

cinema



* *Casablanca Mon Amour* documents the entwined relationship between Hollywood and Morocco.

The Dubai Diaries 2

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Indian cinema is breaking the boundaries, screamed a headline in one of the dailies published by *Screen* at the recent Dubai International Film Festival. Mumbai-based journalist Nandita Dutta wrote that “independent moviemakers are changing the face of Indian cinema and bursting onto the international scene”. She was quoting Nashen Moodley, Director of the Sydney Film Festival and Programmer for Dubai.

Moodley had more to say. “For those who think of it as only song-and-dance sequences, India cinema has created plenty of surprises in the past few years... In 2012, three Indian movies — *Miss Lovely*, *Peddlers* and *Gangs of Wasseypur* — screened at Cannes ... These films vary widely in their style and content, but deal with taboos and uncomfortable themes...”

While *Miss Lovely* traces the tragic story of two brothers who make soft porn in the 1980s Bombay (Mumbai), *Gangs of Wasseypur* is a *Godfather*-like tale of generational revenge, and *Peddlers* underlines the turmoil of two young men who are sucked into the world of Mumbai's drug mafia.

There is more of Nashen's cinema. *Ship of Thesus* explores questions of identity through the lives of a blind photographer (who finds life exasperating when her sight is partially restored), an ailing monk (who resists a liver transplant) and a young stockbroker (with a new kidney). The hero of *Shahid* is a lawyer, whose brief flirtation with a terror leader has unimaginable consequences. *Gulabi Gang* documents the crusade of a pink brigade against atrocities on women and Dalits.

Shutter captures the dilemma of a man locked up with a prostitute in his own garage, and *Sound* explains what happens when a Foley artist gets obsessed with ambient noises, and fails in the process to hear human voices. *Quartet 1* is an anthology of four of

Rabindranath Tagore's poems created with lyrical precision.

Most of these movies played at Dubai, and some of them won prizes too.

But are these films breaking the boundaries? Do they indicate “Indian New Wave”?

I really feel that these are fancy notions which sound good in seminars and discussions. In the 1950s and even later, path-breaking movies were made by directors like Bimal Roy, Ritwick Ghatak, Satyajit Ray and even Raj Kapoor. What about men such as Balachander? What about a film like *Veerpandiya Kattaboman* or even *Chandralekha*?

It is very easy to stick a label. When Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* came in 1969, everybody hailed it as the Indian New Wave, akin to the French Nouvelle Vague. But it was, by no stretch of imagination, Indian New Wave. It was, at best, New Indian Cinema or Parallel Indian cinema, and helmers such as Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan, Kumar Shahani, Shyam Benegal and Girish Kasaravalli among others contributed, strengthened and extended this movement.

The recent emergence of directors like Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee and Ashim Ahluwalia, not to speak of Gurminder Singh and Amit Dutta, has evoked a debate. Are their movies part of India's New Wave? Is something different happening at last?

At a seminar organised during the Dubai Festival, Ahluwalia (who made *Miss Lovely*) criticised the tendency among festival programmers and others to label his movie and those of others as the New Indian Wave. They are just about a new kind of Indian cinema. Also, it would be unfair to club his own work with, say, that of Kashyap's. His *Gangs of Wasseypur* was very different from *Miss Lovely*.

During a chat with me one afternoon, Ahluwalia said that while *Gangs of Wasseypur* might not really be an arthouse film, it was

also incorrect to bunch together the new generation of moviemakers. Each had a very individualistic style and take.

Admittedly, all these auteurs were making different kinds of pictures, each of which was personal and more rooted. However, this cinema had only a small presence in India today, because the big Bollywood producers were not prepared to fund anything that was significantly different from the usual run-of-the-mill films.

But what about audiences? Are they ready to see a different kind of cinema, different from star-driven fare, packed with songs and dances and far removed from reality? Yes, said Ahluwalia. Indians were now keen on seeing a more authentic kind of cinema, which did not insult their intelligence.

Interestingly, I saw a whole lot of Middle Eastern cinema at Dubai that appeared far more real than a whole lot of Indian movies. *Leila Albayaty* plots the unrequited love of a woman singer in Berlin Telegram who realises after several arduous journeys that there is but one destination — the heart. *Moondog* is an exciting story of a man who turns into a dog, and with its well-mounted structure the film has the ability to keep disbelief as minimal as possible.

Winter of Discontent draws us into Egypt on the eve of Hosni Mubarak's fall. Torture and intrigue form the basis of this narrative scripted with a sense of authenticity. Perverved money power drives a Casablanca cop in *Zero* to step outside his life of everyday mundaneness to search for a missing 15-year-old girl. Dramatised with finesse and able performances, the film transports us to the world of street-walkers and drugs.

Bekas pins us to the lives of two orphan boys in Saddam Hussain's Iraq, and their childish wish to ape Superman and fly away to America. We revel in the children's fantasy as we do in what *Casablanca Mon Amor* has to offer. It documents the entwined relationship between Hollywood and Morocco. Do you know that there is Rick's Café Americain in



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* Sri Lankan film *Him Hereafter* examines a former militant's effort to rebuild a 'normal' life after conflict.

Casablanca, even though most of us know by now that the 1942 Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman movie was never shot in the Moroccan city!

Outside the Gulf, I just loved *A Few Hours of Spring* from France that hits us hard with the story of a convict's relationship with his dying mother. Style and superb story telling get this work flying high. America's *Hyde Park on Hudson* is hilariously all about Franklin Roosevelt's love affairs, and how the secret services guys are adept at letting their President play his games. Bangladesh's *Television* is about a village headman who refuses television and mobile phones in his jurisdiction. Two lovers break the man's Taliban-like dictum. Sri Lanka's *Him Hereafter* paints the poignancy of a former Tamil militant's desperate attempts to return to “normal” life.

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