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# Out of syllabus

The CFSI's travelling film festival for children reaches out to small towns and villages

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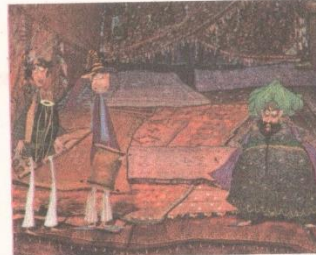
**T**ill last year, the Children's Film Society, India (CFSI) held two film festivals. The International Children's Film Festival India, or The Golden Elephant, held in Hyderabad every two years, features international films, forums and workshops. The National Children's Film Festival (NCF), held every alternate year, focuses on films made in India and by Indians. Both are city-centric events that by default leave out smaller towns and villages.

Now, in a first-of-its-kind initiative, the

CFSI has launched a third festival, Film Bonanza, hoping to reach out to the interiors of India's 600-odd districts after honing its plans with small cities last year. Around 150 movies have been dubbed into regional languages: 51 in Gujarati and 10 in six North-Eastern languages. It will run for a week in each state where the CFSI has tied up with district administrations, NGOs and schools.

In the first phase, films were showcased in Assam (6-13 February). They will go on to Gujarat's 33 districts in the last week of the month. Then they will cover the rest of the North-East and 10 districts in Kashmir, including villages in border areas. Some of these places don't have theatres, so the films will be shown in classrooms and community centres through LCD projectors.

CFSI's chief executive officer, Shравan Kumar, says they have learnt their lessons from the past, when screenings in rural areas would be held sporadically and had no impact. "Children would treat it as a government function and would show no



A still from 'Goopi Gawaiyaa Bagha Bajaiyaa'.

interest. We realized there can't be one formula for the entire country."

Film Bonanza has been curated keeping in mind the country's cultural diversity; films picked up for a region have themes that officials hope will resonate with children there. It can be tricky. In the North-East, for instance, a large part of the population is more familiar with Korean pop culture than Indian mainstream culture. "Most children are only exposed to things that have no connection with the Indian reality. For a healthy development of psyche, it is important that they understand some of the heritage and traditions of our society," says Kumar.

Among the titles on the roster are Shilpa Ranade's Hindi film *Goopi Gawaiyaa Bagha Bajaiyaa* (2013) as well as some early films by directors of great repute, like Rituparno Ghosh's debut Bengali feature *Hirer Aangti* (1992). The handful of foreign language films in the list, like the Latvian drama *Mother, I Love You*, have subtle messages. "One of the things I have learnt is that the preachier you get with children, the less you speak to their minds," Kumar says.

Kumar hopes this will become a self-sustaining process. The change is already evident in Patna, where the initiative had a run in September. Screenings are held in schools regularly. "We get film critics and professors who chat with the children about the film after a screening. We hold sessions where they are encouraged to write their own stories that can be turned into films," says Sanjeev Kumar of the Vishwa Samvad Kendra, Patna, who collaborated with the CFSI on this initiative.

The screenings in Gujarat, the North-East and Kashmir will be followed by filmmaking workshops that will end with the children making one-minute movies. The most creative ones will be invited for the "Little Director" section of The Golden Elephant in November.