

bollywood

Hope soars with *Udaan*

The Indian film *Udaan* (Flight) has broken the Cannes jinx. For seven years, the famed festival in the French Riviera did not screen an Indian movie. Vikramaditya Motwane broke that barrier, and his first work has been chosen to play in the festival's second most important section after Competition, A Certain Regard.

Produced by the newly established Anurag Kashyap Films, the Hindi language *Udaan* is three hours long and is the story of a boy growing up in an emotional vacuum. Having studied in a boarding school, he has not seen his father in eight years, and the movie — starring television actors Ronit Roy and Ram Kapoor and debutant Rajat Barmecha — traces their relationship as it struggles to take off.

Motwane's film will screen along with the creations of such heavyweights as Jean-Luc Godard (*Socialisme*), the auteur credited with the French New Wave, 102-year-old Manoel de Oliveira (*The Strange Case of Angelica*) and Lodge Kerrigan (*Rebecca H*) among others.

Before *Udaan*'s inclusion in the festival's official lineup was announced in Paris on April 15, nobody had heard of Motwane. His earlier claim to fame was his association with director Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Motwane had helped Bhansali with *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* and *Devdas* (screened in Cannes in 2002 as part of the Special section).

Motwane wrote the *Udaan* script in 2003, but could not find money to make it. Till, he met Anurag Kashyap (*Dev D*, *Gulaal* and *Black Friday*), who agreed to finance the movie and write the dialogue. The shooting took just 42 days.

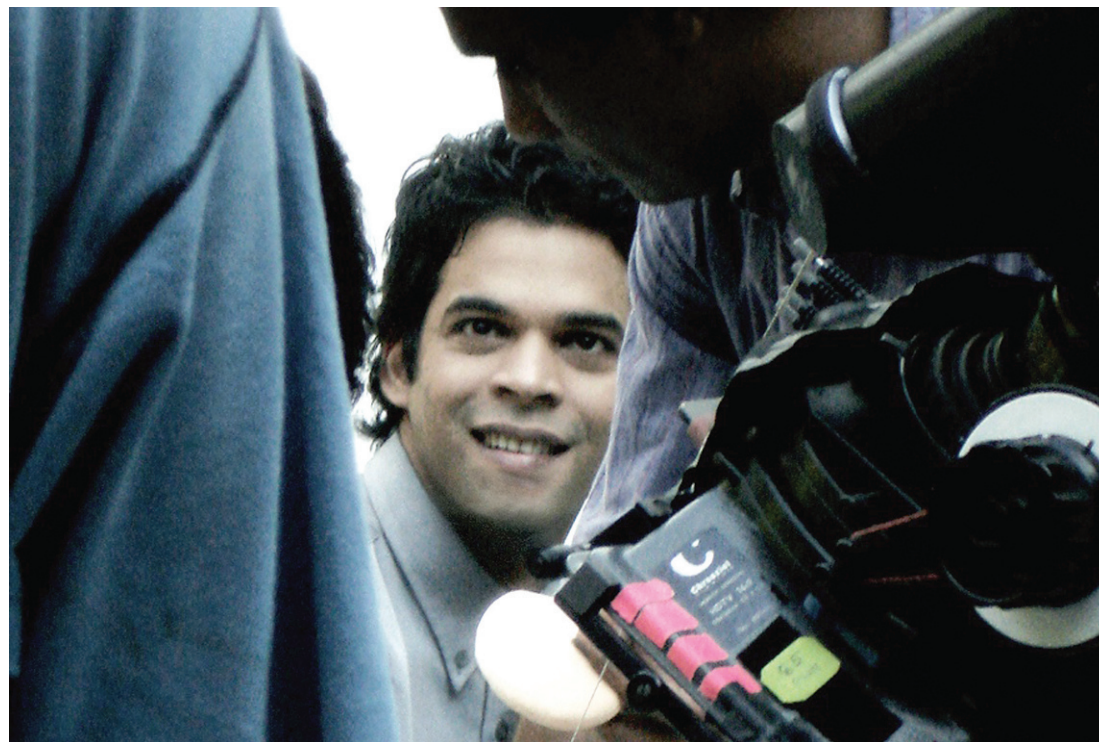
The Cannes Film Festival, whose 63rd edition will unroll on May 12, has resisted selecting any work from India since 2003, when Murali Nair's Malayalam entry, *Arimpara*, made it to the A Certain Regard. Festival president Thierry Fremaux had been his evasive best when confronted with a question about India drawing blank.

But one did not really need to know the answer from Fremaux. It was more than apparent. A festival that had virtually introduced Indian cinema to the world in 1956 (when Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* got a prize there after it was recalled by an eminent critics' jury that had carelessly ignored it in an earlier round), and had been extremely supportive of the country, grew disillusioned later with what was being produced there.

In spite of the extraordinarily

The Cannes film festival has largely ignored Indian cinema due to the poor choice of entries. But this year, *Udaan* may break that jinx, writes

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* Vikramaditya Motwane's *Udaan* is to be featured in A Certain Regard section at Cannes Film Festival this year.

large number of movies the country makes year after year winning the distinction of being the world's most prolific producer, much of Indian cinema remains boringly repetitive and formulaic.

Producers and directors blatantly borrow from one another and merrily plagiarise.

Bollywood's *Dil Hai Ke Maanta Nahin* (1991) was a frame-by-frame copy of Frank Capra's 1934 *It Happened One Night*. The Indian producer and helmer must have thought that the nearly six-decade gap between the two movies would take care of the longest memory. But they were wrong. People noticed.

And those outside India noticed it all the more and grew disdainful of the great Indian copies that became a sickeningly regular affair.

In the face of such misdemeanours, Cannes forgot the great Indian cinema that once came from men like Ray, Ritwick Ghatak, Bimal Roy, M S Sathyu and early Raj Kapoor, whose work was deeply rooted in the country's milieu, and conveyed refreshing idealism.

The superficial and pretentious Indian fare sent to Cannes selectors every year — instead of meaningful cinema made by men like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan, Girish Kasaravalli and Buddhadeb Dasgupta — further marred the country's celluloid image.

Also, there were times when the festival ended up making rank bad choices. One can safely conclude that after 1982, when Adoor's classic tale of feudalism, *Elippathayam*, was shown at Cannes, there really has not been a great show. Shaji N Karun's *Swaham*, which competed in 1994, was so dismal and complex for the Western mind that the theatre was empty long before the last reels rolled on.

His subsequent *Vanaprastham* (1999) or Nair's *Marana Simhasanam* (1999) or *Pattiyude Divasam* (2001) or *Arimpara* was unpopular with audiences and critics. Well, Cannes gave up India at that point.

Indian cinema's greatest folly has been its stubborn refusal to see beyond the wall of the well. The

country's rich and famous actors, directors and producers care little about what is happening elsewhere, in a rich and vibrant medium like cinema.

Some fascinating films are coming out of Africa, Iran, China, Japan, South Korea and, of course, Europe.

But the 'A's, the 'B's and the 'C's of Indian cinema are so busy copying (or copying copies of) Hollywood or Bollywood or other regional films, that they have little inclination to take time off and soak in the novelty of an international movie festival like Cannes or Venice or Berlin. And, discover and perhaps learn.

One ardently hopes that Motwane and his *Udaan* will wipe the Cannes slate clean of all the accumulated muck.

But the moot point is: has the festival made the right choice, and if it has, can *Udaan* hope to take the Riviera's critics and crowds on a flight that will fascinate?

(The writer will be at Cannes for the 20th year this May)

Ash learns Tamil, not acting

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (pictured) has essayed many parts. As a beauty queen the world loved, as the fabulous face of L'Oreal, as the juror in Cannes and as the adored 'bahu' (daughter-in-law) of India's first family of cinema, she has held the centre stage. She first made a splash in the Tamil film industry in 1977 with Mani Ratnam's *Iruvar*. Her lines were dubbed, but now working again with Ratnam in *Raavan*, she has decided to mouth her own Tamil lines.

Raavan is bilingual, being shot in Hindi and Tamil. Ash had a tutor to coach her the language, and we hear that she is pretty good at it. And with Rajnikanth's *Endhiran*, where she plays the female lead, also on the floors, she sure would need a flawless diction in Tamil. However, some would have been happy to see her being taught how to act.

She has consistently attracted bad press in the South, with most reviewers describing her as nothing more than a decked-up doll.



Kapoor tries a Khan, with a twist

Talking about copies, Shahid Kapoor has been trying to promote his new film, *Paathshaala* (by Milind Ukey), somewhat in the same way that Aamir Khan did some months ago, when his *3 Idiots* was set to open. Khan disguised himself and went to several cities egging his fans and others to seek him out.

But, Kapoor remained Kapoor, and visited his school, Gyan Bharati, in New Delhi, where he sang and danced with the children. "As a kid, I was always late for school and my grandfather had to urge the guard to let me in", the actor said.

However, *Paathshaala*, is unadulterated disaster. There is no story, no script and the plot is so ridiculously unbelievable that you wonder how Nana Patekar and Kapoor agreed to do this movie.