**The Story of Cannes 2024 – Emergence of a new Indian generation**

It was a dreary beginning at the competition section of the Cannes Film Festival this year. Despite their grand entry on the red carpet and the standing ovation they received at the end of the screening of their latest work, the likes of Francis Ford Coppala, David Cronenberg, Paul Shrader, Ali Abbasi were all disappointing in their new creations. It was just the celebration of their reputation and not their contemporary work. It was not enough to enthuse the discerning audiences at the Theatre Grand Lumiere where cineastes gather in large numbers to access the new contemporary works of cinema. Even the better ones of the lot by eminent Greek Director Yorgos Lanthimos, Chinese Director Jia Zhangke, French Realisateur Jacques Audiard and the Italian Master Paolo Sorrentino were all patchy and inconsistent. The redeeming features were found only in other sections like Un Certain Regard, Critics Week and Directors Fortnight. In those were small independent films like the French “L’Histoire the Souleymane”, the Chinese “Black Dog” the Italian film “The Damned”, Bulgarian film “Shameless”. first Saudi Arabian film “Norah” and a few others.

Suddenly in the last two days of the event, the young Indian filmmaker Payal Kapadia brightened up the proceedings with her debut feature film “All we Imagine as Light”. She was joined by Miguel Gomes, the Portuguese filmmaker with his classical film “Grand Tour” and the celebrated Iranian Director and political dissenter in exile Mohammad Rasoulof with “The Seed of the Sacred Fig”. His film along with Payal’s restored the credibility of the competition section of the Festival. The festival was back on track of its reputation by the last day. The context under which Mohammad Rasoulof appeared at the festival forum escaping imprisonment in Iran added to the democratic spirit of the festival. Historically Cannes festival is known for its celebration of life and Artistic freedom and it could stand for these values this year also through presentation of these films and recognising their worth in the face of stiff competition from big filmmakers in terms of resources and visibility.

Though the US film maker Sean Baker’s film “Anora” won the top prize at the event, it was Payal Kapadia and Mohammad Rasoulof who stole the show and the honours at the festival. The overwhelming media and appreciative critical response to the films of these two filmmakers from Asia not only shifted the limelight to the Artistic expressions of the region but also underlined the socio political realities that shape the contemporary Arts in general and Cinema in particular which mirrors the contemporary and immediate realities of the changing World Order like no other art form. The Best Actress award to a non-celebrity Indian actor Anasuya Sengupta in the Un Certain Regard section of the festival in a film with the Indian content by a Bulgarian auteur and the Best Student Film award conferred on Dr. Chidananda Naik a Film & Television Institute of India student from Mysore are other evidences of the arrival of a new generation of film Artists from the Indian subcontinent.

What “All We Imagine As Light” does is historically significant. It decodes the Western sensibilities in a way the eminent filmmaker Satyajit Ray did with his early films in the last century. Almost all the western Critics invoked his name in the reviews of the Payal’s film. If Peter Bradshaw of the UK Newspaper ‘Guardian’ described it as glorious, fluent and absorbing story full of humanity, Indiewire Critic Sophie Monk Kauffman highlighted the vignettes of sensuality and rhythm of life the film casually uncovers in its narrative. “Hollywood Reporter” reviewer called it “as a story of women looking for love and happiness in a calamitous world”. The BBC correspondent summed up the critical responses and recalled a conversation with Payal where she had talked about her documentary film featured at an earlier edition of Cannes festival as being a “love letter to public universities and what they stand for - a place where ideally people of all strata of society can be together and enjoy freedom both intellectual and physical” which she has echoed in the present film as well.

One need not be carried away by these expressions of western adoration and sensibilities but Payal’s film does really project an Indian identity in a sea of films in the Indian marketplace though it is not known whether it has a separate Indian title. The film demands and deserves acceptance of the global movie scene of new Indian form of Independent film makers.

“All We Imagine As Light” goes beyond the Social Realism genre of the Indian independent cinema vibrant mostly in regional cinemas of India. It also places Indian reality in a universal context exploring both the social reality of the external world and the inner conflicts of the soul of India. It paradigmatically shifts the film form of Indian Realist Cinema from the shadows of the school of Italian Neorealism to its own post colonial search for a new Film theory and Practice which had become evident in the last few years of Indian independent cinema. In fact some of the film critics have even invoked the contribution of eminent Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar Wai to the mainland Chinese Cinema in juxtaposing the proletarian concerns of the needs of the body and bourgeois spiritual search and how the Body and Mind are integrated into the narration of a film. If the Palme D’Or award winning film “Anora” totally indulges in images of sensual and erotic search of the human body in a loud manner, Payal’s film balances the needs of the body and the mind in a calm and stoic format and demands of the audience greater understanding of hope in an illusory life of contemporary Indian reality. It does not evade any issues of that reality. There is this obviously evident reality of deprivation, political agendas of organised religions and patriarchy, economic cliches of Development and Consumerism, but then there is an intellectual and philosophical tone to it as well. When one of the character exclaims that life in the metropolis (Mumbai) he is not a dream but an illusion it is a philosophical statement rather than a response to the cliched expression for Mumbaikars resilience in the face of adversity, both natural and man made. In fact, it is this philosophical assertion of the film and it's efficient film making techniques that pushed out of competition Coppola's “Megalopolis”, a story of overindulgent and narcissistic notion of the cities of the world, David Cronenberg’s weird and unimpactful futuristic tale “Shrouds” and the self effacing drama of Paul Schrader “Oh Canada”. The banal autobiographical works on the maverick former president of US Donald Trump, the Punk writer and Russian Anarchist & political disruptor Eduard Limonov and light hearted pointless replication of legendary Italian Actor Marcello Mastroianni’s life and roles by his own family members Chiara and Catherine Deneuve faded into oblivion in the context of social impact of “All We Imagine As Light” and “The Seed of the Sacred Fig”. .

Canne Film Festival is an important platform for the art of the cinema despite its hijack by the market forces for sale and purchase of cinema as a product and its notoriety for parading celebrities on the over publicised Red carpet catwalks, the core of the festival still remain strong. Though the western sensibilities are still averse to the emotionally driven stylistically performed cinemas of the east it cannot neglect the realities and had to extend themselves to the more inclusive cultures and forms. Films like ”All we Imagine as Light” demands inclusivity.

“All we Imagine as Light” also brings to notice of the aspiring Indian young filmmakers the nature of Film production and Distribution in today's Movie Business. It has in its Title credits, production Houses from France, Netherlands, Luxembourg and India as producing partners. This is the reality of almost all the films in the competition section of the festival and indicates that Art of the cinema can survive only through international cooperation and multilateral economic resources but that is another big story “All we Imagine as Light” is trying to convey.

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