

PASSION

MAYA MAHAL AT THE PARK BRINGS ALIVE FORGOTTEN MOMENTS AND MEMORIES OF INDIAN CINEMA IN ITS 100TH YEAR

Flying djinns and winged *apsaras*, *daakus* with whiplashes and cloaked *hunter-walis* — extraordinary figures and montages of lost and forgotten films, actors and genres of Indian cinema have come alive on the first-floor walls of The Park, transformed into a house of Indian film memories. All hand-picked from the private collection of Priya Paul, chairman of the Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels.

Titled Maya Mahal, aptly named after the 1949 film starring Fearless Nadia, around 100 paper-paste film memorabilia spanning posters, lobby cards, song booklets and magazine covers offer a flashback into the magical world of mainstream and B-circuit films.

The exhibition commemorating 100 years of Indian cinema kick-started the Apeejay Calcutta Literary Festival on Wednesday morning, in keeping with one of the key themes for this edition of the fest.

"Priya Paul's collection comprises close to 4,000 film paper artefacts that she has gathered over the years from collectors, hobbyists and film distributors. We tried to find a particular voice to the posters and picked ones to fit into three themes — fantasy, action and dance," explained Debashree Mukherjee, a PhD student of film studies from the New York University who is curating the show.

Priya's brother Karan Paul, also chairman of the Apeejay Surrendra Group, inaugurated the exhibition and smiled, "For years (sister) Priti and I have been wondering what she has been up to! Now we know and what we see here is really her labour of love."

Besides the iconic *Sholay* and *Himmatwala* posters, the exhibition was a unique peek into a world of forgotten classics like *Hatimtai Ki Beti*, *Jadoo*, *Madame XYZ*, *Chhota Chetan 3D* and others.

Veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal, present at the inauguration, pondered, "There's a lot of history here, unconventional yet historical," as he browsed through the posters and cards from the 1930s to the new millennium and pointed out the changing publicity material in Indian films evident from the changing artwork.

Maya Mahal will be on display till January 27 before it moves to Delhi and Bangalore. If you have a *filmi* bone in your body, don't miss this one.



Browsing through the posters, Shyam Benegal smiled, "Songbooks and lobby cards were a tradition in urban theatres during those times. Even many of these actors like Motilal, now forgotten, would cause a riot with their presence. This kind of archiving helps in keeping them alive." The veteran filmmaker spent some time catching up with Rita Bhimani.



Kishore Bhimani and Shuvaprasanna with Karan Paul who inaugurated sister Priya Paul's private collection of film poster memorabilia, on display for the first time. The display at The Park is on till January 27.



Onir, the maker of *I Am*, picked *Hunterwali* as his favourite. "I love Nadia! I have always heard stories of Fearless Nadia and seen her posters in magazines but seeing the real *Hunterwali* poster was precious!"



Mohua Das

Madhu Neotia with Karan Paul.



Pictures: Rashbehari Das