

I fail to understand the high pitched annual fervour, of the electronic media in particular, in covering the Oscars. 'Why don't we win the Oscar? Where do we go wrong? What are the challenges faced by the Indian directors?' Same issues get churned out year after year! I also fail to appreciate the fascination with these awards. Are we not mature enough to assess the quality of our films qua the world cinema? Oscar awards are necessarily 'local' American awards in which American creative talent is commemorated. When we are pitching in for the 'best film in foreign language' category, issue is how best can we trans-culturally represent cinematic ethos of India as a nation? To identify indigenous ascendancies in Indian cinema that can be the denominator of American sensibilities while competing with other foreign entries of any given year is the key! Out of the 67 awards given for foreign language films, 56 have gone to the European films. 'How best can we woo "their" sensibilities', doesn't offer a very fair deal to the South Asian milieu! Iranian cinema managed to crack the glass ceiling to some extent. With 'Newton', we may too perhaps!

I have to applaud the Indian Jury that they have not chosen 4th grade copy of the 3rd grade Hollywood film which we churn out without feeling ashamed of the plagiarism and celebrate the 'commercially successful' trash. Kudos to their unanimity!

We need to have clarity at various levels - are we selecting the "best film" or a "representative best film" from all the Indian films made that year? We select the best film for our National Awards. How can we select "only one" film from so many films produced in various languages which shall "represent" the Indian cinema? How can any one film claim to be representing the diverse bouquet of our flavours? Then why not send 4-5 "representative" films as the official Indian entries?

Choosing the best film has been debatable every year for the Oscar jury as well. In 2017, for instance, the selection of 'La La Land' over Moonlight or Hidden Figures was labelled to be the racist choice reflecting the insular pleasures. Academy's openness to the marginalized stories has always been questionable. With the popular culture becoming more divisive, choice of one is going to be complicated and mostly wrong. Let's not get fooled by the 'White Male lens' giving us the 'best'! Should we believe that 'The Departed' was the best of Martin Scorsese, and not 'The Taxi Driver' or

'Goodfellas'? None of us believe that "Jai Ho" was Gulzar saab's or A.R. Rahman's best. Let us be clear that through the smear campaigns and whisper campaigns, these awards are political.

The reason behind our failure to grab the award is primarily two-fold. Firstly, because of our physical/financial inability to reach/tap the pool of Oscar juries for lobbying professionally. Lobbying in the unprofessional, unethical and bad sense is prevalent all through our history of domestic film awards. Probably due to this mind set, we have not even tried to understand the American way of 'lobbying' which is completely legal and imperative in the Oscars. It's high time, we start playing that game professionally! Apparently no Indian producer could get this part right. I could have been privy to this process at the time of when 'Paheli' was the official Indian entry to the Oscars in 2006. However, I despite being the director was kept completely away from the process.

Secondly, we fail to select correct juries who will then choose an apt Indian entry. Familiarity with world cinema, knowledge of English is a must for all the juries; they ought to be familiar with the latest rules set by the Academy; they need to have clarity as to what should be the norms of judging the representative cinema; they must not have conflict of interest with any film that is in the pool; neither government nor the film industry should interfere in the process of selection. I have seen how the process gets channelized in an undemocratic way.

Originality of content ought to be our unique selling proposition. Though indigenous, the theme ought to have a universal appeal. Let's hope that 'Newton' embodies all the right ingredients and it will fetch the ever elusive honor to us.