

Article

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Women Filmmakers and Gender-Ing Equity Empowerment Eco-Space



Sisters

Empowered ensemble representation across the board. Equitable visibility for, and of, women, work distribution, and engagement has been a contested and championed one, especially post #MeToo.

Both in the public sphere and at high-profile film festivals, given their immense draw on a single ubiquitous platform, a sea of the congregation. However, things have taken a turn for the greater reformative good.

Film festivals, after film festivals, have lately made it incumbent upon themselves to ensure the ‘right’ and ‘encompassing’ space for women, in and, from all departments of the film industry, at the annual jamboree. Some film festivals have gone a step ahead, mandating a selection process to ensure this happens without let or fail.

It is, in this regard, heartening to note that here, at recent film festivals such as the first Red Sea International Film Festival (RSIFF), the Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFES), Toronto, Berlin, Venice, what have you, there has been a conscious paradigm shift in representation of women

directors and their creative works at the flagship calendar festivals. Toronto, especially, has been vigorously advocating and promoting this idea of women’s engagement, despatching mailers and soliciting donations for the noble cause.

Each edition, at these film festivals, one has seen this number healthily rising, warming the cockles, to note that festival organizers have consciously and religiously ensured there is a healthy meld of women filmmakers and their films showcased to speak of the immense strides they are and have been, making in this tough, yet creative, industry/field.

Immersive, engaging, eclectic, and encapsulating. Provocative, prodding, and perceptive. Each ensemble auteur works of woman directors showcased, be it at the maiden RSIFF or the 13th Edition of BIFFES. Those listed on the Kerala International Film Festival have ensured they provided that nuanced and delectable “female” gaze into their own ilk and the issues their fraternity confront, day in and day out, the world over.

That these multifarious cinemas drew from woman directors across several countries were all an eye-opener truly epitomizing what the RSIFF stood for “Changing the Script.” BIFFES is all about “World in Bengaluru,” is indeed a welcome wind of change such that women audiences too feel engaged in the cinemas they watch at these film festivals and have a truly representative voice of their ilk coming through.

With empowerment and decisive engagement with their community being the new normal among the film festivals circuit the world over, and gender parity the one thing, it was pleasantly “surprising” and equally welcoming in keeping with the changing times, the showcase of ensemble creative works by women directors was truly an absorbing adventure of its own.

If, at RSIFF, one witnessed as many as nine feature-length films showcased at the film festival with women at the helm, this time around, the number of films by women filmmakers was virtually half the number of curated films for the 13th Edition of BIFFES.

Indeed, with a sense of pride, one notes that as many as 30 films were screened under various sections at BIFFES this year from as many countries providing a multifarious flavour of auteur works being done by these women, many of whom are truly trailblazing.

These multifarious cinemas drawn from woman directors across several countries are all an eye-opener truly epitomizing and championing the cause of women empowerment in every form possible.



Farha

At RSIFF, you had *Farha* by Jordanian director Darin J Sallam, *Yuni* by Indonesia’s Kamila Andini, French flick *A Tale of Love & Desire* by Leyla Bouzid, Danish *As in Heaven* by Tea Lindeburg, Algerian *Sisters* by Yamina Benguigui, British *The Colour Room* by Claire McCarthy, *You*

Resemble Me from Egypt by Dina Amer, and a homegrown quintet of Sara Mesfer, Jawaher Alamri, Noor Alameer, Hind Alfahhad, Fatima Al-Banawi with *Becoming*, and *Quareer* by another fiver comprising Ragheed Al Nahdi, Norah Almowald, Ruba Khafagy, Fatma Alhazmi, and Noor Alameer.

In Bengaluru, leading the luminous charge of women brigade was Greece’s young, talented, and promising Sonia Liza Kenterman with her *Tailor*, which flagged off 13th BIFFES as the inaugural film coveting a pride of place for itself.



Fire

Then you had Kazakhstan’s Aizhana Kassymek Granaz’s *OT (Fire)*, Farnoosh Samadi’s Iranian feature *180 degree*, Macedonia’s young Norika Sefa’s *Looking for Venera*, Indonesia’s Kamila Adini’s *Yuni*, Antonete Alamet Kusijonovic’s Croatian fare *Murina*, Spainard Pilar Pilomera’s *School Girls*, Dina Amer’s Egyptian *You Resemble Me*, Fernanda Valadez’s Mexican film *Identifying Features*, Israel’s Ruthy Pribar’s *Asia*, Mexico’s *Prayers for the Stolen* by Tatiana Huezo, Antoinette Jadaone’s Philippine fare *Fan Girl*, Bosnian Jasmila Zbanic’s *Quo Vadis Aida?*, Granaz Moussavi’s Afghanian fare *When Pomegranates Howl*, Tracey Deer’s Canadian fare *Beans*, Nora Martirosyan’s Armenian flick *Should the Wind Drop*, Kristina Crozeva co-directed Bulgarian movie *The Father*, Tunisia’s Kaouther Ben Hania’s *The Man Who Sold His Skin*, Russia’s Kira Kovalenko’s *Unclenching the Fists*, Ildiko Enyedi’s German’s film *The Story of My Wife*, Natalya Merkulova co-directed Captain Volkonogov Escaped, Angneiszka Holland’s Polish film *Charlatan*, Mia Hansen Love’s French fare *Bergman Island*, and Natalya Vorozhbit’s provocative and prophetic Ukrainian *Bad Roads* whose country is in the midst of a bizarre Russian incursion.

All the films listed above speak of how young, adolescent women, on the verge of womanhood, in

some cases, confront the various social structures they have been boxed in to fight the systemic suppression in the most emphatic manner and try to give wings to their youthful aspirations. Each of the protagonists navigates the patriarchal hegemony and stifling social situations successfully coming into their own and the greater good of their ilk.



As In Heaven

Not just family, filial, domestic, and social issues, or caught in the first flush of youth, some of the women directors' films take you into the thick of Ground Zero, where social, cross-border, and political strife and survival are the potent issues

Indeed, as RSIFF, BIFFES, and other fests, feted these celebrated creative cinematic works of the rich, resplendent women directors, saying Prosit! Viva la the Women Brigade may your tribe grow; it is pertinent here as an aside to point out what the latest Gender Evaluation 2021 exercise undertaken at the 71st Berlin International Film Festival to evaluate the gender distribution in the 2021 film selection reveals. According to the study, a comprehensive gender evaluation has been on annually since 2018.

Of the 132 films so evaluated from among the submissions received, it was found that 45 films were made exclusively or predominantly by female directors = 34.1 % (2020: 38.7 %).

Likewise, the study further notes, in the festival's competition section, wherein a total of 17 people were involved in directing, the 15 films in the competition, five were female (29.4 %) and 12 male (70.6 %), besides five either directed or co-directed by women.

One other aspect about the Berlinale study is, in the course of the examination of gender

distribution at the Berlinale, and, in addition, to examining closely at the Berlinale film selection, the festival also turned its attention and analysis to the internal gender distribution for the board of directors, heads of festival, sections, and initiatives.

It is heartening to note on all these parameters both RSIFF and BIFFES stupendously far outweigh not only the Berlin film festival but other Big Ticket film festivals as well, being held annually elsewhere.

What is heartening to note is that six out of the eight Berlinale Bears awarded went to female filmmakers speaking of the ascendancy of women filmmakers in the centre stage of high competitions at the film festival.

Of the 18 films from 17 production countries that made up the field in this year's competition – women occupied the director's chair in seven of these, with six of them scooping up the eight Berlinale Bears. A development that bodes well for the female fraternity while bearing in mind that the Berlinale is openly committed to gender equality in the film industry.



A Tale of Love and Desire

Surely, the prevalent mindset has positively changed, and the bridge has been crossed. How far the entertainment and film industry will sail across to become all the more assimilative, accommodative, and appreciative of the better gender's contribution to the fine arts of cinema and making engagement with it even more productive and fruitful only time will tell. For now, though God Speed Women as we doff our hats to your lot and your brave spirit and resilience surmounting the heavy odds in your paths till recent past.