



Satyajit Ray's directorial debut was with *Pather Panchali*, based on the autobiographical childhood story of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's novel with the same name. The film is a masterpiece and Ray showed the world how with very limited resources and absolutely amateur actors, he could create a gem.

Pather Panchali in 1955 opened to empty screens with most critics dubbing it as an effort to portray India's poverty to the western world. But *Pather Panchali* is much beyond criticism and is ranked at 12 by *The Guardian* (2010) as the best ever made art movie and is shown at most film institutes, where this movie is dissected thread bare for its sheer brilliance.

After winning the Cannes, Berlin and Venice film festivals, it is ranked one of the finest films ever made. Ray's *Apu Trilogy* (1955–1959), three films telling the story of a poor country boy, Apu's growth to adulthood and *Asani Sanket*, (1973), telling the story of a famine in Bengal are films of that golden era.

Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa in his *Rashomon* (1950), talks about four witnesses' contradictory accounts of a rape and murder. Through *Ikiru*, (1952), he talks about a Tokyo bureaucrat struggling in his meaningless life.

Tokyo Story (1953) by Yasujiro Ozu, explores social changes of the times. It is the story of an aging couple who travel to Tokyo to visit their grown-up children, but find them too self-absorbed to spend time with them. In 1969, Dariush Mehrjui's, *The Cow* deals with the story of a man who becomes insane after the death of his beloved cow, sparking the new wave of Iranian cinema.

With Asia's developmental pace taking off later than in Europe and the US, the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s saw a sudden change in societal norms and values with the population migration from villages to the big cities. And the films of Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Kurosawa, Ozu and other Asian directors spoke about pathos in their protagonist's struggle for existence.

CULT MOVIES

Taking cue from Europe, Asian directors too started making some of the finest pieces of art although the films had bizarre characters and imagery. Some films resonated intellectually, exploring philosophical and ethical issues. But with most directors, it was to each his own,

like French Louis Malle chose moral path to exploration, dramatising his childhood experiences in *Au revoir, les enfants*, which depicts the occupying Nazi government's deportation of French Jews to concentration camps during World War II.

Directors in the 1990s explored philosophical issues and themes like identity, chance, death, and existentialism. Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) explores themes of chance, death, and infidelity by tracing 10 parallel and interwoven stories. These films with diverse thoughts and fascinating treatment remain cult movies.

However, some of the cult movies of all times, as listed by *The Guardian* are *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* by Pasolini, *Fanny and Alexander* by the legendary Swedish filmmaker, Ingmar Bergman, *Stephen Woolley's A Clockwork Orange*, *Citizen Kane*, *Tokyo Story*, *L'Atalante*, *Andrei Rublev* by Tarkovsky, Satyajit Ray's *Pather*



Panchali.

As of October 2017, *Pather Panchali*, has a 98 percent fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes based on an aggregate of reviews. In 2018 the film earned the 15th spot when BBC released the top 100 foreign language films ever.

Pather Panchali was included in other all-time lists, including *Time Out's* "Centenary Top One Hundred Films"

In 1999, *The Village Voice* top 250 "Best

Film of the Century" critics' poll included *The Apu Trilogy*. *The Apu Trilogy*, *Pyaasa* and *Mani Ratnam's Nayakan* were also included in *Time* magazine's All-TIME 100 best movies list in 2005.

In 1992, the Sight & Sound Critics' Poll ranked Ray at No. 7 in its list of "Top 10 Directors" of all time.

These films have acquired cult status as they have inspired filmmakers and students across the globe cutting across linguistic barriers. Also, they did not remain merely for the intellectual's discussion but was widely accepted by the masses and went on to earn huge revenue. They are watched even today with as much enthusiasm and have outlived time warps.

BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

Dhallywood or films made in Dhaka actually took wings after independence. Although most films were made with the box-office in mind, some films stand out. Of the acclaimed directors, *Fateh Lohani*, *Zahir*

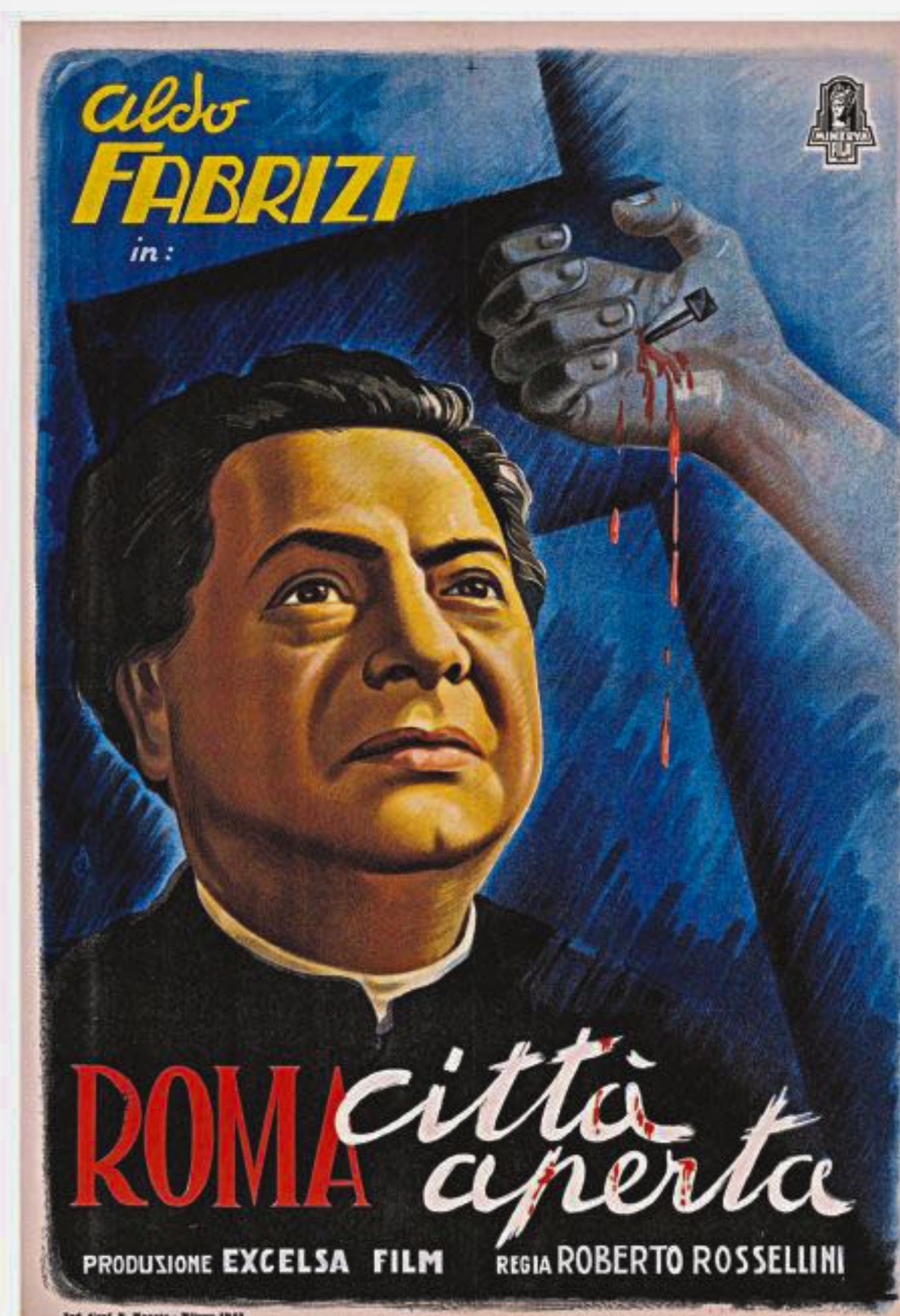
ing, so the films fail to make a mark.

One of the major reasons for the decline of the parallel cinema in India is that neither the Film federation nor NFDC looked at the distribution of art films. The mainstream exhibition system did not screen them for less entertainment value. The audience's intellect was never taken into account and only what a miniscule comprehended was forced on the audience.

To an extent, rise of TV is a threat to cinema and more so to the art films. Although it seems art film is dying a slow death, it should not be forgotten that filmmakers these days understand the pulse of the audience and hence every time there is a tendency to experiment. Some of these experimentations have resulted in Bollywood films like *Barfi*, which despite belonging to mainstream cinema was a visual treat.

IS THERE A CHANCE FOR ART FILMS?

Certainly, with the merging of the genres,



Raihan, *Alamgir Kabir*, *Khan Ataur Rahman*, *Subhash Dutta*, *Ritwik Ghatak*, *Ehtesham* deserve mention.

After independence, one of the first international acclaimed film was *Titas Ekti Nodir Naam* released in 1973, directed by prominent Indian Bengali director, *Ritwik Ghatak* and starring *Prabir Mitra* in the lead role. *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* topped the list of 10 best Bangladeshi films in the audience and critics' polls conducted by the British Film Institute in 2002.

Other notable films of 1970s include *Joy Bangla* (1972) of *Fakrul Alam*; *Lalon Fokir* (1972) of *Syed Hasan Imam*.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Bangladeshi film industry plummeted to great depths with unmindful copying of Bollywood potboilers and financial crunches. But then in 2012, government bailed out the industry which thereafter went on to make critically mentioned films like *Monpura* and others.

THE DECLINE: WHY THE YOUTH DOESN'T WATCH THEM

Camille Paglia states that young people from the 2000s do not "have patience for the long, slow take that deep-think European directors once specialised in..." These days, mainstream films also deal with moral dilemmas or identity crises which are usually resolved without much didacticism. It is a fast-paced instant age now and slow movies cannot keep up with the pace of youth mind. The attention span is shorten-



art films will be commercially viable. The audience is mature and they crave for newer things. So, there is every possibility of a revival if the directors are also willing to work with low budgets with the fire and passion.

In the Indian sub-continent, the films must be shortened and editing must be trite to hold on to the attention span of the youth. Movies like *Rituparno Ghosh's Utsab* deserves mention in this regard. It falls into the parallel film genre despite being a box-office hit. Other films like these are *Dahan*, *Yuva*, *Bas Ek Pal* and others.

Internationally, too, some notable films from the 2000s possess art film qualities and differed from mainstream films due to controversial content like *Gus Van Sant's film Elephant* (2003), which depicts mass murder at a high school bordering on the *Columbine High School* massacre, *Todd Haynes' complex I'm Not There* (2007), uses non-traditional narrative techniques, intercutting the storylines of the six different *Dylan*-inspired characters.

More recently, the tradition is carried forward in *Roma* (2018), by *Alfonso Cuarón* who deftly talks about his childhood living in 1970's Mexico and the movie is shot in black-and-white.

— LS Desk

Photo: Collected