

Interpreting Myth and Recreating New Myths – 4th IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival 2008 – A Documentary film review by Divya Raina



The Perfect Match by
Dhwani Desai

The wonderful world of tales from the Panchatantra is open to numerous tellings and retellings. The extraordinary elasticity of these tales mean that one can enjoy seeing in them current, contemporary concerns embedded in their structure.

The animation documentary 'Man Pasand – The Perfect Match' by Dhvani Desai about the “journey of a father in search of a suitable groom for his daughter, which was screened at the 4th IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival at the India International Centre, provoked some heated discussion.

Some of the questions raised were whether the selection of the Panchatantra tale itself as a subject of the film was a bit regressive. Did it imply that the 'she-mouse' could never have 'lofty ambitions' and ideals; unable to aspire to marrying a 'god' instead of the implications of marrying only a 'mouse' –

as this would restrict her to her lowly status.

Some in the audience wondered if the film maker had thought this through and whether its repercussions had occurred to her. Moreover the answers provided by the defensive film-maker present on the occasion were not considered very satisfactory either. Later, in an informal session, outside the screening venue, someone in the audience asserted that the woman/mouse had been allowed to freely choose her future husband by the father, and wasn't this a progressive step?

Some others wondered why the Children's Film Society had decided to use this particular fable and sponsor it. Was there any ominous connection, or ulterior motive in doing so?

However, a closer reading of the film would suggest that the agency the 'she-mouse' enjoys in willfully rejecting suitor after suitor and finally settling to her own choice – the 'he-mouse' is in fact, radically subversive and extremely liberating in a different level.

This reading is in fact consistent with the moral allegory of the film's structure – the false bravado of the fiery sun, the coldness of the 'puffed up' god of 'wind', the blackness of the god of thunder, the hard rigidity of the so-called 'solid' mountain god – all in contrast to the deceptively insignificant mouse that can actually terrify the mountain god by merely boring a hole in its side.

The entire parable actually serves to function as a tremendously subversive way of looking power, and what we perceive as strength and where true strength *actually* lies.

The entire parable makes us re-examine our own notions of strength as well as gender roles (such as the typically 'masculine' desirable qualities in a suitor of 'strength', solid' character, etc).

Why is it that we aren't able to effectively read and analyse

allegory and animation, and are unable to see parables from a multiplicity of viewpoints and instead get weighed down by our attitudes and readings?

The exposure to many diverse films and the analysis that follows the screenings is vital if we are to progress not only in our cine-literacy but also in the new reworking of myth and fable in our lives.

Knowing For Sure Without Knowing For Certain: How I Make Films by Paromita Vohra – A film maker's presentation at the IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival

I admit to being embarrassed about making a presentation about how I make films. I feared it would be a pompous thing somehow and that my body of work is not substantial enough (which it's not) to talk about. But as I began to think about it, I realized in some ways it was an opportunity to valued, if one could speak with both an honesty and seriousness about intent.

The reason I value it more is because it's very difficult to be a documentary filmmaker. Not because of money, because of lack of sufficient exhibition and distribution structures – these problems will remain because we will always want more money and more audiences. The nature of any work which is independent and not part of the mainstream makes those things

a given. But the reason I think it is difficult is because there is so little discussion around us about documentary films – and even less about it as a film, not only a political statement (although in essence the two are not different).

Sometimes people ask me what I do. When I say I am a filmmaker I see their eyes lighting up and when I add that I make documentaries I see the light go out, their voices peter out into a “oh accha, I see.” If someone asks me what I have been doing recently and I say, well I just finished a film, their voices go up in delight – oh? You made a film?! And I add, yes, it’s about this incident in Meerut that.. and they say, deflated, oh, you made a new documentary, I thought you’d made a *film*.

The fact is, no one really takes documentary films seriously as filmmaking – sometimes not even filmmakers themselves. No one writes about it in the film reviews column in the press. Academics and critics develop increasingly sophisticated ways of talking about mainstream culture but a language and framework to assess the contemporary alternative culture seems not to coalesce. And in the absence of that language it becomes hard to clarify one’s own craft and thinking, for it to grow stronger.

Even as we stand at a moment that has seen a real surge in the popularity of the documentary film, it appears that documentaries are still invisible even to those who watch them – as films.

As any documentary filmmaker, I could not but be conscious of the marginality of the form. As one who began work in the mid-90s, just as the media landscape was undergoing a seismic shift, I was all the more keenly aware that the relationship with the language and the style of this form was a sporadic one. I lay all this out because I think, what I have come to realize on reflection is that a large part of my goal in a film is to make people think about filmmaking as a language

and to talk about it.

Why do I want to do this – besides reasons of vanity of which there's always some part in any artist's repertoire?

I am not very sure if younger people today feel what I felt when I was young. I wanted to make documentary films at a time when there were far fewer filmmakers around than today. Of those, the ones who didn't have beards, wore far more serious clothes than I did (or do now that I am no longer young). Although this sounds a bit facetious I say it only to indicate that in some senses a lot of the filmmakers working then came from a largely common (despite disagreement and dissimilarities) political and filmic tradition.

To quote from an interview with the well known feminist documentarian Deepa Dhanraj which appeared in *Deep Focus*, although I read it years later, anthologized elsewhere:

"We saw films as a way of documenting and expressing a certain thinking. We also saw the making and viewing of films as an emotional experience for other women. Why we chose films specifically as the medium as opposed to the theatre, we really were not clear about. We were unhappy with the films around us and we did feel the need to reach out and generate images that never existed and could counter the negative portrayals and manipulations of women in the media. India having such a strong audience tradition, films seemed to be a good medium to enable us to go into community and draw people together. That we were not going to screen these films to a neutral audience was very clear, so our audience was fixed. The whole process was an alliance with the people who helped us to make the film. So both in production and conception, the themes and concerns of these films originated with the activists of that area."

Therefore, there seemed to be an implicit understanding which indicated what was political and what wasn't – for the

filmmaker and the viewer. In the context of that commonality – it is hard to describe how uncertain and how ill-equipped I felt to make films. I felt like a pretender and I found it very hard to show my ignorance because it usually aroused shock. People were shocked that I didn't know everything about the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, the Naxal movement or the Mathura rape case. I felt an instinctive relationship with the political impulse and ideas in all the documentaries I watched – from Bombay our City to Something Like a War. But because they were ideas I couldn't see clearly articulate – in terms of an easily accessible historical record – I felt very nervous because I didn't know any of this for certain although I in my heart felt that I knew it for sure.

What resulted from this was something I can only call a hectic political anxiety.

I was a middle class kid who had gone to a couple of rallies and felt supportive of many leftist positions. I remember being excited when I went to the first big NBA rally in Bombay – but I hadn't as such been a part of an organization and I didn't really want to be – I wanted to be a filmmaker. However, I constantly felt that that would not be political enough. If I wanted to be really political I could do it only if I were somehow attached to a movement of some kind and if my film were somehow interlinked with these issues. And yet...Why did this not convince me? Was I scared of my own ignorance? Was I too entrenched in my middle class identity to want to abandon it? I am sure these things played some part but the fact is there was actually not enough discussion happening around documentary film making having a political space of its own, as art, and there wasn't really much of a space to talk about all this and so, come to some understanding from which I could move on. I felt political – but how to express this politics? Would I have to become a naxalite? Or work in the Narmada valley? But I didn't think I could, I didn't even think I should. Was it as simple a matter

as voting? Obviously not. What is it then that films want us to do – and by extension, should I ever get to make films- what was I supposed to tell people to do?

What was important for me to understand was that I actually was in a different time and space than a lot of earlier filmmakers – that I wasn't actually operating in the same context and that some of my confusion about their responses was in itself a critique from which some new understanding was born for me about the kind of films I would eventually make.

In fact, later in the same interview quoted above Dhanraj says:

"In India, what has also happened is that we have got stuck with the form of socialist realism without the environment of revolution which bred this form in the first place...(as in say Chile, or the USSR)...Many film forms created (in those contexts) have become radical genres which 'political' filmmakers have used and are still using in toto. Here in India, the prevailing ideological climate is reactionary and we seem to have got stuck with these forms without the specific historical circumstances that bred them in the first place. *Today, by and large, these films only illustrate the individual filmmaker's politics and don't move into the realm of political activity.*" (Italics mine)

What does that mean – to move into the realm of political activity. This kind of discussion about filmmaking is important because it asks us to think about two things: the nature of politics and the nature of film as a medium of political activity. Do we make films that faithfully illustrate our political position on a particular matter? Or do we use our political position to arrive at an understanding of the subject and try somehow to bridge the gap between what we see when we look at something thanks to our political perspective?

As I see it, with the political shifts of the 90s a lot of filmmaking was not necessarily happening within the context of particular movements. And as, in the last decade and a half, the urban and semi urban middle class has prospered and expanded hugely it has increasingly gone away from a lot of progressive political thought and in fact information which might cast a questioning light on their choices and their realities. For me in many senses it is imperative to draw this community back into the fold of a larger political discussion and I am going to speak very briefly about how the nature of intervention in my work is tied to my formal choices.

I was lucky that I saw the work of a few filmmakers that I think was also responsive to this pool of ideas – Jill Misquitta, Reena Mohan, Madhusree Dutta – strangely they were all women – which helped me in thinking about these things a lot, however associatively.

Then I was very lucky because I was asked to make a film about feminism – not an event etc. but a film about a political idea that would encourage people to engage with this political idea. So this was important to me because in fact I was struggling with these two questions myself and I had to find a strategy to deal with it.

While researching this film I found again and again the normal human contradictoriness in many ways – the way people acted and the ideas they had for instance did not always match. There'd be lots of people whose ideas I agreed with who would not behave well or be very rigid – i.e., not in accordance with the values they (we) espoused, whereas frequently, people whose ideologies were anathema to me were the soul of human reasonableness and courtesy. I wanted, in the film, to try to communicate a sense impression of what I understood in the research process and I think a lot of the language I have since been using, evolved in the process of making this film.

I wanted to find a way to include the idea that I might both

agree and disagree with something. So for instance in interviews, I decided not to ask about all the things someone notable had achieved, not to glorify, but, although I did not know them personally, to find a way to have a personal conversation while talking of political things.

One of the things I decided to do (and have done ever since) is not choose people who were in the film on the strength of their achievements but how the conversation with them answered my personal questions about some of the ideas (in this case feminism and the feminist movement). Also I think I tended again and again to choose people who inhabited a sort of middle space, or at least were willing to talk about the middle space. I basically began to be very interested in that which was not quite being discussed in public space – the interior, the quotidian, the emotional.

(CLIP OF VINA MAZUMDAR'S INTERVIEW WHERE SHE TALKS ABOUT HER PERSONAL SENSE OF INADEQUACY IN THE FEMINIST WORK SHE DID AND YET, SHARES A CERTAIN WISE, REFLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE NATURE OF MOVEMENTS).

I think what's important to me – is that within the narrative of a film, absolute positions not be taken vis-à-vis a person or event. However, clearly my position on the matter is clear and should be communicated somehow. This is the basic idea along which I structure my films: that my politics is clear in the way I choose things but I often talk to those (to use a lovely word I've learned from academic friends) who inhabit a liminal space – or at least look for that sort of space within the conversation.

A curiosity I had about why films also proceeded along certified political lines – was that they would become so repetitive. I came to understand that one of these reasons was that both politically and formal-ly, we know that we are marginal in some way and that the ideas we are working with are not in the realm of common knowledge, or even a common

value system. Hence, an anxiety about stating and arguing our position in a peculiar mixture of indignation and dutiful proof emerged. In all of this film as a medium gets engaged with for its amplificatory properties, more than its performative ones.

But so much of art is a trick of performance. So, I decided rather consciously, that in a film, what if we assume not what is right or wrong – but we assume what matters and doesn't. We assume that our position does not have to be explained – either by proving someone wrong or by explaining why we are right. But what if we just assume it's fine to have the position we have and maybe make a little effort to present it clearly enough and not explain it.

To do that we need to rely on the nature of film as primarily a space of ambiguity where ideas may be clarified through constant presentation/examination.

In some ways I am particularly uninterested in the concept of expose, the concept of the sting for instance so I tend not to interview too many of the "accused" in the progressive framework. Because the truth is audiences don't share my values although those values may overlap. And if they shared those values then I wouldn't feel the need to show them a film. Furthermore I do feel that if the instruments of justice really worked in our society then the expose would serve a genuine purpose, which, following a natural path would lead to justice. But in the context of a rather cynical system and a disenchanted public, the language of the expose seems to reaffirm violence/injustice.

So I've become very interested in the idea of conversation – with all its attendant charms, points of convergence and divergence, as a means of changing ideas and for that I felt it was necessary to create spaces within the film where strong lines were not constantly being drawn. What are we really making these films for – to help people make more informed,

more democratic decisions? Perhaps, I felt, a way to do this would be to allow them to inhabit a space for some time that would be a space of no absolute truth, no certitude and perhaps, take that sense away with them.

So I tend to use what I call a multiple window – which is not about providing different perspectives as much as a sort of more mischievous behaviour of jumping in from one window and then jumping out and then coming in from the door and just playing the fool a little bit.

I also tend to inhabit a persona and I try to keep it consistent – that is I see myself as an actor in the film and I make the film with that exact state of mind and way of asking questions – diff. for diff films.

This gives the films a sort of clear landscape for the viewer to inhabit, creating a sort of sensual journey of possibilities.

(CLIP OF BILQUIS' INTERVIEW IN Q2P)

The biggest issue has been what to do with things you really don't like? Do you not include it? I felt there was no need to waste a lot of time with stereotypes or those who propagate 'regressive thinking' because a film can't degenerate into a tu-tu-main main. I am uncomfortable with the black and white position – not so much because there is no right and wrong – actually I think there is, but the language of right and wrong is too polarizing. What do you do with stereotypical situations of which you are critical then?

I've tended to use fictional ideas for this. In Where's Sandra? I used tongue-in-cheek song picturisations that typified the gaze with which people see the Catholic girl (the figure of whom the film was about). In Unlimited Girls I used fake advertisements for anti-feminist products to typify the prejudices about feminism. In Morality TV aur Loving Jihad: Ek Manohar Kahani I used a fake article written in the style of

pulp fiction as a commentary (the film was about the language of tabloid news).

(CLIP FROM WHERE'S SANDRA – OF A SONG. ALSO, EARLIER, MORALITY TV HAD ALREADY BEEN SCREENED)

To do this, freely, but with the firm sense of making a political intervention I think I've had to trust that this is how I believe films work. Of course this is not absolute, it changes from time to time but we no longer look at films as absolute evidence. It's important to acknowledge that. Offering pleasure, knowing that film is a medium of pleasure and that is what draws people in but now allowing it to lull them, rather to wake them up to make them excited (not always pleasurably, but certainly in part through their senses) is a chance I feel all film-makers do take.

And in that sense I also see my work as a conversation with other filmmakers – I believe in knowing what they do and not doing the same thing. I am confident that this works as a composite movement and what one comrade in this endeavour is doing – is being taken care of – and that I need to not replicate it as an indication of solidarity, but I need to know about as much as I can and learn from other films and complement them.

It's obvious I have an interest in the way something is said and not exactly the thing itself although these two things are intimately connected. One of the things I am often accused of is leaving some things not quite said. I have to say it's deliberate – I think if you try to connect to the logic of the filmmaking aesthetics (not only factuality) in a film the audience will get it in their heads and will need to talk about it as a way of expressing what they've sensed – because they will know it for sure, but not for certain. And in getting there, in conversation with the film and each other, they may get to other places. And I really and truly in my heart know both for sure and for certain that in this way

(along with many others), a little bit, the world can slowly embrace change.

Fourth Asian Women's Film Festival 2008 showcased "Insights and Aspirations of Women" by Jai Chandiram



Madhushree Dutta's
'Scribbles on Akka'



Anupama Srinivasan's
'Everyday'

Inaugurating the two-day Fourth IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival in New Delhi, Dr Vatsyayan, Chairperson of the India International Centre Asia Project said that the observance of the International Women's Day had both 'deep positive and negative messages' since it drew attention to the inequities among the genders even as it had the avowed objective of empowerment. She added that the documentary had the ripeness to highlight various important issues as it had the capacity to cheer and to disturb.

Eminent film critic and historian Aruna Vasudev, who is also founder President of the Network for Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC), wondered whether the pronouncements made by political leaders on International Women's Day were mere lip service. She stressed the power of cinema to inspire people to make a change in society.

In her message read out on the occasion, Jocelyne Josiah of UNESCO said women still remained highly under-represented in all fields and this was of great concern to UNESCO. She called upon the media to let women handle the editorial content of the media on the International Women's Day tomorrow, a project that UNESCO has been supporting for the last eight years.

The International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) has been organizing this Festival for the past four years. The aim was to celebrate the vision of women through film. The festival reflects how women film makers explore reflect, negotiate, resist and document self , family religion ,political, social, cultural, environment. The IAWRT is presently concentrating on two projects, under the broad theme 'Violence and Women'. One project was on "Enforced Disappearances" and the struggle of Kashmiri women for human rights and the second on 'Trafficking of Women in Nepal , India and Bangladesh'.

Around 25 films from five countries were screened in the festival being held in collaboration with the IIC Asia Project

and UNESCO on the theme 'Insights and Aspirations'. They included features documentaries and animation films from UK, Japan, Pakistan, and the United States besides India.

The festival featured, "Mortality TV and the Loving Jihad by Paromita Vohra. The film looks outside the Breaking News and covers the complex dynamics of fear of love, scrutiny and control of women's mobility and sexuality and the feudal mindsets. "Lakshmi and Me" by Nishtha Jain explores her changing relationship with Lakshmi her part-time maid, "Word Within The Word" by Rajula Shah in her film shows how Kabir, the mystic poet resonates with ordinary lives today. Madhushree Dutta in her film "Scribbles on Akka" looks at the bhakti and rebellion of the 12th century poet Mahadevi Aka. Chandra Siddan enquires into her first marriage when she was a child and many more films that inspire.

Haruyo Kato captures her mother who is dying of cancer in her film . A film that that inspires as it challenges the ravages of the disease

Each screening was well attended by students from local media institutes and colleges .

The distinguished filmmaker Paromita Vohra revealed her approach to filmmaking , she said she opened up many windows so people can go in and out without being judgmental. Academics/ professionals spoke about their concerns in popular music culture and struggles in human rights . Truly an inspiring fare . Other filmmakers shared their experiences and discussed the emerging trends in documentaries.

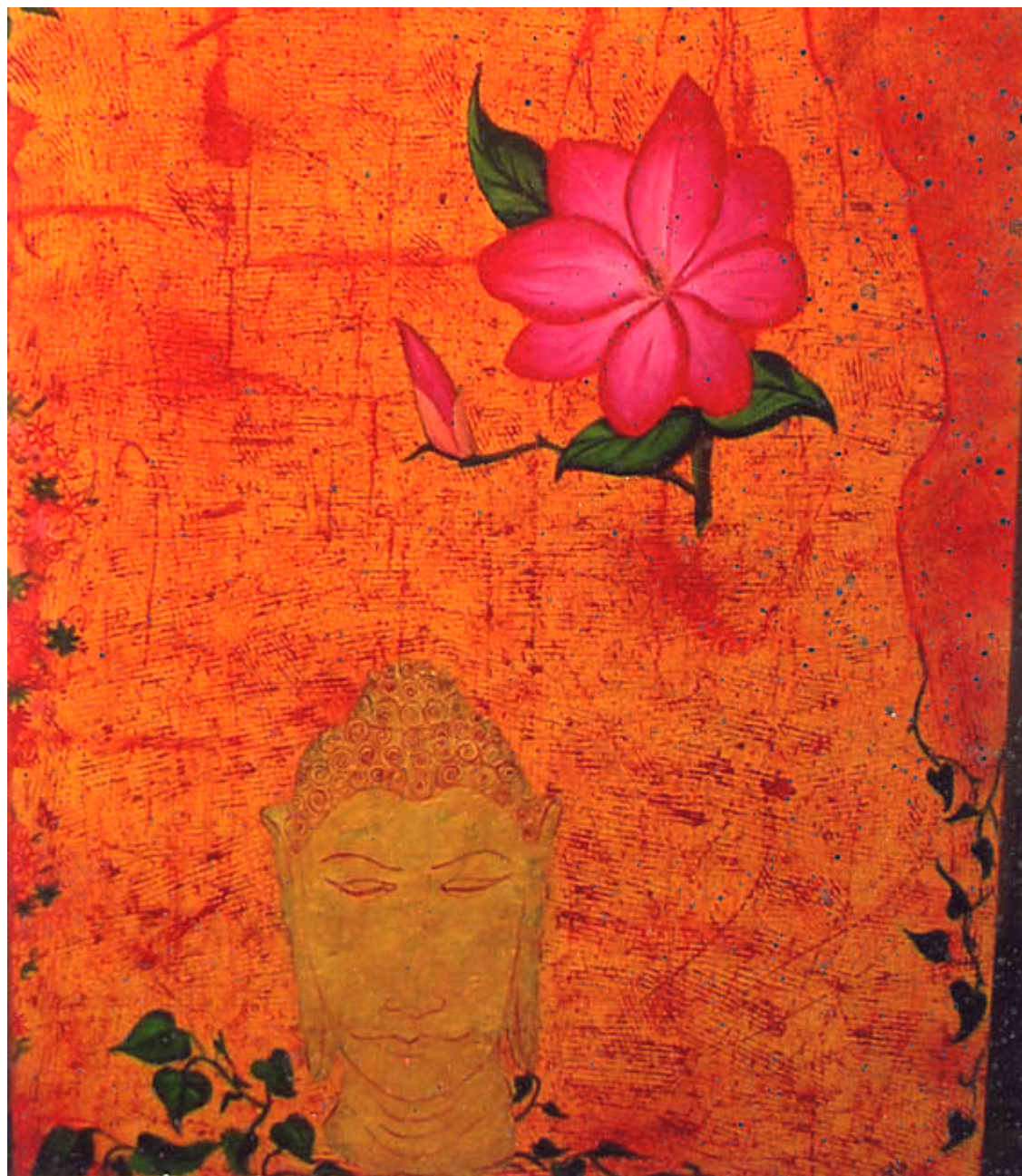
Some of the underlying questions during the festival examined whether women are creating a new language of filmmaking, which reflects, and explores new politics of filmmaking, and how women are widening the frame for issues concerning women.

Overall, recognizing the critical need for a forum that can

sustain the form of documentary as well as women's contribution to this unique form, the festival showcased documentary films created by women, covering a range of genres and expressive styles.

The author is Managing Trustee at IAWRT.

Kanchan Chander: A Woman Artist of Vision by Seema Bawa





Kanchan Chandar Oil on Canvas

While most art is influenced by the personal history of its creator, Kanchan Chander's paintings *are* her personal history; from student to artist to hopefully married and then joyful mother to estranged wife and then a single mother. The three decades of her paintings reflect and reinforce these states, and are emotively and expressively explored through her art which is not only visual but experiential.

In her early sketches, the impact of a brother's death on her and her family are delved into. In *Drifting Apart* two female figures, her mother and she, cling to one another in shared grief while the male figure, the father, stands alone masking his sorrow.

The angst emerges again in her etching *Expression II*, a feminine interpretation of Edward Munch's *Scream*. The contorted female face with a wide gaping mouth from which a silent eternal scream seems to be emerging is a very powerful image that is a testimony to Kanchan's early potential.

In the first decade of her artistic journey she concentrated on print making especially etchings, lithographs and woodcuts. It is in the latter she uses bold, almost rough strokes to match the thematic of primitive primordial relationships and identities. Using archetypes from African and Polynesian tribes, she has posed a couple where the female figure stands with her legs crossed while the man stands in a hieratic pose, neither looking at each other, emphasizing an estrangement despite the intimacy of nudity.

During the period of her estrangement from her husband she painted on window, frames doors and furniture, which came out from her parental house (which was being rebuild) where she had to move in. As if painting on the dismembered utensils of her life and through this process reassembling her "self" under a dramatic new aegis.

Her signature work that emerge out of her re-assertive new female "self" are voluptuous female torsos. Sensual, confident and centered these are projected in bright feminine colors such as pink orange royal blue. Over a period of time she has experimented with ornamenting the torsos with so called feminine accessories such as sequins, beads, gold and silver foil; unapologetically emphasizing and celebrating the ornamental, alamkara and also the physicality associated with womanhood. In contrast the relatively later male torso, Male/Nail are superimposed with symbols of masculine power and violence such as hammers, saws, scissors and knives.

Simultaneously she used the iconic symbolism of Indian Goddesses in her paintings such as *Durga and Me* in which she has juxtaposed the three eyed dark Goddess, with a red tongue hanging out seated on a stylized lion, with various profane motifs of masculinity.

During the next period came her series, *Pallav's world*, which she painted with mixed media on takhtis representing the child's world of school, play and homework. The use of motifs

such as alphabets, kitschy popular heroes and boyhood ideals such as the cartoon character of He Man, emphasize the environment in which the mother and child dwell.

In her recent works two thematic trends are obvious. The first continues from her earlier *Vatsalya* series through which she had expressed the bonding between the single mother and child; now the roles seem reversed in *What's your POA, MAA* where the child standing behind her seated self portrayal seems a young adult, protecting her. The second trend is a more settled, peaceful portrayal of flowers and Buddha's head, with of course some hint of disturbance, with an overall coming to terms with life, desire and expectations.

The show significantly highlights the works of a woman-artist who is comfortable and indeed assertive of this dual identity. Though she and indeed her work are not radically feminist with a rejection of all that is male or seeking to glorify only the female, there is a refreshing and unapologetic delving into feminine, domestic and maternal concerns and sensibilities in her art.

India Dominates MIFF, Wins Largest Number Of Awards In International Category – B B Nagpal



Goddesses



India Untouched



Inauguration

Makers of short or documentary films generally feel they are given the short shrift when they try to find finances for making their films, and are then treated to a step-son treatment by the government, the public service broadcaster Doordarshan, and the private television channels as far as distribution and exhibition goes. As a result, it is felt that people are no longer interested in short, documentary or animation films.

But the large number of viewers that turned up at the Tenth Mumbai International Film Festival for Documentary, Short and Animation Films were enough to prove that the medium has its own niche viewership. And the ovation that the award-winners got also showed that their judgment did not differ very much from that of the juries.

However, though every festival has some good and some bad films, the primary problem with MIFF is that the duration is just one week thus permitting only one show per film, and the number of films and variety of sections needs to be curtailed. The press conferences also could have been coordinated in a better manner since they often clashed with the film shows.

It was also necessary that while there are films that last less than a minute and others may go over one hour, the selection of films in one slot should as far as possible be of a similar kind. For example, all films dealing with wild life or all those made in animation could have been shown together. This helps the discerning viewer to decide the kind of films he or she wants to see, since all four theatres were showing different films and making a choice was often difficult.

The festival, which is held every second year by the Films Division (a media unit of the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry) in collaboration with the government of Maharashtra and the Indian Documentary Producers Association, took place in the four theatres of the National Centre for the Performing Arts at Nariman Point in Mumbai from February 3 to 9.

A total of 235 films were shown in the special packages in the festival. In addition, there were 44 films in the International Competition from 16 countries, 54 films in the Indian competition, and 13 international and nine Indian films in special screenings. Films from a total of 37 countries were screened in different sections.

Renowned Manipur filmmaker Aribam Syam Sharma received the V Shantaram Award for Lifetime Contribution from Kiran Shantaram amidst a standing ovation. The award carries a shawl, a citation, and a cash component of Rs 2,50,000.

Sharma is a film director, actor, critic, and music director. He came to limelight with his award winning film 'Imagi Ningthem' (My son, My Precious) that received the grand Prix at International Film festival at Nantes in France in 1982. His other acclaimed films include 'Ishanou', the official selection (un Certain Regard) for Cannes Film Festival 1991, and 'Sangai-The Dancing Deer of Manipur' declared as the "Outstanding Film of the Year 1989" by the British Film Institute. He has directed nine Manipuri feature films and 26 non feature films. They include 'Sanabi' (The Frey mare) in 1996, 'Rajarshee Bhagyachandra of Manipur', and 'Gurumayum Nirmal'. He has won numerous national awards and also chaired many juries.

Indian films bagged the top award – the Golden Conch – for best documentary in both the national and international categories even as it bagged four other awards in the international category at the Festival.

While 'India Untouched – Stories of a People Apart' by Stalin K. based on the oppressive caste system got the top award in the Indian section (Rs 1,50,000), 'Goddesses' by Leena Manimekalai on women's emancipation received the Golden Conch in the international section (Rs 2,50,000) for films up to sixty minutes.

'India Untouched' also won the award of Rs 100,000 for best film/video of the Festival for the Producer Drishti – Media, Arts and Human Rights.

In 'Goddesses', the young filmmaker tells the story of three old material goddesses who for different reasons find themselves naturally emancipated from Tamil tradition and

orthodoxy. Leena creates a trusting filming arena that was never manipulative so that the three women opened up and revealed their total strength and power bordering on the archetype. They emerged free, master of the very tradition that had earlier kept them shackled.

‘India Untouched-Stories of a People’ not only achieves the ideals of socially and politically committed documentary film making, but unflinchingly uncovers the all pervasive, deeply rooted and still existing caste system in twenty first century India, with chilling evidence that it shows no sign of abating in generations to come. In fact, the Jury recommended the film as essential viewing for all audiences worldwide, adding that the film is in the best tradition of documentary film making and is an inspiration to all filmmakers for independent, thought-provoking, free-spirited use of the medium for social change.

The film’s producer Drishti – Media Arts & Human Rights won the award for taking the initiative and having the courage to investigate the issue of untouchability and its ramifications in all corners of Indian society.

The awards were given away on 9 February in Tata Theatre by Festival Director and Films Division Chief Producer Kuldeep Sinha, filmmakers Shyam Benegal and Jahnu Barua, and actress Nandita Das in a ceremony conducted by television actress and presenter Rajeshwari Sachdev.

The other Indian films to win awards in the international category were: ‘Kramasha’ by Amit Dutta which won the best fiction up to 75 minutes (Golden Conch and Rs 2,50,000) and the Producer’s Award for the Film and Television Institute of India (Rs 100,000), ‘Ink’ which was the first best film by director Bharani Thanikella (Trophy and Rs 100,000), and ‘Undertakers’ by Emmanuel Quindo Palo which shared the award for second best fiction film up to 75 minutes with Belgium’s ‘Bare Handed’ by Thierry Knauff (Silver Conch and Rs 100,000).

In 'Kramasha', the music keeps one quietly enthralled with a resonating sense of things without a need to necessarily reduce the experience to a verbalization of meanings. The film shows a world of images and sounds that make one smell and touch the lush of nature amid a mysterious index of hallucinations. Like a dream that one may fail to understand but that reaches deep recesses of the unconscious and touches familiar chords, this film by Amit Dutta weaves a powerful narrative that blends legends, myths and nostalgia into a film that allows us to recall one's early experiences.

Emmanuel Quindo Palo's 'Undertakers' manages to distance the viewer from the narrative and create a moving account of a Catholic coffin maker whose business is death but whose dead friends can claim free coffins. The absurd idiom of the film draws a humane picture of the struggles of an ordinary salesman who appears strangely caught between his survival and personal ethic.

Through surreal imagery, Bharani's 'Ink' was able to employ a violent visual idiom for existential struggle of the poet, and the fight he wages against violence of terrorism. In this film which is full of resilience, the poet's wife deeply worried about their lives takes on the mantle of fight against terrorism after the poet's death.

Just the manner in which the dancer in Knauff's 'Bare Handed' handles the newspaper and the noise caused by it to strangely reveal the violence a newspaper and therefore the world around us may carry. But it is the dancing woman whom a verbal world threatens to contain. In a series of deft choreographed movements and an equal graphic light the film makes the dancer dance her way through memories and desires until after a complete immersion in this world she loses herself in it.

Poland, the United States, and Egypt won two awards each in the international section. Two Polish films 'One day in People's Poland' by Maciej J. Drygas and 'Beyond the Wall' by

Vita Zelakeviciute, both produced by Drygas, shared the award for Second Best Documentary up to sixty minutes duration (Silver Conch and Rs 100,000). 'Salata Baladi' (House Salad) by Nadia Kamel of Egypt got the Golden Conch and Rs 2,50,000 for best documentary above 60 minutes and the international critics FIPRESCI award (Certificate of Merit). The two American films to win awards were 'Flow: for love of water' by Irena Salina got the FIPRESCI award and Rs 100,000, and 'View from a Grain of Sand' by Meena Nanji which won the second best documentary film above sixty minutes (Silver Conch and Rs 100,000).

September 27, 1962 was an ordinary day in Poland except for its reconstruction by Drygas in the film 'One Day in People's Poland'. The archival images and sounds retrieved from several sources obviously do not synchronize to a singular reality. Without an effort to force a historical realism upon the material, the director keeps the two tracks independent, making them move closer and further away from each other, creating an extraordinary document that is startling in its revelation of the nature of surveillance the state maintained in the sixties by keeping account of banal and inconsequential details in the daily life of its suspect citizens. The enormous task of editing the monumental archival material has been handled very competently.

'Beyond the Wall' uses short and pure images that elude description. Through this poetic procedure, the director directly enters into a hazy universe of Russian soldiers sent to prison hospital to serve their sentence. The nondescript events such as the walks, the meals, the medicines, the crowding of the cell generate an unforgettable poem of silence and depth in confinement. Vita Zelakeviciute's narrative of broken spirits is a reflection on cold and heartless systems mankind is able to set in place in governance of countries.

'Salate Baladi' breaks down the classical cinema composition and makes a film deeply insightful of history. It makes

geographical borders between countries appear unnatural, incapable of constricting families from their extensive affinities. The metaphor is no longer the family tree rooted in local soil – it is closer to a multiplicity in the manner the grass grows.

Faced with an environment where women are oppressed to the extreme, Meena was able to make her characters in 'View from a Grain of Sand' feel safe for them to candidly re-evaluate their condition under the Taliban and post-Taliban periods in Afghanistan. Even as they put themselves to risk they are prepared to boldly share their knowledge and experience with the filmmaker.

The FIPRESCI jury decided to characterize its Award as recognition of films that bring unknown shocking revelations that threaten ecological and even existential balance of planet Earth. The depiction of a global crisis caused by privatization of natural resource such as water in the film 'Flow: Love of Water' attempts to educate the audience of atrocities major corporations commit against individuals, families and communities in the name of water and for the sake of plain old profit. The message of the film is clear: make water free, clean and available to the citizens of the world. The revealing research Salina conducted was exemplary.

In the Indian section, the Golden Conch and Rs 1,50,000 also went to best fiction 'Manjha' by Rahi Anil Barve who also got the award for best first film of a director (Rs Trophy and Rs 25,000), and best animation film 'Myths about you' by Nandita Jain. Other awards included Indian Jury Award (Rs 100,000) which went to two films: 'I'm very beautiful' by Shyamal Kumar Karmakar and 'Thousand Days and a Dream' by P Baburaj and C Saratchandran, the Indian Critics award to 'Mahua Memoirs' by Vinod Raja which also received the award for second best documentary (Silver Conch and Rs 75,000).

'Mahua Memoirs' compassionately exposes the ruthless underside

of corporate globalization through the ongoing decimation of Adivasi lands, people and their cultures throughout India. Crafted with outstanding visuals and haunting music, it is an urgent call to re-examine the policies of the day.

In 'Manjha', first-time director Rahi Anil Barve's fictional expression of child sexual abuse and survival has been portrayed in a highly individualistic, graphic and cinematic style. The filmmaker manages to extract outstanding performances from the actors within a stark, industrial urban landscape. The film is also laudable for the understanding of cinematic form and idiom and having the courage to push the form to tell a difficult story.

'Myths About You' is a clever and imaginative representation of the history of the Universe, both in terms of Hindu mythology and scientific research, in an original graphic style, all within a short span of 9 minutes.

'I'm the Very Beautiful' is a personal, complex and often contradictory portrait of an indomitable woman and her continuous struggle in her pursuit of a life of freedom and dignity despite her social stigma in a patriarchal and chauvinistic society. In its style and treatment, the film mirrors the free spirit of the protagonist with abandon and candour.

'Thousand Days And A Dream' tells the poignant and dramatic story of the peaceful struggle of common people against a gigantic multinational company supported by the policies of the state in which the people have been deprived of their vital, basic natural resources and livelihood.

The Silver Conch and Rs 75,000 for second best films also went to 'The Lost Rainbow' by Dhiraj Meshram produced by FTII (fiction up to 75 minutes) and animation film 'Three Little Pigs' by Bhavana Vyas and Akarito Assumi.

'The Lost Rainbow' presents a series of nostalgic, touching

moments in an evocative and playful manner, enhanced by the realistic performances of the child actors. The film details how the results of mischievous sibling rivalry can haunt the protagonists for the remainder of their lives.

'Three Little Pigs' is a well-known childhood story made through wire frame animation techniques in a deceptively simple style. The film has background voice-overs in the form of a conversation recalling the story, which is both engaging and amusing while bridging the documentary form with animation.

Special Mention and Certificate of Merit was awarded to two films: 'Our Family' by Dr K P Jayasankar and Dr Anjali Monteiro, and 'Raga of River Narmada' by Rajendra Janglay.

'Our Family' is a compassionate and sensitive portrayal of the third sex – their bonding and their aspirations. The film traces their roots sourced from mythology combined with a mesmerizing one-person performance of the traumas and stigma experienced by their community.

'Raga of River Narmada' has fascinating flowing visuals highlighting the river in its many vibrant moods through its journey complemented by an exceptional use of the Dhrupad.

Apart from the main sections, there were sections like 'Best of Festivals' for selected films from some renowned documentary, short and animation film festivals and Oscar winning and nominated films, a retrospective of films by jury members, a section of Classics featuring films of great masters of documentary films which will have films made by Great Masters like Bert Haanstra, Robert J. Flaherty, Francois Truffaut, Istvan Szabo, Kristof Zanussi and Ritwik Ghatak. This package was organized with the support of National Film Archives of India. A Film Memoir showed biographical films made on great filmmakers like Andrei Tarkovsky, Ingmar Bergman, Satyajit Ray, and Bimal Roy

There was a special and rarely seen section on films on the Second World War with rarest film records of the Indian troops in action at various part of the world during Second World War. This will also feature the battle of Britain, Russia and other major incidents of that period. This package was put together with the help of the Armed Forces Film & Photo Division, Delhi.

There were sections for films from the North East and from Jammu and Kashmir, and Glimpses from the archives of the Division, apart from homage to filmmakers who passed away in the recent past.

Unfortunately, most of the films which won awards are unlikely to be shown anywhere, since Doordarshan shows the films at unearthly late hours and the Government is still not taking a decision on a proposal by the Films Division for a separate documentary channel. The NDTV recently commenced showing documentaries once a week, but all this is hardly enough.

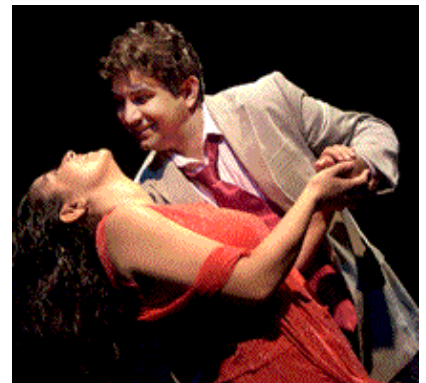
It is high time that the Information and Broadcasting Minister Mr Priyaranjan Dasmunsi lives up to the promise he made on the opening day of MIFF that he would clear any proposal for a documentary channel within five days. With the new advent of short features and amusing animation, even a documentary channel is bound to find sponsors and become commercially viable.

The author is a senior film critic

The Owl and the Pussy Cat – Art review by Seema Bawa



Director: Satyajit Sharma



Actors: Kavita Dang
and Kumud Mishra

"The Owl and the pussy cat went to sea in a beautiful pea green boat..."

Thrown together in a low-rent bachelor's flat instead of a 'pea-green boat', the odd couple in this highly amusing **Bill Manhoff comedy**, is certainly not at sea! 'The Owl', Felix played by **Kumud Misra**, a highly accomplished actor, is a self-styled intellectual author – while 'the Pussycat' played by **Kanika Dang**, is a wannabe actress and model – however, to pay the bills she entertains gentleman callers, a prostitute but not promiscuous.

Having noticed the stream of gentlemen caller at her apartment through his binoculars, the peeping owl does his 'civic' duty by informing the superintendent of the building. The pussycat with nowhere to spend the night seeks revenge by imposing on the owl for a bed. And then, through a battle of wits, words, and wisdoms they both start to 'educate' each other as well as the audience in ways they never knew they could.

The current production by Dotted Line Productions has wisely kept it simple and has not endeavored to create convoluted and over intellectualized caricatures of the protagonists. The director, **Satyajit Sharma**, an NSD Alumni with several outstanding acting and directorial performances to his credit, takes two great actors who handle some good old fashioned repartee rather well; coupled with adept handling of a witty script to put together an eminently watchable show.

The play focuses on two people who get to know each other, have sex, and eventually fall in love. As in most romantic comedies, one-liners abound and the protagonists are shown falling from their own self constructed identities. The fight in Felix's apartment after Doris barges in at the beginning is hilarious. She gets upset by his use of big words, but eventually buys her own guide to extending one's vocabulary. He is horrified by her "filthy" animal existence exemplified in his use of words like gutter slime and filth for her, but delights in the new experiences she has to offer. The two show each other new ways of looking at things and which is why Doris and Felix's chemistry works for the audience. It's is akin to what *happens* in real life. Their romance is played for laughs, but it's also sweet and touching. Felix, like most men, has to have a near nervous breakdown before deciding Doris is the one for him through a bitter-sweet dream sequence that evokes meta-theatre. As each displays their softer selves, the audience realizes they have more in common than they think. The two are in transition; looking for that obscure goal of success; he in writing, she in acting. This

shared ground draws them together and reflects to the audience a very real struggle that we all experience in relationships.

Odd couples, whether of the same or different sexes have been a comedy formula for decades. The play enthralls with its at times salty language. Most importantly, Kumud and Kanika have a very definite chemistry. Though Kanika's is better delineated and in intrinsically is the more outrageous and attractive character (being the underdog) in the script, it does not steal the focus. Kumud interprets the inherent wimpiness and prissyness of the character with a paradoxical male strength and libido. This makes for a powerful performance that converts the essentially mono-dimensionality of the character into a rather complex and conflicted one. The interlude when the wimpy Felix transforms briefly to a randy 'baby' is remarkably executed with Kumud performing from each pore of his being. Kanika has put in a lot of effort into building her character but while she is able to bring to fore the tartness of Doris, the vulnerability written into the character does not come out as well as it may have. Though this prostitute has a heart and it shows. While the play per se is not deep enough to allow for great acting, it does give scope to the two protagonists to demonstrate impressive technical finesse; the director who is apparently debuting for the group needs to be complemented for this.

In order to be memorable theater, the discovery by Felix and Doris that they are good for each other need not be revelatory in the vein of a metaphysical revelation, but should be funny. The director and his cast achieve this with ease. The humor in "The Owl and The Pussycat," depends largely on sarcasm, insult and the sort of logic that has Doris announce: "I may be a prostitute, but I'm not promiscuous." A lot of the humor of the play depends on language and the "play" thereon. Much is made of the fact that Doris doesn't understand words like despicable, aesthetic, assimilate and intrinsic while Felix who seeks to define himself through

words or concepts finds them completely incapable of addressing his feelings for Doris. A comedy based largely on language and timing is always a difficult ask and the current production delivers in aces.

Directorial skill is amply demonstrated in terms of technique, stage craft and spatial usage. The fundamentals of good stagecraft such as blocking, body language and use of space have a refreshing rehearsed certainty and professionalism fast disappearing from current productions. Interludes of well chosen music pieces and the intermittent use of gaps during the play deserve to be commended. This despite the somewhat inadequate lighting arrangement around the proscenium of the LTG auditorium

Pulling Strings – A review of the Ishara International Puppet Theatre Festival by Divya Raina



Daddee Pudumjee with
his puppeteers and
puppets

It doesn't quite matter whether one pulls strings or uses larger than life marionettes, glove or rod puppets, its pure theatre that one is watching. Quite distinct from a puppet or the *kathputli* show this form of theatre is as creative, compelling and meant for adult audiences as much as for kids.

In fact **Dadi Pudumjee** has been a staunch crusader for the cause and promotion of puppet theatre for decades now. An extraordinarily talented puppet creator and manipulator, director, performer and choreographer, he along with his remarkably versatile crew of the **Ishara puppet theatre troupe**, has entertained and enabled Indian (and international) audiences to view a totally different type of performance art.

This was vividly brought out at the staging of the Spanish “Batuta” or small baton, at the recent **Ishara International Puppet theatre Festival** held at the **India Habitat Centre** in collaboration with **ICCR** and others. It was quite a treat to watch the interplay of music, lighting, spoken dialogue and most of all, the entrancing moves and gestures of the animated puppets of different shapes and sizes.

What came through clearly was the constant refrain “I love music” and also “*musica classica*”, and the entire duration of the performance was devoted to an exploration of different forms of music with accompanying puppet movement. The saxophone puppet duet was the highlight with its foot –tapping rhythm, but there were many other musical elements incorporated. It was as though there was an earnest plea in this globalised TV-corrupted world, to both young and old viewers to re-connect with “purer” forms of music than the fusion and confusion of mtv-inspired forms one generally finds today.

Did it work? For most of the audience, with its short-attention -span habits and general restlessness it was quite a novel experience. One wishes however that anxious moms insisting on ramming ‘culture’ down their offspring’s throats would dispense with their loud running commentaries which unfortunately become an unwelcome sound-track thrust upon one on such occasions.

JANAM Commemorates Safdar's Martyrdom Day




Jan Natya Manch (Janam) remembers **Safdar Hashmi** on 1st January every year by performing in Sahibabad at the very same place, where he was assassinated on January 1, 1989 by goons of the ruling party. This year too the event was remembered .as a mark of defiance to the perpeturates of the crime. Moloysfree, Safdar's Widow, Sudhanwa Deshpande along with Janam's actors performed *Sangharsh He Hai Rastaa* in a packed Ambedkar Park. The street play performances were interspersed with revolutionary songs Sung by Janam actors and composed by Kajol Ghosh. The event was supported by CITU whose volunteers controlled the massive crowds and provided background support. CPM leader Brinda Karat, a former Janam activist, was also present on the occasion. The audience was very enthusiastic and cheered all the way. Sudhanwa's hilarious rendition of George Bush dressed as Uncle Sam in *One Two Ka Four* was greeted by guffaws from the audience. The play highlighted India's weak foreign policy while negotiating the Nucleardeal with USA and other related issues, Delhi Young Artists Forum

did a street play *Dilli Door Hai* on the forthcoming Commonwealth games and its impact on unorganized sector workers of the National Capital Region of Delhi

Janam also organized a ***Gadar Mela*** to commemorate the **Indian Sepoy Mutiny** when in 1857 Indian soldiers killed their British officers and tried to expel the British from India. The format of a typical Diwali Mela was used to educate the visitors about this important event. Janam volunteers cooked the food themselves. The food stalls had rare delicacies like *Shakargandi ke Khire, Bajre key Tikki, Sattu ka Paan, Tapioca* and what not. There were games for children which included, Quiz Programs, Jigsaw and Crossword puzzles. There were kids events like Fancy Dress Parade. The Sahmat Exhibition was used to enlighten the young audience about the hard won independence.

6th Pune International Film Festival inaugurated in a glittering ceremony

 It is that time of the year again which is much awaited by lovers of cinema. The Sixth Pune International Film Festival (PIFF 2008) was inaugurated on Thursday, 10th January at the hands of Sharmila Tagore, Suresh Kalmadi and Nana Patekar in a grand ceremony organized at Ganesh Kala Krida Manch. This week long festival which kicked off from 10th of January will end on 17th January, treating film buffs to an exclusive collection of national and international movies.

Rajlakshmi Bhosale (Mayor of Pune), Antino Gogala (Councilor

of Republic of Slovenia in India), Daniel Johar Zonshine (Council General of Israel), Pravinsinh Pardeshi (Pune Municipal Commissioner) graced the occasion. The international jury and guests were also present for the ceremony. Apart from this, some of the renowned Bollywood stars like Nana Patekar, Ameesha Patel, Amruta Khanvilkar (Sade – Made Teen Fame), Zeenat Amman were also present.

The inauguration ceremony of the festival began with the lighting of the lamp by the guest of honors and “A Naandi” which was followed by dance medley on famous songs

Introducing PIFF at the inauguration, Suresh Kalmadi chairman of PIFF 2008 said, “Pune is the cultural and sports capital of the nation, and is home to several famous institutions like FTII, Prabhat Studio and National Film Archives. This event offers a perfect platform to showcase a group of extremely talented film makers from the international arena to Pune. Around 145 movies were selected from across 43 countries for this year’s film festival.” Further he said, “The much awaited Commonwealth Youth Games, 2008 is the next step forward in placing Pune on the international map of sporting arena. This year Pune is the proud host of the 3rd Commonwealth Youth Games which is being held in Asia for the first time, where nearly 71 countries will be participating.

This year’s Lifetime Achievement Awards were conferred upon eminent actors, Shammi Kapoor and Sharmila Tagore to acknowledge their invaluable contribution to Indian cinema. Later an audiovisual on their career was screened which effortlessly took the audiences to the golden era of Indian film history. Nana Patekar stole the show with his sense of humour. He said,” I am very happy to be here today on stage with eminent actors like Shammi Kapoor, Sharmila Tagore and Zeenat Amman and I respect them for all the hardwork they have done to achieve this success.”

Courtesy M/s Perfect Relations