



FILM: **THE LAST FILM SHOW**

FDG RATING: 4.0 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Pan Nalin: *director*  
Bhavin Rabari: *actor, Samay*  
Bhavesh Shrimali: *actor, Fazal*

DATE: May 21, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE LAST FILM SHOW**

For many of us, the 2021 Indian film, *The Last Film Show*, was infused with the magic of movies that we had expected in Spielberg's film, *The Fabelmans*, which showed us Steven's childhood fascination with special effects but then focused on his family relationships. *The Last Film Show*, directed by Pan Nalin, is semi-autobiographical, and has so many captivating visuals and the story telling aspect is so visceral it calls to mind the unforgettable 1988 *Cinema Paradiso*.

From the minute the film begins, we are dazzled with the gorgeous colors of Indian culture, foods, spices, clothing. And because nine-year-old Samay, (outstanding performance by 10 year old Bhavin Rabari) is captivated by how light shines through glass, many scenes are viewed through his eyes as he holds up colored pieces of glass so that images change color or become distorted.

His parents take him to see his first film, a several hour journey by train, as a warning. Films are considered sleazy entertainment but this film is religious so his father allows him to see it and warns him never to see another film. Naturally, Samay disobeys. He uses the coins he has collected while helping his father sell tea to train passengers, to buy a ticket to the film at the Galaxy Cinema. A few days later, he sneaks into the cinema through the back but gets thrown out when discovered. While outside the back door of the cinema, he meets the projectionist, Fazl, who takes him under his wing, shows him the projection room, and teaches him about film in exchange for some of the very tasty traditional food that Samay's mother has made for her son and packed in his school lunch kit. We really liked the relationship that formed between Fazal and Samay.

Samay is a born story teller. One of our favorite scenes is when he lines up many matchbook boxes that have picturesque covers and relates a story for his young buddies by moving the matchbook boxes around, giving life to the faces or locations on the covers. The comradery of Samay and his band of buddies was completely delightful as they all help him in his quest to find junk yard parts to build a hand-cranked projector from cardboard boxes and shards of tinted glass so they can watch some of the film strips he has taken from the Galaxy. We later learn where he got the makeshift projection screen as Samay's mother says she cannot find her white sari. It's a joy to see the boys riding on their bicycles peering through bits of film strips like goggles. We were amazed at Samay's ingenuity and appreciated that his approach to cinema was driven by his obsession with understanding the projection of light. His teacher at school recognizes and supports the boy's quest for knowledge.

One discussion participant who really enjoyed the film noted that it is a complete story. But a few thought it bordered on sentimentality. Another comment was that it couldn't decide whether it should be recollection or fantasy. It definitely had a dreamy quality. What we missed was all the film makers that this movie paid homage to from Sergio Leone to Satyajit Ray and even part of the closing credits expresses "Gratitude for illuminating the path..." followed by a short list of names that consists of the Lumière brothers, Eadweard Muybridge, David Lean, Stanley Kubrick, and Andrei Tarkovsky.

Today, we are experiencing the demise of the film strip and our favorite movie theaters, as digital streaming proliferates. Nalin illustrates the tragic end of watching films using traditional technology in one of the most powerful, poignant final scenes. We witness hundreds of reels of film strips melting in huge boiling vats, being turned into different colored plastic bracelet bangles sold in the marketplace. "...ribbons of celluloid are melted down and reincarnated as bracelets and cheap silverware." The camera pans across hundreds of bangles worn by women in train cars as the names of film makers are enumerated in the sound track, underscoring the tragic loss of their cinematic creations.

The performances in *The Last Film Show* were excellent, the cinematography was luminous capturing the colorful culture and especially the beauty of light cast or filtered in unusual ways, and precocious Samay was completely engaging. As film enthusiasts, many of us are partial to films about the love of movies and found this one delightfully entertaining. *The Last Film Show* scored a shining 4.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!  
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