

DELHI GETS A OF VARIED CINEMATIC VIEWS AND HUES

The jugalbandi of Hindi cinema and Urdu has been a timeless love affair. Setting the stage for a series of conversations about the language of love, filmmakers and screenwriters spoke about Urdu and its place in cinema during their sessions on day two of Jashn-e-Rekhta 2023

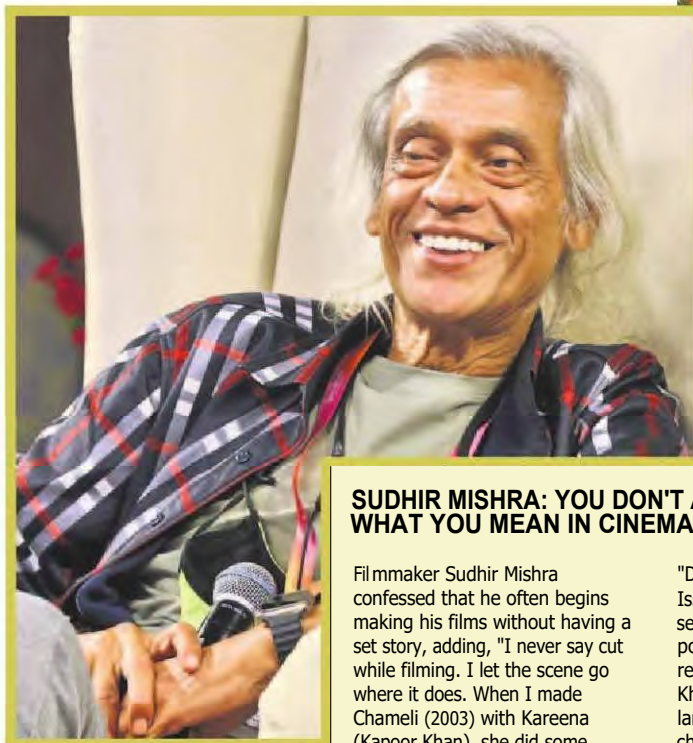
■ Kriti Kambiri



ANURAG KASHYAP: SAM MANEKSHAW'S WIT ADAPTED FROM BRITISH ENGLISH TO HINDI; A LOT IS LOST IN TRANSLATION

Stressing that language is deeply contextual and often loses its essence when translated loosely, the filmmaker said, "Take (actor) Vicky Kaushal's film Sam Bahadur... Sam Manekshaw's (former Field Marshal of India and the film's protagonist) wit and humour — all in British English — was adapted into Hindi. Those who knew of the man have called this adaptation inauthentic. But in such a case, a lot is lost in translation and setting the context," he said.

Kashyap also recounted how an incident while working on the 1998 film Satya exposed him to Urdu. "Gulzar (lyricist) sa'ab was writing the song Kallu Mama and originally the lyrics were 'bum ke neeche bamb lagake gham uda de,' (later changed to 'goli maar bheje mein'). Vishal Bhardwaj and I Ram Gopal Varma, who felt like the original words should be retained, asked me to convey it to Gulzar sa'ab. I was 22 at the time, and went to him and said, 'bum ke neeche bamb lagake gum uda de' hi rakh lijiye. Gulzar sa'ab looked at me, and said, 'Gum nahin, gham hota hai. Nukta hota hai. Baha r jake kaali chai pi le aur baith ja'. That was how I started learning Urdu," he recalled.



SUDHIR MISHRA: YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO SAY WHAT YOU MEAN IN CINEMA

Filmmaker Sudhir Mishra confessed that he often begins making his films without having a set story, adding, "I never say cut while filming. I let the scene go where it does. When I made Chameli (2003) with Kareena (Kapoor Khan), she did some things that I never told her to do, and it was so magical."

Mishra also spoke about the value of subtext in cinema.

"Dialogues are to create a mahaul. Issi samwad aur alfaaz ke takraav se main mudda nikalta hai," pointed out the filmmaker before referring to his 2003 film Hazaron Khwaishein Aisi to talk about language lending nuance to characterisation: "It is set in Delhi University and the characters speak different languages at home. But when together, they speak a mix of English and Hindi."



VARUN GROVER: WHATSAPP GENERATION'S LANGUAGE IS PUNJABI

Screenwriter-actor Varun Grover feels like the language that we see in cinema is not really Urdu anymore. "WhatsApp generation ki bhasha hai Punjabi. Someone I've been speaking to for work, starts all messages with 22ji. For the longest time, I thought maybe it's a typo but he later told me that it means bhai ji, because 22 is pronounced 'bai' in Punjabi! This language hasn't come to cinema, yet," he laughed, adding, "WhatsApp ki bhasha aur nafrat, donon hi filmon se dus saal aage chal rahe hain."

Grover, who made his acting debut in Qala (2022),

added that cinema is a reflection of society. "If we look at a film like Animal, it is entirely about big households trying to protect themselves. There is no space for realities like Covid-19 or learning from society. That's not what we need from cinema right now," he said, before going on to sing a verse of his song Mann Kasturi Re (Masaan, 2015). "Amit (Kilam, who sang the original) Delhi mein hi rehte hain. Agar main gaunga toh yahin aakar maareng mujhe!" He followed it up with the uncensored version of Jaadu Maya (by the band Indian Ocean).



JAVED AKHTAR: IN HINDI CINEMA, AARTIS ABOUT HINDU GODS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN URDU LANGUAGE, IS THIS NOT SECULARISM?

Speaking during a session with writer Saif Mahmood on secularism and Urdu poetry, lyricist Javed Akhtar spoke of secularism and cultural syncretism. "For years, Hindi films have had 95% songwriters from Urdu — be it Gulzar, Shakeel Badayuni or Kaif Azmi — writing about Radha-Krishna, or festivals like Holi and Diwali. Is this not secularism?" he said.

Akhtar also shared an anecdote from the sets of the film Yugandhar (1979), when one day, he was asked

to write an aarti on Lord Krishna. "I penned the whole crescendo with the names of Krishna. As I narrated the lines, they were surprised, and asked me, 'Itne naam humein nahin pata the. How did you know?' I said, 'The reason I know is because I am a disciple of Urdu. I've learnt all names from Urdu poetry'," he shared, adding that he learnt about the Jain festival of forgiveness (Kshamavani) "through a nazm by Nazeer (Akbarabadi)"