This is the published version

Sarwal, Amit 2014, Melbourne’s Indian Film Festival needs to strengthen its ties, The conversation, pp. 1-3.

Available from Deakin Research Online

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30065354

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner

Copyright: 2014, Conversation Media Group, published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives license.
Melbourne’s Indian Film Festival needs to strengthen its ties

Amit Sarwal
Alfred Deakin Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Deakin University

The Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) kicked off last night with Bollywood’s cult classic curry-western Sholay in 3D format. This year IFFM is screening 46 films from four countries in 17 languages, including Urdu, Nepalese, Himachli, Sinhala, and Sherdrukpen. It’s the biggest film festival of its type in the southern hemisphere – but it’s attracted criticism from some in the Indian community in Melbourne for its failure to nurture ties between local filmmakers and the industry in India.

So what’s going on?

In 2012, the Victorian Government started the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne. This year, there is a strong set of films on the program that have been recognised with international awards, including Ship of Theseus, The Lunch Box, Lakshmi, Filmistaan, Liar’s Dice, Jal, Apur Panchali and Lucia.

The festival includes films from Pakistan (Waar and Good Morning Karachi), Bangladesh (Pipra Bidya), Nepal (Pailahuru), and Sri Lanka (Thanha Rathi Ranga, Bombs and Roses and Miles of a Dream); it’s really a film festival of the Indian subcontinent.

Ship Of Theseus | Official Trailer

https://theconversation.com/melbournes-indian-film-festival-needs-to-strengthen-its-ties-24967
Melbourne’s Indian Film Festival needs to strengthen its ties

The IFFM has attracted both positive and negative attention from Indian, Australian and Indian-Australian community media.

Firstly, the mode of funding has attracted some comment.

Mind Blowing Films, a Melbourne film distribution company that distributes Indian films for theatrical releases in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji won the tender for A$450,000 funding to curate the festival over three years.

To put that figure in context, the Victorian government tends to award around A$10,000 to support film festivals for other national groups and provides the Melbourne Film Festival with A$1.5 million annually.

IFFM, presented with the support of Film Victoria, is a not-for-profit event backed by commercial sponsors, including Mind Blowing Films.

The potential for conflict of interest for Mind Blowing Films has concerned some in the community. In 2012, the company was criticised for putting films from its distribution network that had already received theatrical release on the program – and effectively rebadging them as a festival entry.

IFFM could be a fantastic opportunity to showcase the breadth of Indian cinema: Indian/Indian-Australian independent cinema(s), documentaries, short/digital films, parallel/arthouse and regional films. Over three years, it has not been so successful in this regard and the IFFM largely remains an event to showcase hand-picked Bollywood films.
Melbourne’s Indian Film Festival needs to strengthen its ties and filmmakers.

The inclusion of some regional films in the 2014 program, such as Apur Panchali and Lucia are a promising sign of a new future direction.

Where are the locals?

In a 2012 media release the IFFM promised that it would invite local filmmakers to participate in order to strengthen ties between the Indian film community in Australia and in India.

Since then, however, it has overlooked, the likes of Chayan Sarkar, Ana Tiwary, Anupam Sharma, Stanley Joseph, M. Shamim Khan, Alex Singh, and Sandeep Raj. Given the film festival is funded by the Victorian government, many in the local Indian community want to see a greater role for local film makers.

Good Morning Karachi Movie Trailer

Trailer for Good Morning Karachi (2013).

There are a few notable Australian films that would be a good fit for IFFM, such as Boyd Hicklin’s Save your Legs (funded by the Victorian Government in 2011); Winston Furlong’s Taj, and Lisa Sabina Haney’s Satyagraha - Truth Force that haven’t screened at IFFM.

The present advisory board of IFFM includes many heavy hitters – such as Manika Jain (Consul General of India, Melbourne), Anthony Pratt (Executive Chairman of Visy), Pamela Chopra (Producer, Yash Raj Films), Simi Garewal (Actress), Ronnie Screwala (Founder, UTV Group), and Vikramjit Roy (Executive Producer) – but missing are the voices of local community leaders.

Their input is needed to strengthen the IFFM’s relationship to the local community. For example, there’s a growing Indian population in regional Victoria. By extending the festival to regional theatres, where they do not screen Indian films, a new contour would be given to cross-cultural engagement at both urban and regional levels.

Given the excitement that the films and celebrities at an event such as IFFM generates, it’s an excellent opportunity to strengthen people-to-people relations, and not just build business ties – while audiences enjoy the diverse spectacle that is Indian film.

*The Indian Film Festival runs in Melbourne until May 11. Details here.*

https://theconversation.com/melbournes-indian-film-festival-needs-to-strengthen-its-ties-24967