Pak classic Jago Hua Savera is a true gem that wowed Cannes

Description

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One of the classics at Cannes Film Festival in May was AJ Kardarâ??s 1959 black and white movie, Jago Hua Savera (Day Shall Dawn).

The film, which was to be screened as part of the Restored Classics Section of Jio MAMI 18th Mumbai Film Festival starting October 20, has been dropped.

Made in 1959 in what was then East Bengal, Kardarâ??s work was to have screened at Mumbai. But the prevailing political climate has not allowed this.

1959 Pak film Jago Hua Savera was set in what was then East Bengal. It's screenplay was by the legendary Faiz Ajmad Faiz. (Cannes Film Festival)

In a section titled, Restored Classics â?? which has become quite a hit at Cannes since it was introduced some years ago and which has seen the works of some Indian masters like Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen figuring â?? Jago Hua Savera was described as a gem.

Be that as it may, Jago Hua Savera is a haunting piece of celluloid that was also Pakistanâ??s first ever submission to the Foreign Language Oscars. The year was 1960. A moving story of fishermen in East Pakistan, the movie traces their weaknesses and strengths â?? clearly underlying their never-say-die spirit in the face of a hostile nature and prowling man-eating tigers.A Cannes brochure said: â??By many standards, life in these far flung tiny villages is dull and monotonous, yet, for the people who live there, life is full of trials and turbulence. This is the story of the people of the river to hunt for fish. This is the story of one such man, of many such men, each aspiring to own their own boat.â?• The simple folk had a simple aspiration â?? to own a fishing boat, but caught in a web of loans, they lost even before they began their fight. The big sharks were too powerful for these small fish.

After all these years, what strikes as truly remarkable about Jago Hua Savera was its truly international crew and cast. The revolutionary Pakistani poet, Faiz Ahmad, wrote the screenplay and even penned lyrics for this quasi-documentary fiction, while a German-born British cameraman, Walter Lassally, caught the fantastic rural scenes with a kind of unforgettable magic. He used the Arriflex camera with superb dexterity to capture a set of rank amateur actors as they went about their mundane lives on the banks of Meghna. The style was true realism.

The original story came from West Bengalâ??s Manik Bandhopadhyay, the lead actor, Tripti Mitra, too. She was a member of the Indian Peopleâ??s Theatre Association. And Indian music director, Timir Baran, co-composed along with Pakistanâ??s producer-composer Nauman Taseer. Shanti Chatterjee, an assistant of Satyajit, was also part of the crew. And one can see Rayâ??s influence in Kardarâ??s work.

Cut to present. The movie was restored with the help of the Nauman Taseer Foundation. Picture and the Deluxe Restoration in London. Taseer had been the financial backbone of Jago Hua Savera in its original avatar. Now his son, Anjum, took it upon himself to reconstruct a long-forgotten classic. He dug up the prints from France, London and Karachi, screened them at festivals like the Three Continents at Nantes (France) and New York, before he got restoration teams to work on the film, a painstaking job.

When the digitally-remastered movie was shown at Cannes, Faizâ??s daughter and celebrated poet now living in Lahore, Salima Hashmi, had tears welling up, and she called the experience â??emotionalâ?•. Understandably so. For, her father was in jail â?? as part of the anti-Communist crackdown by Pakistanâ??s General Ayub Khan â?? when Jago Hua Savera premiered in London. The movie went on to win a Gold at the 1959 Moscow Film Festival, and nothing was heard of it after that. Till it re-emerged as a brand new print at Cannes.

And Kardarâ??s life like that of the fishermen in the film ran parallel to the sea and the surf and the sand. He initially worked as a sailor and then went to London to study cinema. His first dabble with the megaphone was Jago Hua Savera.

In an important way, Kardarâ??s brilliant piece of creativity was a turning point in not only the cinematic fortunes of East Bengal â?? which really had no money for the arts and was always subjugated

culturally by the rich and powerful West Pakistan â?? but also that of the country as a whole. After the 1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent, the thriving film industry in Lahore shifted to what was then Bombay. Talent migrated, and Bombay became Maya Nagari, while the movie industry in Lahore floundered and perished. Jago Hua Savera came as a whiff of fresh air, injecting oxygen into Pakistanâ??s business of cinema. But the glory was not allowed to last by Pakistanâ??s military rulers, who saw a threat â?? real or imagined â?? in the emergence of cinema in their eastern wing, which boasted of several men of letters.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the number of films produced annually in Pakistan is well under 20, while India churns out about 1300. After, Jago Hua Savera, Pakistan did not submit anything for the Oscars till 1963 (Ghunghat). It was a long gap after that â?? till 2013, when the country sent Zinda Bhag.

Jago Hua Savera was a landmark work all right, and it is a pity that it will not be screened at Mumbai Film Festival.

(Source: http://www.hindustantimes.com)

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Date Created
October 21, 2016
Author
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