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Opening Ceremony of the 14th Feast of the House of Cinema



MOHAMMAD MEHDI ASGARPOUR
PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF CINEMA

FARHAD TOHIDI
SECRETARY OF THE FEAST

According to the public relations department of the House of Cinema, the opening ceremony of the 14th Feast of the House of Cinema was held with the participation of juries of the various sections and heads of the film industry guilds in Tamasha Restaurant in Milad Nour building, Shahrak Gharb.

Thanking the guests for their participation in the ceremony, Kamarn Maleki said: “For the people in the film industry the feast of cinema is one of the most pleasant times of the year as it provides the occasion for all of them to gather in one place and for a single aim – the promotion of the film art.

“The 14th feast is being held this year in spite of the financial sanctions and lack of coordination which led some people to think that there will be no feast this year.”

The ceremony continued with a speech by Farhad Towhidi, secretary of the feast who said: “It is a great pleasure for me that for the next two and a half months I will be associating with many friends. The upcoming feast will be held, at least in terms of quantity, on a much greater scale. All the people who had filled in entry forms last year will be added to those who submitted new films, and in fact we will be having a biannual feast.”

Towhidi specified that: “This year nominees in the best film category will be selected from among titles that have been nominated in four other categories, with the proviso that two of the four categories are in the 5 categories of screenwriting, direction, editing, acting and cinematography.”

Referring to the points emphasized by Seyed Moshen Hashemi, executive deputy of the

House of Cinema, Towhidi said: “The juries have been selected from among the guild members, but the verdicts should reflect an overall cinematic outlook and not guild views.”

In response to criticisms regarding the fact that he has been the feast secretary for two editions, Towhidi said: “The 13th feast did not include jury evaluation of the films, and was in fact a non-competitive event. So I suppose I have been secretary of one and a half feasts, and that could not hurt anybody. The fact that the previous feast was held with no jury evaluation must have pleased certain supposedly friends. It was claimed I was incapable of organizing a proper feast and there were many unfair criticisms mostly written anonymously. They were directed mainly at discrediting people.”

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In continuation of the proceedings, Kamran Maleki, press advisor of the managing director and secretary of the board of directors of the House of Cinema said: "In view of the prevailing conditions many of our friends are worried about Mr. Towhidi as the secretary of the feast, and many thank God they are not in his place. Last year many filmmakers did not want the feast to be held while others insisted that it should be held. Now again there are many who want the feast to be organized while some people try to create problems, including financial problems, in the hope that the feast may not be held."

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"The screening of short and documentary films will start simultaneously in halls Nos. 1 & 2 of the House of Cinema on Monday, July 5, while the feature films will be screened in the

main hall of the House of Cinema on Tuesday, July 6."

The last speaker at the ceremony was Mohammad Mahdi Asgarpour, managing director of the House of cinema who began his speech by thanking the jury members for their participation. "The organizing council of the feast of cinema, particularly Mr. Mansouri, tried to draw up a permanent set of regulations for the feast of cinema, and I hope that this will make it possible to hold much more organized feast in the coming years."

"Everything has been prepared so that we can have more coherent and organized feasts and that future events will not turn into occasions for professional squabbles. Going over all that has been done in the film industry during the past 30 years and through the feasts of cinema,

one is saddened to realize that our achievements have remained mostly unappreciated, and that no support is given for the organization of such events and we always have to mangle with the minimum of facilities."

Asgarpour urged filmmakers to value such occasions as the gathering time of all people in the film industry, and try to preserve the spirit of cooperation and consultation. He warned that prevailing conditions do not favor such gatherings of filmmakers. He pointed out that many supposedly compassionate managers are in fact delivering the worst blows to the film industry. He said that no doubt this was the result of lack of information or misinformation, and that therefore, it is essential that we encourage such gatherings as occasions for reaching greater coordination and cooperation.

The ceremony closed at 11 p.m.



Screening of 300

The second session of film review and discussion with the theme of "Islamophobia and Iranophobia in the Western media" was held after the screening of the film "300". According to the public relations office of the House of Cinema the session was attended by Dr. Davoud Hermidas Bavand, the distinguished professor of the international relations and the film critic Keyvan Kasirian.

Dr. Bavand began his speech by saying, "A great deal of controversy has been going on in recent years both in Iran and abroad about the film "300". Historical distortion is not a new phenomenon and we in Iran have particularly witnessed such distortions. Generally there are two approaches and methods for historical distortions. The first method involves a complete denial of parts of history and the deletion of those parts from the history. And unfortunately, this method is used not only by our enemies, but also by people inside the country who deny the reality of the Medes and Achaemenid dynasties, or deny any relation of those dynasties with our history.

The second type of historical distortion involves an exaggerated respect for one part of the global culture at the expense of the others. This type of distortion is particularly evident in the film "300" which apart from denying and distorting historical truths about the Achaemenids, presents an inordinate fascination with the Greek civilization, considered as the mother of the Western civilization.

"In my opinion, the same type of impartiality that should be observed in the academic circles should also be observed in artistic productions. The type of clothes worn by the Achaemenid kings is clearly observable in the stone reliefs that are still extant. But in the film the clothes worn by the Achaemenid king Xerxes has no relations with the historical facts. In fact the film tries to present Xerxes as the chief of a group of cannibals.

"Another point relates to the number of soldiers in each of the opposing armies. Ancient historians were not very accurate in presenting exact numbers of soldiers of the armies. They would, for instance, say that the Iranian army was composed of one or two millions and this was clearly a means of overvaluing the bravery of the Greek army. The fact is that mobilizing one or two millions of soldiers and moving them across long distances was an impossible task in those times. Also you must have observed in the film that the Iranian army is presented as a disorganized horde, whereas the Achaemenid Empire was well known for its organized managerial system without which it could not have maintained its dominance over a vast territory extending from the Mediterranean to India. And certainly such an empire would have maintained a much more orderly organization of its army. This is the type of historical distortion and denial which is totally incompatible with impartiality in the recounting a historical event.

"We observe the same type of approach by the government of Uzbekistan who consider the Sasanid dynasty as the start of their

history, and deny ancient Persia."

At this point Keyvan Kasirian asked the question: "Dr. Bavand, are there any historical documents that such an event occurred at that period, and are there any reliable source of information about the numbers?"

Dr. Bavand: "Our information about the Medes and the Achaemenids are more or less well documented. And also let us keep in mind the history has been written by the Westerners. But we know very little about the Parthians, because the Sasanids obliterated every trace of the Parthian dynasty which lasted for almost 500 years. During all those years they managed the country with an easy-going manner, tolerating different religions and creeds. Our historical knowledge is based most on Ferdowsi's 'Epic of the Kings', but even Ferdowsi refers to the Parthians in one line, calling them Pishdadian and Kianians. After Ferdowsi our historical information is based on the investigations of the orientalist of the late 19th century. Iranian nationalistic movement started during the Constitutional movement, and not as is popularly believed with the reign of Reza Shah, although it became a comprehensive awareness at that time.

"Also, in the film Xerxes claims that he is God, whereas are very well known that ancient Iranians were Zoroastrian and wor-



shipped Ahura Mazda as God, and this is clearly substantiated by the stone relief inscriptions at the Persepolis. Before that Iranians were Mithraists."

Keyvan Kasirian: "Yes, and of course all this is distorted by the film where Iranians are presented as idolatrous."

Dr. Bavand: "You are right. The fourth error in the film is that it ascribes slavery to Iranians, whereas it is one of the glories of our ancient history that there was never slavery in Iran, while in Greece slaves formed one of the social groups. Of course there were different social groups in Iran but they did not include slaves. In other words, the film tries to glorify the Greek side of the affair and distort history by ascribing slavery to the Iranians.

"In the past town alleys and passages were narrow, and this was a defense mechanism, as narrow passages offer better means of defense against invaders. The film presents Iranians as uncivilized people, but in fact Iranians had very well-organized armies even during the Medes who preceded the Achaemenids. They had clear military divisions such as the infantry and cavalry and

it was due to their organization skills that they defeated the Assyrians and liberated two Israeli tribes some of whom were settled in Isfahan and Hamedan cities. And all this is in contrast with the film in which Iranians are depicted as half naked and uncivilized people.

"The name of Cyrus, the Achaemenid king, is followed by the adjective Great in the encyclopedias because he issued the first proclamation of the human rights in the ancient times. In the past human rights were given to societies and not to the individuals, and that is why Cyrus is great. Today of course human rights are given only to individuals. The ancient Iranians tolerated peoples of any race and creed, while the Greeks considered the non-Greeks as barbarians. After the conquest of the Philippe of Macedonia it was considered advisable to regard the Macedonians also as Greeks and the government formed by them was included in the Greek heritage.

"In contrast with Athens, Sparta was a completely totalitarian and militarized society, and you could not find there the likes of Plato, Aristotle or the stoics. The expression Spartan life brings to mind a hard and military life. Handicapped newborns were killed and healthy boys were taken away from their families at the age of four to be raised in military schools to grow into soldiers.

"Athens was a community of businessmen and this led to an open and democratic society. But in the film Sparta is described as a democratic society which is in complete contrast with historical facts. The filmmakers were obviously making an entertaining product, but they should not have distorted verifiable historical facts. Generally the Westerners consider themselves as heirs to the Greek and Roman civilizations which they cherish, and present the opposing nations in a negative aspect. This attitude is evident even in the film about Alexander. And it dominates their legislative

views. Article 38 of the international tribunal specifies that the general principles of the civilized nations are among the basis of judicial rulings. In other words, even today the Western societies consider their Greek and Roman heritage superior to the cultures of the other nations. Thus their fascination with the Greco-Roman heritage leads to the distortion and negation of other civilizations. And naturally this attitude governs their artistic productions. It is of course true that the battle in 300 is a tragic and epic episode in the Spartan history."

Keyvan Kasirian: "Well, doctor, what approach can we adopt regarding these types of films. Such films are produced, why don't we make film to introduce our history?"

Dr. Bavand: "You are right. When we have no confident approach about our own past, we can not expect better treatment from others. In a way, our present conditions should provide sufficient answers to such historical distortions."

The discussion about the film went on for another 45 minutes among the critics present in the session.

Screening of Traitor

The third session in the series of workshops organized by the Society of International Relations and the House of Cinema was held on Saturday, May 29 with a screening of the film "The Traitor" by Jeffrey Nochmanov at the House of Cinema followed by a session of review and discussion attended by Dr. Ahmad Naqibzadeh, professor of international relations from Tehran University.

Dr. Naqibzadeh began his speech with a short reference to the historical roots of terrorism. "Terrorism beyond geographical boundaries is a new phenomenon in the world politics which has been intensified since the September 11 event," he said.

"Although this is related to the West's tricks for the preservation of their national interests, the phenomenon of Islamophobia is a political fact in the Western world, and dates back to the ancient Greece. A book titled 'Empire and the New Barbarian' was printed in France after the collapse of the Soviet Union which emphasized the need for an external enemy for the preservation of the empire. Now after the collapse of the Soviet Union there has to be another external enemy to ensure the West's superpower position. And among the Third world countries, the Muslim nations have selected as the best alternative."

Pointing out certain inaccuracies in the translation of the subtitles, Dr. Naqibzadeh said: "The image of the terrorist we are presented in the film consists of three layers. There are the soldiers who seek martyrdom, the people who lead them and behind the scene is the Alnazir group who design and have the overall control.

"The film remains faithful to the realities to a certain extent, and presents the different layers of terrorism. And in the beginning of the film we are presented images of the contrast between the social groups of the rich and the poor which is the basic factor in the formation of terrorism on the world scale. But the one factor connected with terrorism which is left out is the Israeli government."

Dr. Naqibzadeh further pointed out: "The film presents the complexity of the issue of terrorism and the fact that many hands are hidden behind the phenomenon. And in fact the presentation

of the complexity of the issue is one of the strengths of the film."

Film critic Reza Dorostkar said: "We are faced with different groups of Muslims in the film 'The Traitor'. First here are those with strong faiths who do not



have adequate understanding of Islam, or vice versa. When they decide on a suicide operation in the bus, their action reflects their strong belief, but it also shows their weakness. At one point in the film one of the characters – Samir – states that people have taken advantage of their faith.



"The final scene of the film reflects a complex truth in this connection. At the end Samir says that according to the verse of Quran when you kill one human being you kill all humans, and his interlocutor says that according to the teachings of Quran when you save one person you save all humanity. So the film does not affect Western viewers about religious terrorism. In my opinion the film is aimed at Muslim viewers and tries to alienate them from the essence of religious fight which is part of the Islamic teachings.

"But Dr. Naqibzadeh believes the film is not aimed only at Muslim viewers and that many of the questions which we have in relation to terrorism also occupies the minds of the Western viewers. The fact that the U. S. has created the Taliban and promoted it is well docu-

mented. In the film we discover that Samir is a FBI agent while other FBI agents knew nothing about his identity and were looking for him. In my opinion the Muslims have been deceived in this connection. The clear message of the film is that there is no security anywhere at any time, that September 11 is not a finished issue. It only provides the U. S. with the pretext to protect its position as the single superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and continue the unipolar system in its own favor."

Dorostkar then offered some factual information about the film: "The Traitor" was produced in 2008, was nominated for several Oscars and its box office receipts totaled 74 million dollars. It was simultaneously screened in 2400 cinemas, and it cost 22 million dollars to produce it.

Dorostkar further stated that the special feature of the film consists in the fact that it does not present a clear and one-sided picture of terrorism, and depicts its various dimensions. He also quoted a film critic who had described the film as hovering between an action film and a thriller.

At the end Dr. Naqibi emphasized once again that Islamophobia and the antagonistic attitude toward this religion dominates the West, and one can witness examples of it in films. But the main point is that we Muslims sometimes provide them with easy excuses. In fact we are deceived. One of the principal messages of the film is that one should take care so that no one can take advantage of our faith.

Dorostkar also criticized the tendency to interpret any event, and that one of the main points of the film is the necessity to avoid the error of hasty judgments. The viewer of the film is forced to constantly change his judgment about Samir's behavior. In other words, the truth is too complex and does not lend itself to simple and hasty conclusions. The session ended at 9 in the evening.

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www.khanehcinema.ir
info@khanehcinema.ir
#29, Semnan St., South Bahar Ave., Tehran
1561737511, Iran.
Telefax: (98 21) 77 52 12 65