

With Love from Canada

The 48th International Film Festival of India hosts Canada as the 'Country of Focus'

Date: November 27, 2017



By Syed Mahmoud Nawaz*

To promote cultural exchange and to enhance the friendly bond between India and other nations, it has been a tradition that every year, the International Film Festival of India features a 'Country of Focus' to showcase the cinematic contributions of that particular nation and to provide a platform for film-makers and others connected with cinema from both the countries to exchange ideas, to connect and to look for opportunities for collaborations.

The 48th International Film Festival of India hosted Canada as its 'Country of Focus'.

2017 also marks the 150th Anniversary of the Canadian Confederation. Diversity and inclusion, reconciliation with Indigenous people, environment and youth are the major themes of the 150th Anniversary of the Canadian Confederation and it very well reflected in the film package of a variety of genres that Canada had brought with great warmth and love to the 48th IFFI. The package was curated by the Toronto International Film Festival in collaboration with Telefilm Canada.

The list of Canadian films included Stephen Dunn's '**Closet Monster**' which tells the story of an imaginative teenager, his struggle through a rough childhood onto the brink of 'adulthood', Pat Mill's '**Don't Talk to Irene**' which portrays how the central character Irene who is bullied at school for her fatness and who gets suspended at the school as a result of a cruel prank, utilizes her community service punishment to prove that you don't need to be physically 'perfect' to be perfectly awesome, Kim Nguyen's '**Eye on Juliet**' which is a love story captured through the eye of a spider drone, Mina Shum's '**Meditation Park**', which gives us an insight on the experiences of first-generation immigrant women and focuses on the tale of a women's journey of liberation which unexpectedly starts when she discovers the infidelity of her husband.

Johnny Ma's film '**Old Stone**' was the **opening film** of the 'Country of Focus' screenings. The psychological thriller takes us on a journey with a local small town taxi driver in China who bears the brunt of bureaucracy and legal manipulation after he gets involved in an accident.

Other films were, Robin Aubert's '**Ravenous**', which is a horror tale set in a small remote village in upstate province of Quebec, Carlos and Jason Sanchez's '**Allure**' cinematically captures the quest for a worthy companion and the journey thereafter, and Hugh Gibson's documentary '**The Stairs**', which is 'a non-judgmental character study of life on society's margins' in director's own words.

Some of the Co-production films from Canada were also participating in the festival- The film, 'Still Night, Still Light' (Canada, China and Mexico production) competed in the International Competition. Two films were screened under the Cinema of the World Category; 'The Bread Winner' (Canada, Ireland Luxembourg) and 'Union Leader' (Canada, India). Another film 'The Solitude' (Canada, Venezuela, Italy) was part of the "Biennale College 1017 Venezia" package.

In a recent interview, The High Commissioner of Canada to India, H.E. Nadir Patel said, "Today, Canada is driving not just the story telling in films, but the technology that allows those stories to be conveyed to audiences around the world. We are delighted that in addition to screening some wonderful films during the 48th IFFI, Telefilm Canada has brought prominent Canadian film personalities, film makers and Canadian companies who are ready to explore opportunities with their Indian counterparts".

Cameron Bailey, Canadian film critic and the artistic director of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) clearly believes that there is a valid comparison between the culture and diversity in Canada and India, and the way this multiculturalism reflects in Cinema of both the nations.

Indo-Canadian film-maker Brinda Muralidhar said, "As an Indian I believe and appreciate the value and spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The Whole World is One Family), in the same spirit, my adopted home Canada embraces everyone from around the world equally without any exception".

The Consul General of Canada in Mumbai, H.E. Jordan Reeves said during a press conference in Panjim that the Government of Canada is very committed to celebrating the diversity of its population. He added, "Diversity is part of the equation in Canada and we are really serious about that. We really value the contributions of Indo-Canadians and other Indians coming to Canada to make films".

India and Canada too have a standing **Audio-Visual Co-Production Agreement** which is enabling Indian and Canadian film producers to utilize a

platform for collaboration on various facets of film making. On the sidelines of the 48th International Film Festival of India, a Canada-India Co-production Film Workshop was also organized in Panaji by Telefilm Canada and the Consulate General of Canada, Mumbai. In Canada, the official co-productions are recognized as '100 percent Canadian' and have access to the same domestic financing as Canadian productions.

Canadian cinema has always been under the shadow of 'big brother' Hollywood, but it has never failed to retain its unique character and appeal, thanks to the work of celebrated directors like Denys Arcand, David Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan, Guy Maddin, Xavier Dolan, Patricia Rozema, Sarah Polley and others. It continues to be a force to reckon with despite a steady 'brain drain' which has seen the likes of James Cameron and Denis Villeneuve make blockbusters in the US. Canada manages to unearth talented new directors every year because it has a well-oiled publicly-funded system to spot and promote young filmmakers.

Indian film-critic, Saibal Chatterjee who has been regularly covering TIFF has some advice to offer, he says, "Canadian cinema has the potential to be commercially viable in India, beyond the festivals. Similarly, Indian expatriates are a large community in Canada, especially in Toronto (Ontario) and Vancouver (British Columbia). The viewership for Indian stories in these cities is considerable. There is, therefore, room for developing the potential of both Indian and Canadian cinema with an eye on marketability. English-language Canadian films could be commercially exploited on the Indian exhibition circuit, which currently is dominated entirely by Bollywood and Hollywood. This would give audiences here wider choice. Indian films, too, could look at tapping the Canadian market in a bigger way. That is the direction that filmmakers in both countries should take in the years ahead".

The Lifetime Achievement Award of the 48th International Film Festival of India also went to one of Canada's most celebrated Canadian film-maker, Mr. Atom Egoyan whose 3 films-'Exotica', 'Remember' and 'The Sweet Hereafter'- were screened at the festival. Mr. Egoyan also held a Master Class on 'Making Drama' during the festival.

The India-Canada bilateral relationship is developing in many different areas, and the cultural ties promoted through films between Canada and India is an area with great potential. Now it is up to the film-makers of both the nations to join hands together to make a bright cinematic future.

**Syed Mahmoud Nawaz is a senior journalist and film maker
Views expressed are those of the author.*
