

CIFFI2020 Sixth Day

Filmmakers and Scholars discuss Australia-India connection and filmmaking during COVID- 19

Noida: Day-6 of World's First 7-Day Hybrid International Film Festival by educational institutions – CIFFI 2020, saw exchange of information and ideas by eminent scholars and filmmakers along with screening of documentaries on legends of Bollywood on December 20. This film festival is being organised by Delhi Metropolitan Education, Noida, India in association with School of Communications and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia,

On the 6th day, two Curated Sessions and a Workshop took place. As part of curated sessions, 6 films – Achhut Kanya, Kismet, Mahal, Dastaan-e-Rafi, The King of Romance Shammi Kapoor and Mahendra Kapoor were screened. Also, 21 competitive films including 'Alone' and 'Birdsong' were screened on the official website of CIFFI.

Remembering Bollywood icon Himanshu Rai

The first session was the second segment of Curated Session on 'The Bombay Talkies and the Australia India Connection'. It was curated by Dr Vikrant Kishore, Festival Director and Course Director-Film, Television & Animation, School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Melbourne, and hosted by Ms Yashasvika Yadav, Assistant Professor, DME Media School. Prof. Paul Dietze, Programme Director, Behaviours and Health Risks, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia, and Mr Peter Dietze, Creative Director, Turner & Dietze Creative, Melbourne, Australia, were present in the session.

Dr Ambrish Saxena, Professor and Dean, DME Media School and Festival Director, CIFFI 2020 emphasised on the rich history of Indian cinema. He remarked, "India is passing through a phase of technological advancement. However, even when it was not this way, there were good filmmakers, who produced films parallel to western ones."

Prof. Paul talked about the events leading to him learning about his relation to Indian legendary filmmaker Himanshu Rai. "It has been an incredible journey during 1994 - 1995 when I visited India", he said. Mr Peter added to the conversation, by saying, "We have been following his legacy since a long time."

Talking about the prospect of digitizing the archives of work of Himanshu Rai, Dr Kishore commented, "Lots of cinematic history has not been archived well. It makes finding traces of Indian cinema difficult. Today with digital archiving, it has become possible".

He further gave his take on Indian films on social issues. "Sometimes films on social issues are not commercially viable. This issue exists even today." He also talked about historic contributions of legendary Indian actress Devika Rani and Indian Music Director Saraswati Devi.

When asked by a participant about the contribution of Devika Rani, Mr Peter said, "Not just her beauty, but her constant push to improve Bombay Talkies was remarkable. She was instrumental in the day-to-day running of The Bombay Talkies."

Commenting on the impact of Bombay Talkies on commercial films of today, Prof. Paul said, “The use of simple Hindustani to communicate to the audience, and the use of music and dance, adding to the artistic presence, it fundamentally laid down the basis of what Indian cinema is today.”

Dr Susmita Bala, Professor and Head, DME Media School and Festival Associate Director, CIFFI 2020 appreciated the discussion and gave her concluding remarks. “It is good to know that people are working on the heritage of Himanshu Rai. We look forward to future collaborations regarding Bombay Talkies.”, she said.

Documentaries on Bollywood legends

The afternoon session was another curated session on ‘Before Bollywood’ moderated by Prof. Suresh Sharma, EC Member IDPA. The session took the audience to the golden era of Bollywood of sixties and seventies with mesmerizing songs of Rafi matching the signature dancing sequence of Shammi Kapoor that immortalized him and the melody of Mahendra Kapoor through three documentaries – ‘Dastaan-e-Rafi’ by Rajni Acharya, ‘The King of Romance - Shammi Kapoor’ by Suresh Sharma, and ‘Mahendra Kapoor’ by Bipin Choubal.

Remembering the period, Dr Ambrish Saxena could not help stating that it was like going back to old times when Rafi and Shammi Kapoor duo would create memorable magic on the screen.

Filmmaking during lockdown

The day came to an end with a workshop on ‘Filmmaking during lockdown’ with resource person - Kanwar Deepak Gulati, theatre and film practitioner, writer, actor and director. Actors Ms Vani Kumar, a senior artist of theatre, film and radio, New Delhi, India, Mr Sarabjeet Singh Arora, Director, Actor, Creative Director and Storyteller, Toronto, Canada, and Mr Tipu Sultan from Pakistan participated in the session, each sighting the limitations faced as result of the Covid lock down and stating how they managed to overcome these limitations.

The trial and turbulence of a director guiding his team to shoot on their own inside their houses as per the requirements of the story was well explained by Kunwar Deepak Gulati. Ms Vani and Mr Tipu Sultan endorsed all his efforts and supported him while narrating their own experiences of learning and adjusting to the changing times.

Mr Sultan said: “Covid -19 has proven a blessing in disguise. The world has become boundary less in true sense of the word. One can meet anyone, at any point of time, anywhere in the world. Mr Gulati and Mr Sarabjeet showed us the path and told us how to walk on that path.”

Mr Sarabjeet while elaborating on his role of Makkhan Singh maintained that as “an actor it was challenging to present a look of a *sarkari karamchaari* and to keep changing of dresses was indeed a difficult task.”

Mr Gulati as director believed in “keeping the interest of the story alive and hence discussed the script with the actor constantly. I was not only educating the actors but was learning too. In the end, we started enjoying the shoots.”

While giving the concluding remarks of the day, Festival Director, Dr Ambrish Saxena said: “Indeed Covid has given us new experiences, learning and a different perspective to life itself.”

Dr Susmita Bala, Associate Festival Director and Head, DME Media School, hoped that if and when things will be normal, these kinds of discussions can be possible in an offline mode as well.