

Home / Culture / 'At IFFM, we're screening 34 regional films from India'

'At IFFM, we're screening 34 regional films from India'

Nibedita Saha

Updated : August 4, 2018, 11:37 AM

Print f t



Mitu Bhowmick Lange.

Mitu Bhowmick Lange, director of the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne, whose 2018 edition inaugurates on 10 August, speaks to Nibedita Saha about fans of Indian cinema in Australia.

Q. What's the theme for this year's edition of the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM)? And why was it chosen?

A. This year's theme is "Inclusion". Every year we choose a different theme that looks into the socio-political landscape of the world—ideas that ought to be discussed. Our world is polarising people so much. Instead of promoting inclusion, talking and appreciating the differences, we are pushing people away. What better way to bring people closer, talk and discuss the differences and maybe change views, than with films? So that is why we chose "Inclusion" as the theme. Last year's theme was "Gender". The year before that, it was "Empowerment"—topics that the world needs to pay attention to.

Q. How do you think such film festivals can help in building stronger cultural ties between India and Australia?

A. Every year the high commissioners from both countries not only send us their support and blessing, but the Indian High Commissioner in Canberra has been visiting the festival for the past six years. We have had the Australian High Commissioner in India upload information about our programme and events all across his website and social media accounts. We have dancers who don't know a single thing about Bollywood dancing participate in our Dance Competition. They've won tickets to India and loved their trip to Mumbai. In fact, a few of them met and collaborated with dancers in India.

We have shattered a lot of stereotypes through our festival. I am sure other festivals must be doing even more. Plus, tourism always helps. Actors (visiting the fest) fall in love with Melbourne. They plan holidays for themselves and recommend the place to others. We have had Australian producers head to India. In fact, our jury member last year spent over five months in India. So such festivals promote cultural tourism without trying too hard.

Q. How many regional films are going to be screened this year at the IFFM?

A. This year, altogether 34 regional films and documentaries have been selected from across India, and four films from our neighbours in the subcontinent—Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal—are also on the list. We have always received the best films across India. Because many a time we hear people only associate Indian cinema with Bollywood, and IFFM wants to change that perception. With the IFFM we are trying to showcase diversity through our regional films. This year we even have a film in the Jeseri language, a dialect of Malayalam spoken only in Lakshadweep.

Q. Tell us about the film selection process for the IFFM. What are the parameters on which the entries are judged?

A. We use the help of curators from India, like Uma Da Cunha, and also filmmaker friends and producer friends who suggest films, talk about upcoming films and even introduce us to people. Often, the producers or directors contact us directly, especially if they haven't premiered anywhere in the southern hemisphere, and we work on how to screen their films in Australia.

Q. Could you list for us a few films which will be the main attraction at IFFM 2018?

A. Films with follow-up Q&A's are always among our main attractions. Our opening night film, *Love Sonia*, will hopefully be huge because of the director, Tabrez Noorani, and actors Richa Chadda, Mrunal Thakur and Freida Pinto—all present at the Q&A. We have *Balekempa*, a Kannada film about a bangle seller, which will be amazing because it has got fantastic reviews from other festivals. *Ahare Mon*, a Bengali film about love and whom to love, has been receiving traction in India. We also have a Konkani and

Malvani film on the emotional and physical harassment of a child that so many people want to watch and discuss: it's called *Juze*. Then there is *Hichki*, a film about Tourette's syndrome. *Village Rockstars* is an Assamese film about a 10-year-old girl with big rockstar dreams. There's also *Mahanati*, a bilingual film, in Telugu and Tamil, about the actress Savitri.

Q. Your production house, Mind Blowing Films, has established a wide distribution network in Australia and New Zealand for Indian films. Tell us about that.

A. Many years of hard work, building trust, starting small and slowly becoming bigger, and the IFFM festival have all helped Mind Blowing Films (MBF) become what it is today. When we started out, we literally had 10 screens all over Australia. And now we screen at over 110 locations in Australia, 40 in New Zealand. We also screen in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. We became big because I had the blessings of people like Yash Chopra and firms like UTV and Reliance, who believed in MBF and gave us the films. They trusted us with getting the numbers. Our films have won awards for being the highest-grossing films in Australia. We have had our films stay in theatres longer than some Hollywood films.

Q. You have produced *Spice Girls of India*, which was screened at the London Feminist Film Festival in 2013. Are you planning to produce more such films?

A. Alongside *Spice Girls of India*, I have produced a documentary film, *Raising the Bar*, directed by Onir. I and Kate Sayers [director of Emotion 21 dance troupe] collaborated on producing the documentary. The film was screened in India and Australia. I always look for films which can touch a chord with the audiences, and *Raising the Bar* did that, just as *Spice Girls of India* did. Both the films' plots were derived from real-life stories that the audiences can connect with. I will produce more films whenever I'll find real stories that are worth sharing.

Q. Do you have any plans for organising film festivals in India to provide more support to the regional film industries?

A. India has some amazing film festivals that work at promoting regional cinema like no other. As a country, India is so big, we cannot have just one film festival binding everything. First, there are festivals in the region. Then there are bigger ones, like the IFFI and MAMI, that do so much regional film promotion. I have no plans yet to organise a film festival in India, but there might be collaborations, workshops and panels that might happen. Stay tuned!

Q. In your experience as a distributor, how has the reception of Indian cinema changed globally over the last decade or so?

A. Indian cinema is raking in the numbers, which adds to its acceptance worldwide. The other aspect is that we have many actors who have gone to Hollywood, which has automatically increased their fan following across the globe. The third and most important aspect has to do with the films themselves—we are making such fantastic films that are eye-catching, with strong plots and amazing acting and direction, and everyone seems to be attracted to them. Also, more and more filmmakers and producers want to associate with Indian cinema now, because of the large audience that the Indian film industry caters to.