

The IFFI 'tamasha' that shows no sign of turning over a new leaf



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Cinema is an amazing platform for entertainment, and, yes, education too. And film festivals at Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Cairo, El Gouna, Goa and so on have provided an excellent opportunity for producers, directors and actors to not only display their myriad talents and creations, but also present social and cultural facets of different countries and their people.

The International Film Festival of India (IFFI), which began its run in the Nehruvian era over five decades ago – and which is now on in Goa's Panaji – was first mooted as a venue for showcasing the mind-boggling diversity of our country through cinema that celebrities like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan, Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, Raj Kapoor, Kamal Hassan, Mani Ratnam and so many more helped create. Viewers were also treated to the choicest of world cinema.

IFFI in its early days travelled to different Indian cities but came back to Delhi every other year. Till the organising Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting decided to rein in the gypsy Festival and give it a permanent place – at Panaji. It has been playing there annually since 2004.

Many were unhappy with this spot, Panaji; Gopalakrishnan once said famously that IFFI would be hijacked by Bollywood, given the proximity of Goa to Mumbai. He hit it right. This is precisely what has happened to IFFI. It has turned into a Bollywood tamasha with Mumbai stars and starlets making a beeline to Panaji every year. Often to merely mark their presence by attending a few parties. In the almost three decades that I have covered the Festival, I have seen very, very few guys from the tinsel town there. Kamal Hassan

used to be there for a few years. Mani Ratnam too, Prakash Raj as well. A few more perhaps, but I do not remember them. This year, a report says “The opening ceremony of the 55th IFFI in Goa on Wednesday (20 November) crammed in several Bollywood-style performances and personalities”

The story adds: “The spectacle came from 'The Perfect Couple' breakout star Ishaan Khatter dancing to a medley of Bollywood hits and Manushi Chhillar to hit movie songs from India's various creative industries. Sanya Malhotra and Sunny Kaushal enacted a musical tableau chronicling the journey of Indian cinema from 1913 to the present day.

“On the business front, on the back of the India-Colombia audiovisual co production agreement that was signed in October, the first look at a film examining the role of guru and spiritual leader Sri Ravi Shankar in bringing peace to Colombia was unveiled”

So, IFFI swings between cinema and spiritualism! What gets crushed between these extremities is the very concept of a movie festival – whose main role is to evoke questions and underline social ills, while presenting meaningful films. Somehow and somewhere, IFFI has strayed far, far away from what its founding fathers had envisaged for it: to screen in those 10 days (now fewer days) thought-provoking cinema from all over the world.

Yes, over the years, there have been some interesting films, but an overwhelming number of them are nothing short of trash. The reason is obvious. While Cannes, Venice and even Berlin have had Festival heads serving for years, IFFI has never let this happen, constantly changing them, not letting them settle down thus denying the Festival stability.

The writer is a senior movie critic and author. Views expressed are personal