Film festival – to be or not to be

Culture Cocktail (from Mid-Day, Delhi every Wednesday)

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As the 34th International Film Festival of India drew to a close it continued to be in a debacle, thanks to the continuous indecisiveness about its character. From a fairly prestigious beginning it has been brought down to shambles because of the lack of empowerment of the people running it, starving the festival of funds and changing its location every time. Why shift the national festival to Goa? Why mix tourism with serious cinema? Why spend millions of rupees to develop infrastructure and then invest all over again in another city. These are some important questions which will have to be answered before the venue is shifted again. As far as the films are concerned it was a mixed bag as always. There is space enough only to discuss some of the films which I liked.

Pajn-e-Asr was an Iranian film based in post Taliban Afghanistan. It was about innocence and ambition in a country ravaged by its earlier rulers and how a young woman, Agheleh (Noqleh), tries to find a future for herself and maybe even become the President of her nation. No harm in dreaming. Her admirer, a poet and a fellow refugee, in the war torn land, puts up her portraits in an abandoned palace. The film ends in a desolate landscape where she and her father have to burn the horse-cart, which once transported them, just to keep warm at night. The conservatively religious father loses his son, his grandchild, and his horse in the land which according to him was becoming increasingly blasphemous. They meet another old

man in the desert who was going to Kandahar to re-elect Moola Omar. “Too late,” he is informed, “the Americans have already overthrown him.” The film is directed by Samira Makhmalbus, who became the world’s youngest director to participate in the official section at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival.

Undoubtedly the most talked about film in the festival, *Dogville,* directed by Lors Von Tries, is a highly stylised film, more theatre than film. The entire film is shot on a set representing a small town, Dogville, in which most of the set is drawn on the studio floor, which looks like an architectural drawing, complete with labels. Only the dimensions are missing. The central character is an exasperatingly self suffering and a stubbornly stoic woman, Grace, whose role has been played with a remarkable intensity by Nicole Kidman. Grace is on the run from Gangsters and the town shelters her at a price which goes on rising. The film is an interesting study about how seemingly respectable and apparently well meaning individuals become more and more savage. Just when the audience has had enough of the citizen’s sadism, Grace gets her sweet revenge. The Head Gangster turns out to be her own father. In the entire film you never get to see the open sky, except once, when a window curtain is drawn away. This adds to the claustrophobic nature of the story.

Yes Nurse, No Nurse, Directed by Peter Kramer, is a delirious, all-singing, all-dancing romantic comedy revolves around the eccentric denizens of an Amsterdam rest home and the killjoy neighbour who wants the whole lot of them evicted. Chock full of over-the-top*1960s* set design, tinted postcard tableaux and lush, split-screen visuals, the film’s cheerfully rude musical numbers would have the audience tapping its feet. Based on a Dutch television show from the *1960s, Yes Nurse, No Nurse is* the musical tale of Nurse Klivia (Loes Luca), who runs a rest home populated by a gang of lovable nutcases next door to the cranky Mr. Boordevol, who is constantly looking for a way to get Nurse Klivia and her rowdy “patients” evicted, and may

finally have found a way when a young, hunky burglar with a heart of gold (Waldernar Torenstra) moves in with them. The film ends endearingly with a change of heart of the nosy neighbour.

At the age of 84, Sri Lanka's leading director Lester James Peries returns to the international stage after an absence of almost 20 years with *Mansion by the Like.* With 18 features to date this classic veteran filmmaker has not only brought his country to the forefront of Asian cinema, but also inspired a whole generation of Sri-Lankan film makers. The film is inspired by Anton Chekhov's Cherry orchard, and although it has been adapted to the local milieu the characters drawn from the play are mostly true to the original. The film has been shot in visually pleasing locale- in a dak bungalow next to a reservoir. The direction is tight and conservatively classical. All the emotions are neither over stated nor under stated by the actors and actresses who have given taught and controlled performances.