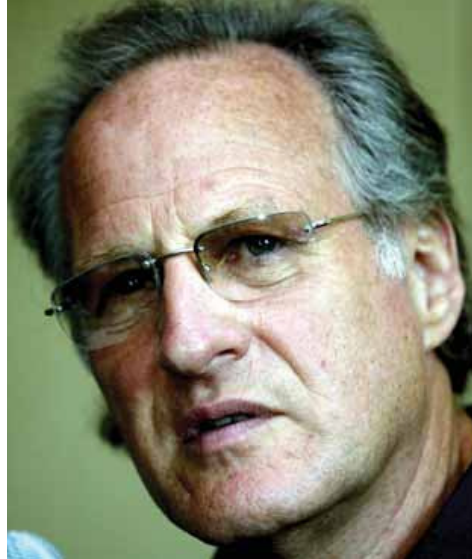


cinema



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Highlights from Venice 2012

Shekhar Kapur and Michael Mann will head juries at this year's film festival. **By Gautaman Bhaskaran**

India appears to be in the limelight in the international arena of cinema. After decibels of music and dance at Cannes with *Gangs of Wasseypur*, *Peddlers* and *Miss Lovely*, the Venice Film Festival looks all set for an India bash. Now, how big that would be is not yet clear, but a start has been made.

Indian actor-director Shekhar Kapur will head the jury for the Luigi de Laurentiis Award at Venice, to run from August 29 to September 8. He shot into limelight with his 1994 *Bandit Queen*, a loosely knit biopic of Phoolan Devi, a notorious dacoit who roamed the ravines of Chambal before she surrendered.

Shocking as it may sound, she fought an election on a Samajwadi Party ticket after her jail term was over, won it and went to Parliament. But those who live by the bullet die by it. She was shot dead outside her New Delhi house in 2001.

Phoolan was angry with Kapur, because she felt that the movie was inaccurate. But when the

producer of *Bandit Queen*, Channel 4, paid her £40,000, the bandit's dissatisfaction disappeared.

But there were others to lambast Kapur. Booker prize-winning author-activist Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*) in her film review titled, *The Great Indian Rape Trick*, questioned the right to "restage the rape of a living woman without her permission".

Although the movie may have aroused public curiosity because its protagonist was still

living then, many could have walked into the theatres to see a nude shot of actress Seema Biswas, playing Phoolan. That was 1994, and Kapur's bold picturisation, done though with finesse and subtlety, caused a sensation all right.

With a string of films behind him — *Masoom* and *Mr India* in particular among others — Kapur made *Elizabeth* in 1998, a fictional account of the British monarch's reign. The movie garnered seven Academy nominations, including one for direction. This was followed by a sequel in 2007, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*,

which clinched two Oscar nods.

Accused of being anti-British for his portrayal of the British Army and monarchy in the 2002 *The Four Feathers*, Kapur nonetheless walked on unruffled with the *Elizabeth* sequel coming five years later.

In 2010, Kapur announced at Cannes that he was making *Paani*, with Danny Boyle as the producer and A R Rahman scoring the music. The film, a futuristic detailing of war over water, is still in the making. Or so, we presume. There has been no word on this from the maker himself.

In the meantime, Kapur is playing a part in Kamal Hassan's *Viswaroopam*, set to open soon.

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At Venice, American helmer, screenwriter and producer, Michael Mann will lead the main international jury. Born in Chicago in 1943, Mann is one of the most influential figures in contemporary American cinema. After having written, produced and directed a few television series, he made his debut movie in 1981 called *Thief*. His characteristic post-modern style came out in all its complexity in *Manhunter* (1986), a film which marked the first appearance on our screens of the character, Hannibal Lecter, the cannibal psychologist.

Mann's name is particularly associated with city thrillers such as *Heat* (1995), which saw Al Pacino and Robert De Niro starring together for the first time, *Collateral* (2004, out of competition at the 61st Venice Film Festival), with Tom Cruise, and the political thriller, *Insider* (1999), the adaptation for cinema of *Miami Vice* (2006), and the noir biopic, *Public Enemies* (2009), about the 1930s bank robber, John Dillinger, essayed by Johnny Depp. Mann's movies also include the epic, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), and *Ali*, with Will Smith as the legendary boxer, Mohamed Ali.

As a producer, Mann's work includes Martin Scorsese's *Aviator* (2004), *Hancock* (2008) with Will Smith, and *Texas Killing Fields* (2011), directed by his daughter Ami Canaan Mann (in competition at the 68th Venice Film Festival).

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Apart from this, the cinema world will be keenly watching Venice this year — the Festival being Alberto Barbera's first edition. Marco Mueller had to leave Venice some months ago, after heading the Festival for eight years. His stint was widely seen as the Festival's golden period.

The world's oldest film festival, which opened in 1932 more as a propaganda platform for Mussolini-Hitler's political beliefs rather than a venue for showcasing cinema as an art form, Venice has had a turbulent sail all through its history.

It has had as many directors as there had been governments in Rome. It appeared that only Mueller had given the Festival a semblance of stability.

One of the high points of the festival's 80th anniversary will be a retrospective of seven features and three short/medium movies that were screened in the course of the eight decades. These works have been long considered lost, and in a way, their screenings would be akin to walking down memory lane.

Some of the movies in this selection are: *The Last Night* by Yuli Yakovlevich Raizman (USSR, 1936, on the October Revolution), *God Needs Men* by Jean Dellanoy (France, 1950, about how an Atlantic storm-battered community lives in non-conventional ways), *Genghis Khan* by Manuel Conde and Salvador Lou (The Philippines, 1950) and *The Brigand* by Renato Castellani (Italy, 1961).

Renewing the tradition, the pre-opening night of the Festival will be celebrated again this year in the historic city centre on August 28 in collaboration with the City of Venice. The film, *Rome 11:00*, 1952, the masterpiece by Giuseppe De Santis, one of the fathers of Neorealism, will be screened.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran will be covering the Venice Film Festival this year, and may be contacted at gautamanb@hotmail.com)

