

Film Society Movement in India

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“Film Society Movement took big strides when those with vision, who loved cine passionately, and who were not bureaucratic or puny people, guided it. Barring a few areas, the movement has now become moribund” – Prof. Vijaya Mulay. (Visiting Scholar, McGill University, Canada; Pioneer Leader of the Film Society Movement in India; Former President of the Federation of Film Societies of India.)



August Lumiere and Luis Lumiere offered the world a wonderful experience on December 28, 1895 at a café in Paris. They showed an exhibition of moving images. The history of cinema started off. And in the year 1920, again in Paris, Luis de Louviers established the first film club of the world. Name of his organization was “Cine Club de France”. The history of the Film Society Movement began. In the year 1924, “Cine Club de France” was established. Some twenty more film societies were formed in the next three years in France. The “Cine Club” known to the French was the “Film Society” to the English. The first “Film Society” was established in London in October 25, 1925. Eminent personalities like Anthony Asquith, Sidney Burnstein, Ivor Montague, H G Wells, George Bernard Shaw were among the founder members of the society. Many other film societies were formed in Germany, Australia, Canada, USA and in other countries almost during the same period.

the same period. In the year 1930, the first Central Council of Film Societies, the "Canadian Federation of Film Societies" was formed in Canada. In 1935, the "British Federation of Film Societies" was formed consisting of 26 film societies of that country. In 1936, the "Central Films Council" was formed in Scotland.

With the advent of the World War-II in 1939, this spread of the formation of the film societies came to a halt. Many film societies got closed. The state of the few that survived became very poor. Some existed with their entities in stake. But after the war was over, there was seen an unprecedented enthusiasm in the Film Society Movement. Many new film societies were established. The number of members of the old film societies increased heavily. "Federation of Film Societies of France" was formed in 1945. In 1948, "Australian Federation of Film Societies"; in 1950, "Federation of Film Societies of Tunisia"; in 1952, "Federation of Film Societies of England, Wales, North Ireland"; in 1954, "Federation of Film Societies of South and Central Africa" and in 1959, "Federation of Film Societies of India" were established. Earlier, "International Federation of Film Societies" was established on September 16, 1947. Arabia, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, East & West Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Panama, Poland, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Sudan, Tunisia, Uruguay, USA, USSR, Yugoslavia and many more countries became the members of this international organization in the next twenty years. By the middle of the 1960s more than five hundred film societies were formed in France. The number surpassed the 12,000 mark in the next ten years.



In India, the first film society was formed in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1937. The "Amateur Cine Society" was formed by the enterprise of film critic Rudi Laden, documentary maker Dr. Pati, Dereck Jephrys and others. One of its prime movers was Stanley Jepson, the then Editor of the 'Illustrated Weekly of India' – one of the most prestigious publications of India brought out by the House of the 'Times of India' Publication. Later in 1942, The "Bombay Film Society" was formed by the documentary maker Clement Baptiste, K L Khadpur and commentator Samuel Barkley. Although these two societies worked for long, the leadership required to elevate the subject to a movement could not be provided by these film societies. "Bombay Film Society" was

registered officially by the Government in 1943. The membership fee was Rs.12/- half yearly. In those days this amount was fairly expensive. These two early film societies did not have much influence on the larger content of the Film Society Movement in India. The first organization actively pioneered the movement was the "Calcutta Film Society" formed on 5th October 1947. The main organizers included stalwarts like Satyajit Ray, Chidananda Dasgupta, Nimai Ghosh & Ors. eminent people like Harishadhan Dasgupta, Subrata Mitra, Shudhi Pradhan, Ajay Kar, and Jyotirmoy Roy were also associated with this society in its initial period. By the 2nd Annual General Conference of this film society on 9th April 1949, the number of members rose to a total of 75. The conference elected Prof. Prasnata Mahalanabish & Hiron Kumar Sanyal as the President & Chairman and Satyajit Ray & Chidananda Dasgupta as the Joint Secretaries. The significant members of the advisory committee included Dilip Kumar Ghosh of 'Signet Press' and Charuprakash Ghosh of 'Bharatiya Gana Natya Sangha'. Noted film personalities like Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Mriganka Sekhar Ray and others were associated with this movement at some point of time.

Four years after the inception of "Calcutta Film Society", the "Patna Film Society" was formed, courtesy, the active enterprise of Vijaya Mulay. The President of the 1st managing committee was Prof. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay. Vijaya Mulay and Arun Roy Chowdhury were the Secretaries. In the beginning, there were about 20 members. The first film screened was Eisentein's '*Battleship Potemkin*'. The "Delhi Film Society" was established by the end of 1956. It started functioning actively from 1957. The first managing committee consisted of 5 members namely Vijaya Mulay, Murlu Wasi, Krishna Kripalani, Gopalan and Chanchal Sarkar. There were 20 members to begin with. The yearly contribution amounted to Rs.10/- for each member. The inaugural film for this society was again '*Battleship Potemkin*'. Others mention-worthy personalities connected with "Delhi Film Society" in the formative years were Aruna Asaf Ali, Indira Gandhi (later the Prime Minister of India), I K Guzal (later the Prime Minister of India) and the like. In 1957 the "Madras Film Society" was established.



In the year 1959, in a meeting at the residence of the then Secretary of 'Sahitya Academy' - Krishna Kripalani, it was decided that a central organization should be constructed. Following this, on 13th December 1959, in Delhi, the "Federation of Film Societies of India" was formed combining the film societies of Calcutta (now Kolkata),

Delhi, Bombay (now Mumbai), Madras (now Chennai) and Roorkee. Satyajit Ray was the Founder President. There were three Vice Presidents, namely, Ammu Swaminathan, Robert Hawkins and S Gopalan. Both Vijaya Mulay and Chidananda Dasgupta were the Secretaries while D Pramanik and Abul Hasan jointly held the post of Treasurer. At one time I K Guzal was designated as the Treasurer. Satyajit Ray was the President of the Federation till his death. Indira Gandhi was once elected as the Vice President of the Federation and held that post even after she became the Minister of Information & Broadcasting of the Union Government. The Central Office of the Federation is in Calcutta (Kolkata) since its inception. The following is the complete text of the 'Memorandum of Association of the Federation of Film Societies of India:

Memorandum of Association

Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI)

As adopted by seven representatives of film societies in India at the meeting held on December 13, 1959 at the residence of Sri Krishna Kripalani (then Secretary of the Sahitya Academy) at New Delhi.

(Registered under the Societies Registration act XXI of 1860)

1. The name of the Society shall be the Federation of Film Societies of India, hereinafter referred to as 'The Federation'.
2. The registered office of the Society shall be situated in the State of West Bengal in the city of Calcutta.
3. The objects for which the Federation is established shall be:
 - a. To promote the study of the film as an art and a social force.
 - b. To encourage the production of films of artistic value.
 - c. To promote public appreciation of films of artistic value.
 - d. To promote and coordinate the activities of film societies towards the achievement of the above aims, particularly in the matter of organization of showing film classics and outstanding current films from all over the world.
 - e. To promote research on the cinema.
 - f. To cooperate with national and international organizations having similar objects.
4. The above objects will be realized through the following activities:

- a. To enroll individual film societies as its members.
 - b. To promote the formation of film societies and the development of the film society movement all over the country.
 - c. To raise funds and/or loans from member societies and from other sources and receive and pay grants, bequests, donations, subscriptions, etc.
 - d. To establish and maintain museums, collections, libraries, auditoria, etc. and to translate, compile, collect, publish, purchase, or sell any literature bearing upon any subject relating to films.
 - e. To organize and participate in film festivals, lectures, seminars, conferences, etc. in India and abroad.
 - f. To establish and maintain liaison with national and international organizations having similar aims and objects.
 - g. To own, buy or sell or purchase, hire or mortgage all property.
5. At the time of adoption of this memorandum of association the Committee of administration of the Federation consisted of the following members:

President : Satyajit Ray.
 Vice Presidents : Ammu Swaminathan; Robert E Hawkins; S Gopalan.
 Joint Secretaries : Vijaya Mulay; Chidananda Dasgupta.
 Joint Treasurers : D Pramanik; Abul Hasan.
 Members : R Anantharaman; Rita Ray; K L Khandpur;
 Jag Mohan; A Rehman; A Roychowdhry.

6. We, the several persons whose names and addresses are given below, having associated ourselves for the purposes described above, do hereby subscribe our names to form ourselves into the Society.

Vijaya Mulay (Delhi Film Society)
 Arun Roychowdhury (Patna Film Society)
 Tryambakal Patahk (Roorkee Film Society)
 Robert E Hawkins (Bombay Film Society)
 E B Samuel (Madras Film Society)
 Hiran Kumar Sanyal (Calcutta Film Society)
 Chidananda Dasgupta (Calcutta Film Society)

