



Throughout the 13th New York Indian Film Festival, April 30-May 4, young filmmakers, producers, and actors, some clad in head-to-toe black and others in long flowing dresses paired with lace-up boots, milled around the Varick Room in the back of Tribeca Cinemas. A mingling of that cool Bombay lilt and hard American accents filled the space between screenings and discussions on the state of Indian filmmaking.

While old restored classics like *Garam Hawa* and new documentaries played in adjoining theaters, the scene in the lobby and back area brought the feeling of an evolving Indian film culture with blurred geographic boundaries full circle.

"In these 100 years, and with the changing mood and ambience in film and with indie directing and the acting and everything, I think it's great that alternative, Diaspora cinema is making huge strides and hopefully change old ways," said Aroon Shivdasani, executive director, Indo-American Arts Council, which organizes the festival.

"That doesn't mean I'm disparaging Indian cinema — I'm not at all. It's wonderful. And there were excellent filmmakers before, but in many ways, they've remained in a certain mold because that's what sells to the public. That's what the audiences want, and that's what they give them."

"We show films that are gutsy and controversial and it's still unknown whether they'll accept them in India."

The idea of using the festival as a way of honoring 100 Years of Indian Cinema

Legacy of a Centenary

The New York Indian Film Festival celebrates the old and new from 100 years of Indian Cinema. **Chaya Babu** joins in

was Shivdasani's.

May 3 marked exactly a century since India's first full-length feature film *Raja Harishchandra* was screened, so the timing could not have been better.

The date is not exclusively being recognized in Indian circles — the Cannes International Film Festival will celebrate this anniversary in a few weeks, with India being invited as a special guest country, the third after only Egypt in 2011 and Brazil in 2012.

Aseem Chhabra, the NYIFF festival director, was put in charge of selecting landmark films — *Kalpana* (1948), *Garam Hawa* (1973), and *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983) as the classics to include as part of the 100 Years line-up as well as *Baavra Mann*, *Bombay Movie*, and the *Human Factor* as the new independent films which depict and discuss the Indian film industry today.

Chhabra said the old films had cult fol-

lowings — "There are people in India who can recite whole dialogs from *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*. People love it — and he described the process of seeking out and getting his hands on the remastered versions of the films, all US premieres, as tedious and roundabout, but also more than worth it.

"We're seeing the film in the way the filmmaker intended it to be seen," Chhabra said, "The original film prints, they're very old, and there's no culture of preserving the prints in India. So, there's a whole history of film in India that has been completely lost. People say, 'What's the big deal? You can see it on DVD or stream it online.' But that's not how these films were meant to be watched."

For some of these films, improper storage techniques and essentially neglect have caused the color and glow to be lost over time. Restoring them is expensive, but there are organizations and entities

throughout the world committed to the preservation of films to be brought to future generations.

The World Cinema Foundation did this for *Kalpana*, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences has been restoring all of Satyajit Ray's films. So, the best place to find them in their clearest form is in the AMPAS archive in Los Angeles, versus some place on the sub-continent, which hopefully speaks volumes about the bridge between Indian cinema and the rest of the world.

The newer films screened at the festival represent this connecting force and the globalization of Indian cinema.

Amrit Singh's *Dosa Hunt* is a short about musician friends searching for the best of this South Indian dish around Manhattan and Queens, piled into a van and spouting a brand of humor that could only come from slightly clueless yet snarky Indians born and raised abroad.

They use American slang, sport New York street style, poke fun at their mothers' Indianisms, and rate the quality of the Dosas they sample in Bobby Jindals: 'I give that masala dosa three Bobby Jindals.'

"The themes I'm trying to explore and capture are just very reflective of the experience and identity of the cast and myself," Singh said. "I think the festival overall is doing a great job of reflecting global Indian themes, like tensions within the country — I'm thinking about *Shahid*, *Filmistaan*, *Oonga*, but there were few films that spoke to what I am talking about: Not exactly a tension but a generation that is experiencing a sort of synthesis between two different cultures."

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The filmmakers who screened their films at the festival. Well known New York-based actors came in to hand out the awards on the closing night. Among them were Top Chef host Padma Lakshmi, third from right, actors Aasif Mandvi, first row standing 9th from right; Sakina Jaffrey, first row standing 10th from right; and Sarita Choudhury, right

13th Annual
2013 NYIFF
NEW YORK INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL April 30 - May 4, Presented by the Indo-American Arts Council

