

IFFK REMINISCENCES



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E8

Being a part of the twentieth edition of International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK 2015) was, indeed, a delightful experience. Over the last twenty years, IFFK has played a vital role in enhancing the cinematic sensibility of Malayalee audience by keeping the promise of showcasing a wide range of movies from all around the world. Over the past few years, IFFK has emerged as one of the best film festivals in India. It has developed itself into a sort of unique cultural fiesta, where thousands of film enthusiasts from across the country get together for a week in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala. The IFFK 2015 was scheduled during 5-11 December 2015 and the event was inaugurated on 4 December by the Chief Minister of Kerala. The inaugural function was blessed with the presence of tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain, who set the stage with a mesmerising performance with the percussion instrument. Staying the whole week at Thiruvananthapuram with friends was a rewarding experience, and the reassuring moments with twenty five movies are memorable. Most of these films are so brilliant that we could hardly make any distinction between the best among them. Hence any effort to recap them for a neat review is challenging indeed.

Ozhivudivasathe Kali (An off day game) directed by the state award winner Sanal Kumar Sasidharan, tops our list with very little confusion. If we couldn't watch another movie immediately after seeing this and had to leave the theatre, it shows how much emotional disturbance that this film had made and how powerful the language of cinema is. Based on Unni R's short story of the same name, the film is set over the course of an election day, when five friends decide to get together, drink and have fun at a secluded house up the hills. Over a few pegs, we find them letting down their guard and discussing and fighting among themselves over

social issues. To ease the mood and to kill time they revive a childhood game with each one of them role playing judge, king, minister, police and thief. That game as it progresses reveals itself to be modelled on the current state of our democracy and caste system. The tension that builds up with every passing moment can be felt in our pulses. The continuously flowing camera shot all over the house adds up the tension. Off-day game mirrors our society and the reflection



is crystal clear. This film would surely make you uncomfortable.

A dazzling production under the category of woman power was a Guatemalan French film, **Ixcanul**, directed by Jayro Bustamante. It tells the story of Maria, a 17 year old girl living with her parents at a Guatemalan coffee plantation located in the valley of an active volcano.

Maria is unsure if she wants to continue with her family's traditions or take a step into the wider world. She seduces a plantation worker who wants to escape to the USA hoping

that he would take her too. But the man leaves her behind and Maria is left alone pregnant. Unexpectedly she is bitten by a snake, and the remainder of the picture depicts a series of complex emotions and events. The unfamiliar routines of their culture, far away from the globalised world, will surely tempt us to rethink about the notions of morality we see in our civilised world. The elegant way in which the film is shot, the brilliant performances and location increased the beauty of the film. *Ixcanul* is a very strong feminist tale told on the backdrops of an unfamiliar culture composed of strong characters living near a volcano in a plantation filled with snakes. For people who are drawn to cinema from diverse origins, this film is a treat.

Another brilliant one in the woman power category was a Brazilian film, **The Second Mother** directed by Anna Muylaert. This tells the story of Val, the housemaid of a wealthy family



in Brazil where she also takes care of the family's only child. Val is living with the guilt of leaving her daughter in the hands of relatives in northern Brazil for her studies. When Val's daughter returns to the city, tensions and problems start arising in their lives when she finds out her mother stays with her employers. Her presence in the house creates a lot of confusion when she tries to make it her own home. The film brings

into limelight the 21st century class division in Brazil. It becomes so realistic when the supposedly liberal employer class struggles to express the unease and discomfort happening with the presence of their maid's daughter without hurting the sentiments of them. The film is blessed with the wonderful performance of Regina Case, who played the role of Val. Her performance is so exceptional that at many times we forget the fact that we are in a theatre watching a movie. Watching a foreign language film, we wondered how many of our films have conveyed the motherly emotions so perfectly as Regina did. *The Second Mother* was absorbing and moving which handled serious issues like class tensions and complex relationships. It was powerful and thought provoking. Iranian film, **Taxi**, directed by the maestro Jafar Panahi under the world cinema category was a delightful experience for several reasons. Panahi is an Iranian film



maker who is under house arrest and banned from film making for 20 years by the government of Iran for portraying various sensitive issues in his films. Despite the support from film and human right organizations from all around the world, the Iranian government has not agreed to compromise on Panahi's ban. This unfortunate condition, with no support from his own government, has not paralyzed the film making

passion inside Panahi and he continues to make brilliant movies by guerrilla film making. This is the third film he had made since his ban and this whole film happens inside a taxi. Like the previous two films, Taxi was also smuggled out of the country to be seen. Jafar Panahi drives a taxi through the streets of Iran picking up a diverse group of passengers in a single day. He has placed a dashboard camera and the whole film is his conversation with the passengers. Throughout the day, we understand from the various passengers how life is in Iran today with serious discussions happening on women issues, state sanctioned brutality, censorship, death penalty, abuse of religious laws. There lies an underlying connection between each passenger's story and the way Panahi had told it is enough to portray his genius. On the surface Taxi feels small and funny, but underneath it is seething in anger and defiance at the Iranian government. Panahi knows that he is living under the menace of religious authority and under their surveillance. In spite of the ban, his films are shown internationally and Taxi had won the top prize at this year's Berlin International Film Festival. Sadly, Jafar Panahi is still living at the mercy of his government and could be imprisoned at a moment's notice. The oppression and injustice which he experienced, alongside the lack of freedom of expression within the country, indeed transformed Panahi's art into something very poetic. It is very painful to see that even in this century, genuine artists like Panahi are under siege in the name of religion. Still when we see people like him coming off in flying colours with films like Taxi, we realise that the strength and bravery of human spirit can never be in detention.

On the whole, the IFFK 2015 was a

unique experience. It was so exciting to see the people from different states and different cultures getting together, talking the language of cinema, roaming around the beautiful city of Thiruvananthapuram, either trying to figure out the next film to watch, or debating over issues some of the films raised, or sitting in groups singing while waiting for the next film to start, forgetting all the other affairs, and the only concern was cinema. IFFK 2015 continues to be one of the best in the continent. It takes in and unfolds all that is great about film festivals: new and cutting-edge talents, enthusiastic and engaged audiences, and a warm and welcoming vibe – all with the elegant the God's own country as a backdrop.



Orphan

Avinash O.K
M8

The little girl want to know how she came to this world.
The caretaker took out a pregnant pomegranate and carefully
peeled it to take out a seed.
The girl was still worried of her thousand siblings.

monoliths

