

Osian's Cinefan 2009

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Celebrating its eleventh birthday in New Delhi, Osian's Cinefan Film Festival (25-30 October 2009) started its second decade with a new direction, well-known independent filmmaker Mani Kaul as the director-general, and an eclectic program that stretched over several continents. Founded in 1999 as a small festival of Asian cinema by Aruna Vasudev, the president of Netpac (Network for Promotion of Asian cinema) and the founder and editor-in-chief of the now defunct *Cinemaya Asian Film Quarterly*, Cinefan gradually enlarged its scope to include Arab cinema as well and has become one of the largest festivals of contemporary Asian and Arab cinema in the world.

This year, the thirteen first, second or third films 'InCompetition' from Asian and Arab world included two films from Turkey: a highly experimental film, *Knot* by Uigur Asan and *There* by Hakk Kurtulu and Melik Saraçolu, with overt influences of Ingmar Bergman. *The Long Night* by Hatem Mohammad Ali from Syria about jailed political dissidents; *Khargosh* by Paresh Kamdar from India about a boy used as a go-between between two lovers; *Before the Burial* by Behnam Behzadboroujeni from Iran about a man trying to settle scores and reconcile himself with the past; *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* by Edwin from Indonesia drawing portraits of several people in segments and *Wailing Wall* by Elyes Baccar from Tunisia about the sufferings of Palestinians since 1967 were other noteworthy films of the competition.

In the short film competition section, Jafar Panahi's son Panah Panahi's *First Film*, about trying to make a clandestine film in oppressive Tehran was one of the fifteen films judged for the best short film award.

'InDialogue', which according to Kaul included films beyond competition rather than out of competition was organized as a forum for cinemas and cultures of the world to dialogue with each other. From Kazakhstan *The Gift to Stalin* by Rustem Abdrashev; from Turkey Dervi Zaim's *Dot* and Semih Kaplanolu's *Milk*; from Iran Abbas Kiarostami's *My Sweet Shirin* and from South Korea Kim Ki-Duk's *Dream* drew large crowds by the reputation of their directors. But other films also received favourable responses from the audience. For example, from South Korea, Kyu Hwan Jeo's *Animal Town* about a child molester and how he and those who are touched by his action cope with their lonely lives and human urges in the large metropolis in the aftermath of a tragedy was a difficult film to watch but nonetheless left its impact on the viewer. Özcan Alper's *Autumn* about a young political prisoner who returns home to his mother, half of a man that he once was, was beautifully shot in the mountains of north east Turkey where it rains incessantly. The desperate love between the protagonist and a Georgian prostitute in a dead-end in the post-Soviet republic was touching in terms of underscoring the external elements (history, geopolitics) that could determine the lives of ordinary people. India's Oscar entry, *Harishchandra's Factory* by Paresh Mokashi about the tribulations of Dada Saheb Phalke, the first filmmaker of India as he fights all obstacles doggedly to realize his dream was a crowd pleaser. Among the short films of the 'InDialogue' section, Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhangke's *Cry Me a River* about age, love, ecology and culture was memorable.

The 'NewStream' umbrella name brought together filmmakers who, not unlike the Indian New Wave filmmakers of the sixties, seventies and eighties, are radically different from each other but at the same time carry a sense of solidarity, with a major difference that they enjoy a wide audience and hence, redefine 'mainstream cinema'. Working within the framework of the mainstream, these filmmakers distance themselves from Bollywood. If they use the thematic and visual codes of Bollywood (such as the melodramatic plot or the song and dance sequences), it is only to dismantle and subvert them. One of these films was *Dev D*, a take-off on the famous classic of doomed love, *Devdas* and its re-makes. Here, the director Anurag Kashyap built the plot around the spoilt son of a rich Punjabi businessman who goes to London to further his studies. Paro is his childhood sweetheart, whose marriage to another man pushes Dev into a self-destructive spree of alcohol and drugs. In a brothel, he meets Chanda, the victim of a sex scandal and they fight their demons in the arms of each other.

The festival opened 24 October with a Rumanian film, Adrian Sitaru's *Hooked*, which begged the question why it was chosen as the opening film of a festival on Asian and Arab cinemas. *Hooked* tells the story of a man and his married lover who go for a clandestine picnic in the countryside and meet a young woman who seriously complicates their relationship. A day in the country becomes a crisis of conscience for them after they hit a prostitute with their car. Presumed dead, she suddenly wakes up, and the couple lies to her about the accident. On 30 October, the closing film was *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Forman from Israel.

References

During the impressive closing ceremony that brought the elite of the New Delhi film and art world together, the awards of the 11th Osian's Cinefan were distributed as follows:

Best Feature Film

The Long Night (Syria) by Hatem Mohammad Ali

Best Actress

Negar Jhaverian in *Before the Burial* (Iran) by Behnam Behzadi

Best Actor

Ali Reza Aghakhani in *Before the Burial* (Iran) by Behnam Behzadi

Special Jury Award (*ex aequo*)

The Wailing Wall (Tunisia) by Elyse Baccar

Khargosh (India) by Paresh Kamdar

Best Short Film

The First Film (Iran) by Panah Panahi

Netpac/Fipresci joint award

The Long Night (Syria) by Hatem Mohamad Ali

Audience Award

Khargosh (India) by Paresh Kamdar

Author Information

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