

Finally, Goa for Indian film fest!



By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Although the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) has been unspooling in Goa's capital city of Panaji every November for 10 years now, there has always been an air of uncertainty over the venue. Often, this was because the Directorate of Film Festivals – a wing of the Union Ministry for Information and Broadcasting, which organises the 11-day event – has faced hurdles. Sometimes, these have been political; the government at the centre could have been run by a party which was different from that in the state.

While it was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led administration at New Delhi in 2004 that mooted the idea of a permanent venue and in Panaji (and dreaming of making it another Cannes), other political parties which subsequently governed Goa and at the centre seemed less enthusiastic about this plan.

However, now that the BJP is at the helm of affairs both at the centre and in Goa, a very important decision was taken last week. Panaji will be the permanent venue of IFFI, an acronym that the festival is popularly known by. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the union ministry

and the state government. With this the doubts that had persisted about the festival's location are finally over.

This decade-long ambiguity did hamper IFFI.

Although the complex where it is now held overlooks the scenic Mandovi river, and has enough space for at least a couple of more theatres – with already four there – the lack of clarity over Panaji as a permanent venue hampered development. At least to an extent.

IFFI has had a troubled existence – and not just during the past decade but even earlier when it led a nomadic life. The festival, since its inception in 1952 and till 2004, wandered around the length and breadth of India, returning to New Delhi every other year. So, we have had IFFI editions in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and so on. As far as I know, no other major festival anywhere in the world has gone through this.

I remember a former director of the festival, Malti Sahay, telling me how difficult it was to set up a new camp every alternate year. "About 60% of our energy and time go into this while we should be paying all our attention to getting an interesting lineup of movies," she used to lament. Also, not many celebrities were coming. And what is a festival without content and glamour.

With Panaji now getting set to host IFFI

from November 20 and every following year, the BJP chief minister of Goa, Manohar Parrikar – who was also instrumental in organising the first festival in his capital, apart from people like Ravi Shankar Prasad and Sushma Swaraj who were Union Information and Broadcasting ministers by turn – is believed to be leaving no stone unturned to make India's most prestigious cinema event absolutely memorable.

Parineeti Chopra

The other evening, I watched *Daawat-e-Ishq* – which was all about the way Indian girls are being harassed for dowry – still a major social problem. Parineeti Chopra is the heroine, a sales girl, Gulrez, in a Hyderabad shoe shop who dreams of making it big through an American degree and her own business. Sick of being turned down by one prospective bridegroom after another on the issue of dowry, she and her father (an excellent performance by Anupam Kher) try and use a law on the evil to pin down a Lucknow biryani-seller into parting with a huge sum of money.

The film is disappointing. Although it does stay true to its core plot of dowry harassment, peppered with spicy biryani and kebabs, the script seems to be in a hurry to end the tale on a station platform (How many times this has been the setting for a climax – perhaps

the earliest being in *Kora Kagaz*, where Vijay Anand and Jaya Bahaduri meet and make up in a station).

Imagine this, here is a biryani retailer (Aditya Roy Kapur), cheated out of his Rs 40 lakhs and jilted so badly forgiving Gulrez on the railway platform the moment she says she has developed a fondness for him! Human emotions do not work this way, and a hurt heart takes time to heal.

Somewhere, *Daawat-e-Ishq* has got its ratio-proportion all wrong. While a lot of time is spent on biryani and band-baja, the reconciliation between the lovers following the drive down the dowry den is hurried through in the din of the station – cops and a gang of ruffians adding to the mayhem.

What I found even more disappointing is that Parineeti's sheen is beginning to wear off. And this is not just my opinion. Others feel this way as well. Movie critic Rajeev Masand adored her in the 2012 *Ishaqzaade*, describing the actress as "the biggest strength of the film." Two years later, reviewing her latest work in *Daawat-e-Ishq*, he said Parineeti had done similar roles earlier. Probably, he did not want to be harsh. But to me it seemed like lambast.

Anyway, the fact remains that an actor, however good he or she may be, will begin to jade and appear boring if he or she were to keep performing the same kind of parts.

In her earlier *Ishaqzaade*, as the gun-toting free-spirited girl caught in a romantic whirlpool caused by two warring and egocentric families (another *Romeo and Juliet*), Parineeti was just splendid.

However, I thought she was better in *Shuddh Desi Romance* – her career best – essaying a girl who gets the shivers every time she is about to tie the marital knot. Outspoken and rebellious, she portrays Gayatri, pairing with Sushant Singh Rajput. She won several best actress nods for this, but failed to clinch an actual award.

But her 2014 outing in *Hasee Toh Phasee* was a let-down. As a mad scientist, who runs away from her family after stealing money, she replays her *Shuddh Desi Romance* role, and this gets dreary after a point.

In her latest movie, *Daawat-e-Ishq*, Parineeti is chirpy, vivacious, good humoured and lovely to look at. But was she not the same kind of person in just about every other film she has done before?

The fault may not quite lie with her, but with producers and directors – who are desperate to repeat a success, with the result that they encourage an actor to be the same in movie after movie.

We have seen this in Indian cinema. Bollywood comedian Mehmood was done to death in the awfully silly roles he had to essay. There were a few exceptions though. *Around the World* was one. Maybe *Padosan* was another. Tamil comedian Santhanam had to be the stupid sidekick of every hero till he got somewhat of a break in *Vallavanukku Pullum Aayudham*. Let us hope he betters this.

Hopefully, Parineeti will put her foot down the way she does in the romantic feast, *Daawat-e-Ishq*. She tells her father that she must return the money stolen from the Biryani guy. And she does just that. Hopefully, she will also say enough of free-spiritedness and bubbly bursts. What about something different for a change?

● Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered IFFI for a quarter century and will be back in Goa this November, and he may be e-mailed at gautamanb@hotmail.com