

Journey of IFFI



It was a long journey from the early 1950's to the close of the second decade of the 21st century, a journey of accomplishments and national identity. When India was celebrating the Golden jubilee of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), every Indian should be proud of the fact that we are part of a wonderful tradition of cultural exchange through the Art of Cinema. Apart from its entertainment value, cinema has, over the years, proved its humanistic, social and political overtones reflected in the innumerable film festivals happening in the nook and corner of the world. No doubt, IFFI has made an indelible mark in the history of the film festivals of the world with its uniqueness of culture, heritage and artistic excellence.

It is surprising to note that there is an inherent relationship between film societies and film festivals. They are complementary to each other. In many cases the film clubs or film societies paved the way for film festivals. In turn, the film festivals were the influenc-

ing factor for the formation of film societies which stood for the exhibition and propagation of good cinema.

The first Lumiere film screening in India was held on 7th July, 1896 at Watson Hotel in Bombay. The first film society in India, 'Amateur Cine Society' was also formed in Bombay in 1937. Later 'Bombay Film Society' was organised in 1942 and it was officially registered by Government in 1943. 'Calcutta Film Society' was formed in 1947 under the leadership of stalwarts like Satyajit Ray, Chidananda Das Gupta, Nimai Ghosh and other film enthusiasts of the time. It was also a period when Indian films were slowly coming out of its slumber of embracing mythological and Bhakti cult films. The post-independent Indian aspirations and realities found a way to silver screen making a different approach to the medium hitherto unknown.

The birth of International Film Festival of India was the healthy outcome of all these fac-

tors. It happened to be the first International Film Festival held anywhere in Asia. The objectives of the festival were drafted with the sublime vision 'Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam' (The entire world is one family), inspired from Maha Upanishad. The Film Festival aimed 'to provide a common platform for the cinemas of the world to project the excellence of the film art, contributing to the understanding and appreciation of film cultures of different nations in the context of their social and cultural



ethos and promoting friendship and co-operation among people of the world'.

Chronology

The first edition of the International Film Festival of India was held in Bombay from 24 January to 1 Feb 1952. It was organised by the Films Division, under Ministry of Information & Broadcasting with the patronage of the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was unable to make it for the inaugural ceremony in Bombay. But he sent an official message to be read out in the function. In the message he urged the film industry to introduce artistic and aesthetic values and cautioned against the promotion of popular films which were often sensational or melodramatic.

The festival was inaugurated by R.R. Diwakar, Minister for Information & Broadcasting. 23 countries participated in the film festival which showcased 40 feature films and 100 short films from countries across the world. The veteran Director Frank Capra led the US

delegation, WuIn-Hsien, the Chinese delegation and Mohammad Fathy Bey represented Egypt. On completion of the festival in Bombay, it moved to other cities namely Madras, Delhi and Calcutta. The festival in Delhi was inaugurated by Prime Minister Nehru on 21 February 1952.

The first edition of the festival was non competitive. Apart from foreign films, Indian films were represented by Aawara (Hindi), Pathala Bhairavi (Telugu), Amar Bhupali (Marathi) and Babla (Bengali). Bicycle thieves, Miracle in Milan, Rome Open City (Italy), Yukiwarisso (Japan), The Dancing Fleese (UK), The River (US) and The Fall of Berlin (USSR) were some of the notable films screened in the festival. Like in Bombay, films were well received in other cities also in fully packed cinema houses.

The first edition of the festival was, in fact, an eye opener to the film industry. Media also criticised the industry 'for its relentless production of melodrama and musicals and its unwillingness to experiment'. The Italian films screened in the festival were hailed for its humanism and simplicity.

The non- competitive second edition was held in New Delhi in 1961 after a long gap. From 3rd edition (1965) onwards the festival had introduced competition section. The festival, held in New Delhi, was chaired by Satyajit Ray. The major landmark of the third edition was that FIAPF (International Federation of Film Producers Association), the International body to control film festivals of the world, recognised IFFI with an 'A' Grade. The recognition of the FIAPF brought IFFI at par with the major festivals of the world, Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Karlovy Vary and Moscow. Golden Peacock Awards were presented to the Best Feature film and Short film. The Srilankan film Gamperalia directed by Lester James Peries won the first Golden Peacock Award

and the Cuban Short film Cyclone received the Golden Peacock for short film.

The fourth edition was also held in New Delhi in 1969. The year 1975 witnessed the 5th edition of IFFI staged again in New Delhi. In this festival IFFI had adopted a permanent insignia which comprised of a representation of the peacock, India's National Bird, with the permanent motto of the festival, 'Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam'. It was decided in the same year that a non-competitive festival of festival films, named 'Filmotav' would be held at major film producing centres of India, alternating with IFFI. Decisions were also taken to hold IFFI in New Delhi alternating with Filmotav. Subsequently Filmotav were held in Kolkata (1975), Mumbai (1976), Chennai (1978), Bangalore (1980), Kolkata (1982), Mumbai (1984), Hyderabad (1986) and Thiruvananthapuram (1988). From 12th edition onwards the title Filmotav was abandoned and the name IFFI was retained for all festivals irrespective of its venue being New Delhi or elsewhere. A new chronology for the festival was effected in 1993 rescheduling it as the 24th edition accounting all the previous festivals.

The 32nd edition of the festival scheduled in October 2001 in Bangalore was cancelled 'in view of the increasing uncertainty on international participation in the wake of global fight against terrorism'. The decision was taken at a meeting of senior officials chaired by the Information & Broadcasting Minister Sushama Swaraj.

After a long shuttle between New Delhi and other major cities, the IFFI, at last, acquired a permanent venue in Goa from 2004 onwards. The efforts of the govt. of Goa under the leadership of the then Chief Minister Manohar Parikar were instrumental in bringing the festival to Goa, the land of Sun, Sand and Sea. There were speculations about the lack of in-

frastructure and poor film culture prevailed in the state. But as a world tourist destination, Goa had other advantages to attract national and international cineastes. Soon the apprehensions proved wrong and large no of delegates flocked in to attend the festival. Initially the film screenings were held at different cities in Goa along with other cultural programmes including the Goa Music Festival. Gradually with the development of infrastructural facilities in Panaji, the capital city, the festival screenings in other cities were dropped and the festival grew around Inox Multiplexes in the campus of Maquinos Palace and the Kala Academy. With the 16 years of lively existence in Panaji, IFFI is entering its new phase in the Golden Jubilee edition of 2019.

IFFI Awards



The prestigious award of IFFI is the Golden Peacock presented to the Best feature film in the competition section. It carries the Golden Peacock trophy, Certificate and Rupees 40 Lakhs. From 3rd to 11th editions of the festival the Golden Peacock was awarded to Best Short films too. All other awards carry the Silver Peacock. The other awards are assigned to the Best Director (15 Lakhs), Best debut feature film of a director (15 Lakhs), Best Actor (Male) and Best Actor (Female) with 10 Lakhs each. The other Special Awards include the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' presented to an international film personality for his/her total contribution to the art of cinema and the Centenary Award to the 'Indian Per-

sonality of the Year'. The 'Indian Personality of the Year' award was instituted in 2013 on the occasion of 100 Years of Cinema in India as 'Cinema Centenary Award'. The annual award is given to an Indian film veteran for his/her outstanding contribution in Indian Film Industry through their film craft. The award carries a Silver Peacock, a certificate and a cash prize of Rs 10 lakhs. The first recipient of this award was Waheda Rahman, the yesteryear actress. In the subsequent years the awards were presented to Rajanikant (Actor), Ilayaraja (Composer), S.P. Balasubrahmanyam (Playback Singer and Composer), Amitabh Bachan (Actor) and Salim Khan (Screen Writer). The ICFT UNESCO Gandhi medal, instituted by the International Council for Film, Television and Audiovisual Communication, Paris and UNESCO, is awarded to the Best feature film fulfilling the criteria put forward by the organisations. The criteria for the Gandhi medal reflects UNESCO's fundamental mandate of building peace in the mind of men and women, particularly human rights, intellectual dialogue, promotion and safeguard of diversity of cultural expression.

Indian Panorama



It is a flagship section of IFFI showcasing the best current Indian Feature fiction and non-feature films. The Indian Panorama section was introduced to IFFI in 1978. It is the best means to know and understand contemporary Indian realities and how the filmmakers of various states excel themselves in the art of cinema. It is also exciting to notice that the rich heritage and culture of the country

continue to be reflected in the cinematic expressions of the filmmakers of younger generation.

Film Bazaar

A film market known as 'Film Bazaar' is running along with the festival since 2007 organised by National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), a govt. organisation under the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting for the promotion of film production and marketing. 'Film Bazaar' focuses on discovering, supporting and showcasing South Asian films and talent in filmmaking, production and distribution. It is the largest South Asian film market. It encourages creative and financial collaboration between South Asian and International film communities. The Bazaar also facilitates the sales of world cinema in the South Asian region. In fact, the Film Bazaar becomes the meeting point for film buyers and sellers from all over the world. Every edition witnessed increased National and International participation. In Film Bazaar 2018, 872 delegates from 30 countries attended. The words of Thierry Fremaux, the Artistic Director of the Cannes Film Festival, may be recalled in this context, 'Film Bazaar is full of good filmmakers and good projects. In the long run I see IFFI Film Bazaar at par with Cannes, Berlin and American Film Market'.

The programmes offered in the Film Bazaar are multifarious. Work-In Progress Lab, Co-production market, Screen writer's Lab, Networking Events, Producer's Lab, Viewing Room, Industry Screening, Film Offices, Exhibition Stalls and NFDC Knowledge Series are the facilities available in the Film Bazaar. The most important programmes are the Co-production market and the Work In Progress Lab.' Co-production market is a programme developed for original projects from South Asian countries that are looking for co-production partners and financial collaborators'. The market is also a focal point for festival directors, programmers, sales agents,

producers and financiers to find fresh voices from South Asia. Since 2007, the Co-production market has consistently brought out coveted projects. In 2010 the market was expanded to include projects from South Asian countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In 2018 the co-production market showcased 19 South Asian projects from 7 countries.

Work-In Progress Lab provides selected filmmakers a chance to screen the rough cut of their feature length fiction film to an eminent panel of International Advisors (Mentors) and get constructive feedbacks from them regarding the edit. The Viewing Room facilitates to present films seeking finishing funds, world sales, distribution partners and film festivals. Film Programmers, distributors, world sales agents and investors can watch completed as well as films awaiting completion. The programme Industry Screening in three digital theatres provides the producers an opportunity to showcase their films to attending buyers, agents, festival directors and programmers.

On the Move

IFFI, the oldest International film festival of Asian continent, had its impact on a National and International level. IFFI was role model for many of the Asian countries to launch their own international film festivals. At present, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei, South Korea, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, Tajikistan and a host of other Asian countries have their own independent film festivals. IFFI was a great influence for the states of India also to launch their own International Film Festivals. Kerala was the first to hold such a festival in 1996 followed by West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Assam and so on.

The Indian Panorama section for feature and non-feature has become a boon to the Indian films. It encouraged many new Indian filmmakers to emerge with more meaningful

and artistic productions. The screenings in the section of World Cinema indeed provided better chances to understand the culture, heritage and polity of different nations of the world. The wide opportunity to interact with the film personalities from the various parts of the world was also a great blessing to the Indian film enthusiasts, especially the young filmmakers and film critics of our country.

The attitude of the film industry towards good cinema has entirely changed with the advent of IFFI. The high participation of the produc-



ers, distributors and the financiers in the Film Bazaar and especially in the co-production market testifies this observation. The Bollywood film industry always kept a close look at IFFI and many of the celebrities found time to become part of it.

The first and foremost objective of any film festival is to cultivate a film culture akin to good cinema. IFFI can no doubt boast of attaining this goal in India. It enabled the film enthusiasts to appreciate films better. Indian filmmakers also got an opportunity to ascertain their position in the larger context of world cinema. Moreover, it is an arena for national and international integration where we meet people from various parts of India and abroad to interact and exchange the thoughts on cinema.

IFFI has to and will continue its journey with more bright colours. A festival complex for IFFI with all infrastructure facilities is still a dream! The screening theatres, the food &

refreshment stalls, Exhibition halls, sales kiosks for books and films, venues for seminars and discussions, full -fledged media rooms, Press conference centres and Amenity centres for the delegates and all should be under one roof which make the festival all the more attractive and user-friendly. Either the intake of the delegates has to be limited or viewing facilities for all the delegates are assured. The indefinite waiting in the long queue to watch a film is awful for a festival which has celebrated its 50th edition. The authorities should see that the delegates are not terrorists. In fact, the prevailing mode of security check -up is terrible and it causes harassment and insult to the delegates. As a person who has attended most

of the major film festivals of the world, I am sorry to state that the inhuman security check up is the worst part of IFFI.

IFFI was growing year by year. If 23 countries participated in 1952, now the number exceeds 75 when it is celebrating its 50th edition. Film personalities both from India and abroad make it a point to bless the festival with their honorary presence. In spite of the Carnival atmosphere in Goa, film lovers attend the festivals in large numbers. Other activities like Master Class, Press conferences, In Conversation, seminars and varied type of interactions happen in full attendance. IFFI still has a long way to go to fulfil all the visions of its founders. Let it happen!

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