

Festival Report**Narendra Bandabe****27th International Film Festival of Kerala**

The 27th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK 9-16 Dec 2022) was held recently, and it featured an impressive schedule in almost all sections, including a Masterclass with legendary Hungarian Filmmaker Bela Tarr and a huge crowd of cinephiles who came together to celebrate cinema. The festival's theme was flow, and it was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Kerala, Pinararayi Vijayan, who switched on an ark light toward the audience, marking the festival's journey through technology and cultural progress.

During his inaugural speech, CM Vijayan stated that festivals are a creative tool for concisely expressing art. The IFFK is a manifestation of an artistic and cultural gathering unified by togetherness, harmony, fun, and excitement, reflecting humanity worldwide. He emphasised that the festival is a celebration and a reminder to promote art as a freedom of expression, especially if that expression is a justified fight against the rules that condemn basic freedom and human rights.

The festival's theme of flow was inspired by the idea of allowing the audience to engage with the films more organically, with fewer barriers between the movie and the viewers. The festival's organisers created an atmosphere of freedom and flexibility, where the audience could explore the films and interact with the filmmakers more relaxedly.

The festival's opening ceremony was infused with the revolution when Iranian filmmaker Mehnaz Mohammadi, who has long advocated for women's rights in Iran, sent her hair, which she described as "the end of suffering," through Athina Rachel

Tsangari, a Greek filmmaker who received the award on behalf of Mehnaz Mohammad. The festival witnessed the first Open Forum session at Tagore Theatre, celebrating the spirit of freedom and art.

Renowned film actor and director Nandita Das flagged off the session. The bottom line of the

forum was to discuss how the outlook of the themes of expression can be cogitated through such film festivals.



Nandita Das commented that open forums aid in building a society that is less polarised, less prejudiced, less blinded, and less biased.

There were meet-the-director programs almost daily, which gave the audience a chance to ask questions of the directors whose films screened at the festival. In one of the sessions, Oksana Cherkashnya, the actress of the Ukrainian Film *Klondike*, said, "The war in Ukraine is not just a Ukrainian issue, but an issue of the safety of the entire world. In Ukraine, we don't call it a crisis. We call it a full-fledged war, which began eight years ago. It's an antiwar movie as it shows how war changes our daily lives and what we should do, go through it and protest the violence. This is a new kind of resilient protest, a feminist solely dedicated to women—a challenging but necessary step. Our movie, *'Klondike'*, is a monologue for the entire world and not just for Ukraine. Personal is political, and political is revolution". Other filmmakers like Hadi Ghazanfari (Iran) and Aruna Jayawardana (Shri Lanka) conveyed the tragic situations in their respective countries.

This year's country focus at IFFK was Serbia, and the complex history and socio-political life of Serbia were reflected in its typical films too. Films like *Working Class Heroes*, *Father*, *Oasis*, *As far As I can Walk*, *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist*, and *A Cross in the desert* were showcased, narrating the world of Serbia. Films like *Working Class Heroes* and *Father* narrate the living conditions and fights of the betrayed and displaced working class, the poor, and the downtrodden.

The 27th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) attracted a large audience, and the conversation sessions were particularly popular. During these sessions, filmmakers explored various themes, including co-production, funding, and gender representation in films. On the fourth day of the festival, Greek filmmaker Athina Rachel Tsangari highlighted the issues of co-production. She mentioned that the Greek Film Society has very limited funds, which was the sole reason behind her decision to not depend on the state and do everything through co-production. She further stated that when it comes to co-production, filmmakers have to make core compromises, and these compromises can become bigger and bigger, leading to a struggle to find the right crew.

Chaitanya Tamhane, an Indian filmmaker, also spoke about the challenges of independent cinema funding. He said that they didn't want to be parochial since there is no institutional funding for independent cinemas. Co-production can become a power dynamic with a bigger struggle, he added. These conversations shed light on the challenges faced by independent filmmakers and the importance of finding alternative funding methods.

Another important issue that was highlighted during the festival was film restoration. Veit Helmel, the Jury Chairman of IFFK 2022, discussed this issue with Mr Prakash Magdum, former Director of the National Film Archives. He stressed the importance of acting fast if we want to save the heritage of films. With accessibility to cinemas becoming much easier these days, there is a greater need for restoration.

Many old movies still exist that need to be managed, and if we want to unveil those timeless classics to this generation, restoration is the only way possible. Helmel also mentioned that analogue films tend to fade after a certain time and may have perforated and lost information. He added that colouring such films is practically an artistic rape as a movie is shot in black and white with a specific intention.

The festival also presented the lifetime achievement award to Hungarian filmmaker Bela Tarr. In his acceptance speech, Tarr emphasised the need to protect movies and the young generation. He said that we are from different continents and countries and have different lives and cultures, but when he sees the audience, he feels they have a beautiful common language called motion picture. Tarr also delivered this year's Aravindan Memorial Lecture, where he shared his filmmaking style, vision, and process with the audience. He described filmmaking as a "very dirty job" and compared himself to a hunter stealing the audience's emotions and forcing them to see the reeled emotions.

Utama, directed by Alejandro Loayza Grisi, won the Golden Crow Pheasant (Suvarna Chakoram) for Best Film at IFFK 2022. The film is considered an artistic statement of the global climate crisis. Through an audience poll, Lijo Jose Pellissery's *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* won the Rajatha Chakoram Award.

In addition to these awards, the FIPRESCI Award for Best Malayalam Film of the 27th International Film Festival of Kerala was awarded to the film '*19(1)(a)*' directed by Indhu V.S, while Manipuri filmmaker Romi Meitei's *Our Home* won the FIPRESCI Award for Best International Film.

Overall, Kerala's 27th International Film Festival was a huge success, and the conversation sessions added to its appeal. The festival highlighted the challenges faced by independent filmmakers, the importance of alternative funding methods, and the need to restore old films. The event also recognised the achievements of filmmakers and movies that explored significant issues.