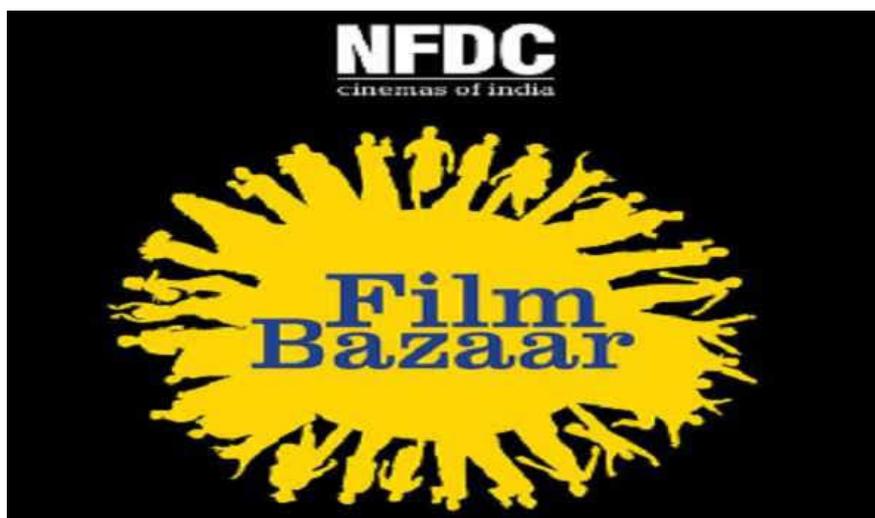


Essay

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Grants and Labs: Where We Stand



We all know that filmmaking is impossible without fund. Even the shortest film also needs fund to be executed. People who are making films under the guidance of a film school (Diploma Films) generally get a fund from the authority and professional filmmakers get their funds from professional producers. But the budding film enthusiasts who are experimenting independently, what about them? Does any professional film producer think about sponsoring a new filmmaker who has little or no experience in the commercialization of the film or in our country do we have a film school which also helps growing filmmakers outside its classroom? If we look at the world, we will notice a totally different scenario. Every reputed film festival is associated with either 'Film Lab' or 'Film Grant'. Some of them are associated with both. There are only a handful of Indian organizations that are offering grants or arranging labs to the citizen filmmakers.

Filmmaking is a continuous process of learning. Even the most famous or most veteran will admit that he or she learns new things every day, every moment.

In the western countries children start growing their interest into filmmaking as early as at the age of 16 or so and till they pass the middle school they have in their hand one or two completed projects along with a good number of workshops and master classes attended, perfect pre-school knowledge to get into a film school. On the contrary, Indian children watch the films by themselves and managed to clear an entrance test to get into a film school and that too after passing graduation i.e. at the age of 19 or 20. Every year approximately 80 youths get the chance of admission into film schools all over India where many more are left, be that monetary reason or ideological differences. But as filmmaking is an art, we can not measure an artist on the parameter of degree. Most of the Canadians and Europeans, especially Central and Eastern European countries offer a good number of grants and labs to their citizens. All these grants are associated with well-known film festivals. They provide pre-production and production grants to complete the shooting of the film, and post-production grant to complete the remaining post productions like edit-

ing, sound designing. Other type of fund is Finishing Fund/ Audience Engagement Fund for promotion and distribution of the film etc. Another type of grant is Equipment Grant. Some organizations provide camera, sound recorder, light and other equipment, necessary to shoot a film other than giving money. Film lab is another most important program in order to enrich the budding filmmakers. In these labs many veteran directors, cinematographers and other technicians as well as film teachers take master class and workshops. Moreover, it gives selected filmmakers a chance to screen their rough-cut of films to an eminent panel of advisors including film festival directors, producers, world sales agents etc.



CINEMART

Now for the Indian filmmakers there are only two notable grants offered by National Film development Corporation (NFDC) and Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) and only one film lab by NFDC. The NFDC grant is mostly for feature length fiction films and PSBT's area of interest is documentary that has to be of maximum 52 Minutes which is not up to the mark for world wide television standards and theatrical release. But recently a new trend has started due to the COVID 19 pandemic as a lot of artists including filmmakers have been affected. So, there is a new kind of grant being provided worldwide as the COVID 19 support or grant. In this, Kerala has shown a good stand, besides fighting with this pandemic situation. Kerala State Government has announced a competition to submit ideas and scripts on Lockdown and Corona Crisis. The selected scripts will be executed with the sponsorship of the Government of Kerala. In this situation the Indian filmmakers have no option left other than to look for the global grant

market to seek financial or equipmental assistance for their films. There the scene is even heart breaking. They need to find a suitable grant program first which allows India to take part in it. Because most of the grants are only meant for the citizens of the grant giving country. Others ask for Co-Production like if a filmmaker from India applies for a grant in UK, he or she must need to have an UK based co-producer or at least an UK based technicians or cast in his or her team to be qualified for application.

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Asian Cinema Fund

Another type of sponsorship is Fiscal Sponsorship. We all know that Fiscal Sponsorships are given to non-profit organizations mainly in United States for films. It is introduced to exempt federal tax. Some notable organization supports artists specially filmmakers to get fund from these organizations. So that, it would be easier for them to avoid tax deduction even for the international transactions. But the problem is statistically fund providing organizations are more in USA than in Europe and Asia and the law of fiscal sponsorship is streamlined especially for US Citizens. The application fee is quite high and a native filmmakers enjoy the privilege under 501(c)(3) Federal Tax Exemption Law. There are certain risk for international filmmakers other than US Citizens as the Fiscal Sponsorship functions like a middle man between the artists and the funders. Sometimes these kind of sponsorship giving organizations use this fund in their own terms which is quite problematic for international as well as Indian filmmakers.

Not only Work in Progress but also there are a great variety of film labs like Screenwriters Lab, Directors Lab, Producers Lab and many more available where new ideas are being nurtured and completed under

professional guidance and support. But as stated above, India's only hope lies in NFDC Film Lab asso-



ciated with IFFI (International Film Festival of India) in Goa. The screenwriters Lab like Mumbai Mantra and Cinestaan take place in Mumbai but is it enough for a 135 Billion people's country? The trend shows decreasing number of completed projects which became successful in Indian film market because the people are not aware of this experimental subject. Another major reason being the domination of mainstream Bollywood films. In this scenario, Over The Top platforms (OTT) are playing major role in encouraging new filmmakers by putting their films on their platforms and surviving out of the box contents of new wave Indian Films. But in the norms of film business is it a right choice to mark only one platform to measure as success or failure where new wave Indian films can not get a better distribution in major

screens and multiplexes?

The central as well as state cultural and broadcasting department needs to look after this matter very seriously. It is high time we should acknowledge our faults and flaws as an audience and watch cinema which is not quite mainstream. We have many film festivals organized throughout the year in our country. If only a half of them offer at least a grant or a lab to encourage the local film enthusiasts, the scenario will change drastically within a few years. Moreover, film schools should arrange master classes and practical workshops at least once in a session where outside filmmakers can join or apply to attend along with the institutional students. This will not only enhance the quality of new filmmaker's projects but also will make the film school students more enriched with the help of exchanging ideas. We also need more Government bodies like West Bengal State Film Development Company Ltd. to support new Indian regional contents which has a lot more possibilities in the national as well as international market rather than so called industry based cinemas. Though the Central Government has allotted a Fund for Film Promotion in various notable film festivals along with OSCAR nominated films from India but the problem is first we need to create a proper infrastructure to curate more films which has their own potentials to compete at the best. But for this 'Labs' and 'Grants' are only solution being the essential part of supporting a new content from the very beginning.

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