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Title	AMIC Seminar on Asian Films : Survival or Revival, Singapore, January 26-28, 1988 : [welcome address]
Author(s)	Menon, Vijay
Citation	
Date	1988
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10220/959
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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon

SEMINAR ON 'ASIAN FILMS: SURVIVAL OR REVIVAL'
Singapore, 26-29 January, 1988

Welcome Address by Vijay Menon, Secretary-General, AMIC, Singapore.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you, on behalf of AMIC, to this seminar, our first for 1988, on Asian Films: Survival or Revival. To Dr. Sarath Amunugama, our keynote speaker, I must extend the special welcome due to a one-time Committee Member and Secretary-General and long-time friend of AMIC.

Asia is the largest film producing region in the world. Yet we know so little about our continent's accomplishments in this field. Few realise that in 1986 India produced 930 feature films; that Bangladesh produces about 100 films annually; that Indonesia in its hey-day produced over 100 films in a year.

Today the industry is in turmoil, beset by a number of problems ranging from censorship and poor distribution to scarce finances and shrinking audiences, sky-rocketing costs and video piracy.

There are some who believe that "the dying film can only be revived by the ardent kiss of the movie theatre", that "there is a crisis of the movie-house, not of the film." (Andrzej Wajda). The call for sprucing up cinemas to induce the crowds to return is heard not only in Europe and America but equally in the countries of Asia.

There are others who see the malaise as stemming from the transitional phase that the industry is passing through. "Film is not dying; it is simply changing its dimensions. It is assuming proportions appropriate to co-existence with other means of communication - like TV, records and videocassettes". (Ermanno Olmi). This is a view shared by Louis Malle, who says, "There has never been as much need for films as there is now. Television and videocassettes have given rise to an extraordinary world demand. We must hope for a new relationship between film-makers and an audience made up of television and videocassette viewers".

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The one point on which there is general agreement is that the cinema is currently in a state of crisis; that in its heyday no less than today little serious effort has made to promote films from the Asia-Pacific within the region.

It is our expectation that during this seminar we can not only familiarise ourselves with current trends in Asian cinema but, more importantly, review current efforts towards a wider exchange of Asian films in Asia and recommend a plan of action to further these efforts. It is our hope that we can, at a future date, bring together directors and distributors, producers and policy makers, to discuss this plan of action and suggest concrete steps for its implementation.

The cinema in Asia is more than simple, ephemeral entertainment. As the Far East Economic Review, writing on the Hong Kong International Film Festival, said, "The differences and similarities in Asian cinema are complex and many. But the one characteristic which emerges is that the region's films are largely defined by heritage. Secreted in the productions, the audience finds memories of lost traditions, perhaps customs and social attitudes which have been fading with increased urbanisation and industrial developments...Though they represent a plethora of cultures, languages and politics, Asian movies offer some common perceptions on man's fate, drawn undoubtedly from the shared human experience of developing countries".

This, then, is what we are seeking to promote and preserve.