

A REPORT

TALKING FILMS ONLINE in collaboration with FORUM ON CONTEMPORARY THEORY held its 1st International Seminar on September 30 and October 1, 2024 at the latter's Centre in Baroda on the theme "Indian Cinema in the Digital Era: Continuities and Discontinuities." Talking Films Online (TFO) began as an online film discussion forum during the COVID pandemic and lockdown in June 2020. Gita Viswanath from Baroda and Nikhila H. from Hyderabad have been coordinating the activities of TFO since then.

While research on cinema today is not the same as before, the way we interact with cinema has also drastically changed. The move from analogue to digital has brought about a change in its production, distribution, exhibition practices, and nature of audience engagement, and in the process, has created new and dynamic forms of participatory cultures, through what Jonathan Gray calls "media paratexts."

The seminar organisers invited three distinguished academicians, Swarnavel Eswaran, Fabienne Le Houérou, and Tharakeshwar V. B. as keynote and valedictory speakers.

Swarnavel Eswaran, who gave the first keynote address, is a graduate of the Film and Television Institute of India and the prestigious film studies program at the University of Iowa. His recent documentaries include *Tsunami: Waves from the Deep* (2018), *Hmong Memories at the Crossroad* (2016), *Migrations of Islam* (2014), and *Unfinished Journey: A City in Transition* (2012). He is professor in the Department of English and the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA. In his address, Swarnavel laid the theoretical ground tracing back understandings of cinema to Andre Bazin's ideas of realism that called for an authentic representation of the real world. With digital technology challenging such an understanding, the seminar was set for an interesting engagement with new developments in the field.

Our second keynote speaker, Fabienne Lehouerou made an online presentation from Paris. Fabienne is a French historian, researcher, and filmmaker known for her work on migration, refugees, and postcolonial studies. She is a retired research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and still affiliated with the Institute for Research and Studies on the Arab and Muslim Worlds (IREMAM) in Aix-en-Provence, France. Marking 2010 as a turning point in the history of Indian cinema, Fabienne endorsed the endless possibilities of the digital medium and spoke admiringly of a short film *Baala* that was a prize-winning entry in the short film contest held annually by TFO for students.

The valedictory address was delivered by Tharakeshwar V. B. He is Professor and Head, Department of Translation Studies at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He has published in the areas of Translation Studies, Colonialism and Nationalism, Linguistic Nationalism/Identity, Literary Historiography etc. He is a bilingual writer who has published both in Kannada and English. He has coordinated a translation series called 'Classical Kannada Texts in English.' Tharakeshwar spoke of the relevance of the seminar theme, and the rigour of some presentations, while calling for more engagement with regional cinema in the future.

The participants from different parts of the world such as Syria and Indonesia and several parts of India like Pune, Jodhpur, Hyderabad, and others explored the possibilities of the digital era for their research on Indian Cinema. Also of major concern was the ways in which media ecology impacted knowledge production and dissemination of Indian cinema. The term 'Indian cinema' referred to films made in all the filmmaking languages and regions of India. Hence papers were read on filmmaking and film-going/viewing practices in several regions in India such as, Assam, Odisha, Bengal, and Karnataka. The positive responses from the participants have made us seriously consider the likelihood of making the seminar an annual event.

Gita Viswanath