



‘FIRST CUT’ a two day North East film festival
Organized by the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research
in collaboration with AKJ-Mass Communication Research Centre

The two day North East film festival ‘First Cut’ organized by the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research in collaboration with AJK- Mass Communication Research Centre on 16 and 17 August 2013 was inaugurated by Prof. S. M. Sajid, officiating Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia. The festival garnered the attention of both faculty and students alike in Jamia, and saw an audience of over 90 people on both the days, and was also attended by students and faculty from Delhi University, JNU, TERI and ISI. Ten documentary films produced, scripted and directed by people from different states of North East India were screened.

Prof. S.M. Sajid who inaugurated the festival, appreciated the collaboration forged between the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research and AJK- Mass Communication Research Centre. Centres and departments in educational institutions prefer to function alone in isolation from each other often based on the misconception that they shared nothing in common with other disciplines. He noted that the Centre in collaborating with AJK- MCRC in organizing the film festival, and with other departments like History, Geography, Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution and Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women’s Studies has gone on to explore avenues of interdisciplinary studies which in fact is the need of the hour in academia. He was also much impressed by the ‘Boat Clinics’ project of C-NES of which Prof. Sanjoy Hazarika is Managing Trustee, and which was depicted in the film *Where There Are No Roads* (the inaugural film). The Boat Clinics are a unique experiment which rides on the waves of the Brahmaputra river in Assam, where a major innovative health campaign reaches some of the most marginalized and poorest communities in India who live on hundreds of islands, inaccessible and isolated, unknown and unheard. A dozen boat clinics conceived and developed by the C-NES, and manned by doctors, nurses, lab technicians and pharmacists as well as crew,

organizers and community workers reach more than six lakh people, pulling them out of a deadly cycle of maternal and infant mortality, conditions which contrast dramatically with the overwhelming beauty of the place. Prof. Sajid expressed the hope of forming a collaboration with the C-NES with students from Social Work and Human Rights visiting the clinics for both field work and internships.

The inaugural film was followed by *Children of the River: The Xihus of Assam* and *A Measure of Impunity*, directed by Maulee Senapati and produced and scripted by Prof. Sanjoy Hazarika. While the former film focused on the issue of the unwarranted killing of the Gangetic dolphins in the Brahmaputra by the fishermen, the latter dealt with the issues of violence and instability wrought in the lives of the people living the conflict ridden states of Nagaland and Assam. The other films that were screened on Day I of the festival were *My Lament, My Plea* directed by Irene Phunthsog, Salma and Yirmiyan Arthur and *Revelation* by Neilkolie Kuotsu, Lalboi Haokip and Mustaquim Ali all of whom have graduated from AJK-MCRC, and *Mayong* by Utpal Borpujari, on the village of magic in Assam. All filmmakers were present.

The first half of Day II had back to back screenings of *19/87*, a film by Wanphrang Diengdoh, another MCRC graduate and was followed by three others; *The Green Army: Saviour of the Sylvan*, *The Macabre Dance* and *The Nine Months* by Merajur Rahman Baruah. The festival concluded with a panel discussion on 'Our Films, Their Films'. The panel saw eminent film makers from the North East Maulee Senapati, Utpal Borpujari and Merajur Rahman Baruah and Shubhra Gupta, film critic, The Indian Express engage in a vibrant discussion on issues of isolation that both films and filmmakers from the North East face in relation to the mainstream media. While Senapati, Borpujari and Rahman sought to highlight the difference in treatment of subject and themes that the filmmakers from the North East deal with, they also pointed out the difficulty that filmmakers in the region face in financing and distributing their films that more often than not are categorized as one entity 'North Eastern Cinema', when in fact the cinema from every state has a flavor of its own. Shubhra Gupta, a critic with more than twenty of years of experience observed that for any kind of cinema that does not fall in the oeuvre of mainstream to reach a larger audience, requires active efforts by the audience to ensure that big corporates engage with films other than mainstream cinema, and that such cinema finds its way to the big screen for a tenure of one or two weeks. The panel discussion also saw the faculty members

from AJK-MCRC and students actively engage with the filmmakers with questions being raised about the merit of Bollywood vis-à-vis 'other' cinema, and the avenues and future of 'other' cinema whether Indian regional cinema or world cinema at large.

The vibrant discussion concluded with Prof. Sanjoy Hazarika, who had also chaired the session remarking that the need was to develop a broader view of cinema vis-à-vis a insider-outsider perspective so that, more 'marginalized' voices find platform. Financial and distribution challenges needed to be addressed with audiences taking up a more active role in promoting cinema. Prof. Hazarika also expressed the hope of developing future collaborative projects that will benefit Jamia, and specifically AJK-MCRC and the North East Centre.