

**HEMAL ASHAR**

hemal@mid-day.com

**T**HE venue was the star at the Kashish Film Festival opening night on Wednesday May 21. Kashish is a Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) film festival running at two venues in Mumbai, the Liberty Cinema and Alliance Francaise, both in South Mumbai. The festival held its opening night at the magnificent Liberty cinema, a single-screen theatre holding its own in this multiplex age. A gigantic rainbow flag festooned the building (rainbow is the symbol of the gay community, its varied colours signifying diversity). As guests waited inside the red-carpeted foyer, one saw a couple of pigeons fluttering their wings near the top of the cinema, close to the rainbow flag. They then opened their wings and flew away, reminding one of the wings signifying the freedom of the gay community. The Section 377 judgement can't stop this community from finding its wings and taking flight.

Kashish is in its fifth year of existence, so opening festival nights have been happening for four years continually. What made Wednesday night stand out was the venue, Liberty Theatre living up to its iconic label. The sweep of its stunning staircase, the chandeliers blinking cheerily in the foyer, the red carpet shouting out a welcome and the sofas outside the hall with their dark Burma teak inviting people to sink into them... most guests who attended the pre-screening party were awed by Liberty. Many guests and Kashish volunteers were very young, so the Liberty era may have passed them. Those with salt 'n' pepper hair (more salt, less pepper) were overcome by nostalgia. As Liberty spun its web of magic, one did not mind being snared in those silky cinematic strands.

**T**alking about venue, Nazir Hoosein, Liberty theatre owner stood smiling in the foyer, pre-screening as he saw the guests enjoying the wine and finger food at the party. The slight, old man of Liberty when asked why he gave his theatre for a LGBT film fest stated, "Why not? Why stand on ceremony. And...we do have a big space here," he stated with a twinkle in his eye, of his 1,200-seater cinema. Just before the screening of the festival night film called, *Out in the Dark*, Nazir was called on to stage as the fes-



**GAY, WE SAY:** Ashok Row Kavi (l) talks as P Shahani looks on



**MOOS-ICAL EVENING:** Meher Moos with Liberty owner, Nazir Hoosein



**DARE TO DREAM:** Festival director, Sridhar Rangayan against the grand sweep of the staircase at Liberty



**FLASHLIGHT:** Guests corner the attention and speak at the opening night party

tival promoters wanted to thank him. He got a standing ovation, which was quite moving. Nazir said, "It is all about diversity. Since Canada is the country of focus this festival, I want to tell you that the seats you are sitting on, are a mix of Canadian and Burmese wood, the white wood is from Canada, the dark teak wood is from Burma." There was a lot of applause for well-known name and woman-about-town Meher Moos too, who had facilitated the Liberty-Kashish tie-up. She had introduced Kashish organizers, to the Liberty owner and the result was history.

The bow-tied Parmesh Shahani of Godrej Culture Lab raised a few laughs. As the sponsors (Godrej is one of the sponsors of the festival) were being called on stage to be thanked, Shahani took a bouquet of flowers given to him. He then threw it like the bride traditionally does, turning his back to the audience and throwing it over his head. Before throwing he asked, "May I throw this bouquet? I always wanted to do this, but I do not know if I will ever get married." Then, the bouquet went flying into the audience, to some laughs and cheers. Flower power at Kashish hour.

Since Canada is the country of focus, a statement made by Richard

Bale, the Consul General of Canada, is worth quoting. It received hearty approval. Said Bale of free Canada, one of the first to legalize same sex marriage, "I am quoting a Canadian politician. He had said, 'the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation!'" That evinced loud cheers and it was certainly not because of the wine the guests had had, in the pre-screening party.

**T**here were Consul Generals, former MP (Nitish Bharadwaj), activists and lots of ordinary mortals too comprising the mix of audience at the Festival. So, this young man and woman were overheard walking into the aisle of the cinema for the screening. The man had his arm around the woman, pushing her along as they walked down the aisle. The woman, who seemed nothing more significant than a friend, told the man in Hindi, this is an English translation, "If we walk like this, we will look straight, very straight in fact." To which the man replied, "Let us look straight. Like they say appearances are deceptive..." You can bet they are, especially at an LGBT event where you are warned not to presume about

gender or sexuality.

Dolly Thakore, Kashish supporter, when called up on stage spoke about how far the community has come. She said in the very early days of the LGBT movement and when people were not aware about AIDS, "I remember going to various clubs in Mumbai, with Ashok Row Kavi (gay activist) and putting condoms on various tables." It made one think of the trailblazing days of the gay movement the battles fought, the tears shed, the lathis faced, days of darkness and gloom and finally, amidst all that some light at the end of the tunnel.

The opening night's movie, 'Out in the Dark' a love story between a Palestinian student and an Israeli lawyer was a powerful one, making the adage: the personal is the political, truer than ever. A better print would have helped though, as some of the English sub-titles were hard to follow, wiped off the screen too quickly. At times, the background seemed very dark it was difficult to discern what exactly was happening on screen. Though the focus was same sex love, it was also riveting for those who wanted a glimpse into the Israel-Palestine conflict, which resonates in so many terror attacks across the world, including Mumbai, today.

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