

# Review: Red Sea title 'Last Film Show' is a haunting ode to cinema



JEDDAH: Pan Nalin's autobiographical sketch "Last Film Show," which is India's Oscars submission and is part of the ongoing second edition of the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah, is a heartening look at a young boy's dreams, made more wonderful by the innocence reflected in the work.



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Set in the lush green village of Chalala in the northern Indian state of Gujarat, Nalin takes us on a nostalgic trip to his boyhood. He discovers and understands the power of the movie medium and its ability to transport us to a dream world. After all, cinema is but dream, magical and mystical.

Samay (Bhavin Rabari) is the son of a humble tea seller. When he is not helping his father, he invariably bunks school and whiles away his hours thinking about movies. The father (Dipen Raval) keeps reminding him that they belong to an upper caste and passions like cinema bode ill for them.

“Watching films is not respectable,” he often admonishes the boy, sometimes not sparing the rod. Samay rebels and makes fun of his father and his ideas — “you sell tea... my teacher says that there are only two castes – one who speaks English and one who does not,” he tells his father.

Samay is steadfast in his resolve to find ways of making cinema a part of his life, and lucky for him he finds a single screen theater where he befriends the projectionist, Fazal (Bhavesh Shrimali).



Pan Nalin. (Supplied)

However, Samay is not interested in just watching movies, he wants to learn the art of how they are made and finds ingenious ways of doing so. He and his friends steal film reels and set up their own little show with the help of a variety of unbelievable gadgets, including a sewing machine.

It is fascinating to watch Samay's inventions, but "Last Film Show" has a deeper meaning. It is an ode to cinema, the kind of cinema we grew up watching in small, single screen theaters. There is a very disturbing scene, when we see Fazal's theatre being demolished to make way for a multiplex replete with digital equipment. It is telling that Nalin's work comes at a time when there is a lot of anguish and uncertainty around the future of the big screen as streaming platforms continue their advance.

Beyond this, "Last Film Show" has gorgeous imagery, emotional relationships and offers a powerful take on caste and class. It is also about the need to move with the times — "Last Film Show" poignantly embodies change at an unhurried pace with an excellent performance by its young lead who is a natural star.

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