Institute had been contacted for its 16mm print. But upon its arrival at the Khidderpore dock, there wasn't enough money to pay the fee for its release from customs. It was shown after an influential fellow member intervened to reclaim the print from the port authority (Halder, 2011). However, apart from their enthusiasm and gratitude, they never managed to pay anything back to the British Film Institute for the print that remained with the members of the society (Ray, 1994:27-29). In a sense the energy behind this cinephilia for international cinema came from the rarity of the films in the public domain as well as the exhilaration that resulted from availing, carrying and experiencing them with fellow members. At a time when few foreign films were screened at morning shows of cinema theatres, scouting for suitable films for the society at the offices of several distributors was a common activity amongst its keen members. On one such trip, member Ram Halder along with Satyajit Ray chanced upon Jean Delannoy's *Pastoral Symphony* (French, 1946) at the R.K.O Radio Company's local office and displayed their eagerness to screen it. In the impulse of the moment Ray is said to have offered to carry the film cans on his shoulders immediately, only to be stopped by a dutiful manager who instead suggested that he would send it to the required destination after payment of the rent amount (Halder, 2011:7).

Similarly, assistance came from different quarters regarding possible spaces for screenings. While on the one hand, homes of members were ready alternatives, drawing rooms were never the ideal spaces, and there was always the possibility of being asked to leave. On the other hand, there were also suspicions from a segment of

the film trade who were wary of subversive activity against Bengali films⁷. Notwithstanding, help came from within the industry, for instance, the owner of New Theatres, B.N. Sarkar vacated a room above New Cinema for the purposes of the society. Similar logistical assistance was provided by the foreign consulates which not only showed films in their premises but also loaned projectors. Moreover, the miniature theatre of Lighthouse Cinema and Artistry House hall (which is now Park Hotel) were regular screening places during the 1950s when the membership was within fifty, and later in the 1960s, cinema theatres such as Janata, Dipti and Bhavani were rented in the mornings as the membership of the Calcutta Film Society touched the four hundred mark. Therefore towards the mid-sixties Calcutta had begun to experience an influx of international cinematic culture that with the growing participation of the young urban population was soon another feature of its metropolitan identity.

Coterie and the Commons: The Movement Begins

The *Cine Club of Calcutta* and *Cine Central* were two other significant societies formed in the 1960s which also witnessed a surge of membership within their first few years of existence. The membership of all these film societies soon became a contested area owing to the intellectual tenor underlying the organizational principles. Film societies' discourse on film culture was geared towards instituting cinema as an art form, worthy of the attention of the educated classes of society. In an

⁷ For details on common screening locations and issues of space during the early days of the Calcutta Film Society see Satyajit Ray, *Our Films, Their Films* (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1976), 7; Ram Halder, "Prashanga: Film Society", *Chayachitra*, Issue November, 2011; Purnendu Narayan, "Kolkata Film Societies' Godar Katha", *Chitrapat I*, (Kolkata: Calcutta Film Society Publication, 2007), 189-192.

article titled “Film Society Movement: Calcutta Film Society”, Chidananda Dasgupta vociferously argued for cinema’s inclusion alongside the study of the other arts,

cinema is not a hobby like gardening or a business such as the selling of oil and salt. In today’s age it is one of the most widespread and influential art forms in the social sphere, and therefore it needs intellectual engagement. - To prove as well as to propagate this is the prime objective of the Calcutta Film Society.⁸

Such a need to address issues related to the qualitative and quantitative aspects of film society membership was also a result of the growing significance of the movement in the national sphere. In 1959, *Calcutta Film Society* had been instrumental in the formation of the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) with twenty five different film societies from the country. This institutionalization of the movement, backed by powerful national and bureaucratic forces brought in a relaxation of censorship norms and taxation that transformed the scenario of the circulation, exhibition and reception of international films. Although, on the national front the movement represented a united mission for spreading alternative film culture but locally the content of the films they promoted proved to be a challenge to their tastes and preferences. Hence, on the one hand, this change authorized the discourses on disseminating intellectual film culture, while on the other hand, the films, especially European cinema which was the referent for mature cinematic art unsettled the establishment, paradoxically making the voices of restrictive membership grow even stronger.

The pioneers who were responsible for sowing the seeds of the movement found themselves at a crucial juncture which meant rethinking their notions of ‘good cinema’ as well as the need address the problem of restrictive membership. While Dasgupta maintained his caustic stance on intellectual exclusivity, accusing

⁸ As cited in Sudhin Bandyopadhyay, “Film Society Andoloney Baidyutin Ganamadhyamer Prabhah” in *Chitrakalpa*, Bulletin of the Cine Club of Calcutta, October 2010, p. 5. (Translation by the author)

“demagogues” of including “all and sundry” (Dasgupta, 1983), Ray used the cinematic medium to locate the issues within the cultural sphere of Calcutta, then a city on the verge of political dissent;

Shiben: No No, there won't be any bomb explosion where we are going.
Siddhartha: Oh, is this place your film club?
Composite close shot of Shiben and Siddhartha. Shiben smiles at Siddhartha.
<Cut to>
Both of them sitting next to each other in a cinema hall
Shiben: Swedish Film! Uncensored!
Pratidwandi (Ray, 1970)

Ray's mention of film clubs in the first of his Calcutta films, *Pratidwandi* (1970), as a preferred haunt for dilettantes attracted by the sexual permissiveness of foreign cinema obliquely references the membership issue while simultaneously situating film societies within the urban culture of an exceedingly despairing and disintegrating city on the verge of political transformation. The scene from *Pratidwandi* marks the juxtaposition of several different histories as it brings together problems of film society membership, debates on the content and quality of cinema that film societies wished to promote, the specific context of Swedish cinema that was reacting against censor directives within its own country, all within the larger political and historical changes occurring within Calcutta, a postcolonial Indian city. Therefore, if the earlier realist moment of art cinema was confronted by the political scenario of the turbulent 1970s, then the changing dynamics of urban culture in the wake of political undercurrents effected the burgeoning of the movement, challenging the preferences and idiosyncrasies of the early days of the movement.

However, the early history of the *Calcutta Film Society* is still unequivocally bound up with the writings, biographies and stories about the talents and skills of its two most prominent members, Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta. Since much of the film society movement's beginnings in Calcutta has been known through their

life's work, their legendary stature within the film cultural circuit has also overshadowed the contestations and diversities that attempted to broaden the parameters of such an alternative culture. While voices of dissent recognized the *Calcutta Film Society's* primary leadership as a "coterie"⁹ because of their emphasis on the intellectual background of its members, differences of opinion surfaced regarding the socio-political role of a film society. Therefore, in order to understand the emergence of other film societies and their differences, it would be useful to narrate their nascent ideas of film culture with respect to the films they watched and promoted.

The cinemas that featured in the programmes and film festivals of film societies were not only reflective of the preference for certain sensibilities within the cinematic form but were also indicative of their cultural affiliations, specifically with Soviet and European countries. The influences of specific countries and their films not only determined the social and political affiliations of certain film societies but also affected their constitution. To elaborate, along with the national institutional framework which lent governmental and bureaucratic support, cultural consulates such as the United States Information Service, Alliance Francaise, Soviet House as well as the embassies of Poland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and Hungary provided a well connected exhibition and circulation network. Such a culturally diverse network ushered in pertinent debates on film culture and its dissemination, thereby establishing film societies as significant discursive sites.

⁹ See Ram Halder, "Prashanga: Film Society", *Chayachitra: Bulletin of Burdwan Chalachitra Charcha*, Issue November 2011 (Reprinted from *Sharadiya Anustup*, First Issue, 1988.); 1. Halder uses the term 'coterie' to define the earliest group of members of the Calcutta Film Society. He refers to a rumor regarding the stringent methods of C. Dasgupta who apparently did not even allow his wife to become a member of the society.

The inaugural event of the *Cine Club of Calcutta* established in the summer of 1961, provides an interesting instance of this film cultural scenario. *Cine Club of Calcutta* was set to open with a festival of Polish films, which included Andrzej Wajda's war classics *Kanal*(1957) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), at Priya Cinema. Unfortunately it was discovered that there was a ban on *Ashes and Diamonds* in India; however since the film had been publicized as one of the inaugural films, the members undertook the initiative to write to the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, requesting an exemption for it. They also used the editorial and readers' columns in the English daily *Statesman* to bring the significance of the film into the public domain and highlight its demand with the audiences. *Cine Club* not only succeeded in its efforts to acquire a censor relaxation for the film, but also managed to put *Kanal* into circulation to other metros like Bombay and Delhi through a private distributor. Following this, *Cine Club* witnessed a surge in membership with almost thousand members in its first two months. Ironically, this film society which had begun with the intention to remove the bar on numbers for film society audiences, eventually had to decide on thousand as the capacity of their membership. Although dominated by the cinemas of East Europe, this film society built a reputation for organizing elaborate film festivals with creative programming and for producing a quality journal *Chitrakalpa*¹⁰. *Cine Club* continued on its original democratic principles by providing intellectual and structural support to emerging film societies in suburban and smaller towns such as Dum Dum, Burnpur, Darjeeling, Cuttack and Rourkela (Halder, 2011).

¹⁰ See Hiran Mitra, "Khanda Chitra, Cine Club, Ebong..." in *Chitrakalpa*, November 2011; 5-12. Mitra reminisces about the friendships and creative partnerships that fuelled the enthusiasm of running a film society like Cine Club of Calcutta. His recollection narrates instances like buying their first typewriter, locating a suitable printer for their literatures and organizing several film festivals.

Since the dominance of cultural transactions with certain countries was rooted in the historical context of their relationship with India, the films that were exhibited and put into circulation were consequently looked upon as cultural carriers of those nations. Moreover, the position of film societies as alternative exhibition spaces combined with the discursive impulse of their constitution, appropriated the role of these films for concerns of language and aesthetic development of cinema as a global form through seminars, film literature and avenues for distribution. Ram Halder recalls the arrival and screening of four Polish films for members of the *Calcutta Film Society*, on a special request by the Polish Embassy. While for Halder, watching a holocaust film like *Last Stage* (1948) was a revelation of Nazi atrocities during the Second World War, a local newspaper reported it as a propaganda film. Even though they could not convince any independent distributor for the circulation of this Polish package of films, for the members, these films represented a unique appropriation by cinema for the articulation of unimaginable loss, pain and trauma (Halder, 2011). Thus, film societies steadily became spaces for cultural interaction that impacted collective consciousness as well as modes of interpretation.

Cine Central, another significant film society of Calcutta, formed in 1965, exemplifies how film culture ushered in historical and political consciousness, which they chose to disseminate further through their activities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Cine Central* found itself in possession of several film prints belonging to the smaller countries of East Europe. In the absence of diplomatic ownership, *Cine Central* took the initiative to not only preserve these prints but also manage them in an archive from where they could be lent and borrowed. Significantly, it also became one of the rare film societies in the eastern region to introduce and organize a festival of Indian cinema supplemented by an exhibition of printed material, posters and

equipment, thus confronting the dominance of international cinema within film society culture.¹¹ Furthermore, this film society went on to host several South Asian film festivals evoking the political climate of the Vietnam war crisis. Thus, film societies simultaneously became symbolic, not only of historical moments of cultural transaction, but also became markers of difference within localized desires of cinephilia. However, these film societies from Calcutta reflect the changing tenor and mood of the movement specific to only one part of the country. Following trajectories of film circulation within film societies, the next section will elaborate on how such cinephilia resonated and developed in other cities of India.

Celluloid Object: A Cultural Biography

The objective behind laying out a brief sketch of the early phase of the film society movement in Calcutta was to evoke two broad aspects of the movement that were strengthened later with the consolidation of a diverse network of film societies: first, the aesthetic and cultural values associated with cinematic form that was crucial to the conceptualization of discourses on film appreciation, and second, the transformation of the film object, the celluloid prints enclosed in cans, from its commodity status to a cultural object en route a trail charted by the demands and affect of cinephilia rather than the monetary or economical framework of the marketplace. The histories of the film societies discussed above - the *Calcutta Film Society*, *Cine Club of Calcutta* and the *Cine Central* - have been gathered from inception records, newspaper articles, as well as memoirs and biographies of members who participated in their emergence which locate the nature of film society cinephilia

¹¹ See "A Movement from Within: Cine Central" in *Cinema In India*, July-September 2003, 67-68.

and cinephiliac activities within the social, political, cultural and intellectual contexts of a specific city. While on the one hand, such a historicization upholds the distinctiveness of these societies, on the other hand, this mapping of the history of a movement as geographically and temporally widespread as that of film societies in India, privileging narratives of impact in specific locations, reduces their notions of film culture only to an entirely oppositional position to popular tastes. However, another way of assembling issues of film appreciation, film practice and the dissemination of film culture so as to develop a plural narrative on the reach and impact of the movement can be embarked on by tracing the biography of the films that were screened, including stories of particular films and events like seminars and festivals surrounding directors and their cinemas.

This shift in perspective is crucially informed by Igor Kopytoff's methodology of understanding objects in any chain of movement based, not only on their economic value, but also on the specific cultural and temporal connotations that they acquire during processes of transfer or transaction. Kopytoff's engagement is with the commoditization and singularization processes of objects that transpire between a range of economies, namely social, cultural and aesthetic, which he suggests can be written about from the biographical perspective of the objects. According to him, "the cultural responses to such biographical details reveal a tangled mass of aesthetic, historical, and even political judgments, and of convictions and values that shape our attitudes to objects labeled 'art'" (Koytoff, 1986: 66). Moreover, the special feature of writing the biographies of things is that these "can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure" (67). A cultural biography of things therefore has the potential to reveal variations in people's relations to the objects as well as the transformations in cultural significance of the objects within societies, without rendering the objects

obscure. In the context of the film society movement, the presence of an alternate viewership that took interest in cinema beyond its value as a consumable economic product complicated the ritual bonds of ownership that prevailed within the market place.

An incident from the initial days of the *Delhi Film Society* elaborates this premise. *Delhi Film Society*'s session with Satyajit Ray at a screening of his film *Devi* is an interesting case in point. This society was formed in 1957 by a small group of people with a membership fee of rupees ten but consisted of influential members which included Indira Gandhi, I.K Gujral, and Aruna Asaf Ali. In its initial days, *Delhi Film Society* functioned from the homes of its members and later was granted the use of the Films Division Auditorium. During this time, the members were made privy to the screening of the then unreleased film, *Devi* (1960), by the director himself on his visit to the *Delhi Film Society*. If for the members, this event was an experience that Indian films should also be “seen, discussed and understood, then exported for its sensitivity”, for Satyajit Ray it invited trouble with the film's distributors for having screened the yet unreleased film (Wasi, 1981). Hence, films journeyed to these societies, outside of the commercial exhibition circuit, following the logic of cinephilia that was hitherto unknown. The absence of these films from the mainstream, arrival under special conditions, portability and sensitive materiality made the films, the most important object around which cinephilia organized itself. Moreover, cinema moving out of the commercial framework, breaking away from market forces specifically for film societies, was also recognized by the member audiences as momentous thereby transposing an aura on to the film object, and a sense of privilege to themselves.

These were also the early lessons in the procedural issues of creating an alternate viewership. Experiences like these set the foundation for actualizing the film society circuit which then with the establishment of institutions related to cinema like the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and the Film Finance Corporation (FFC), managed to further elevate the cultural qualifications of the film object. But before that, there were two issues, specifically related to the status of cinema as a commodity that had to be dealt with by the burgeoning film society movement. For the small number of film societies during the fifties and early sixties, films arrived through their connections with particular embassies under the aegis of diplomatic travel such that a print of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, on its way from Dhaka to Rangoon, could be halted at Calcutta and shown to the *Calcutta Film Society* before sending it back on its course (Halder, 2011). While this availability of films in transit, through collaborations effected the growth of societies, it also became a major role of the Federation of Film Societies of India to be able to maintain such availability of films. This meant issues of importing films, taxation and censorship. For instance embassies, willing to import films for societies also had to bear the additional expense of procuring a censor certificate. Film societies with their limited collected funds could not afford such costs frequently. Also, embassies were often disgruntled by the edited form in which the films came back from the censors. It was in 1964 that a solution was reached, with the intervention of Indira Gandhi, the then Information and Broadcasting Minister, assuring that films for film societies would be exempted from any clearance from the censor on request from the President of the Federation of Film Societies (Rao, 2009: 50). All these stories and issues indicate the efforts made to keep cinema within the cultural sphere created by the film societies, by overcoming the commoditization aspect of film culture.

How would a cultural biography of the celluloid object account for the history of the film society movement? This project of revisiting the emergence of film societies in India is informed by the significant position that cinema as a cultural object embodied for the movement. As narrated in the earlier paragraphs, histories of film societies are linked with the availability of certain kinds of cinema. Therefore, following a history of the films that were repeatedly circulated and exhibited can lead us to an understanding of the deeper intellectual, educational, aesthetic, political and social concerns of the movement. Before proceeding to writing a biographical journey of the films, it is important to underline the fact that this biography would differ from Kopytoff's examples on a fundamental level because the 'object' under consideration would not be a particular can of film, but the cultural product, cinema. The narration of the lives of films would incorporate both, the different film prints as well as the film as a cultural entity. However, examples of particular prints will be useful to observe how the value associated with celluloid objects led to a plural sense of film culture which was further complimented by institutional libraries and archives.

“After All, How Many Times Can You See Battleship Potemkin?”¹²: Journey of a Film

Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* remains one of the classic texts in film history because of the possibilities of experimentation with the cinematic form and the transformative power of filmmaking that it embodied through the montage of effects. Its iconic status is underlined by the fact that the film is a simultaneous

¹² See Santi P. Chowdhury, "Revival and Excitement of Running a Film Society" in *The Film Society Movement in India* (Mumbai;Asian Film Foundation, 2009), 24. This extract about the revival of Calcutta Film Society is extracted and reprinted from a letter written to Jag Mohan, fellow film society activist, probably also printed in *Indian Film Culture*. Rao's citation is unclear. The title is borrowed from Chowdhury's rhetorical question regarding the stagnation of the CFS during the fifties.

document of the political and historical consciousness of the twentieth century. *Battleship Potemkin's* trajectory in the film society movement as the most common film at inaugural events of a range of societies in a sense reiterates the formal and symbolic position it occupied for collective endeavors, especially of the newly independent nation founded on socialist principles. To the members of the *Calcutta Film Society*, the film came on their demand as has been narrated previously but for the *Delhi Film Society* it came with a distinctive educational undercurrent.

The *Delhi Film Society* started with a small group of twelve or more members, mostly bureaucrats, diplomats, educationists and journalists, who contributed to the finances and brought together more people with common interests in cinema. In 1956, British film academician and an experienced film society activist of the British Film Society movement, Marie Seton came to India with a few films from the British Film Institute which included works of Eisenstein, Kurosawa and Chaplin, with the purpose of formulating the use of cinema in the curriculum of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Her interest and close association with Eisenstein and his works were already established when she also met with Vijaya Mulay and Muriel Wasi at the Ministry of Education in Delhi, who went on to found the *Delhi Film Society*, with *Battleship Potemkin* as their inaugural film¹³. These key members of the Calcutta and Delhi film societies would go on to play major roles in the formation of the Federation of Film Societies of India, with Marie Seton as a technical advisor. Moreover, their pioneering activities combined with their positions within systems of governance and education also informed the course of film

¹³ The contribution of Marie Seton in the emergence of the film society movement is recalled by some of her close associates in India such as Satish Bahadur, Gaston Roberge and K.V. Subbanna in articles and letters, excerpts from which have been reprinted in H.N. Narhari Rao, ed. *The Film Society Movement in India* (Mumbai: Asian Film Foundation, 2009), 227-232.

education reflected in the early history of the Film Institute and film appreciation courses undertaken by film societies.

The inaugural event of the *Lucknow Film Society* in 1961 is such a point of convergence. With the revival of the Calcutta Film Society after the success of *Pather Panchali* (1955) and the formation of the Federation of Film Societies, the screening of *Potemkin* along with a package of Swedish films provided by the Swedish Embassy, prefigured the thriving network of the film society movement.¹⁴ The screening of *Potemkin* in the presence of Marie Seton, Chidananda Dasgupta, who was thanked for providing the print and Robert E. Hawkins of the Bombay Film Society, evokes a range of significations. First, the print that had arrived from the British Film Institute at the Calcutta dock and had remained with the society was possibly the one that travelled to Lucknow as their note of gratitude to Dasgupta from the programme seems to indicate. The importance of the film multiplied due to its association with another film society's history. Secondly, the context of this film as a contingent historical and aesthetic documentation made it an ideal selection for delineating the need for collective interaction with the cinema through film societies. As much as Eisenstein intended for the film to awaken the political consciousness of people, the celebration and resonance of *Battleship Potemkin*, internationally has depended on the affective charge that it carries. Bill Nichols terms it

a film of retroactive fulfillment: it converts a historical defeat into a utopian victory. It does so by modeling through its montage effects how a revolutionary political consciousness perceives the world and sets about transforming it (Nichols, 164).

Although it is not possible to come to definitive conclusions regarding the specific preference for the film based on a journey extracted from a series of scattered

¹⁴ The Programme Notes of Film Societies 1960-1967, accessed at the National Film Archives of India Pune in June, 2011.

records, however *Potemkin*'s potential as a transformative cultural product needs to be acknowledged. This linear path of the journey of the film from one society to another indicates the role of this particular film in the dissemination of film culture but does not entirely qualify its alternative status. Perhaps *Potemkin*'s role in triggering the taste for alternative cinemas through film societies can be gathered from its history with the *Patna Film Society* as early as 1951. Much before the educational role it would take on after the *Delhi Film Society* screening, it served as the first film for the members of *Patna Film Society*, on a borrowed projector at the Lady Stephenson Hall, a college auditorium. For the founder members of this film society, cinema at the local theatres was a plethora of Hindi films interspersed with a few Bengali and English films at the unpopular early morning shows. These morning shows which were not profitable for the theatre owners proved to be beneficial for the *Patna Film Society* as the small group was able to access the screening space for a small rental, for films like *Queen of Spades* (1925), *Tales of Hoffman* (1913) *The Men* (1950) and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), thereby bringing together a group interested in a critical relationship to cinema (Mulay, 1982).

The life and importance of *Battleship Potemkin* for these early film societies based in cities, and essentially composed of small groups of educated professionals and intellectuals investing their resources and critical energies to organize events around cinema, also highlights their notions of alternative film culture as primarily reliant on American and European cinema. The film's travel not only illuminates the cultural as well as educational networks formed but also indicates the institutionalization of aesthetic principles and sensibilities. If this example is understood as symbolic of one end of the spectrum of film society cultures in India, then it leads us to the question of what could have been other alternatives along this

vector of film culture. Therefore, this biographical collage of *Potemkin* also serves as the starting point from where other singular as well as interconnecting trails can be discovered.

As a project of film history in the context of Indian Cinema, the foremost question that arises is regarding the status of Indian films in this system of film societies. Historically, the first film society to be registered in India was the *Bombay Film Society* which serves as an interesting cultural site at this juncture because of the difference in its selection of films. The *Bombay Film Society* was formed in 1943 by a Hungarian photographer in the Army unit, Ferenc Borko, who initiated a culture of understanding cinema in its combined identity as a technological as well as a historical production. The society functioned from a miniature theatre above Eros Cinema along with typical haunts such as cafes and homes of members. *Bombay Film Society's* affinity with the army as well as its location in the film production site of Bombay is reflected in its screening history of films like David Lean's *In Which We Serve* (1942) and *Blithe Spirit* (1945), Vittorio De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (1951) and Jean Renoir's *The River* (1951) alongside Indian socials such as N.R. Acharya's *Uljhan* (1942) and Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* (1946) and several documentaries. In a marked difference from the preferences of the other film societies, this film society is an example of the earliest critical engagement with the regular mainstream film product with a cultural perspective that did not restrict itself to the aesthetic experiments of art cinemas. Although the founding group of the *Bombay Film Society* could not sustain it beyond the 1950s, it was re-established as *Film Forum* in 1962, and its members comprised several filmmakers, critics and technicians, and the society became one of the significant sites for the promotion of the Indian New Wave

and parallel cinemas, with its journal *Close Up* even publishing the 1968 manifesto “Towards a New Cinema” by Arun Kaul and Mrinal Sen.

The city based film societies which initiated the film society movement, inculcated desires for alternative cinemas and became the sites of new cinephilia but could not accommodate its rising demands. Also, the discursive capacity of the film society space functioned as a ground for constant challenges to any deterministic sensibilities, tastes or strict aesthetic and political principles, which with the expansion of film societies to suburbs and smaller towns, made the emerging film cultures diverse yet connected by the movement. Even within cities, different film societies emerged catering to separate segments and regions, displaying interests towards various forms of Indian cinema. For instance, *Prabhat Chitra Mandal* was founded in Bombay in 1968 with the intention to bring world cinema to the Marathi speaking audiences of the northern part of the city. Taking its name from Prabhat Film Company, this film society also invested in the tradition of Indian cinema by conducting several retrospectives on the Indian Studio era. One of its most significant achievements was retrieving the nitrate reels of Phalke’s *Raja Harishchandra* for a special screening celebrating the director’s birth centenary. Following this screening, the retrieved reels were handed over to the National Film Archive of India in Pune, thus resurrecting the film’s life in the exhibition space. In a similar narrative of recovery and restoration of early cinema, *Suchitra Film Society*, Bangalore managed to acquire the print of a forties Kannada film, *Vasantha Sena* (1941) from the garage of a local distributor and screen it in the presence of members of the cast and crew who then placed the film in the National Film Archive, therefore situating it in the network of film circulation and exhibition from the archives to other societies (Rao, 2001).

The network of film travel that was created with the support of foreign embassies and governmental institutions to promote an alternative film culture triggered an even greater awareness about the condition of cinematic practices within the film societies. The films also brought with them a consciousness of the sensitive celluloid nature of the film object, the technological aspects which had to be understood and learned since most members had no direct relationship to the practices of filmmaking or a sense of responsibility towards an object that was not owned by them, even though its journey was meant for the societies. Around the sixties, two important institutional events occurred that acknowledged this presence of a distinct culture and awareness around cinema: first, the establishment of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) at Pune in 1964 for the preservation, exhibition and circulation of all kinds of cinema, and second, the formation of the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) with the objective of raising the standard of cinema via the financing of low budget films by young trained film-makers who would adapt the works of Indian writers therefore ushering in the Indian New Wave in 1969. Both these events not only proved to be a fillip to the film society movement but developed a symbiotic relationship that injected the circulation and exhibition of Indian cinemas into the international cinema dominated network.

As indicated via the examples above, the National Film Archive of India provided a set up for the preservation of cinema as heritage without demands of any alternative sensibility or parallel aesthetic preferences which renewed the approach to cinema from a circulating cultural commodity to an object of preservation. Soon the Archive's distribution units succeeded in advancing Indian films along with international classics on loan to film societies, which also led to their selective inclusion in appreciation courses. While the regular collaborations with embassies

provided for contemporary international cinema, the advent of the Indian New Wave as a departure from the mainstream form with new content and experimental styles of filmmaking found encouraging appreciation with film society audiences.

Mrinal Sen along with Arun Kaul, acknowledged the support from film society audiences for the New Cinema in their manifesto titled “New Cinema Movement”: “In India, about one hundred film societies have succeeded in creating a discriminating audience which demands better cinema and is ready to take some pains to secure it” (Sen and Kaul, 1968:37). Although Sen’s *Bhuvan Shome*, along with Basu Chatterjee’s *Sara Akash* and Mani Kaul’s *Uski Roti* marked the beginning of the Indian New Wave in 1969, not all the films of this movement found commercial release or success, including the much acclaimed *Uski Roti* (Bhaskar, 2013). Yet these did find their way to film society audiences, both in the cities as well as the small town and rural interiors, most notably in the form of the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) Festival package. *Suchitra Film Society*, Bangalore within a year of its existence managed to organize this festival with the support of the FFC, comprising Hindi and regional films like Mani Kaul’s *Uski Roti*, Mrinal Sen’s *Ek Adhuri Kahani*, Kumar Sahani’s *Maya Darpan*, M.S. Sathyu’s *Garm Hawa*, M.V. Krishnamurthy’s *Subba Sastry*, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s *Swayamvaram*.¹⁵ At Chitrlekha Film Society, Trivandrum, the first film society in Kerala, which also had Adoor Gopalakrishnan as one of its founder members, a similar FFC festival was held with the inclusion of films like *27 Down* and *Duvidha*, which travelled further to smaller film societies which Chitrlekha supported. Thus, the New Wave films were accessed by people in different spaces whose lived experiences in turn heavily impacted the

¹⁵ See “Inauguration of Suchitra Film Society and Its Growth” in *My Days with the Film Society Movement*, H.N. Narhari Rao (Bangalore: Sibina Services, 2001; 39-40). The Suchitra Film Society hosted the FFC Film Festival in 1973 along with a seminar on ‘Government and Cinema’ in which the chairman of the FFC, BK Karanjia also participated.

content of the New Wave films and furthered the objective of the film society movement to spread an alternative film culture. Gopalakrishnan recalls a popular comment on the success of the New Wave; “A joke went around that we first created an audience then made films like *Swayamvaram*.”¹⁶ Such a remark on film society audiences, even with its humorous touch, suggests how cinephiliac investments coincided with formal engagements with cinema to constitute an alternative Indian film culture.

Lastly, this section on the impact of cinema as a cultural entity as well as material object engendering different aspects of film culture within film societies cannot be complete without referring to another element - the 16mm projector. Within the movement, there was a collective sense of enthusiasm born out of affective associations with instruments and technologies that supported the spreading film society cultures. If the transportability of the film object accounted for the formation of various film society networks, then combined with portability, the technological possibilities and financial viability of the 16mm projector facilitated film travel further into interior regions. In a similar undertaking as this writing project, K.R Manoj’s documentary, *16mm: Memories, Movement and Machine* (2007) attempts to evoke the impulse, impact and memories of the film society movement in Kerala during the 1970s, its most successful period, through a ‘cultural biography’ of ‘16mm’, the film prints and projectors. Through a range of interviews with film society activists, filmmakers, distributors, artists, and other members, the functionality, advantages and disadvantages of 16mm cinema is remembered. The memories are supported by a series of audio and visual montages of soundtracks from films, lectures, array of film literature such as brochures, newsletters, festival booklets

¹⁶ From *16mm: Memories, Movement and a Machine* (Dir. K.R.Manoj, Documentary/2007/Malayalam/ 40 minutes)

as well as journals which in turn lead to discussions on the nature and problems of the movement such as its intellectual backbone and clarity of purpose, but also its Eurocentric programming, all the while emphasizing its extent and impact within the cultural sphere of Kerala. Therefore, in the same manner as the affective histories of film societies and their film cultures can be traced along the imagined cartographies of films that travelled to them, the story of the 16mm projector and its relationship to the movement can similarly illuminate the film cultures brought into being by film societies.

Going to the Interiors: Experiments with the Network

Much of the narration of the film society movement till now has been assembled from the stories, records and memories of the arrival and screening of international and Indian art cinemas, to assess how the travelling film form effected film society cinephilia and constituted notions of an alternative film culture. This mapping of the practices of circulation, distribution and exhibition through the journeys and movement of films has revealed histories of specific film societies, reflected localized preferences, signified intellectual endeavors and even contrasted creative departures therefore indicating the existence of heterogeneity within notions of alternative film culture. This section will engage with certain examples of film societies as “traversed sites”, in the approach suggested by James Clifford, by not restricting culture to a localized phenomenon, but instead observing “culture as travel” (Clifford, 1996: 103). Clifford’s method proposes the problematization of the notion of culture from that of an original entity to one which is marked by the features of travel such as interactions, departures, displacements and most significantly

movement. The circuits of film travel facilitated the culture of appreciation of international and art cinemas for film societies but it also complicated these notions of film culture by disseminating it outside of its original urban centers to peripheral towns and villages thereby creating assorted cinematic cultures. This section intends to take into account the range of significations of words like ‘film’, ‘society’ and ‘movement’ for the members, participants and patrons associated with societies like *Ninasam Chitra Samaja*, Heggodu and *Celluloid Chapter*, Jamshedpur who capitalized on this network of organized cinephilia to mobilize alternative film cultures as discursive forms of expression and experience.

i) The Heggodu Experiment: *Ninasam Chitra Samaja*

In the 1970s, a small unsuspecting village in Karnataka, about four hundred kilometers from the city of Bangalore called Heggodu became a centre for the dissemination of film culture through regular screening of classic films¹⁷ and film appreciation courses, through the village film society, *Ninasam Chitra Samaja*. Primarily, a collective organization for theatre and performance, *Ninasam* was founded in 1949 for the promotion of amateur theatre in the rural districts which later branched into the promotion of film culture in 1973 with the film society. Its early history with the literary and theatre movement, combined with the practice of reaching out to rural audiences through adaptations of classics found an extension in

¹⁷ See “The Ninasam Vision” at <http://www.ninasam.org/ninasam/vision/> as accessed on 12th May, 2012. The vision statement on the Ninasam website underlines the reason behind the choice of only classic films. It states, “...Ninasam prefers to work, whether in theatre, literature, or film, with ‘classics’ rather than compositions which are held up by some as models of ‘social relevance’. The ‘classics’, old or modern, Ninasam believes, do not ignore the specifically temporal and spatial issues even while aspiring to be universal, and actually address them in a much more courageous and creative, if a little less overt, manner than do texts programmed with political correctness. Ninasam would contend that while ‘good aesthetics’ might not always make ‘good politics’, it certainly never makes ‘bad politics’.”

the promotion, as an organizational principle, of cinematic classics amongst these audiences,. The idea of a village film society was triggered off in the mind of K.V. Subbanna, its chief founder, after he attended the first film appreciation course held at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) by Satish Bahadur and Marie Seton in 1967. In a sense then, Subbanna's initiative takes us back to the inaugural events of the Delhi and Lucknow Film Societies around the 1960s, which had marked the beginnings of educational and institutional dimensions of film culture. Marie Seton's role as key advisor and enthusiastic involvement as film educationist significantly connects the three events as they indicate the emergence of consolidated and institutional notions of film society film cultures subscribed to by the Federation of Film Societies (FFSI) as well as the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. Yet these events were not entirely oriented towards singular institutional objectives; instead the educational or dissemination impulse was supplemented by the emotional charge of cinephilia: an unabashed love for the cinematic form. Subbanna recalls moments from the 1967 Film Appreciation Course at Pune that made him start *Ninasam Chitra Samaja*-

I still remember the way she was overwhelmed with emotions when explaining some of the sequences from the films that were shown in class...I well understood that she was not just teaching us, she virtually introduced us to a mission in life. This made me realize that I have to do something to see that these classics of world cinema should reach all the people and particularly those living with me in the village (1985).

Subbanna would go on to structure a similar film appreciation course at Heggodu with Satish Bahadur and Marie Seton as its keen supporters.

Also, the formation of the film society would mark the beginnings of cinema related literature in the regional language of Kannada. *Ninasam Chitra Samaja*, therefore became a radical concept, appropriating as well as laying out a challenging path for film society cultures. The zeal of the film society movement was

fundamentally determined by several aspects of urban life like the formation of similar intellectual groups, cultures of reading and discussions, and most importantly awareness of the modern technological art of cinema. It was possible to insist and develop upon the idea of alternative film culture in cities where there was a preexisting sense of such culture; however in the rural farmlands of Heggodu, this concept of alternative itself was transformed; ‘alternative’ was not only a qualifier for the pathways of film culture or networks of film circulation, but also signified a distinctive spatial displacement. Moreover, instead of being directed by the demands of cinephilia, film travel was determined by the pedagogical constitution of *Ninasam* as a localized phenomenon, in effect charting newer routes for classic films thereby opening up the domain of film culture to newer audiences.

Alongside workshops on amateur theatre and production of plays, in 1973 *Ninasam* ventured into organizing its first film festival from 19th to 28th December for the village audiences of Heggodu as a testing trope for the need and demand for cinema among such audiences. The festival screened films like *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*¹⁸ (French; 1962), *Pather Panchali* (Bengali; 1955), *Rashoman* (Japanese; 1950), *Bicycle Thieves* (Italian; 1948), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *The Wages of Fear* (1953), *Wild Strawberries* (Swedish; 1957) and *The Gold Rush* (1925) among others, using a 16mm projector in the courtyard of the local district

¹⁸ See K.S. Raghavendra, Mihir Sengupta and Samik Bandyopadhyay, “Darshak Samiksha: Grame O Shahare (1978)” in Rajat Ray and Someshwar Bhowmick eds. *Samaj O Chalachitra*, (Calcutta G.A. E. Publishers, 1980), 86-97. This audience survey is in two parts. The first section is on the responses gathered from rural audiences at a film festival of international cinema organized in Heggodu by *Ninasam Chitra Samaja* from 19th -24th December, 1973. This survey was conducted by Raghavendra, then a student at FTII, Pune and translated into Bengali by Mihir Sengupta. The second section is a survey conducted in Calcutta by the organizing committee for a film festival as part of the West Bengal Youth Festival in 1978. This survey was then used for a discussion forum at the film festival on “Cinema and Audiences” by Samik Bandyopadhyay. For one of the films screened, the survey mentions the film title as “Incident at Owl Creek”, though latest references such as IMDB suggest the USA title, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*.

information office. Even though the festival took place in the middle of the November-January harvest season, it was attended by almost thousand residents of the area that majorly consisted of rural folk other than a few unemployed youth, a handful of government servicemen and local teachers (Raghavendra, 1978: 86). The positive response generated by this festival was taken forward by the launching of the annual Film Appreciation Course supported by the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) and the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). *Ninasam Chitra Samaja* extended its activities to publications on cinema in Kannada through their journal *Chitra Samskriti* and simultaneously continued organizing film festivals in several other rural districts of Karnataka. Therefore, *Ninasam* facilitated an interface between the travelling network of cinemas created by the film society movement and alternative locations which although informed by pedagogical intentions, generated the scope for the emergence of participatory and plural film cultures. Moreover, *Ninasam*'s initiatives remarkably and radically affected the role of the film society activist in dissemination practices.

The confluence of literary, theatrical and cinematic practices transformed the areca and paddy farming land of Heggodu into a site for the articulation of non native creative expressions as alternative cultures¹⁹ that pushed through a rethinking of the paradigms of center and periphery, dominant and marginal. *Ninasam Chitra Samaja* symbolized film society cultures as travelling cultures that were informed not only by

¹⁹See Rustom Bharucha, "Ninasam: A Cultural Alternative" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 26 (June 30, 1990); pp. 1404-1411. As accessed on <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4396441> on May, 26, 2012. Bharucha emphatically argues that Ninasam is the cultural center for India as opposed to major cities where attempts are being made to centralize culture, "Though decisions about Indian culture are becoming increasingly centralised the cultural centre in India today is not to be found in any of the major institutions in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras or Bhopal, which continue to be isolated from the needs of the people. This centre may justifiably be located in Heggoddu village in north-west Karnataka where an institution called Ninasam has spread theatre and film culture in the state. (This is) a study of an institution which provides not only alternatives for Indian theatre but also scope for mobilization and growth- of culture at large."

the principles of aesthetics and art but also social consciousness and community participation. Unlike literary and theatrical traditions that could be learned, adapted and performed for audiences, cinema involved a community engagement because of its material and technological form and also since it could not be possessed in any other form but memory. Moreover, its discursive form and freedom from rituals of ownership also meant a constant interrogation of the hierarchies of caste, class and communities that were central to a rural society like Heggodu. Therein lay Heggodu's significance for an organized and socially conscious perpetuation of the film society movement.²⁰

ii) **Beginning at the Close: Celluloid Chapter**

If *Ninasam Chitra Samaja* was a unique experiment with rural audiences and world cinema, there were several other small town and rural societies that had their own achievements along with the progress of the film society movement. *Berhampore Film Society*, West Bengal is one of the few film societies which has managed to construct its own theatre, named "Ritwik Sadan", after filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak. Similarly, *Karimnagar Film Society*, Andhra Pradesh was not only able to construct its own theatre but also held regular film festivals in the rural areas²¹, including children's film festivals. However, this last section of the chapter intends to move onto an example from the end phase of the film society movement that was characterized by the entry of video, television and satellite into the domain of visual cultures. The film society network of circulation and exhibition that was dependent on and was sustained by the celluloid cultures of cinema was confronted by the new

²⁰ In the domain of popular Bombay Cinema 1975 saw the huge success of films like *Sholay* and *Jai Santoshi Maa*, that reinstated the hold of the industry on the commercial market. The audience survey at *Ninasam* was taken as an exercise to examine whether audiences preferred art cinemas and film appreciation that the film society movement had been promoting for the last twenty years.

²¹ See "Film Societies in Andhra Pradesh: Struggling for Survival" in *Screen*, December, 8, 1989; p.10.

possibilities of personal acquisition, ownership and experience of film that was inaccessible during the earlier moment. During this time when city based film societies were gradually losing their popularity, *Celluloid Chapter*, the film society of Jamshedpur emerged with a host of creative activities around cinema, by maximizing the benefits of film travel along a particular network as well as appropriating the emerging portable visual technologies for the dissemination of alternative film cultures.

In the industrial town of Jamshedpur, during the mid eighties a young group of professionals who spent their evenings working out a literary little magazine for the town also ventured into writing about cinema and discovered common interests in the creative aspects of the medium. This shared interest, followed by the extensive persuasion of fellow members amongst residents of the township, and perseverance with the state societies registration authorities led to the formation of the film society named *Celluloid Chapter* on December 25, 1985. With the history of almost forty years of the film society movement ahead of it, along with the impact of the Indian New Wave and regional parallel cinemas, *Celluloid Chapter* began its journey with intensive seminars and retrospectives on directors.

Two significant events alongside film shows within months of its existence reiterated the emergence and history of alternative film cultures in the country. The first was a seminar on “New Indian Cinema: Its Language in International Perspective” which introduced aspects of Indian film history to the members, and the second, a workshop on analyzing the works of Eisenstein.²² The society rose to prominence with such steady activities of studying, analyzing and appreciation of both international and Indian art cinemas simultaneously with interesting packages of

²² From “The Year that was- A Report” in Filmphile One, Celluloid Chapter, Jamshedpur, 1987.

films from Hungary, Germany, Japan and Latin America. Interestingly, the society's location in Jamshedpur with the city's position on the rail route between Calcutta and Pune made for an interesting feature in its success. Calcutta housed the regional centers of the Federation of Film Societies (Eastern Region) and the National Film Archive of India (the distribution library), international cultural centers such as the Max Mueller Bhavan, Alliance Francaise, United States Information Service and British Council and most importantly some of the leading film societies like the *Calcutta Film Society* and *Cine Central*. Pune had grown to be the academic hub for cinema with the establishment of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and National Film Archive of India (NFAI). Therefore the rail route connecting the two cities was also a common physical route of film travel because of the constant exchange of films between these places. *Celluloid Chapter's* position on this network not only made it access these films 'in transit' but also connected it to the major institutions and societies that facilitated the circulation, distribution and exhibition of alternative cinemas, thus aiding its rise as an influential film society during the 1990s.

Celluloid Chapter's innovative programming combined with its access to a crucial physical network of film circulation not only contributed to the localized emergence of film societies' culture but also made possible the dispersal of cinematic cultures beyond its boundaries, which was effected specifically through two significant activities. First, the exhibition of films for students with the collaboration of the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) provided an interface between urban and rural children for the development of an alternative film culture for children. With the proliferation of visual cultures through video and television among urban children, films that were different from the mainstream were utilized to instill a critical understanding of cinema. Moreover, the children's films which were introduced in

urban schools as alternatives were screened in nearby villages or slum areas at night, mostly as the only mode of visual entertainment.²³ The second important activity was the production of film literature for the public domain; to elaborate - in October 1991 following a film appreciation course organized jointly with the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), the members of the society had a 'meet-the-director' session with New Wave filmmaker, Govind Nihalani, which led to deeper investigations of his films. The consequence of this dialogic process was a documentation of Nihalani's work as a cinematographer and director, his thoughts on political cinema and the opinions of his contemporaries on his body of work.²⁴ Similar literature on a smaller scale was produced for members even for retrospectives on directors such as Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, R.W. Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and others, thereby making the knowledge of alternative cinema available in the public domain. In doing so, *Celluloid Chapter* pushed the limits of thought within film society cultures by investing continually in documentation and readers on cinema that in some ways prefigured the emergence of academic interrogations of cinema. At a time when the film society movement was being pronounced dead in urban quarters, *Celluloid Chapter's* localized efforts produced academic possibilities for Indian Cinema, and the simultaneous exchange and travels of films and filmmakers continually signified an evolving and fluid film culture.

Conclusion: Tracing Cinephilia

This chapter has been about narrating the formation of film society networks that introduced cultural conditions in India in which critical as well as affective

²³ A share from the ticket sales from the morning shows for school children in the city was utilized for organizing the same shows at night for children in the peripheral hamlets.

²⁴ See *Govind Nihalani: A Celluloid Chapter Documentation*, Samik Bandyopadhyay ed., Celluloid Chapter, Jamshedpur, 1992.

associations with cinema multiplied. While on the one hand, the descriptions of networks of organized cinephilia provide a sense of the geographical and institutional spread of the movement, on the other, this framework of interlinked societies, consulates and governmental institutions indicate the imaginative routes along which cinephilia actively transpired. During the period of the film society movement, 'parallel' was the umbrella term used to define their diverse cinephiliac engagements; whether it was the nature of films, the range of activities from screenings to discussions or even the circuits of circulation and exhibition. Moreover, the word parallel also signified the considerable success of the film society movement as an alternative cinema culture that existed simultaneously with the commercial circuit of mainstream cinemas. However, the several different facets which comprised the 'parallel-ness' of film society cultures rarely found space within discourses of the dichotomy of art versus commerce. In contrast to such perspectives, this chapter has examined film society practices as temporal and spatial journeys of the cinemas as well as the people that sustained the movement. Further, the concept of journey creates the scope for unraveling the dynamic nature of film society cinephilia as it took on different roles with every destination. For instance as discussed above, in Calcutta, cinephilia was the constitutive force behind early film societies, while in Delhi it transformed into intellectual passion bringing together professionals from different fields, thereby establishing an institutional base. Similarly, in Trivandrum, film society cinephilia was introduced through the literary route, while in Bombay, early cinephilia travelled along with colonial distribution networks but eventually spread to accommodate concerns and anxieties related to the practices of the Indian film industry.

Finally, this chapter has focused on capturing both, the consolidating as well as diverging disseminating impulses of film society cinephilia by using the methodological approach of tracing cultural biographies of objects to account for cultural specificities and preferences. In doing so, I have gathered inception histories of particular film societies which significantly steered the film society movement through decades. Hence, this chapter has primarily dealt with material histories of social formations and cultural objects. The following chapter will involve another aspect of historical research, the reservoir of collective memory. Nostalgia and personal recollections often contain histories of time, space and events that stable institutional narratives cannot grasp. But, in the case of an intimate emotion as cinephilia, it is only justified that one take recourse to the memories of the people who participated in the cultural matrix of the film society movement. Therefore, the next chapter, in an attempt to push the limits of this history writing, invokes memories of film society cinephiles to elucidate on the various activities and practices that were part of the film society movement.

Memories of Action

Film societies signified different initiatives in different locales and amongst different groups, ranging from selective and alternative cultural groups, cooperative communities to powerful pedagogical and political forces generating discourses on cinema. Among other things, the movement witnessed productive collaborations, long lasting friendships, debates on cinemas, censorship and membership, internal fissures and problems of sustenance. However, these aspects involving the members of the societies and cinephiles have been overwhelmed by institutional discourses on “good cinema” and auteur studies of preferred filmmakers. In contrast to such existing knowledges, this chapter looks into the memories, experiences and anxieties of film society members in order to generate a collage of the range of film society activities and endeavors. It recognizes the existence of such recollections in various forms: publications, photographs and personal interviews from different phases of the movement as well as from the contemporary. Moreover, this framework of examining actions through personal memories will be a critical shift from observing film societies as entire cultural units. Instead it will focus on the emergence of the film society activist as a key cultural, social and political figure to better envisage the reach of the movement.

The connections between memory and history writing have been varied and often unsettling. Pierre Nora in “Between Memory and History” famously argued for memory as belonging to “living societies” to be recalled, debated, used or misused during their lifetime, while history only qualified as a posthumous “reconstruction” that was not only incomplete but also problematic, because inherent to it was

repression of popular memory (Chatterjee, 2002:13). However, Partha Chatterjee invokes this distinction to trace the progression of history as a discipline and the changing interventions of the historian therein. In his introduction to his co-edited volume, *History and the Present*, navigating through methods of history writing, and comparing it to processes of literature, Partha Chatterjee rescues history from Nora's restrictive classifications by arguing that "history never quite manages to do to memory what it sets out to do; instead, it gets entangled in what it is meant to destroy (15)." In suggesting this, Chatterjee repositions contemporary historical quests as engagements with past and present popular memories (necessitated by the changing political conditions), instead of a sealed academic domain. Therefore, in my attempt at narrating the history of the film society movement, Chatterjee's approach towards addressing collective memories is analytically useful.

Furthermore, just as the notions of disciplinary history have been problematized, the category of memory needs to be understood in plural terms as well. My understanding of memory is borrowed from Susannah Radstone who argues against the conceptualization of memory as an unchanging entity. Instead she proposes that along with the changing values of memory even the meanings of memory change with time: "In short, 'memory' means different things at different times." In addition to the significations of memory, Radstone suggests different perspectives on memory that need to be taken into account while "working with memory" to bring out unwritten histories; memory does not reside only as a singular individual mode, or as a historical category open to examination, but also as a conceptual method for interrogation (Radstone, 2000: 1- 3).

In the case of the vast and scattered nature of the remembered records of film societies, these critical approaches to the entwined elements of history and memory

will illuminate the complexities of this project. For instance, articles from the seventies on problems plaguing the film society movement were originally meant to provoke thought and social responsibility amongst fellow members. However, forty years later, even though their anxieties sound dated or were previously rejected, these documents are records of the roles undertaken by film societies depending on their assessment of socio-cultural spheres. Equally important as previous reviews of the movement are contemporary articulations, which display affective associations such as nostalgia, pride, desire to historicise their actions as well as engage with new generations of cinephiles and in some cases detached acceptance. Therefore, this chapter will begin with written narrations/histories of the movement and then progress to the diverse forms of remembrances of events and activities of film society cinephiles that exist in the public and private domains. Hence, this chapter will chart their experiences as members of communities, which undertook inventive methods and made interventions for disseminating film cultures, but also witnessed dilemmas and hurdles in the process.

Nostalgia Narratives: Film Society Cultures

Looking back at the Film Society Movement, fifty years later, we see periods of great excitement and growth followed by times of stagnation. Today, once again, there appears to be a new resurgence in the film society movement. The easy availability of films by way of DVDs from all over the world; the increasing number of International, National and Regional film festivals all over the country; and the establishment of television channels that are devoted to World Cinema have helped greatly in spreading film cultures of different countries among Indian viewers in an unprecedented way. Much of what film societies were doing in the past is already part of the cinema and television landscape today. – Shyam Benegal, Foreword to *The Film Society Movement in India* (2009)

The above extract is from Shyam Benegal's hopeful foreword in *The Film Society Movement in India* (2009) that not only envisions possibilities of renewal for

film societies in the context of transforming visual and cinematic cultures but also recognizes this effort as a significant contribution to Indian film history. In 2009, the Federation of Film Societies of India celebrated fifty years of existence by releasing this commemorative compilation of the history of the film society movement. The book reprinted several articles, interviews and photographs from previously published film society literature. Benegal, one of the most acclaimed directors of Indian New Wave cinema of the seventies, also served as the President of the Federation of Film Societies of India from 2004 to 2010 during which period several campus film societies were formed as regional revival initiatives, primarily in Maharashtra. Even though his optimistic note anticipates resurgence and compliments the occasion of the golden jubilee, the contents of the compilation do not reflect any contemporary enthusiasm and are best captured by his opening words, “looking back at the film society movement...” The book takes a nostalgic turn using film society archives to reconstruct a collective past when despite the difficult material conditions of accessibility, the screening of international cinemas was made possible by the movement. Moreover, this form of ‘looking back’ is a conscious effort to evoke the historic importance and cultural worth of a nationwide cinephiliac network distinguishing the film society movement from present cinematic practices and cultures.

For Narahari Rao, the editor and compiler of *The Film Society Movement in India* and veteran member of the Bangalore based *Suchitra Film Society*, the book’s worth is not limited to its institutional and historical significance. Instead it symbolizes promises and friendships formed out of a certain attitude of religiosity towards cinema and collective responsibilities. He attributes the idea of compiling this history to another pioneering figure of the movement since its earliest days, Vijaya

Mulay, whose encouragement made this massive archival project possible.¹ Interestingly, Rao's modest characterization of the book's history writing as a realization of her dream is exhibited by Mulay's own admission of "nagging" him to take up the task. In her exuberant prefatory note she exclaims that "this chronicler of the FSM has finally done it. I feel like shouting 'Lage Raho, Naraharibhai'" (Rao, 2009: vi). Alongside displaying a historicizing impulse these three distinct articulations of Benegal, Rao and Mulay underline the value of the film society movement in the lives of the people who contributed to it. What follows in the subsequent sections is an excavation of similar personal stories that not only reflect upon institutional events and collective efforts but also positions their narrators as agents of change from within.

i) Collective Endeavours

In the early 1950s in Patna, Vijaya Mulay, newly inducted into government service but also energized by her experience of the British film society movement as a student at Leeds University, found a group of fellow film enthusiasts who wished for better and more cinema than the usual Hindi and Bengali films offered by their local theatres. There was not only a desire for a better quantity and quality of films, but also for an alternative cinema viewing environment. Therefore in a bid to escape from "watching Mae West, Busby Berkeley and Chaplin amongst the whirring of fans, half open doors with light seeping in and with children whimpering or back stage whispering", the *Patna Film Society* was formed (Mulay, 1981). As Mulay reminisces about the effectiveness of this initially small but interested group of people who engaged in regular discussions on films, she mentions the sense of curiosity her activities produced in social surroundings amongst the uninitiated. Mulay recalls

¹ In reply to a questionnaire circulated by the author on 25th February, 2012

being asked by an inquisitive neighbor if she was going to work for bioscopes since mediated accounts of a meeting held with a bioscope company at her house had led the women in the neighborhood suspect her foray into the film company. As incredulous as their anticipation sounded to Mulay, when she tried to clarify their misunderstanding, it turned out that the idea of a ‘film society’ was equally unbelievable for her neighbours. This anecdote demonstrates how the concept of cinema beyond entertainment and leisure was an unheard of activity that required justification. Moreover, it is representative of that early moment of film society formations which was enmeshed in discoveries, excitement and enquiries.

Even during the most successful phase of the movement, film societies often remained an elusive concept. Narhari Rao lists a series of such questions –

What is a film society? Do you finance films? Do you produce films? Can you help us in getting a chance to act in films? I have a story and script, can you help me make a film? If I become a member what do I get? (Rao, 2001:275)

In order to answer questions like this and help existing as well as new societies to reach out to people and disseminate knowledge of the movement, Rao devised *The Film Society Handbook* (1989) as “sheer necessity”². Film society members across the country have had to deal with their share of queries and confusions surrounding the meanings, functions and utility of film societies. One of the reasons for reiterating and revising their aims and objectives through brochures and newsletters was to address the general lack of awareness, clear misconceptions and introduce ideas of film culture. At a time when communication processes were challenging, it was a major task for film society individuals to convey the meaning and need for film societies so as to gather ideal members and patrons for sustenance. Veteran film society activist Ram Halder recalls spending several holidays and strike days convincing people to

² In reply to a questionnaire circulated by the author on February 25, 2012

join film societies. He and Chidananda Dasgupta would visit homes of acquaintances on their bicycles to acquire membership for the then newly established *Calcutta Film Society*. Despite regular persuasions and a quarterly fee of eight rupees, very few agreed while others chose to excuse themselves (Halder, 2011:7).

Therefore, since the beginning of film society formations in India, members have relied on friends and acquaintances to continue as well as sustain their mode of engagement with cinema. These relationships between people as members of societies or in better words, communities of cinephiles, deeply inform the nostalgia associated with the movement, with one of the strongest reasons being the experiences and memories of the activities they undertook together to establish and run their film societies. Inception histories of most societies indicate friends coming together to collectively realize their discursive interests in the cinematic form.³ Moreover, new and lasting friendships were formed in the course of acquiring films, film activism, collaborating for festivals and of course, because of their shared love for cinema. The *Suchitra Film Society* is an illustrative example of how a society initiated by a group of friends strove to associate not only with the masses, but also film institutions, segments of the film industry and other film societies. When Narhari Rao and his friend, S. Raghavendra Rao were asked to wait for a year to join *Mayura Film Society* due to over subscribed membership, they decided to form their own society. *Suchitra Film Society* was formed after consultations with other experienced film society members of Bangalore, Bombay and Calcutta undertaken by Rao. Amongst the activities undertaken by film society enthusiasts, these journeys made for establishing connections with similar groups were integral aspects of their lives. Necessitated by the lack of any other form of accessibility to international and other art cinemas, these

³ The first chapter of this dissertation, "Celluloid in Transit: Film Society Networks" discusses several inception histories in detail.

journeys of film society members are tales of passionate endeavors made for procuring, viewing and discussing films.

ii) Filmic Journeys, Cinephiliac Routes

This triad of articulations, journeys and communities formed an important part of film society cultures in the days for which Amrit Gangar affectionately uses the term “khon paseena days”/ “the days of blood and sweat.” Gangar, now a film curator, historian and theorist, ran the film society *Screen Unit* for twenty years at Mulund in the north eastern part of suburban Bombay. He also acted as the honorary secretary of the Federation of Film Societies of India, Western Region which meant maintaining a network of film circulation with affiliated societies from places such as Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Jamnagar, Bhuj, Daman, Diu and Goa. What he alludes to in his chosen epithet are the many nights and days of hard work comprising commuting with film cans on local trains, standing in queues for permissions for screening spaces and extensive compilation of programme notes for members, all of which sustained their film society and fuelled their commitments. His ebullient recollection of the peculiar relation of film prints and the railway system essentially captures the dynamism that is often associated with film societies. Celluloid prints arrived from sources like the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune or other regional units of the Federation (FFSI) through the railways on special permissions. Considered potentially inflammable although the era of nitrate silver film was past, members would often personally carry film cans between stations, “sometimes with dear JLG [Jean-Luc Godard] on our shoulders, or Jancso squeezed in our armpits, or John Abraham held firmly in our hands” (Gangar, 2011). Notwithstanding the weight of cans, crowded compartments, numerous railway stations from Bombay Central to Victoria Terminus, Gangar and his fellow organizers conducted film shows for *Screen*

Unit, effectively keeping in mind office timings and the commuting woes of fellow members.

Interestingly however, the process of organizing film screenings within tight work schedules, responsibilities of film transaction and transportation given the limited modes of access, resulted in an extensive navigation of the city which further generated familiarity with several segments of the urban public. In the case of these men from *Screen Unit*, carrying film cans from the Peddar Road office of *Films Division* to Mulund became a regular activity as they charted their way through the city of Bombay, first by bus to Victoria Terminus and then by train to their destination, Mulund. The practice of commuting led to inventive ways of dealing with situations with railway authorities or crowded compartments. For instance, in order to be able to alight carefully from trains, without being jostled by people or endangering the films, Gangar narrates how they would often scream “machhi ka paani, machhi ka paani/ fish water, fish water” like fisherwomen carrying their baskets of fish, and people would move aside giving them way to step out of the compartments (Gangar, 2011). However, humor and ingenuity could not solve every situation especially an encounter with the police. In contrast to Bombay’s sprawling railway network, in the capital city of Delhi, film society individuals transported film boxes on their scooters and cycles. Ashok Jha, longtime manager of the Federation of Film Societies’ Delhi unit, recounts an incident of collecting films from the Chinese embassy situated at Chanakyapuri. With a set of five films tied to his bicycle, Jha was not even out of the area when the police stopped him and interrogated him for almost an hour, after which he finally managed to convince them of the existence of film societies.⁴

⁴From the author’s personal interview with Ashok Jha, 2011.

These arduous physical efforts and endeavors were made ultimately for the realization of a collective intellectual engagement with alternative cinemas. In the organized framework of the movement, the investment of physical energies was further determined by temporal specificities such as screening schedules and society itineraries as well as the singularity of the circulating celluloid object. Mihir Pandey of *Celluloid*, the film society at the University of Delhi, recalls an incident from the early 1980s when a particular film was supposed to be screened on the same day at two venues. The first screening was scheduled at 3pm at *Celluloid* in the northern part of Delhi whereas the second screening was at 6pm at another film society at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) located towards the southern part of the city. Halfway through the film, Pandey collected the screened reels, loaded them in an auto and rushed to AIIMS so that they could begin their show on time. Another member followed with the remaining reels of the film after the screening at *Celluloid* was over.⁵ If travelling with film prints on occasions like this stimulated anticipation and responsibilities amongst organizers and film society audiences, then interruptions and detours in such journeys brought anxieties and frustrations which had to be further dealt with in inventive ways.

Delays and breaks in the journeys and experiences of films have historically characterized European and American cinephilia. Thomas Elsaesser evaluating the differences and transformation in cinephilia over generations suggests that it cannot be understood simply as an expression of love for cinema. Instead, there are practices and situations which inform this cinephilia that need to be taken into account, especially with respect to its relationship with time. In other words, for Elsaesser, cinephilia is not only constituted by emotions of nostalgia and love, but is also shaped

⁵ In response to a questionnaire circulated by the author in March, 2012.

by “retroactive temporalities”, meaning its quality to travel through time, places and people. In his observation he states that “(i)t is always already caught in several kinds of deferral; a detour in place and space, a shift in register and a delay in time” (Elsaesser, 2005:30). For classical forms of cinephilia, these delays occurred due to historical and political changes, primarily of the World Wars which banned or blocked cinemas from other countries. However, in the case of the film society movement in India, “detours and deferrals” constituted the communicative and travelling network of film circulation and exhibition. Even though, Elsaesser locates his framework with respect to the emergence of Western film cultures across three generations of cinephilia, his concept can be useful for illuminating the interruptions that occurred along the film society routes.

The nature of detours for film societies was not only informed by limitations of time and resources but also the nascent quality of their circulating network. Amitava Ghosh, who served as the secretary of *Celluloid Chapter*, Jamshedpur for more than twenty years, narrates stories of unprecedented chases, emergency telegrams and phone calls that were made for locating missing prints or incomplete parcels. In the early nineties, unaffected by the increasing influx of video and television, *Celluloid Chapter* rose to national prominence within the film society network as a successful film society. Its location on the railway routes between Delhi, Calcutta and Pune, three major cities for the distribution of international cinemas to societies, significantly facilitated the access to films. An exciting account of a dramatic chase undertaken by a group of members came up during a discussion on the distribution and exhibition practices of film societies.⁶ On one occasion when a package films was to arrive on the Purushottam Express from Delhi to Jamshedpur,

⁶From the author’s personal interview with Amitava Ghosh in May, 2012.

the break van containing the boxes could not be opened during the allotted stoppage time for the train. Ghosh with other members, Subhajt Ghosh and Umresh Mishra made failed attempts to stop the train after which they had to resort to emergency telegrams to station masters of subsequent stations requesting them to unload the prints. After several hours when news arrived of the unloaded films at Kharagpur station, two of them set out to the respective station master's house for the required permission for releasing the parcel since it was a Sunday. This incident highlights the value of the celluloid object for cinephiles and demonstrates the extent to which both desires of cinephilia as well as disruption along film travel routes informed the itineraries of the films meant for screening at film societies. Hence, persuasive capabilities, transportation adventures, logistical anxieties and associated responsibilities combined to constitute the experience of the film society cinephile.

Even with fewer modes of communication and difficulties of transportation, film societies in cities as well as towns managed to conduct regular screenings and discussions because of their passionate participation in the distribution and exhibition network. After overcoming the logistical hurdles of transporting the films, there was always the impending issue of theatres and alternative screening spaces. In cities, specific and limited theatres were available for rent like the Janata and Priya Cinemas⁷ in Calcutta, Chitra, Broadway, New Excelsior and Eros⁸ in Bombay, but mostly morning show hours were made available for foreign and international cinemas. Alternatively, public auditoria and school halls were the most accessible screening centers in cities as well as smaller towns where theatres were rarities. Moreover film society groups also ended up conducting 16 mm screenings in the

⁷ Ram Halder in "Prashanga: Film Society" repeatedly mentions Janata and Priya cinema halls where several film society screenings of East European films took place.

⁸ From Shai Heredia's interview with Amrit Gangar; <http://experimenta.in/2011/05/interview-with-amrit-gangar/> as accessed on February, 14, 2012.

homes and backyards of members⁹ and even used the walls of buildings.¹⁰ Cinematographer Sunny Joseph remembers such adventurous days of film reception in the town of Cherthala, Alappuzha district of Kerala, where he ran a film society named *Free Circle*, when people who travelled from afar for screenings chose to stay back and spent the night on school benches¹¹. Consequently, school halls and classrooms that were the most accessible spaces for conducting film screenings for the members of the society also became spaces where youthful cinephiliac enthusiasm converged with community bonds.

iii) Creative Instincts: Programming and Participation

An important aspect of the organizational and functional structure of film societies was compiling, writing and distributing programme notes and bulletins on the selected films scheduled for screening. Usually typewritten and cyclostyled and prepared at short notice, the notes and film synopses were drawn up from the literature made available from respective film resource centers or researched from newspaper offices and libraries. For instance, Srabani Ghosh, member of *Celluloid Chapter* mentions how her secretarial expertise of being adept at short hand and fast typing was very useful on such occasions. She recalls a specific incident regarding a workshop on Eisenstein's cinema for the members of *Celluloid Chapter* in May, 1986. Since there were no libraries on cinema in Jamshedpur, Ghosh, who was in Calcutta on a personal trip, took out time to visit the *Chitrabani* library, met with its founder, Gaston Roberge, who guided her through the relevant books on Eisenstein. She not only compiled material for the workshop brochures and information bulletin in one

⁹ From the author's personal interview with Amitava Ghosh, 2011.

¹⁰ See *Darshak Samiksha: Game O Shahare (1975)*, K. S. Raghavendra, Mihir Sengupta and Samik Bandyopadhyay in *Samaj O Chalachitra* ed. Rajat Ray and Someswar Bhowmick. 1980.

¹¹ From the author's interview with Sunny Joseph on July 4, 2011.

evening, but also sent them to Jamshedpur overnight so that it could be printed on time.¹² Therefore for Srabani Ghosh, preparing film society literature on the borrowed typewriters of news offices and printing presses demanded dexterous management of time. Alternatively, Amrit Gangar mentions how his sincerity towards typing researched and innovative programme notes disrupted the night time somnolence of his household:-

After working from morning till evening in a private firm for my *rozi roti* [daily bread], I would work on preparing my cyclostyled programme notes through the night in our small house. The *takka tak takka tak* of my rickety typewriter would not allow my wife and child to sleep, but they did not mind my cruelty; after I got the copies they would help me write addresses on the envelopes, carry the bundles and post them. To save money we would send the notes, not in envelopes but stapled, Under Certificate of Posting (Gangar, 2011).

Gangar's account indicates the need to critically understand the roles and identities of film society members. To elaborate, in the case of journeying with film boxes or travelling to different locations to see films, as narrated earlier, film society cinephiles physically mapped the spatial networks of their kind of film culture. If their relationship with these spaces was redefined by their love for cinema, then the investment of their creative and intellectual energies on thinking and writing about cinema further blurred even the temporal boundaries between work, home and film societies.

The myriad creative occasions and discursive spaces, whether in homes, offices, schoolrooms, train compartments, or parks¹³ that were generated due to the range of activities undertaken by film society members also created a few specialized individuals who excelled in specific tasks. This productive aspect of film society cinephilia is nostalgically revealed in the recollections of *Cine Club* of Calcutta's

¹² From the author's personal interview with Srabani Ghosh in May 2012.

¹³ See Shai Heredia's interview with Amrit Gangar; <http://experimenta.in/2011/05/interview-with-amrit-gangar/> as accessed on February, 14, 2012.

Hiran Mitra in an essay titled “*Khanda Chitra, Cine Club, Ebong...*”/ “*Assorted Pictures, Cine Club and more*” (2010). Mitra begins his memories of the Cine Club with impressions of scenes from the films of Ray and Ghatak, which have stayed in his consciousness, more so because of the manner in which they were explained and discussed by senior members of the society. Recounting the contributions and activities of members within *Cine Club*, Mitra narrates the purchase of their first typewriter, lessons and lectures on interpreting films, long hours spent in waiting at queues of international film festivals, interspersed with tales of camaraderie, notoriety and love stories of selective members. Mitra’s accounts of his own contribution to the *Cine Club of Calcutta* by designing covers for journals, producing festival literature and setting up venues reminds one of this creative aspect which was representative of the cultural impact / value of film societies in the public domain. Since the similarities across film societies in terms of logistical activities and practical duties have been discussed in detail above, I wish to now elaborate on the specific activity of designing and art work for brochures, festival booklets and banners for film societies as significant but forgotten creative productions.

During the 1970s and 1980s, when country specific film festivals organized by film societies were regular cultural events, audiences were welcomed with informative and promotional literature such as brochures and folders made specifically for the festivals. In the same manner, the affective identities of people, countries and international cultures were evoked through the décor and ambience of the premises using posters, banners and even festoons. For instance, on the occasion of a Czech Film Festival organized at the Academy complex in Calcutta, audiences were greeted by huge flags of Czechoslovakia and India, alongside a massive collage, displaying a figure playing the bugle on a billowing red festoon. Mitra narrates how

minutes before the opening of this film festival, he insisted on creating this artwork with strips of newspapers, which he tore in geometric shapes while helping hands glued them on to the drape. Similarly, for a screening of Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1969), Hiren Mitra recalls designing brochures that depicted a guerilla with a French/Western gun transformed into a bow and arrow (Mitra, 2010: 9-10). In the drive to create such innovative designs of posters and covers, Mitra formed cherished relations with fellow artists and printers who came to admire his work as well as collaborate with him on such projects. Moreover, these partnerships accommodated artistic idiosyncrasies as in the case of Mitra, who acknowledges the benevolence and support of Rabidhan Dutta of the printing press, Impression House, where he composed, designed and printed most of the circulating literature for the *Cine Club of Calcutta*. There were occasions when strapped for time and resources, Dutta consented to Mitra's idiosyncrasies of preparing folders for festivals, mounting matter on specifically cut out printing plates instead of the procedural zinc blocks (Mitra, 2010: 9). Therefore, stories of such efforts and innovations not only emphasize the archival worth of existing film society literatures such as brochures, festival booklets, bulletins and journals, but also symbolize the qualitative and productive elements of print culture that were mobilized by film society activities. .

Film society archives and personal collections of members contain a diverse range of printed material, with modernist art work, photographic covers, allusions to cinematic traditions, techniques and terminologies which are nostalgically evocative of creative contributions and collective participations of the members. A strong sense of community is exuded from the modes of address such as "we" and "ours" in the yearly reports, programme notes and newsletters of film societies. Amrit Gangar suggests that the emergence of these modes of address were reflective of the effusive

and hardworking collectives that film societies grew into with time. So that Gangar recalls starting his early programme notes with “Dear Members”, soon shifting to “Dear Folks” which eventually changed to a more intimate address “Swajan” meaning kindred. Alternatively, the affective charge of cinephilia became more evident in commemorative editions of journals and bulletins, as in the 1987 edition of *Celluloid Chapter’s* bulletin, *Filmphile* which bemoans the premature death of Smita Patil, one of the prominent actresses of parallel cinema in India. The bulletin with a black and white impression of Smita Patil’s face, opens with a note titled “Farewell Smita!” which expresses collective grief along with a review of her career and filmography. Similarly, “Last year we lost Ray” was the beginning line of the editorial of *Indian Film Culture’ 93*, the journal of the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) which devoted a special section titled “Remembering Ray” after the director’s death, with contributions from prime film critics from across the country.

Therefore nostalgia narratives are spread across the history and archives of the film society movement as significant records, recollections and articulations of collective actions and possibilities. On the one hand, their published existence in film society journals and repeated circulation through reprints indicate the worth of such ‘memories of actions’ in encouraging and sustaining subsequent generations of the movement. While on the other hand, these literatures are crucial to develop any understanding of the cinematic preferences and cultures that were perpetuated within this network. However, nostalgia for the earlier days of the movement has also been admonished by critics from within and outside film societies because of the selective groups and directors they memorialized, their identity as elite and urban social formations, their Eurocentric cinephilia, and restrictive approach to traditions and practices of Indian cinema. In the following section I propose to examine film

societies as social formations through photographs and film memories of the movement alongside the narratives of nostalgia.

Memories: Films, Friendships, Social Formations

i) Film Memories

The opening montage of K.R. Manoj's documentary *16mm: Memories, Movement and a Machine* (2007) digitally transposes posters of representative films of Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Bunuel and Akira Kurosawa on the billboards of an anonymous, traffic congested southern Indian city. In contrast to the nightscape of the beginning frames, the next sequence is of a busy market place at day, but the shots are juxtaposed with several soundtracks of dialogues from European films which heightens the difference between the visible and aural contexts. The soundtrack and images are then drowned out by the whirring of a 16mm projector, which leads to the next sequence of a group people watching *Battleship Potemkin* projected on the wall of a small-darkened room, a visibly makeshift screening space. In the film, these consecutive sequences imaginatively attempt to evoke the visual and aural histories of the film society movement since European art cinemas were the staple ingredient of their film cultural experience. Although the posters and the dialogues seem alien to the socio-cultural surroundings of the people, they indicate the 'film memories' of entire communities of people who imaginatively connected with international cinematic traditions and a global cinephilia network.

Film memories of film society individuals reveal important aspects of the movement such as the histories of films that were exhibited and circulated,

technologies of projections and issues of accessibility. Moreover, these memories are reflective of film viewing cultures which in the case of film societies are also related to memories of discussions, seminars and film appreciation courses. For instance, Hiren Mitra remembers scenes from selective films not only because of their aesthetic impression on his mind but also for the underlining signification in all these scenes that were discussed in the gatherings of the *Cine Club of Calcutta*;

When I close my eyes and think about those days, I can see Amal Dey, our Amalda, continually explaining film grammar to us in his animated gestures. Those were serious days. What was the signification of both actor and actress wearing black framed spectacles or dark sunglasses in *Nayak*; the significance of train tracks and compartments, the difference in implications of passenger and goods trains, the indications in thunder, lightning, rain or parched earth; Why was *Ashani Sanket*, a film on draught and starvation made in color?; What did it mean when the actress ran into the green fields or when Apu tripped on the giant roots of an ancient Banyan tree? (Aparajito) (Mitra, 2010: 5)

Mitra's account of remembered images is marked by the singular selection of Satyajit Ray's films as texts on film grammar. This excerpt illustrates the reverential attitude of the members of film societies towards 'good cinema' and of themselves as connoisseurs of art cinema who would be able to value the cinematic quality of the films as that which would provoke thought through its layers of cinematic subtexts and symbols. Consequently this recollection also reflects the persistence of Ray's aesthetic principles in their perceptions of valued cinema which also became closely associated with the selection of ideal film texts for lessons on film appreciation. Moreover, Mitra's narration suggests how film memories of the members are intertwined with the society's practices of dissemination and sustenance of its forms of film cultures.

These fragments of film memories are usually associated with distinct characteristics of reception that were part of the experiences of film societies. Along with the diverse aesthetic traditions of art cinemas which demanded skills of

interpretation and acute observation, there were also subtitles which required simultaneous reading strategies. Narhari Rao calls his early encounters with 16 mm cinemas during the seventies, “a painful experience” due to dull projections but also because he was new to deciphering subtitles. Yet members sat through such screenings since they had the novelty of difference and were the only experience of alternative cinema available for cinephiles (Rao, 2001: 14). Subhash K. Desai, film society veteran since 1965, who also worked in the Film Finance Corporation during the 1970s, emphasizes the intellectual impressions created by film society screenings despite problems of comprehension. He remembers the Japanese film, *The Naked Island* (1960) as his first film society experience at the Ramnord Laboratories in Worli, Bombay, of which he says, “There were no dialogues throughout the film! But unhurried narration was so much like poetry” (Desai, 2010: 46). Lastly, these film memories also sustained the enthusiasm and devotion of film society activists through their organizational toils. Amrit Gangar jovially remarks how in the middle of sweat inducing endeavors, he imaginatively resorted to impressions of the French Nouvelle Vague for comfort. He says, “Often, as I stood in the queue for hours, there would emerge an image of naughty Jean-Luc smoking a cheroot and enjoying *Vent d’est* [East Wind]” (Gangar, 2011). Therefore, through their desires, cultural activities and participations related to cinema, film society individuals emerged as complex social and historical formations.

Collective experiences of witnessing European art cinemas have also been discussed in film society articles in connection with the exemption from censorship granted to foreign films and voyeuristic/scopophilic tendencies within film society membership. Gangar suggests that scopophilia was a passing phase within film society cinephilia; and that though “many were anxious to see the ‘nude and sexy

scenes in foreign films', the erotic gradually made way for the sensible; and "such proclivities were subsumed by interest in serious cinema" (Gangar, 2011). While this aspect of membership caused feelings of disappointment, anger and embarrassment in many, Hiren Mitra's remembrances of his film society friendships includes instances of scopophilia as two aspects, first as film memories and second as identities of specific members/audiences. Mitra mentions how amongst fellow film society friends, "G.K" was the term used to connote scenes of love making or nudity, which had been derived from the initials of another member whose only interest in cinema was such. Therefore, fragmented film memories in relation to uncensored screenings of film societies gathered different connotations and characterized yet another aspect of film society membership.

So far, most of the discussion on memories of film society individuals has been in the form of reportage on the diverse creative practices of film society cinephiles, with an enumeration of the affective and biographical elements of their cinephilia. Film memories as narrated above are conscious of the momentary nature of film-images and the uniqueness of projection, and have been theorized as 'classical cinephilia' based on historical practices and the attitudes of early film viewership.¹⁴ However, Malte Hagener and Marjike de Valck, accepting that the implications of cinephilia have traditionally been "tinged with nostalgia, possible loss, and retroactive temporalities" (2008: 21), raise the following crucial questions for contemporary investigations with respect to the theoretical conceptualization of cinephilia;

Is it enough to focus on its (cinephilia's) historical practices, to present taxonomies of generations and types of cinephiles? Is it sufficient to merely uncover the discursive

¹⁴ Hagener and Valck lay out the conceptions of classical cinephilia in a detailed analysis of Thomas Elsasser's classifications in "Cinephilia: The Uses of Disenchantment". See, Hagener and Valck, "Cinephilia in Transition" in *Mind the Screen* ed. Jaap Kooijman, Patricia Pisters and Wanda Stauven , 2008: 21.

maneuvers and (dis)agreements? Or should be endeavoring to get into the heart of the cinephile's emotion? (2008: 27)

Considering that the impulse of this project has been to chart the history of the film society movement as an alternative form of cinephilia within India, these three questions raised by Hagener and Valck are pertinent theoretical markers at this point. In this chapter I have consciously elaborated on the various practices of film society cinephiles, both as collectives and individuals in conjunction with their emotional associations with their activities. Such a detailed focus on practices has not been to romanticize film society notions of cinema and culture but to emphasize how they constituted the historical formations of film societies establishing their identities as cinephiliac communities which I will pursue next. Therefore, taking a cue from Hagener and Valck's defining questions I want to shift from narrating modes of recollections of film memories to an examination of their encounters with agreements, debates, and criticisms of the cinephilia of film societies.

ii) Friendships and Social Groups

Friendships between members within and across film societies played a crucial role in energizing the movement with the entry of newer participants and societies. Early histories of film societies show how ideas originated regarding films, and that groups were formed owing to an affinity between people about their taste in films and interest in the cinematic craft and furthermore, these friendships participated in the establishment of film societies. However, it is also necessary to observe how these friendships constituted and impacted the social dynamism of film societies as well as influenced notions of film culture during the movement. Since collective energies and participation has been discussed above, I wish to shift focus now to the questions of who constituted and participated in film societies, their social and educational

backgrounds along with their motivations and responsibilities so as to examine the social texture of film societies.

Towards the end of the 1940s and during the 1950s, film societies in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Patna were formed by groups of people whose desire to engage with the cinemas of the world had brought them together. These early societies were small groups, functioning from the homes and offices of various members, and were marked by their professional identities as bureaucrats, academicians, producers and aspiring filmmakers. Thus, their closed circles and accessibility to governmental and foreign institutions secluded their identities as selective/elite circles. On the one hand, their desire for creating intellectual spaces for alternative cinema made them minorities in the Indian film scenario while on the other hand, their very exclusivity and cinephilia practices against the popular cinema of the country characterized their elitism. In the 1981 issue of IFSON, recollections of Muriel Wasi and Vijaya Mulay fondly state the virtues of their small groups. They associate zeal for knowledge, sense of purpose and devotion with these early formations that were lost, as the movement grew popular. While Mulay chose to state this as a fact of experience in these words, “(s)mall is beautiful is probably true of film societies also”, Muriel Wasi described her insistence on limited membership as essential to their subscribed form of cinephilia in the following words;

But there was some virtue in a cultural situation in which the only passport to a film society was a passionate interest in the medium, a willingness to study and discuss films with more knowledgeable people in order to understand the cinematic revolution that was taking place as we, in India, lived our isolated lives. We did not then think of a film as a 90 minute entertainment, *something to look at for want of anything better to do*. We studied films as we enjoyed them... As our numbers swelled and democracy took over, it was clear that we never could go back to the days of the small group. But it was with some regret that I now look back on the small founder group that knew what it wanted and, for a short time, got what it needed (Wasi, 1981)

Through the prism of this nostalgia, the growth of the movement based on popularity and membership strength seemed antithetical to the ideal with which film societies had begun. But the “democracy” that Wasi alludes to was not only an influx of people wandering into film societies looking for something “better to do”. Instead, from the sixties onwards the film society movement that had originated in the cities spread to smaller townships and rural settings facilitating interactions of this form of film culture with alternative masses.

What such nostalgia fails to indicate is that these pioneers of the film society movement had influenced and supported the growth of several film societies across the country. So, for instance, the Lucknow Film Society formed in 1961 was encouraged by Marie Seton and Chidananda Dasgupta.¹⁵ Their expertise was their involvement with the Delhi and Calcutta film societies respectively. Moreover, Marie Seton’s pedagogical skills during the Film Appreciation Course held in 1967 at Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, further influenced the formation of *Ninasam Chitra Samaja* at Heggodu that same year.¹⁶ Similarly, film society activists like Ram Halder and Shubhendu Dasgupta recall how they regularly extended support to smaller film societies in towns such as Andul, Rourkela, Cuttack and Darjeeling.¹⁷ Moreover, the intellectual character of the movement found motivations from parallel cultural and political movements in theatre and literature.¹⁸ For instance, the *Chitralekha Film Society*, the first film society in Kerala, was formed in 1965 as an outcome of a film festival organized for the All India Writer’s Conference.

¹⁵ Programme notes accessed at NFAI, 2011.

¹⁶ See H.N.N.Rao, *The Film Society Movement in India*, 2009; 231.

¹⁷ See R. Halder, “Prashanga Film Society”, 1981; 12; 2; S. Dasgupta, “Ekta Chalachitra Andolon-Karmir Jibanabandi”, 1987; 148-49.

¹⁸ See Rochona Majumdar, “Debating Radical Cinema: a History of the Film Society Movement in India”, 2011.

The social, cultural and political climate of the country changed significantly from the Nehruvian fifties, to march on to deeply politicized awakenings of the sixties and seventies. With increasing political stirrings within the country as well as the simultaneous emergence of the new and radical cinema traditions of the 1970s, film societies became complex political sites offering debates on transforming cinemas and society. Therefore this history of the film society movement is connected to the history of the New Wave, the Parallel or radical cinemas of India. The fact that several art cinema and avant garde directors like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Girish Kasaravalli, and G. Aravindan were closely associated with film societies has consolidated this historical connection between two major alternative cinematic forces within India during the seventies and late eighties. However, while the radical departures of these filmmakers in terms of their cinematic form and content have been chronicled to some extent within Indian Cinema Studies, the film society movement has rarely received attention.

In her recent essay, “Debating Radical Cinema: A History of the Film Society Movement in India” (2011) Rochona Majumdar attempts to analyse these two histories together. She observes the emergence of the film society movement as a “post colonial civil-social organization”, similar to other “leftist oriented cultural movements”, first, the Progressive Writers’ Association in 1936 and second, the Indian People’s Theatre Association in 1942. She notes that the film society movement led by film enthusiasts introduced two “distinct definitions of good cinema” into the sphere of Indian Cinema, one referring to “an aesthetically sophisticated product” and another “to a radical political text”(1). Although Majumdar’s analysis accounts for the intellectual terrains of thought that were initiated and inhabited by filmmakers and film society cinephiles with equal

seriousness, hers is a historical reading that restricts their impact within singular political and aesthetic conventions. Moreover, her analysis of radical cinema is dependent on the cinemas of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen, which reiterates the auteuristic bracket of the three stalwarts of Bengali cinema as “Radical Cinema” in the Indian context. Therefore, even though her attempt to situate film society cinephilia as a categorically “leftist” movement illuminates an aspect of social formation, it does not, however, account for the diverse activities and geographical spread of the film society movement. Also, Majumdar’s institutional history supposes an alignment of the film society movement with historical formations like the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) and the Progressive Writer’s Association (PWA) which therefore overrides the cultural material object of cinema, a primarily industrial and transnational product, around which the movement developed.

Critical Interventions: The Emergence of the Film Society Activist

Understanding the political, social and even cinematic affiliations of film societies is crucial to situate the movement in Indian film history, but the dependence on the history of auteurs and their biographies overshadows the cultural characteristics of the movement that was formed by the relentless passion of the film society activist in spheres of film exhibition, reception and appreciation. I believe that the material and also, the affective elements of film society cinephilia are best captured in the figure of the film society activist. Through their cinephilia, social encounters and creative capabilities, film society activists continually redefined their class, regional and professional identities.

The political and serious polemics of film society members often occurred in everyday spaces of not only homes and offices, but also in public transport, personal vehicles, staircases and parks. In the example below, Hiran Mitra writes that the general assumption of the film society movement as deeply and only concerned with ‘serious’ cinema, was an experience that came to members like him in everyday spaces with friends;

Amit Purokayastha, Amalda and I would sit in the middle of two tall trees in front of the Esplanade Tram depot. With streaming tea in earthen cups and munching *jhaalmudi*/ rice crispy, we would get our lessons on cinema. In that littered area of broken cups and bottles, I learnt of Truffant, Bunuel, Godard, Fellini and Pasolini. That was some adda! (Mitra, 2010; 12)

In his recollections, the seriousness of an engagement with cinema merges with the informality of friendly intellectual exchange. Like Mitra, Amrit Gangar shares tales of days when *Screen Unit* functioned without an office space, and instead held meetings at local parks. When discussions became fiery and loud, policemen would ask them to leave, forcing them to continue their talks while walking the streets. In many ways, these incidents of film society members creating film cultures in everyday urban spaces is similar to the historical tradition of “adda”¹⁹. In “Adda in Calcutta: Dwelling Modernity”, Dipesh Chakravarty traces the history of modernity in Calcutta through the changing conventions of conversations, orality, locations and practices of “adda” of the Bengali middle classes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Taking in to account the problematic and male dominance of this social practice, “adda” is understood in terms of communities as well as spaces that propelled public associations with literary, political and artistic cultures. Chakravarty’s essay though specific to urban collective traditions in Bengal offers an engaging method, which can

¹⁹ See Radha Prasad Gupta, “Satyajit Ray: Our Coffee House Days” in *Prashanga Satyajit Ray: Chalachitra Charcha*, 2004: 207

be useful to observe urban social practices of discursive communities such as film society groups.

In narrating memories of the Coffee House “adda” culture in the 1950s, Radha Prasad Gupta remembers evenings with future members of the *Calcutta Film Society*, in conversations on literature, theatre and the visual arts suggesting the closed circle’s informal camaraderie that later contributed to the film society movement (Gupta, 2004: 207). However, it eventually grew out of the adda format, with the acquiring of official spaces and the registration of societies, and film society individuals while reflecting different intellectual and discursive patterns, oriented their organizations towards creative activities around cinema. An important contribution of film societies related to the promotion of discursive practices around films was their emphasis on forming their own libraries. The National Film Archive of India (NFAI), which was a support organization for film distribution to film societies, listed libraries as equally crucial to practices of discussions and seminars: “a film society must organize, apart from film discussion meetings, lectures, seminars and symposia and bring out critical writings on cinema. It should also set up a small library which can be used by its members”²⁰. On acquiring closed private spaces to function from, several film societies chose to create libraries with books, journals, their own literatures and later videos, thereby distinguishing their organizations from the social and cultural practices of informal “addas”, even though society premises and gatherings remained evening haunts for members.

The reason for juxtaposing particularly the formation of libraries to the conversational social practices of film society members is to differentiate the academic impulses within film societies from socializing ones. To elaborate, even

²⁰ See Chandrashekar Joshi, “Good Times, Bad Times”, *Deep Focus*, January 1989.

though film society cinephilia developed around alternative and radical debates about cinema, with the popular growth of the movement during the seventies and eighties, events such as international film festivals became attractive arenas of socialization and stardom. Festival spaces produced reviews of films, interviews with directors as well as interactions with fellow film enthusiasts, but like the issue of uncensored foreign films attracting unwanted membership, these arenas also encountered frivolous crowds. In contrast to the complex cultural as well as consumerist events like large scale film festivals, libraries embodied the possibilities of both individual as well as community academic engagements. At the same time, the creation of libraries also involved film society members documenting themselves through the collection of newsletters, news cuttings, photographs and souvenir magazines from their own events. Amitava Ghosh remarks that the idea of having a library out of the funds of the society, collected from membership fees, was initially not taken well by several members. “They argued that more films should be shown with that money instead of a well stocked library, but we managed to win over those voices.”²¹ For societies like *Cine Central*, *Suchitra Film Society* and *Celluloid Chapter*, this bid to institute as well as maintain their libraries has indeed proved beneficial. As opposed to the depleting nature of celluloid material and fleeting film memories of cinematic pleasures, these libraries have survived as the archives of their younger selves.

The intention behind raising these issues of discursive and socializing spaces of film societies is to differentiate the film society activist from the general member and focus on the intervening role s/he played in promoting the cultural and social objectives of film societies. For example, the association of the film society activist with film appreciation was one such activity. The film society archives lead to the

²¹ From the author’s personal interview with Amitava Ghosh, 2011.

history of specific participation in and organization of film appreciation courses. Film Appreciation courses became the chief pedagogical and disseminating tool for film society activists especially for establishing film societies as educational spaces. Film Appreciation, once institutionally introduced by the Film and Television Institute of India in 1963, developed quickly into being not only an integral activity of film societies but also a medium to spread the film society movement. For K.V. Subbanna, the course conducted by Satish Bahadur and Marie Seton motivated him to not only start a film society at his hometown, Heggodu, but also conduct such courses in several villages in Karnataka. From 1971 to 1981, Satish Bahadur undertook to conduct a similar appreciation course at Heggodu, emphasizing the need for awareness and education of film, in both cities and villages. In an interview assessing the progress of the movement, he said, “The Film Society Movement is part of our national culture. Since cinema is a medium of corrupt entertainment, it is necessary that at least five to ten good films (to cater to the aesthetic needs of film societies) should be produced every year.”²² Therefore for Bahadur, the cinephilia and activism of film societies together promoted aesthetic sensibilities in film reception that could further influence film production.

Individuals like Satish Bahadur, Marie Seton, P.K. Nair, Dhruva Gupta, Samik Bandyopadhyay, Suresh Chhabria and Gayatri Chatterjee gained renown in the film society circuit as the earliest film academicians because of their role as teachers of film appreciation. If for figures like Subbanna, film society activism was an aesthetic project of film awareness and promotion, for the likes of Gaston Roberge, it meant a political intervention in film cultural practices.²³ The political responsibility of film

²² See Chandrashekar Joshi, “Good Times, Bad Times”, *Deep Focus*, January 1989

²³ See Gaston Roberge, “Introduction: A Militant Programme”, *Another Cinema for Another Society*. Seagull Books: Calcutta, New Delhi; 1984; 1-6.

society activism is reiterated by Subhendu Dasgupta in “Film Movement Niye Ekti Rajnitik Rachana/ A Political Essay on the Film Movement”. The excerpt below accounts for the meaning of political intervention through cinema;

To go to small town film societies to give them films procured for our society was also a way of politicizing them, drawing them on our side; to print their writings in our magazines, to print political articles, to read films through political perceptions, see political films, understand politics of films, debate, discuss, write, publish... all this contributed to the vigorous political atmosphere of Cine Club.”(Dasgupta, 2010; 13)²⁴

Dasgupta’s association of political energy with the film society movement is rooted in the seventies moment, specifically in the context of Bengal’s emerging left politics. Therefore, as is evident from his assertion, even the spreading of film appreciation culture to small town societies was colored by the radical political activism of the moment. Moreover, both the examples from above are indicative of the specificities of aesthetic and political projects of film societies. Even within the same temporal frame, the aspirations and objectives of film society activism differed according to the needs, anxieties and intellectual climate of the location. Consequently, the film society activist constituted by his/her diverse roles such as organizer, teacher, manager and cinephile, emerged as an intervening agent in his/her specific social, political and cultural scenario.

Lastly, in the figure of the film society activist, a crucial element of celluloid film culture is reflected. The fragments of films impressed or recollected in the minds of these cinephiles not only constituted personal film memories but also became references from which they taught and interacted in the domain of film appreciation and discussions. The specific context of the Indian New Wave films and film society teachers and speakers deserves mention here. Given the limited circulation of the New Wave films, film societies were sites where these were exhibited, discussed and

²⁴ Translation by author.

written about. Ira Sinha, , the founder President of *Projekt*, the film society of Lady Shri Ram College, recalls how it is the screenings of the films of Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani that formed for her generation the knowledge and experience of the experimental cinemas of the New Wave. She adds that it is due to their rarity and unavailability in the digital formats, that for several years the New Wave was accessed, appreciated and taught through their memories and written literatures. Furthermore, at different fora apart from *Projekt*, the screenings of the Kaul and Shahani films were followed by “passionate defenses of the form and heated arguments on whether such films were a waste of government finances”²⁵ Ironically, the identity of this crucial figure in the history of the movement has remained unacknowledged despite the unique position of the film society activist in the history of Indian film cultures. Although several film society individuals continued their relationship with cinema by investing in writing and academics, it must be noted that most of these individuals came from non filmmaking or industrial backgrounds, especially from smaller cities and towns. In fact they redefined their social identities based on their relationship to the movement, privileging their cinephiliac identities over their professional ones. Moreover, their involvement, activism and enthusiasm represented the film society movement in the public domain.

Memories of Cinephilia: Looking at Photographs

In this chapter, I have used personal memories of the film society movement to generate a history of the diverse activities and practices of film society cinephiles that propelled this social and cultural formation. These memories have foregrounded the material conditions of the accessibility and portability of celluloid prints, the

²⁵ From the author’s personal conversation with Ira Bhaskar (nee Sinha).

responsibilities of organizing the activities of the society, and dealing with the difficult issues of space for these activities. However, I wish to conclude with the understanding that there exist other kinds of records such as photographs, interviews, personal memorabilia and cinephiliac associations which can also be included in this framework to generate other kinds of history writing. For instance, the category of photographs can be read not only as material evidence for activities, but also used for locating hitherto untouched histories of people and objects. As Annette Kuhn argues, photographs, depending on their contexts of production, the socio-cultural events they display, along with where and how they have been used, possess a range of meanings (Kuhn, 2000: 183).

Is there a possibility then of understanding the photographs of the film society movement, which have until now been used to produce memories of the past, to bring out different realities other than that of nostalgia? For example, photographs from various festivals, film appreciation courses and other events capture their participants in action, and are reprinted in journals and publications as evidence of such occurrences. This evidential nature of the photographic image has been much debated with respect to its relationship with time and place. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, his 1980 book on photography, argued that “the type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of “being-there” of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but the awareness of its having-been-there”²⁶. In Barthes’ supposition, the photograph was a melancholic reminder of bygone-events; it was frozen time that could not be accessed and therefore, only evoked feelings of loss, trauma and nostalgia. However, in contrast to Barthes’ conclusion, Siegfried Kracauer, who as early as 1932, held

²⁶ As cited in Steven Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118.

similar notions on photographs as fixating personal memories, at least granted the possibility of different interpretations in the future. Unlike Barthes, he suggested that when removed from personal histories and associations, photographs became useful for determining social histories (Leslie: 2010: 127).

Although both these theories on the relationship of photography with captured events are intimations of temporal and spatial specificities of the still image which can contribute to historical constructions, but they provide little space for cognitive or interpretative strategies of memories in this process. For this project of recovering film society histories from the printed records and memories, the understanding of materials such as photographs as archives open to interpretation is centrally important. For instance, still images from the film appreciation courses at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and Ninasam Chitra Samaja range from formal group pictures of the first batch in 1967 as well as pictures from the early 1970s of participants gathered around in informal circles, conversing over tea and cigarettes. The younger selves of film society representatives can be spotted such Satish Bahadur, Marie Seton and director Girish Kasravalli corroborating the written accounts of their participation. However, what is also revealing in these images is the dominant gendered nature of these social groups; apart from Marie Seton there is no other woman in these pictures. Along with the presences, photographs in their details, arrangement and production also indicate the absences. Therefore, in this context Walter Benjamin's understanding of photographs as embodying dual possibilities is interesting. For Benjamin, photographs can be read not only as archives of buried histories but also as clues which can be traced for further discoveries (Leslie, 2010: 128). Hence, memories within and surrounding photographs possess different kinds of historiographic opportunities.

Photographs related to the film society movement exist scattered across newspapers, national magazines, film society journals and newsletters and most importantly in personal albums of the members. In contemporary documentations of film societies, along with reprints of writings from back issues, photographs of seminars, film festivals, publications, offices, venues and member groups have also been reproduced. As Kuhn succinctly remarks “(b)oth personal photographs and autobiographical writing have a part in (the) production of memories, offering us pasts which in one way or another reach into the present, into the moment of looking at a picture, of writing or reading a text” (Kuhn, 2000: 183). Similarly, these images resonate in my mind with the photographs of my parents’ participation in similar events of their film society as well as bring back childhood memories of growing up in the environment of the film society cultures of the nineties. Furthermore, this directs one’s attention towards the possible presence of several such photographs in other surviving film societies. Hence, fragments of memories represented by the still image have the potential to support, rediscover and complicate historical narratives.

Conclusion: Leading to the Archives

In this chapter, narratives of nostalgia have been used as a pathway to discover and enumerate the specific activities of film societies that were determined by their temporal and spatial network of cinephilia. Most significantly, memory has been employed as a method to bring out the detailed endeavours of film society individuals such as maintaining and energizing the travelling network of films, articulating the need for film societies, managing membership and the meticulous programming of film shows. In tracing these staple activities, memories of films as well as friendships

between individuals of the movement have been examined as two integral components of this socio-cultural formation. Hence, a significant portion of this chapter has delved into personal recollections to elucidate certain aspects of the movement. It is through such interaction with remembrances and records that the figure of the film society activist, as a significant agent of film culture has been recovered in this project. The histories of activism and political departures that constituted the critical interventions of the film society movement at different points in time have been navigated through the memories of several film society activists and cinephiles.

Finally, the section on photographs has been used to contemplate on memory as embodied in the still image as well as its surrounding material. This reflection on the photograph has been an attempt to imagine the possibilities of interrogating a movement deeply associated with the cultures of moving pictures through the closed frame of the photograph in order to recover buried histories. Moreover, the concept of photographs as archival resources leads to informed conditions and creative methods of reading other available material on the film societies. Therefore, photographs as memories point towards the processes of the production of written and printed literatures, modes of the dissemination of cultural thoughts and lastly, the locations of film society activities. All of these aspects of the movement which contributed to the dominant knowledges and discourses of the film society movement in the public domain will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Disseminating Film Culture

In the previous chapters, film society cultures have been described by tracing the influences of cinemas in circulation, by navigating through the desires and aspirations of cinephiles, and accessing the memories of participation of people from several parts of the country. All these aspects constitute the affective investments of cinephilia which contributed to the momentum as well as the spread of the film society movement. With this chapter, I arrive at the material consequences or historical traces like writings, discussions and critical appreciations of alternative cinemas, which reflect the persuasive and productive capabilities of film society cinephilia. In other words, along with activities such as procuring and viewing films, organizing screenings and spaces of exhibition, acts of writing and discussing cinema were and continue to be one of the most creative and powerful outcomes of the film society movement. For these societies, alternative film cultures could not be simply transported from one place to another; instead they had to be developed, disseminated and found within social collectives by encouraging exposure and thought on different kinds of cinemas and their practices. Dissemination of film culture/s was one of the foundational functions for which film societies were formed. This desire to share and spread certain kinds of refined interests in aspects of cinema has been one of the underlining features of most early forms of cinephilia and cine club formations across the world but have to be understood in their different historical forms. I would now like to turn to a discussion of how the desires for disseminating film culture and inducing alternative reception practices were processed as well as consolidated within the film society movement.

The modes of dissemination that film societies undertook such as film society newsletters, journals, publications, discussions and appreciation courses contain the epistemological values that were generated in the course of their engagements with notions of film culture. These discursive sites cannot be examined only as sites of knowledge production but also illuminate histories of writing, reading and participation that constituted the cultures of film societies to generate a critical perspective on the cultural impact of such disseminating practices. Moreover, writing about cinema and film culture was not only a process to connect, share, inform and educate members as well as other film audiences about alternative, art and international cinemas, but also an activity through which films were remembered, reviewed and recorded for posterity. Simultaneously, implicit within such practices of dissemination were discourses on ideals of film production and reception marked by admiration for the cinematic medium, artistic preferences, intellectual anxieties along with an acute awareness of the lack of creative institutions for encouraging film culture.

The film society movement in India saw itself as a part of an internationally resonant film culture along with other celebrated cinephiliac cultures of the 1960s and 70s across the globe, which were not only influential propagators of art or experimental cinema, but were also the earliest discursive spaces for serious thinking about cinema before the emergence of the academic discipline of Cinema Studies. Mark Betz characterizes the difference of European and American cinephiliac history from general film cultures, suggesting why it became the referent for subsequent alternative film cultures. He says, “Moviegoing during this period (late 50s to early 70s) was not “feverish” for mass audiences but for a specialized one for whom attending the cinema was not a recreational but a cultural, even intellectual activity”

(Betz, 2009: 2). The engagement with art cinema was characterized by the audiences' intellectual involvement. Alternatively, it is imperative to understand any form of cinephilia according to its historical location and cultural specificity; for instance this classical cinephilia as understood by the "politique des auteurs" discourse is intimately connected to the French cultural scenario with the emergence of magazines such as *Cahiers du Cinema*, *Positif*, the flourishing of the French Nouvelle Vague movement, along with the Parisian film exhibition and reception practices (de Valck and Hagner, 2005:12). Therefore, before delving into the dominant discourses generated by the film society movement in India, it is necessary to understand the conditions and contexts from which the need for the dissemination of film cultures was expressed and articulated. The journals, memorandums, brochures, newsletters and bulletins relentlessly circulated by the film societies across the country reveal and reiterate the ideals of the movement and the need for an alternative film culture as opposed to the mainstream. However these pieces of literature were also means of communication with other members and cinephiles, with announcements of film screenings, meetings, and discussions revealing the activities of film societies, and also embodying purpose and accountability. Therefore such written documentation forms the immediate archive for delineating the historical and cultural conditions of the emergence of film societies.

Newsletters, Bulletins and Programme Notes

The newsletters printed and circulated by the film societies are the less talked about aspects of the movement compared to the more reflective and authoritative forms like film society magazines, publications and compilations which have been

theoretically engaged with in terms of determining structures of thought such as questions of ideology, dominant debates combined with issues of taste and sensibility. The singular page type-written programme notes or the two fold newsletters served the primary purpose of announcing film screenings often accompanied with film synopses and information about related activities for the members. Interestingly, if the material nature of newsletters makes them historically significant, it is also their functional feature that accounts for the difficulties and complications in their availability and archival status. However, as cultural productions primarily meant for the dissemination of film information by societies, these forms of material literature have special significance for this project of history writing not only because of their factual content, but also for the processes they initiated, reported and the associations as well as connections they established.

Apart from the notifications and synopses of films, the newsletters also contained the names of their collaborators and presenters such as the cultural centers of foreign consulates or the National Archives which made the accessibility to films possible. Hence, newsletters reached out not only to member audiences of just the particular society from where it was printed, but in circulation also informed other societies of the resources available on the alternative circuits of film procurement and exhibition. For example, the 1961 inaugural announcement of the *Lucknow Film Society* mentions that the opening of the society was marked by the screening of *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) which was made available by Chidananda Dasgupta, Calcutta Film Society, and selected Swedish Classics, in the presence of Marie Seton and Robert E. Hawkins of the Bombay Film Society.¹ In a similar programme

¹ From the Programme Notes of Film Societies 1960-1967, accessed at the National Film Archives of India, June, 2011.

notification released on January 28, 1962, the *Lucknow Film Society* listed the films screened with the details of the organizations from which they were accessed.

Lucknow Film Society- 7th Meeting, 28th January, 1962

- GLASS, Holland, 1952- Colour-10 mins
- GOTMA THE BUDDHA, Holland, 1956- B/W- 84 mins

The films are available at the Embassy of Holland, 84, Golf Links, New Delhi.

- Excerpt from the Programme note of LFS, 1962.²

In order to understand the role and scope of the programme notes, bulletins and newsletters as carriers of the film society movement, it is important to elaborate on the nature of such forms of circulation initiated by the film societies. Since film societies were registered organizations under the Societies Registration Act 21, 1860, India, so printed matter for circulation such as bulletins or newsletters could be registered with the Registrar of Newspapers in India (RNI), which facilitated affordable and easy circulation by postal service of these newsletters and bulletins to several parts of the country. For a movement anxious about the state of cinema in the country, concerned with the appreciation of cinematic forms and deeply invested in creating alternative spaces for cinephiles, accountability to its members was a key legitimizing condition. Thus, the newsletter at hand was a simple mode of communication and information while at the same time, it was also a crucial element in maintaining the organized form of cinephilia that film societies created by their keen collaborations with archives, foreign consulates and other societies across the country.

Any account of the tradition of newsletters of the film society movement would be incomplete without contemplating the questions of archival value and the availability of such documents for realizing the possibilities of history writing. Just as

² Ibid.

the form of newsletters varied from long typewritten announcements, cyclostyled sheets to two fold documents or thin bulletin supplements, similarly the contents of these documents were diverse. Along with information on programmes and screenings these documents contained synopses and reviews of films, excerpts from debates on cinema, comments and suggestions from members, as well as advertisements from patron organizations and other cultural groups. It is perhaps this combination of the diverse range of content and the nature of their circulation that at the same time emphasizes the significance of this method of dissemination but also complicates it. Although the organizational network of film societies generated a prolific number of newsletters as well as bulletins, but with the waning of the movement, the functional value of circulating informative literature reduced due to the drop in membership and the paucity of funds. These documents now survive in the libraries of film societies which have been able to sustain their spaces. Moreover, since newsletters postmarked as “printed matter book post” mostly travelled to their recipients’ personal addresses, retrieving such material regarding the history of the movement implies reaching out to existing personal collections of film society cinephiles. Interestingly, newsletters which are released and circulated by film societies today are not only intermittent intimations from surviving societies, but also symbolically laden with associations and memories of the movement.

A statement from the first bulletin of *Celluloid Chapter* below, elaborates further on the qualitative aspect of such primary film society literatures:-

A periodical journal of our film society “Celluloid Chapter” was felt necessary. We needed it to communicate with each other, to exchange our views on all aspects of the film movement. – *Bulletin No. 1, Celluloid Chapter*³

³ From the Celluloid Chapter brochure, Jamshepur, 2004.

As mentioned earlier, this society was formed towards the end phase of the movement and in 1986 its very first bulletin displays the consciousness of being part of a larger history. Moreover, there is a sense of ritual involvement inherent in the state of belonging to a larger community, i.e. “film movement”, which had to be represented through particular discursive forms like periodicals and articulated as an exchange of views and participation in debates. De De Baecque and Fremaux suggest that such cultural actions comprise the “cultic practices of cinephilia”. According to them, despite its secular social status “cinephilia is a system of cultural organization that engenders rituals around the gaze, speech and the written word” (Keathley, 2006:6). Incidentally, an announcement for discussion in *Film Forum*’s journal, *Close Up* exemplifies the convergence of all three activities in the context of film societies in India. In a 1968 issue, *Close Up* carried an advertisement titled “Invitation for Discussion” on the contentious issue of “Form versus Content”, specifically requesting readers to participate with examples from their practical experiences (since most of their members were professionals and workers from the film industry) to substantiate their arguments. The purpose, it stated, was to be “able to air our individual views” rather than come to conclusive decisions.⁴ Hence, the nature of other available printed resources suggests that both collective as well as individual views were solicited to continue the project of dissemination. Therefore, acknowledging the dearth of formal or informal forums on cinema, film societies provided diverse sites for speech and written actions related to the films that were screened, thereby including and channeling a plethora of perspectives and opinions.

⁴ See *Close up* Oct-Dec, 1968 No.2.

Film Appreciation: A Pedagogical Tool for the Dissemination of Film Culture

As discussed earlier, the primary aim of circulating printed material like newsletters and bulletins was to maintain communication with members, other societies and cultural organizations. On the one hand, these served to hold the society's membership together, while on the other, they sustained the alternative character of the movement. In other words, these literatures accumulated, reiterated as well as dispersed the cultural contribution of the movement. Hence, the significance of these assorted literatures was defined by their informative and promotional capacity for members. This section will move on to discuss the pedagogical tool of film appreciation as another kind of dissemination practice which not only promoted alternative film culture but also consolidated activities such as film analysis, criticism and discussion into an influential academic force. Moreover, though film appreciation was an offshoot of the cultural discourses of the movement, its transformation into a cogent singular academic course under the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), made it one of the most impacting methods of dissemination, even outside the network of film societies.

The name synonymous with film appreciation in India is that of Professor Satish Bahadur who taught the course at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) from 1963 to 1983. Along with the technical expertise in cinematography, direction, editing, script writing and sound recording, the Institute structured a film appreciation course for generating consciousness regarding cinematic practices and cultures from around the world. While 'classics' from world cinema were included in the various syllabi, in the context of Indian cinema, art cinemas were chosen as texts worthy of study and analysis. Furthermore, the concept underlying the origin of the course was to understand and study cinema as 'fine art', which was aesthetically

opposed to the notion of film as entertainment, or in other words, the commercial principle of the film industry in the country. In a sense, the film appreciation course at Pune continued the institutional project of the government to promote a parallel network of small budget, independent cinemas, which began with the formation of the Film Finance Corporation (FFC), National Film Archive of India (NFAI) and the Film and Television Institute (FTII).

However, Bahadur developed the course from experience, practice and discussions. In his words, in the absence of any defined methods to teach cinema, the course evolved “in interaction with students in the classrooms at the Institute” (Rao, 2009: 218). Since his film society days at the Agra University, Bahadur had been influenced by Marie Seton’s experience as a film society activist in Britain and her subsequent involvement with film education in India. Within four years, this course developed into a residential summer course from 1967 onwards which enabled film enthusiasts and film society members, along with individuals from other professions who were not students of the Institute, to learn methods of films appreciation. Bahadur went on to conduct the course in several parts of the country like Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, and Imphal (219). However, the most successful replica of the course was in Heggodu where he and Seton coordinated with *Ninasam Chitra Samaja* to introduce film appreciation in 1979. Therefore, this structure of film appreciation instituted at Pune, supported by the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) soon became the model for similar programmes in various societies, cultural organizations and educational institutions in the country.

The film appreciation course at FTII had emerged as a crucial tool for the dissemination of intellectual practices around cinema but due to institutional conditions, its geographical reach was limited. However, following the basic methods

that had been developed by the FTII-NFAI course, film societies conducted variations of this course depending upon their pedagogical inclinations and cinematic preferences. The principle contents of the course module included lectures on film history and criticism, extensive notes on filmmaking techniques and language of cinema, supplemented by film screenings and detailed shot by shot analysis. The emphasis was towards developing analytical minds which understood the sophisticated cultural and aesthetic form of cinema. This stress is forceful and obvious in the notes from Satish Bahadur's lectures of 1969⁵ where he underlines the function of film appreciation stating that "Film Appreciation is Film Criticism. Film Culture is not merely Film. It is films *plus* criticism." The dominance of the structural and semantic approach that formed the theoretical backbone of the course is apparent in Bahadur's words, but what is repeatedly foregrounded by him is the need for evaluative criticism of cinema. It is thus that the qualitative features of film appreciation, as a valuing of the specific cinematicity of the films discussed and the key characteristics of the great masters formed one of the key aspects of most film society activities making film appreciation a preferred tool for the dissemination of film cultures. The film appreciation course also provided the ground for preliminary academic interventions on Indian cinema as participants ranging from scholars to journalists pursued their interests in cinema. Moreover, the film appreciation courses became the educational force due to which selective international and national films circulated along the film society network as celluloid texts to be deciphered, analyzed and appreciated. Thus, in navigating the physical routes of film travel, the structure and schedule of film appreciation completed a cycle of the dissemination of film cultures.

⁵ See Satish Bahadur, "Notes on Film Criticism (1969)", Film Appreciation Study Material Series No. 7/A, National Film Archive of India, 1990.

Spaces of Dissemination: Film Festivals

We feel that we as a group, dedicated to the promotion of the film society movement in India and all that it stands for, have a say in the affairs of our cinema and, of course, its audience. The time has now come when we MUST have art theatres in all our big cities so that we also can gain access to all the exciting films that are being made the world over. – Editorial, *Close Up*, 1968⁶

An underlying argument throughout this project has been to discover anew the function and value of the film society network through the motif of travel and movement. However, it also must be taken into account that fixed stable locations for film societies were rare or attained after much difficulty. Although specific cities had grown into centers of film culture, the constant search for theatre spaces to accommodate both alternative films and their audiences remained. The above mentioned editorial plea from *Close up* articulates this problem by raising the demand for separate art theatres. It was as though, the movement for film culture had generated spaces to house films or courses but had not been able to find similar spatial location for the reception of that culture.

However, in the absence of the much-demanded institutionally supported art theatres in India, temporary solutions came in the form of some specific spaces of film reception like film festivals, which then became the culminating point for dissemination activities and processes. The film festival venues not only became spaces representative of the film viewing culture that the film society movement wished to spread, but also significant discursive sites because central to the conception of a Film Festival and key to the festival arrangements that had to be made, films were meant to be exhibited, discovered, discussed and contested. Consequently, film festivals consolidated a robust film culture within a localized

⁶See Basu Chatterji, “Editorial: Art Theatres” in *Close up* Oct-Dec, 1968 No.2; 3.

spatial as well as temporal format. Film festivals in the context of this chapter refer to the various kinds of festivals, national as well as regional including society level retrospectives, international cinema packages and Indian panoramas. These spaces had a specific significance for film societies not only because the festivals formed part of their organizational activities, but also because these were spaces where film culture became interactive, shared and charged with the emotional engagement of cinephilia.

In the descriptions of the organized networks of cinephilia provided by the film society movement, cinema and film society literatures have been discussed as travelling objects initiating diverse cultures of reception, appreciation and film knowledge. However, film festival venues especially the International Film Festivals held in different cities energized these networks in a unique way because they brought together cinephiles and film enthusiasts from several parts of the country. Therefore, the film society activist who usually played the parts of organizer and knowledge producer became the quintessential cinephiliac traveler. Moreover, similar to the film objects, the circulating literature of newsletters, periodicals, brochures along with festival souvenirs came to destinations from where these could be sold, shared and collected.

It is at the festival spaces that several roles of the film societies and their members converged to facilitate dissemination in varied forms. Festivals generated ideal spaces for viewing films, reflected the international appeal of cinema, allowed for discussions with filmmakers, writers and actors and also provided makeshift stalls and outlets to film societies for selling their publications. Significantly, the arena of film festivals provided the possibility of retrospectives, in other words, these spaces facilitated the looking back or the rediscovering of films that had slipped away from

public memory. The case of *Suchitra Film Society*'s "Nostalgia '77" elaborates such a convergence of cinephiliac reflection and interaction.

In 1977, this festival on early international and Indian cinemas held over a fortnight, across five theatres in the city of Bangalore was a unique film society enterprise because it brought cinephiles and promoters of alternative cinemas as well as film personalities from regional and Indian cinemas together on one platform. Screenings of early Indian cinema such as *Throw of Dice*, *Shiraz*, *Light of Asia*, *Achut Kanya*, *Kismet*, *Duniya Na Mane*, *Sant Tukaram* and several other films in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi were supplemented by tales of experience. It was attended by the likes of Mrinal Sen, B.K Karanjia, P.K. Nair, Devika Rani, Nargis Dutt and several experienced technicians, all of whom reflected on their memories and experiences with film culture. Since this festival was held under the film society purview such a cultural exchange contributed to the various perspectives generated by debates and discussions. This Festival was organized with the help of the NFAI and the film society network, but in its attempt to engage directly with the film industry, it catapulted the status of this festival to a significant cultural event of the city. Therefore, 'Nostalgia' signified the scope of the film festival space as a film cultural site. However, as an example of dissemination, film festivals underlined a critical mode for film societies; in the absence of art theatres, it was the festival space that nurtured different kinds of film reception, created occasions for deeper interactions with people and finally promoted the notion of film culture in the public domain.

The presence of film festivals as significant cultural events soon became identifiable with specific cities as well as societies. These film festivals embodied the celluloid cultures of film societies on a slightly larger scale combining regular cinephiliac activities of accessing and watching. Consequently, these spaces became

news events that were reported, reviewed and printed, not only in mainstream news reports, but also in the forthcoming issues of newsletters and periodicals. The scale of contemporary film festivals have transformed considerably according to technological advancements and market changes, which has also affected festival cinephilia. However, this aspect of cinephilia marked by cinematic pleasures and interactions has not received the significant critical attention that it deserves. Meanwhile, even today when film societies are far and few, the International Film Festivals held in the metropolitan cities are spaces where earlier literature produced on cinema is displayed, underscoring their academic and archival worth, and conferring the status of film society memorabilia onto these documents. Acknowledging the importance of particular events and activities of film societies, in the next section I move on to documentation and archival practices of this cinephilia which recorded and preserved such happenings.

Literary Archives

My search for reserves of film society documentation led to an interesting online collection of recent newsletters and journal publications by the Federation of Film Societies of India. In 2010 the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) celebrated its golden jubilee year with almost two hundred registered film societies from across the country with two key publications, first a thick compilation of articles and interviews from several film society journals and other magazines, along with short inception histories of registered societies under the title, *The Film Society Movement in India* (2009) and second, the fifteenth issue of their journal, *Indian Film Culture*. This was a moment of collective recollection marked by a need to narrate

and compile their internal histories for the contemporary, which is reflected not only through the publications, but also in the attempt made to create online accessibility to the digitized version of the journal as well as recent newsletters that give an account of their present activities. These contemporary attempts to revive past associations of the film society movement so as to motivate the present by reprinting earlier material are marked by the anxieties of the present even as they represent discursive mobile archives, albeit complicated.

In an FFSI newsletter dated 1 December 2006, this short quote from Satyajit Ray recounting the formation of the *Calcutta Film Society* with the purpose of disseminating film culture appears alongside news from several film societies and some other factual information:-

Nobody was taking cinema seriously as an art form and this was one of the reasons behind the general run of bad films. Bengali films seemed especially badly made when you compared them to American films. They seemed so crude, too amateurish. It was against this background that we decided to start a film club. We had heard and read that there were film clubs in several countries. Only in our country, we did not have any. That was how the Calcutta Film Society started to disseminate film culture.
– Satyajit Ray⁷

Ray's comment is cited from another newsletter printed in November 2005 by the *Calcutta Film Society*. Therefore an excerpt from an earlier writing by Ray is set into circulation, making it at once available as a historical abstract yet rendering its context ambiguous because of the problematic citation. It is easy to neglect these contemporary documents as activities of communities struggling under the haze of nostalgia, holding on to remnants of a past given their hastily edited content matter, often compiled from other resources. However, the availability of these literatures also directs attention towards the possibilities of accessing as well as retrieving original newsletters, brochures and journals from personal and closed archives by

⁷ See *FFSI Newsletter*, Vol 1. No. 1 2006; as accessed on February 8 ,2011 from <http://www.ffsi.org.in/next.htm>

tracing the inter textual, cross referenced pathways created by their ambiguous reprints.

Another primary example of such a text is *The Film Society Movement in India (2009)* released by the FFSI, compiled and edited by a veteran film society activist, H.N Narhari Rao, which reconstructs the movement by bringing together several influential articles on the formation of film societies in different parts of the country, debates on good cinema versus bad cinema, the need for film education and other issues, along with recollections in interviews of many film society activists, lists of existing societies, their inception histories and publications. Thus, despite the problematic editing, there is a process and desire for articulation and documentation that these texts represent which push for the possibilities of rediscovering the archives and associated methodologies.

What do such books mean for writing histories of cinema and practices surrounding the love for cinema? It is a question that Anne Friedberg raises in her study of the silent period British film journal *Close Up (1927-33)*, which I consider valid for addressing the scattered as well as compiled documents of the film societies in India. In the context of *Close Up*, Friedberg states that its theoretical preoccupation and critical evaluation of cinema combined with its modernist political approach as resistance writing embodied a “struggle to maintain alternatives”. *Close Up* nurtured critical political writing on cinema during the crucial transitional period from silent films to the sound era, as well as during the period of the two world wars. It aspired for an international association of modern writers and creative individuals from major European cities who would invest in transforming the cultural reception of cinema. In its six years of circulation, *Close Up* rigorously promoted art and experimental cinema, was deeply critical of cinema for entertainment, and even anticipated some of

the debates that were to trouble cinema scholars during the 1960s and 70s. Friedberg's reading of the journal's issues, locates them within the modernist practices of experimental art forms. She analyzes them not only for the textual content but also looks at covers, advertisements and correspondence, and the initiators and followers of *Close Up* emerge as communities of writers and readers who constituted the alternative film and literary culture that they were invested in promoting. In fact, in an advertisement in its closing edition, there seems to be an acute awareness of its contribution to film thought and film history as evidenced in the proclamation "Bound Volumes of *Close Up*...Reference Books for the Future" (Friedberg, 1998: 26). Therefore, Friedberg takes them up precisely for their epistemological and archival value at a time when film scholarship itself was caught between writing obituaries on the age of cinema and reflecting on its own histories. In doing so, Friedberg raises pertinent questions about the value and practice of written activities around cinema which should inform any rethinking of the history of cinema and film scholarship.

Following her method of deciphering literary practices around cinema, and stressing the acts of writing along with the discourses they generated can be a useful way of making meaning of the old and new circulating literature of the film societies in India. As mentioned earlier, the search for the archives of film societies involves tracing paths of the organizational as well as personal networks that were formed and that participated in the dissemination of this alternative film culture. For instance, a book like *The Film Society Movement in India (2009)* serves as a resource book for the movement. It is not academic in nature, it overrides issues of citations, but as an internal documentation of the FFSI, it demonstrates a need to consolidate for the contemporary, a history of the movement resurrected from archival literature as well

as personal memory.⁸ Apart from the argumentative articles, short interviews of film society activists like Vijaya Mulay, Muriel Wasi, K.V. Subbanna, Satish Bahadur and Shyam Benegal along with the stories of the inception of societies like the *Calcutta Film Society*, *Delhi Film Society* and *Patna Film Society*⁹, the book contains comments from the editor which directed me to the libraries or reserves maintained by film societies from where this literature was excavated as well as to the people whose memories of the movement facilitated such a reconstruction.

Film Society Libraries as Archives

Film societies which took their institutional role seriously not only screened international and art films, but also created libraries which housed film journals, magazines, publications along with the society's correspondence from all over the world, therefore making a local space available for this form of cinephilia to flourish. There were also unsuccessful attempts made to buy and preserve film prints for better circulation between societies. For instance, in the early 1980s, FFSI collected five rupees from film society members all over India and received an equal amount from the Central government as a grant to procure film prints of *Kaadu* (1973), *Elipathayam* (1981), *Samskara* (1970), *Chinnamul* (1950), *Charulata* (1964), *The Apu Trilogy* and few other regional films. The idea was to own and preserve subtitled prints of select Indian films that could be circulated specifically to film societies.

⁸ "I have a flair for collecting information and took meticulous care to compile all the Film Society publications in the Suchitra Library from its inception. And most of the information that I have compiled in the book are at my finger tips and I can narrate them without the help of any document. It is only the passion for this activity that made me to write this volume, and I am happy it is not a waste. When I started working on this project, funded by the Asian Film Foundation, I had to undergo bypass surgery. But I resumed my work immediately after my discharge from the hospital and completed it before the scheduled date." H.N. Narahari Rao on how he came about chronicling the book *The Film Society Movement in India* (2009); from my interview dated February 26, 2012.

⁹ From *The Film Society Movement in India* (2009) ed. H.N. Narahari Rao; 21-34.

Even though the thought was commendable, but due to faulty execution, mismanagement and the lack of storage facility this project collapsed. Alternatively, with the advent of digital technology, for some film societies the accessibility to VHS copies of films resolved issues of demands for screenings as well as created the scope for different kinds of libraries.

Historically, issues of space have been recurring hurdles for creative, intellectual and organizational possibilities of the film society movement which the zeal and innovation of film society cinephilia has had to overcome. However, film society library spaces cannot only be understood in terms of the traditional architecture of libraries although they functioned procedurally as regular libraries with catalogued entries and ledgers. Instead, these libraries have to be imagined as rented spaces in apartments, office buildings or even backyards of personal bungalows which were transformed by these communities of cinephiles into sites of reading, writing and film screening in the absence of any another creative forum to encourage film culture. Therefore, from the beginning these libraries shifted along with their communities, and even now when the movement has receded into the periphery, some of these libraries are nestled into the homes and other spaces of their collectors and societies, accessible to those who seek.

The *Suchitra Film Society*, Bangalore, houses one such collection, grown and stocked during the peak period of the film society movement; it now functions as a regular library within the premises of the society. Suchitra's story is remarkable because of the range of activities around international, regional and art cinemas, from discussions, seminars, film appreciation courses, retrospectives on directors to regular

publications that it was able to organize and sustain.¹⁰ However in this section I am specifically interested in examining the *Suchitra Film Society's* constant role in the dissemination of film societies' film culture through two key publications on the movement like the *Film Society Handbook (1989)* and the earlier mentioned *The Film Society Movement in India (2009)*. Both these books were the outcome of veteran film society activist and Suchitra Film Society's founding secretary, H.N. Narhari Rao's zeal and intellectual investment in sustaining the movement and with it the archives, both literary and physical, that had been created. According to Rao, these writings and publications were significant agents in disseminating film culture because these informed the members which films to select, watch as well as study.

Similarly, he recalls how the *Film Society Handbook (1989)* came about:

The Film Society Handbook was written because of its sheer necessity. During those days, in fact even now, many people do not know what is a film society? And why is it needed? Many people who wanted to become members and also those who wanted to run a film society wanted some useful information on this activity. The FFSI entrusted me with this job and I did it in the seventies. It is very much appreciated by many.¹¹

This handbook which was brought out in 1989, almost towards the end of the film society movement, was published by the *Suchitra Film Society* with support from the Federation of Film Societies of India. It provides detailed directions on how film societies should function, schedule films and programmes, with what objectives and membership in mind, along with an entire index of the addresses of registered film societies all across India, and the addresses of embassies and government agencies which formed the organized network of the movement from where films could be sourced. With such an extensive support network of film travel and dissemination,

¹⁰ See H.N. Narahari Rao, *My Days with the Film Society Movement (2001)*. The entire story of the Suchitra Film Society from its need, concept, inception, activities and growth through chronicles of its founder secretary.

¹¹ In reply to how and why he compiled the *Film Society Handbook*. From my interview on 26 February, 2012.

such publications were also efforts to define what the film society in India meant and why these existed. For example, the handbook opens with these two succinct definitions of film societies-

Film Societies are voluntary organizations dedicated to the cause of good cinema, and feeding, fertilizing, and cross pollinating the grass roots of cinema. Informality, flexibility, and friendliness are preferred styles; low budget expertise is the basic content. It involves people who love films. ¹²

Film Societies are not esoteric groups,
They are not commercial, cheap cinema houses.
They are not porn merchants,
They are not film producing concern,
They are not financing bodies. ¹³

Both these abstract estimate what film societies stand for as voluntary communities bound by their relationship to cinema, maintained by collective enthusiasm, and should not to be confused with frivolous or profit making agencies. Simultaneously, these quotations suggest the lack of awareness and misconceptions regarding film societies that still had to be addressed in order to reach out to people, even after almost thirty years of the movement further reflecting the dispersed nature of film society formations. Moreover, citations from other sources for a particular definition of film societies indicate the cultural context of film societies and their activists whose zeal and responsibility gave meaning to these formations rather than constructed definitions. This process of defining ideal audiences and members was a responsibility that film society activists undertook more definitively in their articles on the state of film culture, the role, need and effect of the film society movement in India.

¹² See "What are Film Societies" in *Film Society Handbook (1989)*, ed. H.N. Narhari Rao.

¹³ Ibid. Cited from the British Federation of Film Societies.

Sites of Film Writing: Film Society Journals

The focus of the first two sections of this chapter has been on the processes through which film societies set out to disseminate film culture, discussing their material conditions of production, circulation and reception in order to recognize their contribution to the movement as well as to examine the nature of the resources and archives the film societies enabled. Now, I would like to shift perspective from the processes to the debates and discourses that conceptualized the film cultures of film societies. Film society journals like *Indian Film Quarterly*, *IFSON* and *Indian Film Culture*, *Close Up* and *Deep Focus* along with regular articles in newspapers and mainstream magazines like *Filmfare*, *Stardust* and *Screen* were discursive sites where these arguments on cinematic practices and cultures appeared. Moreover, this chapter will also address the existing academic and critical knowledge about the film society movement that has interrogated the movement based on the cultural assumptions exhibited by influential pioneers and their writings.

As the idea of film activism and thought gained urgency, it intermingled with two prime modes of investment in film practices, namely journalistic¹⁴ and academic pursuits, along with the emergence of parallel cinemas. The idea of passion for ‘good cinema’ has been an undercurrent influencing the discourse about film societies in India, which has been institutionally written into the history of the movement in which people from different parts of the country participated with fervor for the sake of cinema as an artistic experience that was not and could not be produced by the dominant mainstream cinemas. So in order to induce momentum into practices around cinema, regular reviews of films, reports and surveys regarding the successes,

¹⁴ B.K. Karanjia as the Editor of *Filmfare* and the Chairperson of the FFC regularly promoted alternative cinema in his editorials.

failures and even the relevance of film societies were a consistent preoccupation with the participants and members. I will examine some of the chief concerns and debates such as the role of film societies in spreading film culture across the country, discussions on censorship, reviews of screenings and most importantly debates on the New Wave film movement, using three film society journals in English, *Indian Film Culture*, *Close-up* and *Deep Focus*, from three different parts of the country to reconstruct the films, discussions and publication triad that constituted the cultural impact of film societies.

i) ***Indian Film Culture: Coordinating Film Culture***

Indian Film Culture is not intended to be a house magazine for members of the Federation. As its contents will show, it aims at being a journal of Film Appreciation, written from the Indian point of view. It is in this sense of film appreciation that we have added the word 'culture' to 'Indian Film'. For culture there certainly exists among those who deal in films directly or indirectly- not only among those who judge them but even among many who make them. There are noted writers, musicians and others among those who make films and distinguished men of culture among those who judge them...But culture and film culture, we submit are not the same thing, although the illusion persists that they are... -*Indian Film Culture*, April-June, 1962.¹⁵

These strong words on the objective of the journal announcing its debut into the Indian film scenario is from the first issue of *Indian Film Culture*, the national journal released by the Federation of Film Societies of India in 1962 from its Calcutta headquarters with the intent of promoting a very specific kind of film culture. With a declaration such as this, the editors of the IFC took upon themselves the authority of not only engendering film culture but also legitimized a pattern of intellectual thought and provocation as representative of this film culture. Therefore, in consecutive issues it brought together articles, on the one hand, on the international film scenario by film academicians such as Marie Seton and Thorold Dickinson of the British Film Institute, and on the other hand, the articles published looked at the conditions of the

¹⁵ From "Indian Film Culture" in *The Film Society Movement in India* (2009) ed. H.N. Narahari Rao; 55-59.

Indian film industry and film appreciation initiatives by the likes of B.D Garga, K.A Abbas, Chidananda Dasgupta and Jag Mohan. In doing so, *Indian Film Culture* claimed for itself the privilege of forming a common cultural ground for discussions on an internationally resonant film culture. Moreover the IFC facilitated the confluence of academic as well as journalistic writing on cinema thereby articulating the methods and conditions of film appreciation. For, not only articles by critics and academicians, but also New Wave filmmakers like Mrinal Sen and Kumar Shahani became readings for film appreciation courses.

Even though *Indian Film Culture* has only fifteen issues, every edition captures a crucial moment of collective articulation that had gained momentum within the movement. To illustrate, the second issue of the IFC raises the demand and need for an institutional space in the form of a Film Akademi for the dissemination of film education and appreciation. Similarly, in the third issue it narrates the histories of film society movements in other countries to set up a contrast with India, and by the fourth issue it welcomes the Customs duty exemption granted to the Federation on a specified number of imported films. The later issues though irregular, but parallel to the New Wave moment take up the cause of the new forms of Indian cinemas, both national and regional. In *Indian Film Culture's* strict ethic of quality writing and cultural consciousness, it actually brought together writings from several corners of the country from different professional fields bonding them in their relationship to the art of cinema. This is perhaps best exemplified in its thirteenth issue, May 1993, which was a commemorative edition on Satyajit Ray which compiles articles by directors, actors, critics, film society members and activists on the success of parallel cinemas, the condition of regional cinemas like Gujarati, Marathi and Tamil, documentary films, the representation of women, reviews of films from film festivals

and a special section on Ray with an unpublished interview. Therefore in 1962, if the first issue had adopted an attitude of cultural supremacy over its readers and envisioned a cultural role for the journal, by its thirty second year of publication in 1993, *Indian Film Culture* had emerged as a national site for reflections and reports on the cultural scenario of cinema in India.

ii) *Close-Up: Perspectives on Film Cultures*

Close-Up was the monthly publication of a film society named *Film Forum*, which was instituted by craft unions in Bombay, but it later merged with the earlier Bombay Film Society and spearheaded the movement in that region for sometime under the direction of several eminent film makers and critics like KA Abbas, Basu Chatterji, Arun Kaul and V.P. Sathe.¹⁶ As is evident from the its representative members as well as the name of the journal, this film society demonstrated a more liberal stance on film culture as it created a space for discussions on all aspects of cinema including form, content, practices and structures of film exhibition and distribution, conditions of filmmaking and also censorship. The democratic nature of the journal was also exhibited in its design and format that along with scenes from films that adorned its covers, included advertisements and announcements from theatre, the parallel film circuit and other literary magazines. Therefore *Close-Up* managed to create a plural literary and cultural space for its members, audiences and readers to engage with.

The unique feature of *Close-Up* as a film society journal was the manner in which it accommodated contrasting points of view, opposing arguments, contemplative reviews yet managed to exude the transformative power of the film

¹⁶ Ibid.

society movement. Film culture as espoused by *Close-Up* was not represented in any fixated discourse but was a constant process of dialogue and discussion that could account for different cinematic practices and cultures in the country. In many ways it replicated the function of the newsletters, but took it further by combining information with substantial argumentation. For instance *Close Up*, January- March, 1969¹⁷, was a number devoted to the issue of censorship in the context of the Indian film scenario which published the proceedings of a ‘Seminar on Censorship’ held in October 1968, organized by the Film Forum to take cognizance of the presence of the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship during that time in the city. This edition was introduced by an editorial on censorship followed by the transcribed speeches at the seminar where speakers included B.K. Karanjia, I.S. Johar, Feroze Rangoonwalla, G. Jagirdar, Satish Bahadur, Nissim Ezekiel, Mohan Segal, Sukhdev, Dina Pathak, T.K.S. Mani, Devendra Goel, Basu Chatterji and Jimmy Ollia.

Taking advantage of the presence in the city of the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship appointed by the Government of India, Film Forum organized a Seminar on Censorship. Shri G.D. Khosla, Chairman, and a few prominent members of the committee were present throughout the Seminar. The proceedings were tape recorded through the courtesy of Films Division. We are grateful to Miss Anees Jung who transcribed and edited the proceedings for *Close-Up*.¹⁸

The report of the discussions at the seminar was followed by a different point of view in the contemplative yet analytic article titled “Thoughts on Censorship” by B.D. Garga. This thematic arrangement of the articles exemplifies as well as brings into focus the triangular circuit of films, discussions and publications that formed the core of the dissemination practices of film societies. Interestingly, the quotation cited above situates the context of the report as well as describes this triad of knowledge production and distribution along with the institutional and individual agents who

¹⁷ See “On Censorship”, “Editorial”, “Censorship Seminar” in *Close-Up*, January- March, 1969, No.3; 3-11, 15-21.

¹⁸ From “Censorship Seminar”, in *Close-Up*, January- March, 1969, No.3; 4.

made this possible like the Films Division and the transcriber cum editor. Another very important cinematic formation that *Close Up*, along with Film Forum, Bombay became representative of was the Indian New Wave Movement with several of its members deeply involved in the support and promotion of the alternative and radical aesthetics of the New Wave. The 1968 issues had frequent editorials and articles on the New Wave encouraging readers to think and participate in the discussions on the form and content of Indian cinema.¹⁹ It also published an extract from the manifesto of the New Cinema Movement issued by Mrinal Sen and Arun Kaul which established a crucial link between the film society movement and their aesthetic project as the extract below substantiates-

New Cinema and New Audience

The two major constituents of the New Cinema Movement are: the enlightened filmmaker and the enlightened audience. The latter, thanks to the dedicated work done by film societies the world over, is a rapidly growing phenomenon. In India about one hundred film societies have succeeded in creating a new discriminating audience which demands better cinema and is ready to take some pains to secure it. But in terms of numerical strength, film societies are not enough to sustain the filmmaker. They have to be supplemented by a new force 'art theatres'. – *New Cinema Movement Manifesto*²⁰

Clearly, *Close Up* was a magazine that anticipated the combined cultural force of the film society movement and the emergent aesthetic movement for better cinema which it promoted vehemently.

The success of Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) was enthusiastically reported along with information on upcoming films by other new directors; for instance, the progress of Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* was mentioned in an article followed by an advertisement of the film in the form of a minimalist poster on a later page. In a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See "New Cinema Movement" in *Close-Up*, July 1968, No.1;36-38

special edition of *Close-Up*, 1970 titled “The Indian Film Scene”, the editorial by Gopal Dutt announced-

Mrinal Sen’s *Bhuvan Shome*, which no commercial film magnet could ever have backed, has been running for many weeks in Calcutta...Other films are in the queue. Kantilal Rathod has completed his *Kanku*. Basu Chatterjee’s *Sara Aakash* is reaching the first print stage. Rochak Pandit (Producer) and Mani Kaul’s (Director) *Uski Roti* is on the editing table. Basu Bhattacharya’s *Adhe Adhure* (financed by the makers themselves) is ready to step out. All these are bold departures in themes and presentation. Written by noted literary writers, they are bound to give our audiences the fresh fare they have been waiting for. – Basu Chatterji²¹

Soon changing modes of finance and production, the state of the film society movement in different parts of the country, and the need for art theatres particularly devoted to alternative film culture became persistent issues in the pages of *Close Up*. However, in the context of a transforming film culture, it was not possible to sustain a regular publication and circulation of the journal and it gradually closed down. However, even as a limited edition journal *Close Up* was able to articulate a discriminating but participatory concept of film culture that dissociated itself from the mainstream only in order to establish deeper links with lived social conditions.

Indian Film Culture and *Close Up* are only two examples of film writing by film societies amongst the several quarterlies, bi monthlies and yearly magazines in different languages circulated regionally as well as nationally depending upon the organization’s capacity. A journal like *Deep Focus* published by the Film Society of Bangalore emerged as a serious film journal during the 1980s bringing in film criticism on regional, documentary, popular and art cinemas along with interviews of filmmakers and technical experts and still manages to bring out critical writings on popular film culture, reviews of festivals, emergent cinematic trends and techniques. In a sense *Deep Focus* continued what *Indian Film Culture*, *Close Up*, *IFSON* had earlier initiated. The historical and cultural contexts in which these magazines were

²¹ See “Editorial” in *Close-Up: The Indian Film Scene*, 197, Special No.5-6. Vol. 3; 4-5.

embedded was reflected in their content; for example *Indian Film Culture* emerged with the conscious intent of engendering intellectual thought into discussions of cinema at a time when there were no other creative sites for appreciation and criticism of films apart from news dailies. In contrast when *Close-Up* made its appearance, newsletters and magazines were already communicative critical tools for film societies for delivering their thoughts and anxieties. Therefore *Close-Up* set out to generate a perspective on the transformative film practices that were emerging as a powerful alternative force against the mainstream Bombay film industry. These film society journals along with several regional periodicals mostly from the eastern and southern film societies like *Calcutta Film Society's Chitrapat*, *North Calcutta Film Society's Chitrabhash*, *Cine Central's Chitrabhikshan*, *Chalachitra's Close Look*, *Chitralkha's* newsletters and documentations constituted a culture of writing on films and filmmakers that had hitherto not been possible. Moreover these literary sites became representative of socially and culturally responsible thought on cinema thereby conferring legitimacy to the intellectual network created by the film society movement.

Academic Publications of Film Societies- Critical Voices and Discourses

In the absence of a discipline such as Cinema Studies it was the discursive sites provided by film societies that produced journals, newsletters and other publications which then generated some of the key discourses on film culture and represented intellectual engagements with cinemas in India. In the Introduction to his book, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction (1998)*, Madhava Prasad begins mapping the field of Indian Film Studies with the problematic lack of serious writing on Indian Cinema that has been restricted to work on Satyajit Ray, Ritwik

Ghatak and a few other auteurs which has hardly taken into account the historical context of Indian Cinemas. Incidentally the film societies were sites from where several such writings emerged, with Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Das Gupta at the forefront of conceptualizing the need for a specific kind of film culture and role for film societies through articles and journal publications against a perceived 'backdrop of mediocrity' that was the Indian film scenario. However, what Prasad side steps as 'restricted work' can also be revisited to locate studies and perspectives on different Indian directors, regional film industries as well as several kinds of film cultures that flourished because of the possibilities provided by the film societies. Moreover, reviewing the writings of film society individuals on film societies' film culture reveals intellectual, cultural and practical similarities as well as internal differences of opinion.

An illustrative example of high cultural notions and intellectual differences can be found in the articles of Chidananda Das Gupta who was a founder member of the Calcutta Film Society, one of the earliest film societies in the country and the editor of *Indian Film Quarterly*. Das Gupta wrote many articles in English and Bengali, assessing the condition and aesthetic project of film societies. Under the title "Film Society Movement in India", in 1965, Das Gupta suggested that the task of managing the film society movement was difficult especially with "memberships ranging from 50-1,600, changing personnel and distant locations ranging from Shillong to Indore, Agra to Hyderabad, Ahmedabad to Madras, Nadiad to Naihati." (Dasgupta, 1965: 75) However according to him

with greater effort on the part of film societies themselves, help from the government and the film industry there is no reason why the movement should not grow and result in the creation of an influential new audience for the best products of Indian Cinema.(75)

This sentiment was again echoed by Arun Kaul in 1970 in an article with the same title, but this time voiced in the rhetoric of the movement- “I envisage a revolution in Indian cinema within the next five years. After all if the minority audiences will not back the minority films who else will?”(Kaul, 1970: 87) During the 1970s such rhetorical and hopeful proclamations were at their peak alongside the heated disputes surrounding the emergence of the Indian New Wave, the grammar of this kind of cinema and what it represented. Yet by 1983 in another review of the condition of film societies under the same title, Dasgupta was deeply critical of the growing number of members and doubtful regarding the survival of film societies. As much as such debates characterize discourses coming out of film societies, they also bring out or rather reveal contradictions, doubts and ruptures within the movement.

Another moment of the clash of perspectives was the heated debates on the emergence of the New Wave. On the one hand, Satyajit Ray as the founder President of the Federation of Film Societies of India questioned the credibility of the emerging avant garde directors to produce the realities of Indian conditions or their form to connect with the audiences.²² His apprehensions were taken up by Bikram Singh in “More about the Indian New Wave”²³ arguing for the validity of these formal departures in strong words. He wrote,

It is obviously not enough for Mr. Ray that the experiment part in these young filmmakers’ efforts lies in discarding the bulk of the idiot clichés of commercial cinema, in aspiring within the framework of their talents and stringent circumstances, to provide articulate and relevant commentaries on the life around us. (Singh, 1972: 22)

In a series of subsequent replies and arguments, this debate between Ray and Singh spilled over the following issues of *Filmfare*, reflecting the national significance of

²² See Satyajit Ray, “An Indian New Wave” in *Our Films, Their Films (1994)*. This article appeared in *Filmfare*, October 8, 1971.

²³ See Bikram Singh, “More about the Indian ‘New Wave’”, *Filmfare*, January 14, 1972.

the emergent 'new wave' or avant garde forms in the Indian film scenario. On the other hand, film societies like the *Film Forum*, Bombay and *Chitralkha*, Trivandrum plunged into promoting the emergent forms of experimental and parallel cinemas. Therefore film societies had become site of contestations. Ironically, post this moment, the histories of the New Wave have found representation in works such as Aruna Vasudev's *The New Indian Cinema* (1986), Throraval's *The Cinemas of India* (2000) and John Hood's specific compilation on directors, *The Essential Mystery: Major Filmmakers of Indian Art Cinema* (2000). However, the significant role of the film society movement in the emergence, exhibition and promotion of experimental and art cinemas has remained unexplored.

Moreover, even from the peripheries, film societies have characteristically played their part in keeping their histories or the memories of their actions alive through several useful documentations on their inception and activities, compilations and readers on selected directors as well as reprints of selected writings from back issues. So a detailed history of the formation, foundation and activities of the *Suchitra Film Society*, Bangalore with lists of films screened and festivals held during the course of its emergence has been recollected by H.N.Narhari Rao in his book titled *My Days with the Film Society Movement* (2001). Other film societies in Bengal have ventured into publishing special auteur editions on Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen with articles and interviews reprinted from their periodicals. The *Chalachitra Charcha* editions on the three auteurs of Bengali cinema bring together reflections of these directors on their art as well as responses to each others' works at different points in time. Furthermore, these compilations are also indicative of the collaborations between film societies to consolidate material from their reserves for posterity.

In this process of documenting thematic and issue based articles from back issues of periodicals some publications like *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties (1993)* by Celluloid Chapter, Jamshedpur and *Chitrapat (2007)* by Calcutta Film Society have opened up possible archives for further studies on early cinema in India. Therefore these compilations have emerged as potential readers and resource books for film historians and cinema scholarship in the contemporary context of Indian Cinema Studies.

Conclusion: Interface with Academia

Lastly, I want to end on a note of contemplation about the interface of the film society movement and the discipline of Indian Cinema Studies. Amidst the continual transformation of technologies relating to film industrial practices, cinematic cultures of reception and exhibition as well as the vastly unrecorded histories of Indian cinemas, the discipline of Cinema Studies is steadily gaining ground. Several academics associated with the field also have a history of interaction, participation and experience of film society culture. But since the collapse of the movement from the late 1980s onwards coincided with the beginnings of Film Studies in India, the relationship between these academics and film societies has been marked by departures. Moinak Biswas elaborates on why Film Studies was instituted by moving away from the “existing cinephile discourse” of the film society movement that was marked by “auteurist bias, the focus on select films, (which) prevented historical investigation, reproduced notions of art and the artist which appeared problematic in the face of the challenges from Theory”²⁴ It was a “divergence” that reflected an

²⁴ See Moinak Biswas, “Film Studies, Practice and Asian Cinema: Points of Re-connection”. This paper was presented at the ‘International Conference on Asian Cinema: Towards a Research and

incommensurability between film society discourse and emerging theoretical positions. Therefore, film academics not only established themselves in differentiation from the selective and increasingly problematic approaches of film society cinephilia, but also shifted focus to the industrial cinemas that were antithetical to film society cultures (Biswas, 2007). Biswas probes this past in order to wonder at the possibility of bridging the ontological gap between Indian Cinema Studies and new cinephilia. At the end of this chapter on the written material productions of the film society movement, I wish to extend Biswas's disciplinary and methodological concerns by indicating possibilities from the interface of Indian Cinema academia with the older cinephilia from its originary moment.

This historical investigation of the film society movement, reconstructed from a range of archival materials and memories can look forward to and imagine possibilities that in the forms and methods of historical analysis taken from Cinema Studies can contribute to the history of cinephilia in Indian film cultures. Indian Cinema academics with their personal histories, affiliations, interactions as well as oppositions to the film society movement possess memories and experiences of this outmoded cinephilia that can be crucial to producing the history of the phases of cinephilia within the country. Finally, of the many roles that the Indian film academic has historically come to identify with, namely film critic, festival jury, filmmaker, cultural theorist and film historian, it is only fair that the cinephile within finds a significant form of articulation.

Teaching Agenda' organized by the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore in February, 2007. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/33220837/Moinak-Biswas-New-Cinephilia> (accessed on July 10, 2012)

Conclusion: Lives and Afterlives

This dissertation has been a historiographic quest to uncover the history of the film society movement in India. It is through the trope of the journey, implying physical, spatial, imaginary as well as temporal movement, that the cinematic cultures initiated, promoted and practiced by film societies have been examined. Each chapter is informed by an aspect of temporal displacement; so for instance, the first one reconstructs the early networks between urban and rural film societies thereby mapping the trail of alternative cinephilia. Similarly, the second chapter revisits these alternative sites and routes of film travel through the memories of the people who contributed to the film society movement in order to account for the activities, interactions and participation that constituted this cinephilia. Finally, the modes through which film society cinephilia travelled and survived over generations are enumerated and analyzed in the third chapter. Therefore, through various narrative, factual and evidential elements the history of the film society movement as an influential cultural formation has been addressed in this dissertation.

Any historical project involves the dual consciousness of the ‘object (or period) of study’ as well as the ‘act of writing’ that establishes it. Partha Chatterjee explains this duality as inherent in the signification of the word ‘history’, which implies both, the “historical works” and the “reality” which it captures. Hence, in Chatterjee’s words, the process of historical knowledge is determined by “a line separating the past as a reality that is no longer present (and therefore as something that can only be represented) from the ways of writing about the past which are part of

the historian's present" (Chatterjee, 2002: 12). Therefore, history is not only informed but also (in several cases) comes alive because of the chronicler's methods and attempts. This project examines the period of the film society movement by navigating through past records, contemporary compilations as well as personal and collective memories. Therefore, this history is as much an account of the past as it is a contemporary narration evoking previous networks of film culture to be able to historicize existent and newer cinephiliac formations. Hence, two methodological approaches have shaped this attempt: as discussed, the first has been the framework of history writing which addresses the existence of film societies as the earliest cultural collectives formed around cinema in India; and the second has been the cultural, historical and theoretical concept of cinephilia. Moreover, it is by using the mode of cinephilia, that the journey between the past and contemporary relevance of film societies has been bridged in order to generate a cultural history of the movement.

Cinephilia as a historical formation as well as an emotional engagement surrounding cinema is a crucial concept for emerging film histories because of the scope it provides to simultaneously engage with the past and present. Moreover, histories of cinephilia contain within them accounts of pleasures, anxieties and memories surrounding cinema, which are key resources for film history. The film society movement as discussed in this dissertation has been reconstructed through the affective force field of cinephilia, constituted by written archives, recorded memories, contemporary articulations and personal interactions. Consequently, in the course of this historiographic journey, several existing film societies and their continuing cinephiliac practices have been brought to knowledge. In conclusion, it would be useful to contemplate on their survival strategies amidst emergent forms of cinephilia

and cinematic transformations to evaluate the significance of this history in the present context of Cinema Studies.

The Film Society Movement emerged around the cinematic pleasures of celluloid film cultures. The international and art cinemas that film societies promoted, were deeply enmeshed in both their aesthetic as well as material forms. If film society cinephilia developed around the modes of access and availability of these cinemas, then the end of these cultures was marked by transformation from celluloid to digital technologies. Mark Betz points out in the case of Western cinephilia that although art cinemas and directors have remained in memory through written critical and academic discourses but “what is dead, however, is that particular object of Sontag’s age of cinephilia: European art cinema as an intellectual, even viable commercial force on (the) contemporary American and British scene” (Betz, 2009: 3). For film society cinephiles, these films were hardly present at the commercial theatres and hence it is the film society screenings that formed sites of reception. However, the possibility of acquiring and accessing them on home screens gradually led to the end of such collective reception. Although, VHS and DVDs created opportunities for frequent and detailed lessons in appreciation, it was not enough to sustain the momentum of the movement.

Almost twenty years after the waning of the movement, new forms of cinephilia have surfaced primarily in cities, which display similar currents as that of the film societies. Moinak Biswas, while observing emerging urban film groups around DVD screenings, LCD projectors and discussions categorizes them as “a reincarnation of the film society in the digital era” (Biswas, 2007:1). In these groups one sees the desires for alternative cinematic cultures that separate them from the popular industrial mainstream which is generically identified by the mediatized

bracket of Bollywood or Tollywood et al. Also, as Biswas notices in his analysis, these cinephiliac practices have evolved around specific directors like Wong Kar Wai, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, Edward Yang, Jia Zhangke and Kim Ki-duk, hence exuding a tremendous excitement around Asian Cinema (1). However, these tendencies towards alternative films and auteuristic appreciation not only exhibit similarities with the film society moment but also reveal the possibility of such cultures developing even outside community gatherings. The rapidly transforming market and technologies of cinematic receptions have paradoxically made this cinephilia a connected as well as dispersed urban syndrome.

In contrast, the film society formations were marked by their organized network and the sense of collective enterprise. Even though the emerging trends of new cinephilia have been successfully housed by some older film societies such as *Cine Central*, Calcutta, which conducts a yearly festival of Asian cinemas parallel to the official Film Festival of city, these survival strategies are not directed towards resurrecting the erstwhile cinephiliac movement. In other words, though digital technologies have reintroduced cinephilia around non mainstream cinemas in the public domain, rejuvenated few film societies and encouraged parallel receptions, the networks that have been created are scattered and virtual. Although they are fundamentally different formations from film societies, but, through their interests and devotion to cinema these new cinephiliac groups have connected as well as attracted academic attention. In my opinion, in this new embodiment of cinephilia, along with the discovery of newer cinemas and film cultures lies the potential for revisiting untouched histories of cinema and its people.

Recognizing this new cinephiliac base, different kinds of film clubs such as the *Taj Enlighten Film Society* and *PVR Rare Film Club* have emerged screening

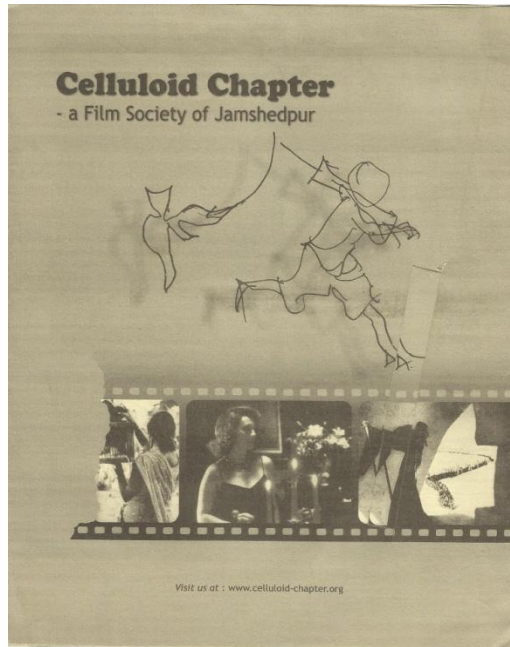
classic national and international along with independent films as part of their programmes. However, because of the expensive and exclusive nature of these clubs, they remain largely inaccessible to larger sections of urban audiences. Alternatively, websites, blogs and social networking sites remain primary discursive sites for cinephiles to discover, interact and engage in debates on cinema. It is at this juncture that I imagine that a need for a cultural knowledge of the film society movement arises. New forms of cinephilia are results of widespread explosion of visual cultures and virtual accessibility to cinemas ushered in by globalization. Yet, present networks of multiplexes, elite film clubs, glamorized film festivals and processes of virtual technologies have also enclosed boundaries of film cultures within urban spaces, and certain elite and privileged classes. Unlike the film societies which even with limited resources persevered to make film cultures accessible to alternative masses, these cinephiliac trends though resonating with global film cultural associations have little reach within the country. As the new ways of appreciating cinema through virtual media are on the increase, even outside of the trends of new cinephilia, the historical perspective of the film society movement can not only be useful for academic reflection, but also provide critical methods of articulation for new cinephilia, so as to be able examine, and perhaps resist, the market processes attempting to define them.



Relics of the Film Society Network: Letterboxes of Calcutta Film Society and Cine Central



Down the Memory Lane: Bharat Bhavan, the building which houses the Calcutta Film Society and the office of the Federation of Film Societies in India, Eastern Region



Film Workshops / Appreciation Courses :

Celluloid Chapter aims to inculcate better understanding and appreciation of cinema among young intellectuals. To further these aims, the organization continues to hold workshops on Photography, Visual Media, Film Understanding, Film Appreciation and even filmmaking.

Seminars and Meet the Director session :

Retrospective of films and Meet The Director sessions have proved to be memorable and informative occasions for Celluloid Chapter members and film buffs alike. Big names and international luminaries in film making have adorned these exciting events and the list of such big names includes Mrinal Sen, Basu Bhattacharya, Basu Chatterjee, Govind Nihalani, Shyam Benegal, Balu Mahendra, Arifam Shyam Sharma, Goutam Ghose, Buddhadev Dasgupta, Aparna Sen, Izhtak Rubin, Keith Saggars, Rituparno Ghosh, M Sukumaran Nair and Sushant K Mishra.

Discussions on African Cinema, Feminist Cinema, New German Cinema, Literature and Cinema, Music and Cinema, Theatre and Cinema, History of the Indian Stage, have proved to be major points of interest amongst Chapter members.

Celluloid Chapter, in association with Sangnet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Kolkata, organized a five day Theatre Festival including daily seminars and a theatre workshop conducted by the eminent H Kanhaiyalal Singh, turned out to be a boon for theatre workers and drama lovers of this steel city.

What we did and keep on doing ...

Four such film appreciation courses have already seen the light of day in the Chapter's exciting sojourn till date. Two such courses were for school children that were organized in association with Children's Film Society of India while the other two were held jointly with National Film Archive of India, Pune and faculties of Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata.

Film workshops organized by Celluloid Chapter contained packages of internationally acclaimed films by masters like Sergei Eisenstein, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopal Krishnan Osman Sembene, Marta Meszaros, Werner Herzog, R.W. Fassbinder, Akira Kurosawa, Ingmer Bergman and Tarkovsky.

A workshop on 'Understanding Cinema' with eminent film critic Mamoun Hassan, proved very effective. An Animation Film Making workshop with Mr. Gerald Conn at the helm, proved to be another successful essay.

Celluloid Chapter brochure enlisting various activities and events

APPLICATION FORM FOR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

To
CALCUTTA FILM SOCIETY
B-5, Bharat Bhavan
3, Chittaranjan Avenue
Calcutta-700 072

I am in sympathy with the aims of the Society and would like to be a general member. I pay herewith Rs. _____ as subscription for _____ and Rs. _____ as admission fee by Cash/Crossed Cheque drawn in favour of Calcutta Film Society.

I undertake to abide by the rules of the society.

Date : _____ Signature _____

Name { In Block
Address { Letters

Telephone No. : _____

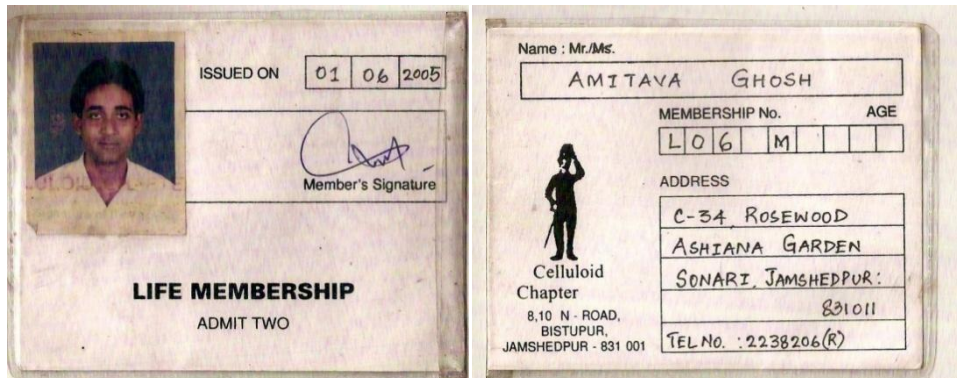
Occupation : _____

Proposed by : _____ (Membership No. _____)

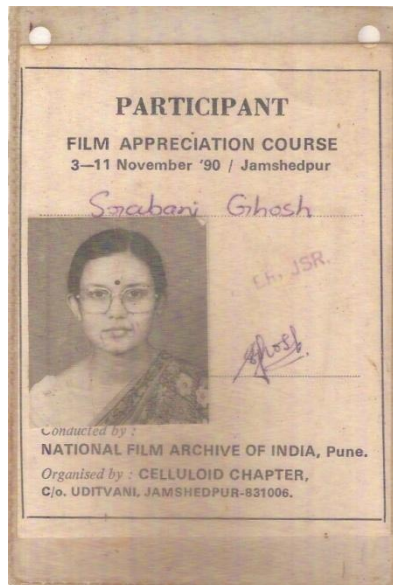
Seconded by : _____ (Membership No. _____)

For Office use only

Date of Admission : _____
Membership No. : _____
Hony. Genl. Secretary/Jt. Secretary



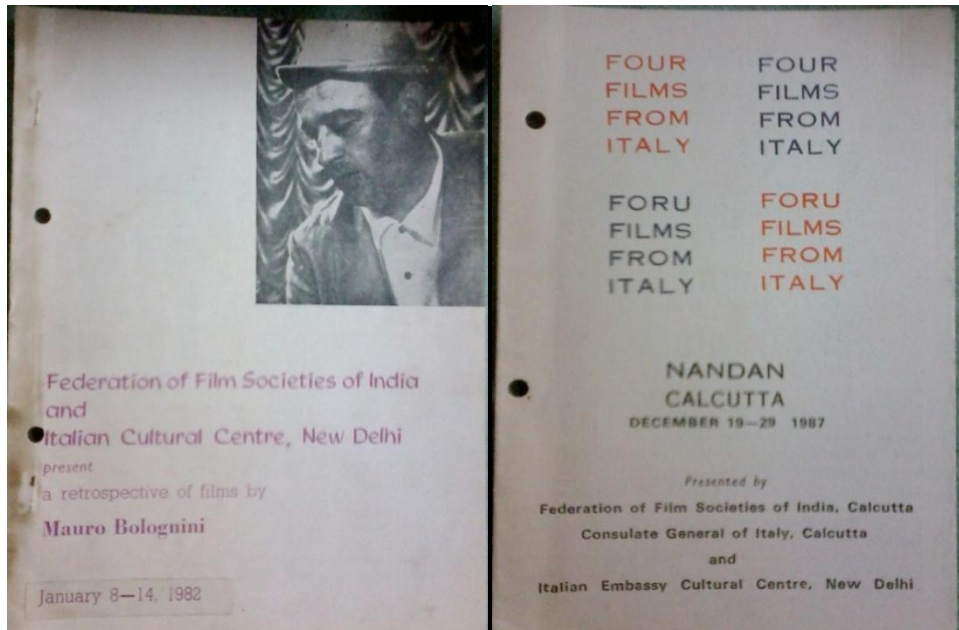
Film Society Membership



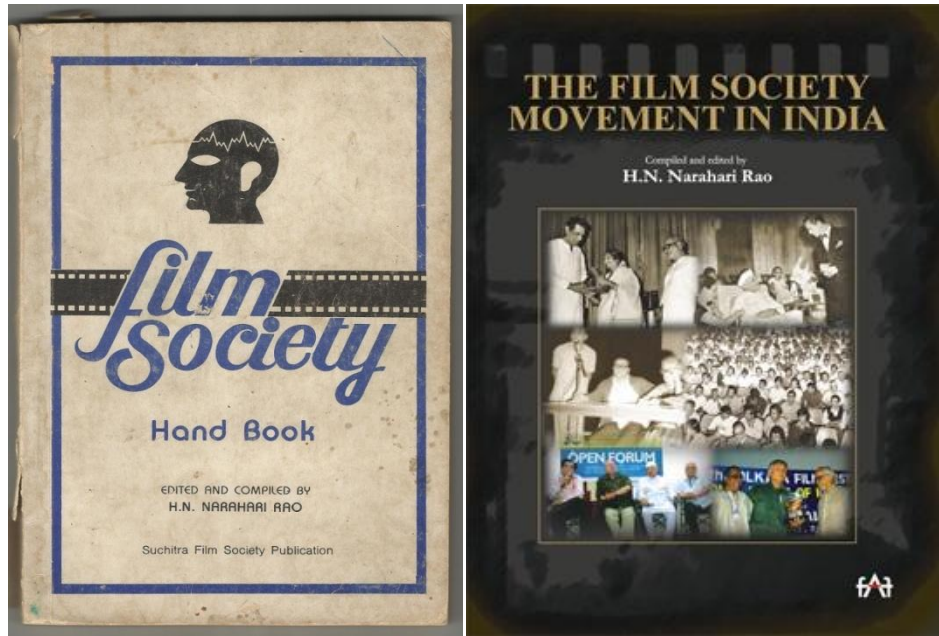
NFAI/FTII		FILM APPRECIATION COURSE '90						FTII/NFA	
		Time Table							
		Fifth week (From 11.6.90 to 16.6.90)							
Day/Date	9.30 to 11.00 a.m. a.m.	11.30 to 1.00 a.m. p.m.	3.00 to 5.00 p.m. p.m.	5.30 p.m.			9.00 p.m.		
Mon 11	History of Cinema (SC)	Voices of Baliapal Discussion with Ranjan Palit	Dance and Cinema (SK)	Bach Bahadur Hindi/1989/91 mins/B. Das Gupta Discussion with Das Gupta (BDG)			Red Desert (Italy/1964/Col Antoniou/116m. (GC)		
Tue 12	Colour in Cinema (AK)	Govt. & Film Policy (BK)	Film & other Arts (SB)	Subarnarekha/Bengali with Eng. subtitle's 1962/113 mins./Ghatak (SC)			Double Suicide/Japan/1969 Shinoda/106 mins. (SB)		
Wed 13	Discussion on Subarnarekha (GC)	Film & Other Arts (SB)	TV Documentaries (BK)	Basi/Telugu/1988/94 mins B. Narsing Rao (BNR)			Memories of underdevelopm Cuba/1968/Alea/100mins. (GC)		
Thu 14	Discussion with B. Narsing Rao and A.K. Bir	Colour in Cinema (AK)	Film & Visual Arts (RP)	King Lear/France USA/ 1987/Godard/88 mins. (SC)			Man of Marble (Poland/1977 Wajda/160 mins. (AZ)		
Fri 15	History of Cinema (SC)	Film & Visual Arts (RP)	Film Animation (Ram Mohan)	Dhara/1987/22 mins/Chabria Ek Sangemil se mulaqat/ Meeting a Milestone (Film on Bismillah Khan/ 1990/ 88 mins./Gautam Ghosh			To be announced		
Sat 16	Discussion	Valedictory Function Chief Guest-Shyam Benegal	Summing up	To be announced			To be announced		

AK - Arun Khopkar BK - Bikram Singh GC - Gayatri Chatterjee RP - Ratan Parimoo
 SK - Dr. Sunil Kothari SC - Suresh Chabria RM - Ram Mohan AZ - Anil Zankar
 SB - Samik Bannerjee

Schedule and Participant Card: NFAI and FTII conducted Film Appreciation Course '90



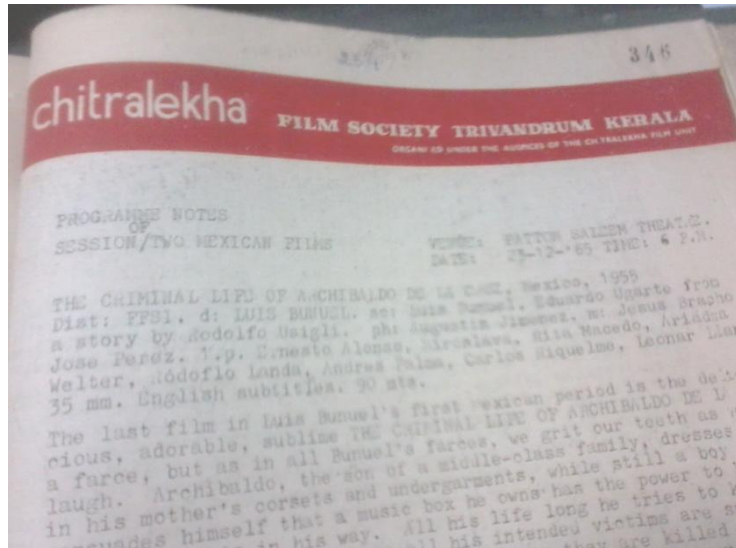
Networks of Alternative Film Cultures: Brochures announcing film festivals in collaboration with cultural consulates



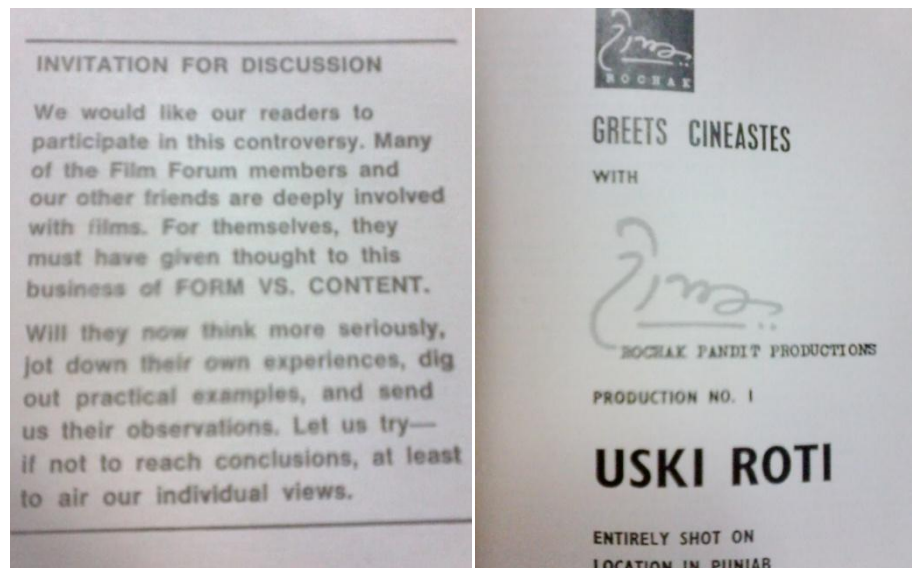
Literary Archives: Institutional Records of the Movement



Sites of Writing: Journals and Publications



Programme Notes: Chitralkha Film Society, Kerala



Recognizing the Alternative Audience: *Film Forum*'s invitation urging members to participate in the emerging debate between form and content in cinema. Also, an advertisement for Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti*, directly addressing the film society 'cineastes'.

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