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Venice Film Festival opens with Italian film premiere, leads with plea to save cinemas

The 77th Venice Film Festival began on Wednesday evening (September 2) with a passionate cry to stop the death of "movie going experience in the face of a perceived threat by streaming giants".

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Gautaman Bhaskaran Hindustan Times



The 77th Venice Film Festival - Venice, Italy September 3, 2020 - Actor Lotte Verbeek poses with performers at the beach for the shooting of the movie "The Book of Vision" in the Critics' Week. (REUTERS)

Every invention in this world has been decried. When the steam engine came, people called it a monster, a huge one belching black smoke. The very devil, they thought. When the telly appeared, the theatres shivered in fright. The Big Screen feared that the small screen would swallow it! This has been imaginatively captured in Quentin Tarantino's 2019 film, Once Upon a Time in Hollywood. But over the years, the big brother learnt to co-exist with the little brother. People did not stop going to the cinema. Did they?

Similarly, the past five years or so have seen theatres shudder at the way streaming platforms have been coming along. Netflix, Amazon, Hotstar and Disney as well as homegrown Zee5 and the like have made huge

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inroads into the entertainment industry. And with home screens now getting bigger and better, theatres are having a hard time. The current coronavirus pandemic with people being forced to stay indoors encouraged streaming platforms in a huge way.

Two years ago, French producers, distributors and exhibitors cried hoarse when the Cannes Film Festival wanted to screen original movies made by Netflix and Amazon. They ruled that the festival films must be shown in theatres before they can be screened online. Being a powerful lobby, they won, and Cannes lost. Cannes' loss became Venice's gain, when the Lido Festival programmed some lovely titles, like Roma, which went on to shine at the Oscars.

This year, the 77th Venice Film Festival began on Wednesday evening (September 2) – in a physical form despite the pandemic still raging – with a passionate cry to stop the death of "movie going experience in the face of a perceived threat by streaming giants".

Although the opening movie – Daniele Luchetti's marriage drama, The Ties (the first Italian title to open the Festival since 2009) – was well received, inspite of the cumbersome temperature checks, compulsory face masks both inside the halls and outside and physically distanced seating arrangements.

But the opening ceremony just before the Italian film was shown had speaker after speaker, including the directors of top seven European film festivals (Cannes' Thierry Fremaux was also there) declaring their full support for the big screen.

"Today, film theatres are opening their doors again, though, like festivals, with a degree of uncertainty and anxiety," their joint statement said. "But they are also doing so with hope and conviction, because they know that now, more than ever before, no one can live without cinema...No one can live without movies seen in a theatre, on a big screen, with an audience, with all the chatter and the silence."

"We wish to firmly repeat this tonight: we must take care of our movie theatres. And all together, they and we, the theatre and the festivals, commit to taking care of the films, the artists, the professionals, the critics, of all those who bring cinema into existence," the statement added.



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Actor Cate Blanchett poses at the screening of the film Lovers in competition at the the 77th Venice Film Festival. (REUTERS)

Earlier, the President of the main Competition jury, Cate Blanchett, voiced similar sentiments at a media conference. "Although people have been sustained by the streaming giants there is a vital component that's been missing. And that's here tonight: it's strangers gathered in the

Achievement during the opening ceremony also felt the same: "to be in



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Tilda Swinton, who was honoured with a Golden Lion for Career

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a room with living creatures and a big screen," and to see a movie in Venice, is pure joy."









The inaugural work, The Ties (Lacci in Italian, and which specifically translates as Shoelaces), got the pride of place in a Venice's opening slot after 11 years – years when Italian cinema never secured this, the slot invariably going to American and European cinema (Gravity, The Truth, First Man, Downsizing).

Set in Naples, The Ties has been adapted from a novel by one of the screenwriters, Domenico Starnone. Veteran Luchetti directs an all-star cast with Alba Rohrwacher and Laura Morante to bring to life a narrative about adultery and regret. Taking place in the 1980s, the movie painful depicts the feelings of a betrayed wife, whose husband of 12 years confesses to sleeping with a younger woman.

Rohrwacher plays the wronged woman who is devastated and hugely concerned how the affair will affect her two young children. But the husband is callous about all this, but later regretting how horrible he had been. Not a very novel theme, but in extraordinary times like these, Venice struggling to counter the absence of big studio films from Hollywood, would have had little to choose from.

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Portrayal of Partition in Pakistani cinema

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through 3 iconic films

Here are 3 Pakistani films that are widely regarded as iconic in the way they portray Partition, as they exhibit how narratives are becoming more sensitive and humane.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Aug 15, 2020 16:47 IST



Huma Sadaf



A still from Khamosh Paani.











'Riots, rolay (fight), wand (disdained divide), ghadar (destruction),' are just few of the terms Partition survivors remember the harrowing event by. As SAHAPEDIA found, the stories of those who were uprooted from their land, forced to leave their homes, life and even loved ones behind have occasionally been captured in the arts, in the form of paintings, literature, theatre, short films and cinema.

However, unlike the other forms, the subject of Partition was carefully and sparingly addressed in cinema—both in India and Pakistan. But more so by the latter, primarily for logistical reasons. In 1947, while India had several centres of film-making, such as Bombay, Poona, Calcutta and Madras, Pakistan just had Lahore. Even then, as filmmaker Karan Bali wrote for a website, the two major studios in Lahore owned by Hindus—were razed to the ground during the communal riots. Some professionals, such as writer Saadat Hasan Manto and others, migrated to Pakistan, but most stayed back in India. Limited resources and funds impacted the struggling establishment of the Pakistani film industry. East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, even more so.

The wounds from Partition were deep, which would explain why the film industries of both countries took their time to make movies around the subject. In India, the Nargis-Karan Dewan starrer Lahore (1949) was

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one of the earliest films on events around the Partition. A decade later Saifuddin Saif's landmark Punjabi film, Kartar Singh (1959), was released in Pakistan. In the following decades, only a handful of films have touched upon the subject—a quick Google search shows a meagre 45, most under a heavy shadow of patriotism, instead of focusing on the suffering that every human faced regardless of their religion and caste. The stereotypes of blaming the 'other' existed, as did a show of 'hate'. However, of late, many in the Pakistani film-making community have been talking about shifting the focus to the shared sufferings and emotions that Partition brought to the common people.

Mehreen Jabbar, renowned director of Ramchand Pakistani, a 2008 film on the relationship between India and Pakistan, believes that the film industries of both countries have never adequately given the real account of Partition. 'I think the films reflect the government of the day in both countries. A large majority of people are unaware of how complex Partition was. We get stuck in our vision of what it meant and do not want to upset the general public.'

While that may be so, there have been several Pakistani film-makers who have tried to sensitively depict one of the bloodiest chapters of the subcontinent. Of those, three very important ones are: Kartar Singh (1959), Sabiha Sumar's Khamosh Pani (2003) and Raza Mir's Lakhon Main Aik (1967).

Kartar Singh is regarded a gem in Pakistani cinema for its balance and sensitivity. Set in a pre-Partition harmonious eastern Punjabi village where Hindu, Muslim and Sikh families live in harmony, the film does not flinch while showing the horrors of Partition and the riots. The human element comes in the form of Kartar Singh who, despite developing some animosity with a Muslim villager, tries to unite him with his sibling, but ends up getting shot.

While Lakhon Main Aik is set in 1967, the events of 1947 play a fundamental role in the doomed love story of an abandoned Hindu girl, raised in Pakistan after her father goes missing, and a Muslim boy. Things change once her father re-enters her life. Written by Zia Sarhadi, a leftist who made social-realist films like Hum Log (1951) and Footpath (1953) in India before moving to Pakistan, the film is highly regarded for its sensitive treatment of human emotions. In Pakistan, the lone criticism for the film was its subplot, wherein the young girl's taking a bullet to save her Muslim lover was seen as insinuating 'redemption'. Made after the 1965 Indo-Pak war, when sentiments against the





Venice Film Fest opens with Italian film premiere, ple to save cinemas neighbouring country was high, the treatment of the film in not entirely vilifying the Hindu protagonists was seen as being more sympathetic to India than Pakistan. So much so, that Noor Jehan's controversial bhajan in the film, 'Man mandir ke devta' was banned on radio in Pakistan, ironically adding to its popularity.

Sabiha Sumar's Khamosh Pani is yet another stellar movie. Although set in Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistan of 1979, when Islamic fundamentalism was rising, the film is wrought with Partition ghosts of 1947. Ayesha (Kirron Kher) survives her Sikh family's insistence to jump into the well to save her virtue from Muslim mobs, only to be later shunned by her son—an extremist—and choosing to jump into a well rather than face his barbs once he finds out about her identity.

A similar storyline is followed in Chandraprakash Dwivedi's 2003 adaptation of Amrita Pritam's novel Pinjar, about Puro, a Sikh girl who was abducted, kept, converted to Islam. Changing her identity to Hamida, she marries a Muslim man, Rashid, amid the chaos of Partition.

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Interestingly, more than cinema, Pakistani theatre has adapted and showcased many productions around the theme of Partition, doing much greater justice to the grief, anger and sense of displacement that came with it. Ajoka Theatre's adaptation of Manto's Toba Tek Singh is one such example. TV serials and short films have also been more open to delving into the stories of those who were displaced and scarred by Partition, much more than the mainstream film industries. One such example is HOME1947, a series of seven short films by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinnoy. The production narrates Partition stories through the perspective of the people who lived through the event and bear the wounds on their souls—their memories of life before Partition, missing the places and people they left behind. Zameen, a migrant from India to Pakistan, remembers the house he left behind, a woman recounts leaving her friend when she migrated at 17, and how they managed to communicate in the years to come. In 'Midnight Fury', a man remembers his mother being murdered by goons. The touching and simple narration includes him remembering the very details of what his mother was wearing when he saw her murdered right in front of his eyes.

The subject of Partition is not easy to portray—irrespective of which

side of the Radcliffe Line the film-maker resides. And while modern directors consciously and conflictingly work towards achieving an objective rendering, there is a sincere pursuit of a sensitive and humane approach that is already visible in the current narratives.

Huma Sadaf is a freelance journalist based in Pakistan. This article is part of Saha Sutra on www.sahapedia.org, an online resource for South Asian arts, culture and heritage.

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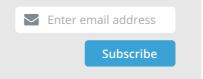
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Goa CM says International Film Festival of India to be held as per schedule in November

International Film Festival of India (IFFI) will happen in November, said Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant.

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Press Trust of India | Posted by Soumya Srivastava



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Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant has said the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) would be held in the state in November this year as per schedule. IFFI is held annually in the coastal state between

in

November 20 and 28.

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The state will be hosting IFFI 2020 as per schedule in the last week of November, Sawant told reporters on Wednesday.

The opposition Congress, however, said it is not advisable to host IFFI in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and urged the state government to reconsider its decision.

Role of @GovtofGoa is now reduced to Travel and Hospitality agent of @IFFIGoa. I demand @goacm must reconsider its decision on hosting of #IFFI2020," Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly Digambar Kamat tweeted.

He also demanded a white paper from the government on the expenditure incurred on IFFI, and benefits received by the local film fraternity and tourism sector from the festival.

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"CM @DrPramodPSawant has accepted that financial condition of the State is bad. The Covid Pandemic is not the time for hosting Festivals and Celebrations. With no Financial support from @MIB_India and @DFF_India, Goa ends up spending Rs 20-25 crores every year on the mega event.@INCGoa, Kamat said in another tweet.

The festival is organised by the Directorate of Film Festivals in association with the state government's Entertainment Society of Goa.

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Actor Antonio Banderas announces being Covid-19 positive on his 60th birthday

Spanish actor Antonio Banderas shared a childhood picture of himself and a note about being Covid-19 positive on Twitter.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Aug 10, 2020 22:21 IST



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FILE PHOTO: Antonio Banderas in Dior poses on the red carpet during the Oscars arrivals at the 92nd Academy Awards in Hollywood. (REUTERS)

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Spanish actor Antonio Banderas, star of The Mask of Zorro and dozens of other films, announced on Monday, his 60th birthday, that he had tested positive for COVID-19 and was in quarantine.

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"I'd like to add that I'm feeling relatively well, just a bit more tired than usual, and confident that I will recover as soon as possible," he said in a birthday message on Twitter, adding that he had reached 60 "full of desire and aspirations".



Banderas said he would use his time in quarantine to read, write, rest

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and make plans for the future.

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With a career spanning more than 100 movies, Banderas was nominated in the Best Actor category of the latest edition of the Academy Awards for the lead role in Pedro Almodovar's autobiographical movie Pain and Glory.

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While media attention was focused on the insider-outsider debate, Chaitanya Tamhane made history

Chaitanya Tamhane brings his craft and discipline to The Disciple, the story of a conflicted musician in Mumbai. His mentor Alfonso Cuaron calls it stunning.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Aug 09, 2020 09:00 IST





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Meet Nilay Chakrapani, a A still from Chaitanya Tamhane's The Disciple.













Last year, at the Cannes Film Festival, I bumped into Oscar-winning director Alfonso Cuaron in a hotel lobby (these are the sorts of happy accidents that occur at a film festival). Cuaron was on his way out, waiting for the airport pick-up. In the few minutes he had, we chatted about a young Indian filmmaker whom he had mentored in 2018 as part of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative—Chaitanya Tamhane.

The conversation turned to Chaitanya's new film, The Disciple. Alfonso had recently seen a first cut and said he was stunned by what his erstwhile disciple had created. As he praised the film and Chaitanya, I felt a rush of pride. Here was one of the finest directors in the world, waxing eloquent about one of our young bright talents.

Over the past few weeks, while media attention has focused on the insider-vs-outsider debate, and the shrill accusations surrounding the tragic death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, Chaitanya has made history.

The Disciple has been selected in competition at the upcoming Venice Film Festival. It's the first Indian film to compete since Mira Nair's Monsoon Wedding in 2001. The Disciple will have its North American premiere at the Toronto Film Festival, also in September.

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The film, set in the world of Indian classical music, is so good, Cuaron has now come on board as executive producer. He said in a press release: I believe Chaitanya is one of the most important new voices of contemporary cinema. Chaitanya's journey is a triumph of talent. He was born in a middle-class Maharashtrian home in central Mumbai. His family has no connections in the industry and incredibly, he has no formal education in film.

He is a self-taught director who started out in theatre and television (at 17, he did a gig writing for daily soaps at Balaji Telefilms). Chaitanya's astute eye, his skill at staging scenes that capture harsh truths without melodrama, his ability to find emotion in stillness, were all apparent in his debut film—the masterful Court, which put him on the map.

Court also premiered at the Venice Film Festival, in 2014, and won the best film prize in the Horizons category. It travelled to several festivals, was India's entry to the Oscars and won a National Award for Best Feature Film.

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In 2018, Chaitanya was selected for the Rolex initiative. He worked extensively with Cuaron on Roma (for which Cuaron won an Oscar for directing and another for cinematography; Roma also won Best Foreign Language Film). Chaitanya said watching Cuaron work was "like watching magic".

The Disciple is the story of a vocalist who diligently follows the traditions of his guru and his father, until life in contemporary Mumbai gets in the way of his devotion to his music. Until he embarked on The Disciple, Chaitanya had no special interest in or knowledge of this world. But he immersed himself in it to create a film that is now putting Indian cinema at centrestage.

Chaitanya is as fierce a disciple of cinema as his protagonist is of music. In an interview Cuaron did alongside him toward the end of the mentorship programme, Cuaron said his daughter had asked him whether Chaitanya would be a successful filmmaker. Cuaron said that he replied: 'He is'. Indeed.

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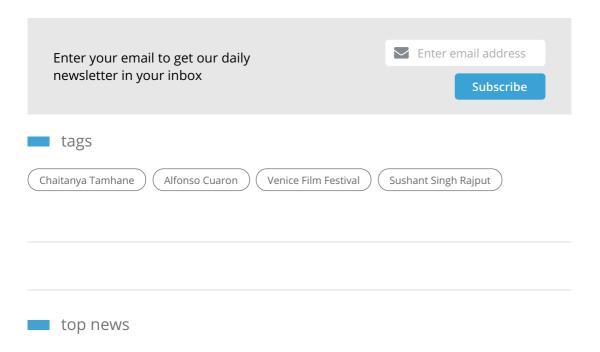


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