



Culture Talk

Why not good films!

HAFIZUR RAHMAN compares the quality of foreign films with Pakistani ones and blames our film producers for not making good movies



the best foreign film, beating India's Lagaan. Imagine a war-ravaged country, almost destroyed by the bloody Serb-Muslim conflict, producing such an impressive movie.

I suppose we should stop complaining about the quality of our films since we are unable to provide to this industry the atmosphere it needs to flourish on the lines of say, the Indian film industry, the only one with which we can compare, both descending from a joint heritage that ended with Partition. While India makes waves in international film festivals, we are consistent in taking our product backwards, as far as quality of content and meaningfulness are concerned.

Some of us bemoan the fact that we have no Satyajit Ray among us. We did have an outstanding filmmaker in the person of Jamil Dehlavi who could at least have secured some respect for our movies. As for Satyajit Ray, we can never have a man like him even in our dreams. After roaming about the West for some twenty years, Dehlavi did get a chance to direct a meaningful movie. This was

Art The Nation J. A. A
Jinnah, on the life and work of the Founder of Pakistan, which earned good reviews in the West.

Jamil Dehlavi can be said to have staged a comeback, but it is doubtful if he will ever get a chance to direct or produce a feature film in our Lollywood. For one, nobody in Pakistan would like to invest in a sensible film even if it is of world standard, and, also because it may not be possible for him to come down to the level of the national film industry.

Apart from the terrible rut in which our films have fallen, with no producer or director bold enough to risk making a good film, you might think there was no talent in Pakistan to compete with foreign movies such as India or Iran or Algeria. No, that is no longer true because we have a host of young men who have been trained in Britain and the United States and have been inspired by the avant garde movie makers around the globe. You will ask then why don't they do something to show their talent?

The answer again lies in the intellectual make-up of the film industry and the financial considerations that do not allow the production of sensible films which might succeed at the box office. These young men are not welcome because they are averse to participating in formula films - films that make money and fascinate the common man among the filmgoers. They would like to put some sense into what they are asked to make, and that is not acceptable to those who invest in the film industry.

Take a recent example of the film *Rukhsati*. There was nothing extraordinary about it in terms of modern film-making as understood the world over. It was not made by

one of those young men I am talking about. And yet it was a miserable flop commercially. So much so that it had to be taken off before completing a week of exhibition, just because it was a serious film, almost tragic, which did not follow the formula. Cinema-goers want plenty of fighting and incredible thrills, with the rest of the footage devoted to songs and hip-swinging dances.

So what do these talented young men do? They go into advertising, produce marketing films, or, if they are not happy with that, they turn out music shorts in which they get plenty of opportunity to exercise their imagination. But what a loss to Pakistan's film industry, in fact what a misfortune that it finds itself unable to make use of such talent.

Great movies, even reasonably good and sensible movies, are not made in a vacuum, nor are they produced by geniuses dropping in from the skies. They are the result, the sum-total, of aesthetic expression and artistic experience available in a society. The stage where so-called art films get to be made is gradually built up over long years, with a combination of education, inborn talent, opportunity and sensitivity to culture.

When all these elements get together then the most important requirement has to come in the shape of public demand and popular acceptance of good movies. Unfortunately our filmmakers have never bothered to create an atmosphere where even these four elements can combine and give something new. As for public acceptance, the excuse of producers of bad films is that this is what the public wants. They forget that they have themselves brought the public to this level of taste where only the formula film finds a ready audience.

Those of us who wish Pakistan to advance culturally cannot be honestly advised not to complain about the quality of our films. It is a natural human desire to see one's country march forward in every field and be respected and honoured in the various arts as well as in science and technology. What a tragedy that our films are only a cause for despair and not of pride. The despair is heightened by the fact that there seems no way out of this blind alley. ■

A festival of Japanese films, with sub-titles in English opened last week in Islamabad. It was made possible by the Japan-Pakistan Friendship Association and showed six films in the NAFDEC Cinema. A show of Japanese feature films has become an almost annual occasion and always attracts large crowds. They are great film-makers, the Japanese.

Similar festivals of movies from other countries continue to be held in the federal capital now and then. Whereas festivals of foreign films are regularly held in all civilised countries, you will never have heard of any showing of a Pakistani film in any country of the world. In Islamabad people are attracted to these festivals because Pakistanis are hungry for good movies. For a person like I am who not only writes on cultural matters but has always been deeply interested in films such festivals are a painful affair.

Why painful? Because I can't help feeling envious when I watch these fine films abroad, and I can't help feeling disgusted at the fare that our own industry dishes out. Any outsider watching Pakistani films (if he can sit through one) will come to the conclusion that this country has only recently discovered that there is such a thing as film-making and is fumbling with the art. He will not believe that our industry is as old as the Indian film industry.

Once upon a time American movies used to attract the most attention, followed by those from Britain, while the product of European cinema, much more cerebral and meaningful, was left to the cognoscenti. But during the last few decades things have changed dramatically. Now some Third World countries are impressing international audiences, and, during the latest Academy Awards, a film from Bosnia was adjudged

By Salwat Ali

Exploring the intangibles

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If sales are any indicator of success then artist Changez Sultan has scored again. His present solo at the Clifton Art Gallery has also been a sell out and these days most galleries in town are carrying his work. The aesthetic substance in his paintings not only defines his conceptual range and painterly abilities but also imparts to his work distinctive signature style whose authorship is immediately recognisable.

Working mainly within a subjective frame the artist has presently exhibited two series titled "The Divided Self" and "Himalayan Odyssey".

Playing on reductive form and Expressionist bias in technique and imagery in the Divided Self, the artist has painted blurred figures and partial portraits in an indeterminate space. Giving shadowy semblance and receding, flickering status to his imagery, he builds an atmosphere of dis-location; a sense of not quite belonging, of not being

certain of one's identity. This is the crux of The Divided Self; exploration of the inner self—fears, anxieties insecurities. Changez Sultan brings out a vulnerable psyche riddled by self doubt and dilemmas. The female figure is his symbolic motif through which he projects these conflicting states. Fleeting impressions of multiple figures or fragments of facial expressions, his models ladylike and genteel are contemporary and intelligent but disturbed and lost.

Almost non-linear the artists hazy configurations fade in and out of cleverly manipulated coloured grounds. The technique of mixing colours is at times so smooth that it appears as if the times have been sprayed onto the paper and yet the works also carry an intricate tapestry of separate strokes interweaving

into each other through varying tonalities. The painters colour palette is also not confined to any specific preferences and the audience is treated to a vast array of experimental mixes from the very gloomy to the

atmosphere. This series is based essentially on high altitude mountain — scapes of the northern areas whose impact has been projected without the presence of some human event to make its meaning explicit. The drama has

ity towards a spiritual contemplation of nature.

In his pursuit of the pure and unaffected he makes a distinction between what is seen and what is recorded. Virtually devoid of narrative he constructs 'moods' through the emotive potential of colour. Shimmering mists of pale blue, gold and green are atmospheric effects that capture feeling as well as the features of a place. There is almost a mystic force to the brief column of pure, piercing light that creeps out from behind the dusky mountains; again a clever play up of warm and cool tonalities, to suggest a sensory experience; to establish a close link between perception and inner being.

Changez Sultan has recorded what he has witnessed not so

much by description as by the creation of a visual experience. These is delicacy and luminosity in his glazes, there is subdued force in his strokes, an internal cohesion to his compositions and colour harmonies. The Himalayan Odyssey is the cumulative effect of his poetic sensitivity towards nature and his expertise as a colourist.

Raja Changez Sultan a senior artist, widely travelled and well read, brings sound academic qualifications to his artistic career. An MFA and MSc from Columbia University N.Y., USA. he has won the Henry Taylor Gold Medal and Connecticut award in 1972. With almost 20 solo exhibitions at home and abroad, his displays on he international circuit have been in galleries is London, New Jersey, Geneva and Vienna. Presently he is serving as the Director General of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts.



most vibrant.

In the second series Changez Sultan has again employed an open palette and artistry of misty evocations. He has put this combination to admirable advantage to capture the most transient and fleeting moments of a landscape, the changes of light and

been interacted within the forms of nature themselves - the sweeping terrain, the elusive peaks, the cascading mist and the changing lights. Employing rhythm, colour and movement he tries to capture the mysterious solitude of the mountains; venturing beyond the external real-

