

cinema

Cashing in on celluloid artefacts

The auction of memorabilia at the recent Osian's Cinefan Film Festival could help to build up a nascent demand for movie properties in India, writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

There have been endless debates over the composition of a film festival. Some of those who helm these events tell me that a movie festival must have interesting sidebars, like seminars and retrospectives. These, they feel, will make up for the shortcomings in the main content, such as competition and panorama.

I have always differed here, and firmly believe that a festival must have a great crop of current movies. The sidebars can take a walk, for I have suspected that these are included and given undue prominence merely to divert attention from the not-so-hot main selections.

With so many festivals in India today, it is only to be expected that a lot many of them are disappointing. And like some of the country's legendary bookshops — which have begun to stock fewer and fewer print titles, choosing instead to use the space for displaying a host of other items, such as music/movie discs, stationery, greeting cards, toys, mobile phones, perfumes, jewellery and even furniture — film festivals too are beginning to run on retrospectives and discussions, rather than on current cinema, which rightfully should be the main focus of a festival.

Shankar Mohan, the present Director of the International Film Festival of India, would always interrupt me by arguing, "But Gautaman, we have such wonderful retrospectives". I could have countered this by telling him that works in his retrospective basket could be picked up from any pirate or a legal shop. One does not have to attend a festival for this.

The recent 12th Osian's Cinefan Film Festival, which began its re-run after a two-year hiatus (forced by lack of funds), had even an auction, though mercifully of movie memorabilia. One of the reasons for this is that the co-founder and Chairman of the

Festival, Neville Tuli, also heads the Osian's auction house, which, he hopes, would ultimately help fund the Festival.

Also, he thinks that like the great art scene in India, which took a decade to take off, interest in film artefacts — like posters or the clothes or jewellery worn by stars — will grow in the coming years.

Of course we all know that cinema drives men and women crazy, and actors are even more seducing. So too their personal effects. In India, we have seen how Rajesh Khanna enthralled an entire nation. We have seen that with Aishwarya Rai, with Shammi Kapoor, with Rajnikanth... It is, therefore, not unusual that the man or woman on the street would just love to possess the clothes an actor wore or the jewels he or she treasured. Sometimes, it gets down to undergarments. Kylie Minogue's panty, which she wore in a 2012 calendar photo-shoot, fetched a whopping \$8,000 in an auction by Christies.

Osian's auction, held along with the Festival, was the first major such event in India since a decade when the organisation's landmark sale, *The Historical Mela — ABC: Art, Book and Cinema*, pioneered the market-building process for movie memorabilia in the country.

For the auction, several cinema families gave vintage film artefacts, and these came from the private collections of legends like Shammi Kapoor. (Aamir Khan bought his jacket for Rs88,000.) Rare posters, costumes, lobby cards and the last unreleased song of Kishore Kumar (sung three days before he died) went under the hammer.

Those who came bidding had a mindboggling range of goodies to choose from: Kapoor's famous scarf from *Junglee* (1961), sweater from *Andaz* (1971), the shehnaai from his last film appearance in *Rockstar* (2011) and favourite personal Mont Blanc fountain pens.

Also auctioned were an album of 45



✿ Some of the items that were auctioned at the Cinefan Film Festival's *The Historical Mela*.



significant Bollywood films (*Rang De Basanti* and *Delhi Belly* among others), and Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra may be planning a studio in the capital city, there was no impassioned or sustained campaign among the speakers for transforming Delhi into a cinema hub. 'Delhiwood' did not appear to be catchy enough.

Tuli felt that Delhi could complement Mumbai, not take over. In a flamboyant speech typical of him, he said that Delhi should never attempt to be the driver. The city could make use of its wonderful cultural heritage, but should make sure that movie-making did not ruin the historic sites. This was a common problem.

Years ago, one remembers Ooty rising in revolt against the damage caused by film units, which dirtied the pristine beauty of the southern Indian mountain resort, even damaging some of the monuments there.

Speaking in the same vein as Tuli, producer Bedi, while admitting that Delhi was an easier place to shoot, with streets less crowded than they were in Mumbai, said that India's capital city could never be a substitute for the metropolis by the Arabian Sea.

Kapur averred that Delhi had the same problems as Singapore, and lacked creative talent. "Maybe Delhi needs a kind of stimulus that comes from Mumbai's underworld and drinking dens," he quipped. In a typical bureaucratic style, Delhi's Minister, Kiran Walla, said she would be happy to see Delhi as the celluloid centre, but "I hope nobody asks for precious land".

All this is fine, but many, many Indian producers are now budgeting for shoots in locations as exotic as Prague (the recent film with the same title is an example), Switzerland, Malaysia, New Zealand and so on. These look extremely alluring and Delhi could hardly hope match them.

And keeping this in mind, stories are being set outside India.

Ashish Shukla's *Prague* takes its lead players to the Czech capital and presents a visually arresting canvas. Forget the plot, forget the performances and forget how believable the incidents by themselves are. Shukla is on a touristy trip and that is about all there is to his work.

(Next week: Cinema at Cinefan)

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signed black and white stills by Dev Anand, costumes worn by Sanjeev Kumar and Amjad Khan from *Shatranj ke Khilari*, posters designed by Satyajit Ray in the 1960s, the turquoise ring set in silver worn by Farooq Sheikh in Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan* and a cricket bat signed by Aamir Khan and the team from *Lagaan*.

Also on the table were some rare photos mounted on lobby cards and show cards from *Aan*, *Mother India*, *Dil Diya Dard Liya*, *Leader*, *Humraaz*, *Zanjeer*, *Aan Milo Sajna* and others.

Tuli, who spearheaded auction, commented "It is sad that in a country which is so passionate about cinema and where film stars are larger than life, the market for vintage Indian cinema publicity material and memorabilia is at such infancy compared to, say, the market for Hollywood memorabilia. This reflects the lack of not just a cinematic culture, but a lack of financial clout in the global context. It must change. The Indian movie fraternity must start respecting its history, the work of its peers, the art of its publicity material. These need to be preserved. In harnessing these issues lies the development of a world class cinematic culture. I hope this auction inspires our collectors and the film fraternity to value its cinematic heritage more effectively."

Apart from the auction, the Festival set aside two full days for a debate on Delhi being India's movie capital. While it may not have been all that a big task to shift the centre of cinema from Lahore to what was then Bombay post-partition, it is certainly not going to be as easy to transport Bollywood into the bureaucratic-government Delhi.

The Cinefan seminar attracted a bunch of cinema celebrities, including Shekhar Kapur, Imtiaz Ali, Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, Bobby Bedi, Marco Mueller (who now heads the Rome Film Festival), Nina Lath Gupta (Managing Director of the National Film Development Corporation of India) and some Ministers.

Though Delhi has been the setting for some