LAHORE: The Pakistan Film Industry is all set to celebrate its 60th anniversary, but there is no clear answer to the question of whether Indian movies should be screened or not.  
  
Critics, film producers, directors, actors, and film exhibiters seem to agree that Pakistan’s film industry is in decline, but differ on how to revive it. Directors and producers rail against the screening of Indian movies in the country’s cinemas while cinema owners believe the opposite.  
  
Recently released Indian movies are doing considerable business countrywide. One movie, ‘Race’ which features a song by Pakistani singer Atif Aslam has received enormous applause from audiences. Defence Housing Authority (DHA) spokesman Tajjamul Hussain said that a number of people had requested that he help them obtain tickets for the film at the DHA cinema. The movie is especially gaining popularity with young people. Another movie ‘Tare Zameen Par’ has become the talk of the town and is being released in Pakistan by a private television network.  
  
There are several reasons why Indian movies have made their way into Pakistani cinemas. Despite all the criticism of and opposition to the screening of these movies in the country, our own film industry does not have much to offer as a substitute for their movies. People from the Pakistan film industry say that the screening of Indian movies is unpatriotic, but admit that their own ‘formula films’ have paved the way for the Indian flicks. The lack of good scripts and stories has led to a great disaster in Pakistan’s own film industry and people have ceased to visit cinemas.

A survey states that in 1973 there were 63 cinemas in Lahore, 16 in Rawalpindi, 19 in Multan, 19 in Faisalabad, 11 in Gujranwala, 12 in Sialkot, 12 in Peshawar, 86 in Karachi, 20 in Hyderabad, six in Sukkar, and eight in Quetta. Currently, the number of cinemas has been reduced to 23 in Lahore, 10 in Rawalpindi, 14 in Multan, 13 in Faisalabad, 10 in Gujranwala, eight in Sialkot, 36 in Karachi, four in Hyderabad, one in Sukkar and five in Quetta. This all points to the decline of the industry.   
  
Nasir Adeeb, a renowned scriptwriter and author of ‘Mola Jutt’, said that some ‘black sheep’ had damaged the industry. “Producers have ousted the script from the film, without which a movie is futile. Script writers are not paid handsomely and very few producers and directors agree to buy a well written script,” he said. He condemned the screening of Indian movies in the country. “The screening of Indian movies is an acceptance of the fact that we have given up before Indian culture. I am not disappointed about the industry’s future; it may take some time but it will revive”, he added. He said private channels that spend millions of rupees on their programmes should come forward to invest in the film industry.  
  
Famous director-cum-writer Rukhsana Noor said that it was a most unfortunate thing to give Pakistani films to others. She said, “The Indian buyer is not ready to buy our pictures, then why are we crazily screening their movies? By establishing an editing lab of international standards we can boost our own industry. If the government allows loans to filmmakers, good produces will come back and the industry will revive”.

Pakistan Film Exhibitor Association Chairman Jahanzaib Baig said cinema owners were happy that their words were being heeded regarding the screening of Indian movies in cinemas. He said the screening of Indian movies would create a viable environment for the industry. “The argument that screening Indian movies is destroying our film industry is wrong, rather it is reviving cinema culture in the country. People are coming back to the cinemas, and that means that they want to see good movies”. He said cinema owners had given a fair chance to Pakistani movies, and ‘Khuda Key Liye’ was an example of this but such movies were made once in a decade. He said that a cinema needed 35 to 40 films to screen in a year, and that such a number was not available in the country. He said, “Our problem is not the quality. We want the product that we lack. Now it’s not a matter of Indian or Pakistani movie, it’s the matter of good or bad picture. Only a good picture will do business irrespective of whether it is an Indian or Pakistani movie”. Cinemas are getting good business owing to the screening of Indian movies, and this environment will help promote the Pakistani film industry, as people will come to see our own good pictures too, he added.

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*By Imran Naeem Ahmad*   
  
ISLAMABAD: Lollywood bigwig,s including actors Reema and Shaan, converged in Islamabad on Tuesday to help figure out ways to revive Pakistan’s film industry.   
  
Renowned actors, directors and producers were all present at the commencement of a two-day conference organised by the Culture Ministry and the Hunerkada College of Visual and Performing Arts at the Islamabad Club.   
  
The gloom that surrounds the industry was evident from speeches made especially by veteran actor Mustafa Qureshi and Culture Minister GG Jamal.   
  
“My heart weeps at the state of our film industry,” lamented Qureshi of the ‘Maula Jat’ fame. “We have only ourselves to blame for the decline because we did not make good films,” he pointed out while the minister spoke of culture not having been a priority of any government. “This was because of the geo-political situation,” he said. Lollywood, that once produced good quality, box-office hits, has been in a constant state of decline since the 80s and is today facing issues like inadequate financing, a lack of quality equipment, piracy and cable operations.   
  
“We have to at least assure that the industry is pulled out from ‘intensive care’ and shifted to a ward, if not a private room,” said Jamal who is also a medical doctor.   
  
The conference aims at seeking viable recommendations that will be presented to the government for consideration and Jamal assured their quick implementation. As many as 80 to 100 films were previously churned out in Pakistan each year but in 2004 only about 25 mainstream movies could be produced — soo terminal has been the decline. The number of cinema houses has also fallen from 800 in 1980s to about 200 today.   
  
Cinemas have been turned into gas stations and shopping plazas as cable operators and piracy provide people an alternative. “It is our collective responsibility to check these trends that threaten our film industry,” Culture Secretary Saleem Gul Shaikh said while assuring an enabling environment for the industry to flourish again.   
  
Hunerkada Head Jamal Shah said that watching movies in cinemas was cheap entertainment and that film was an art form that had the power to bring societal change in addition to creating livelihood for the people. “I take entertainment as a basic human right and it has to be protected, it is a vicious cycle and we have to come out of it,” said Jamal.  
  
Qureshi called for the establishment of a “parallel cinema” that levies heavy taxes on producers making low quality films and exempting those who produce good quality films. He highlighted the importance of national film awards and said that these should be re-instituted and Rs 5 million should be set aside for this purpose.   
  
Saying that the Censor Board had to act stricter, Qureshi pointed to the need for technical education to those involved in the film business and the setting up of academies. He said that poor equipment should not be used as an excuse. “It can always be bought —- it is only a question of having money.”

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Moneeza Hashmi from Hum TV in her presentation Pakistani Cinema: Where it Went Wrong and Why charted the course of Pakistani cinema from its inception to the present day. The greatest challenge in the late 1940s was building something from scratch. The high quality of Pakistani films being produced in that period was attributed to the stiff competition they faced from Indian films produced by a relatively well-established Indian film industry being screened in Pakistan. The first attempts at establishing an alternative cinema were initiated by people like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, A.J. Kardar, Javed Jabbar and Ahmed Bashir. However, such endeavors were not very successful, and, this for Hashmi, was due to the fact that Pakistani audiences were not ready to appreciate socially and politically driven films. Thus, alternative cinema met with an early death. During the 1970s the country was going through unstable and troubled times, and viewers preferred to stay home and watch television than go out for films. The stalwarts and pioneers of Pakistan cinema passed away leaving a vacuum in the industry, and for many, cinema lost its appeal.

Hashmi attributed the decline of Pakistani cinema to all its stakeholders: the filmmakers, filmgoers, as well as the Pakistani government. She explained that viewers have become apathetic and gladly patronize mediocre films; filmmakers do not find any motivation to break the mold; and the government does not consider the nurturing of cinema a priority.

Bandana Rana, a documentary filmmaker from Nepal in her presentation Gender Portrayal in Nepali Films presented an overview of the Nepali cinema, linking it to the social conditions prevalent in the country. Belonging to the Women's Media Forum, Bandana was of the view that since Nepal is an extremely patriarchal society; the gender portrayal in the cinema in Nepal reinforces the stereotypical views held in the country.

Bandana said that cinema first took root in Nepal in the 1960s, however, Nepal produces very few films as audiences prefer to watch Indian films. Moreover, Nepalese films usually cater to men, and this makes the target-audience in Nepal very small. However, there is still hope for revival of Nepali cinema, as the inception of the South Asia Film Festival a few years ago has rekindled interest in filmmaking, especially in socially and politically active cinema. According to her, a few high quality films have been produced in Nepal in the recent past, some by women, and these have been well-received.

The third panelist, Samar Minallah, a Pakistani documentary filmmaker and anthropologist in her presentation Social/Activist Filmmaking as a Tool for Social Change and Development charted the rise of the documentary film as a vehicle for bringing about social change. She traced the origins and the beginnings of the genre, and citing examples from all over the world, built her case for how the documentary has become an effective medium for getting new ideas across to the masses, for spreading awareness, and making a difference by encouraging people to take control of their lives.

She emphasized the need for documentaries to be culturally competent to strike a chord with the target-audience. If the sensitivities and mind-sets of the audience are ignored and a radical view is offered, the audience is more likely to reject it instead of viewing it with an element of understanding. She concluded with a presentation of a Pushto song that pays homage to women. It depicted the hardships faced by women in Pakistan, specifically in the NWFP, and has become one of the most frequently run music videos on regional channels.

The discussant for this panel was Salman Abbasy from the Ministry of Information, Government of Pakistan. He held the rise of commercialism and television as the main contributors to the decline of Pakistani cinema. He said that this is an unusual phenomenon that is not found in any other film industry in the world. He disputed Moneeza Hashmi's comment that held the Government of Pakistan partially responsible for the decline of cinema, and stated that the present Government has played down the role of state-run media and has encouraged private and independent media. He said that the challenge now for the private media is to produce high quality programs since there are no restrictions from the Government on its activities. He insisted that investors and the private media are to blame for their lack of interest in alternative cinema since they privilege their profits over the quality of productions or the promotion of particular social and political values.

The chair, Agha Nasir from Geo TV, maintained that the technical backwardness of the Pakisatni film industry, weak scripts offered, piracy and cable television are significant factors contributing to the decline of cinema in Pakistan. He agreed with Salman Abbasy's view that the government is not responsible for cinema's decline as the government's role is that of a regulating authority. It cannot provide the impetus for a dynamic alternative cinema or even the revival of cinema in Pakistan. According to him, the responsibility of taking this initiative lies with the private media itself.

The panel garnered a very lively question and answer session and participants commented on the role of the state that indirectly influences the themes depicted on television and in films. The lack of training facilities and institutions in Pakistan was highlighted as contributing to the lack of creative and competent people. Government censorship policies were also discussed as inhibiting the creativity of cinema. Limiting the number of foreign films screened, which could have posed as healthy competition for the local cinema, has also encouraged lethargy.

Reported by Azka Tanveer

Abdur Rob Khan from BIISS, Bangladesh, in his presentation State and Human Security in South Asia: Political Economy of Governance termed human development, human rights and human security as interlinked concepts and stressed that the state should be held responsible for all these concerns. He asserted that the gap between the state and the poor is widening which creates a strong sense of insecurity among the masses. He felt that in the post 9/11 scenario, the rise of extremism and an increased role of law enforcement agencies have worsened the issues of human security across the globe. He suggested the strengthening of state through a ‘true' democracy by increasing the role of political parties, a decentralized local government system, and participation of civil society to help the state address human security concerns.

Nizamuddin Nizamani in his presentation S ocio-political Unrest and Vulnerable Human Security in Balochistan , offered a well researched picture of Balochistan. The province, despite having rich natural resources and an ideal geo-strategic location, has more than half its' population living below poverty line and malnourished. The absence of development has isolated the province which lacks basic facilities like water, shelter, electricity, gas and telephone connections, health cover, and security for its people. Over the years, the poor policies of the governments have created a sense of deprivation amongst Balochistan's people, leading to political unrest and instability. He cautioned that the situation is likely to further worsen if the Baloch people do not receive a reasonable share from the resources of their province. He stressed that native people must be consulted to ensure sustainable development and recommended that existing policies towards Balochistan need to be reshaped to bring harmony, peace and prosperity to this part of Pakistan.

Asma Yaqoob from the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan in her presentation Trans-boundary Waters in Jammu and Kashmir: Human Security in a Wider Context highlighted the emerging human security threats to the people of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as the central government of India controls most of their water resources under the Northern Grid, which is also the biggest power supply source to the state. All the Center-led hydropower stations built in J&K provide only 20 per cent electricity to the state whereas 80 per cent is supplied to other states. She clarified that the existing demand for power in the AJK State is 1,250 MW that is expected to rise to 2,563 MW in 2011-2012 whereas the estimated supply is 1,060 MW. To bridge the supply-demand gap, the state government has to either run gas turbines or buy electricity from the Northern Grid. More over, at present the Indian government is constructing six more hydropower projects on the rivers Chenab and Jehlum that are at the various stages of development. She maintained that the poor marshalling of resources, successive droughts and continued militancy have kept the state underdeveloped and complicated the human security issues. She suggested an early settlement of disputes between India and Pakistan, collective reinterpretation of Indus Water Treaty 1960, and construction of an Integrated Power Grid which might ease the situation for people living in the state.

Afrasiab Khattak, associated with the HRCP and PIPFPD, Peshawar, Pakistan, chaired the session and reiterated the consensus that human security should take precedence over all other concerns. The discussant, Mansoor Akbar Kundi from the University of Balochistan, Pakistan, declared Balochistan as the ‘neglected backyard' of Pakistan, and Kashmir remaining in a terrible state of affairs to date.

Reported by Faisal Gorchani

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Humeira Iqtidar of the University of Cambridge, UK, in her presentation Radical Times: Students in the Political Mobilization of Lahore explained the changes in the political role of religious groups in Pakistan, examining the theoretical dichotomy between the modern-secular and the traditional-fundamentalist. She argued that the late 1960s were a formative phase in the politics of Pakistan, both in the 'left' and 'right' leaning groups as developments in the political and social agenda credited to both were actually highlighted and demarcated sharply during this period.

Humeira maintained that students were both the articulators and the constituency of competing political ideologies. Collectively, they played a critical role during this period as a bridge between the various sections of society. Her paper argued that the current politics of Islamist groups like the Jamat-e-Islami can be best understood with reference to the changes that occurred in the organization during that critical period in its student body, Jamiat Tulaba/Talibat. Alliances, strategies, and the stances of both the 'left' and the 'right' went through a definitive phase during this period. Students involved in politics at this stage articulated and radicalized these differences. Many of these students then played a key role in shaping the policies and visions of their respective groups over the following decades. Lahore was an important center of these activities, and the research focuses on Lahore for a more detailed understanding. Humaira built her analysis bringing together the scattered record of the period from magazines, memoirs, official records, newspapers and academic articles, as well as interviews she conducted. She asserted that the ‘Left' and the religious groups were not completely antagonistic toward each other. She emphasized that social and political mobility increased in Pakistan in the late 1960's.

Syed Jamaludin Naqvi, Chairman of Forum for Democracy in Pakistan, in his presentation Rising after Slumber: State of Students Politics in Pakistan said that the role of the sub-continent's students in the struggle for independence from the British Empire is already well known . After presenting a comprehensive historical analysis of students' movement in Pakistan, he said that Pakistani students exhibited a great revolutionary zeal in opposing Pakistan's decision to join the Cold War military blocs, and mobilized people to stand up for national rights. They played a key role in making education affordable and universal in the country. In the 1960s and 70s, the students spearheaded the struggle for democracy and anti-terrorism/extremism in Pakistan. The decades of 1980s and 1990s saw a great change in international politics with the end of Cold War. He maintained that the ideology of the new world order is vague and unclear. Only some of its features like globalization are manifest to everyone. A definitive picture is certainly not there. The youth is trying to find out what the world has become and how it can be made a better place.

The third panelist Sarfaraz Khan, from Peshawar University, in his presentation Growth and Decay of Student Politics in the NWFP was of the view that the emergence, growth and decay of student politics in NWFP is associated with the quality of education. He examined the student politics in azad (free) schools of Ghaffar Khan during the colonial period; in Anglo Muslim schools, and the emergence of Muslim, nationalistic student, and later of democratic student federations. He emphasized the role of the state and held it responsible for bringing violence into student politics, especially in NWFP. He recalled how the present Minister of Youth was involved in the killing of fellow students. He reviewed the relationship of students with political parties and their role in national politics; the violence on campuses during the period of dictatorships, and the role of students in social change.

Khawaja Masood, former Principal Gordon College, chaired the session. The discussant, Aneela Babar from the Centre of Cross Cultural Research, Sydney, reviewed the presentations. She felt the presentations were a rich narration of urban sociology and raised the issue of class effectively.

Reported by Saima Ali

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