

August 18, 2016

Crossing cinematic borders

- [Kenneth Rosario](#)



Joint venture: Lamba and Suckale's partnership was born out of the desire to bring diverse talent to India and give Indian films a platform abroad.— Photo: Rajneesh Londhe

Actor Arfi Lamba with German producer Katharina Suckale takes indie films across countries

Actor Arfi Lamba's breezy apartment on the ninth floor of a suburban Mumbai building is buzzing with intense discussions on the post-production of his latest venture as a producer, *Road to Mandalay*. Lamba's production house, Bombay Berlin Film Production, is the co-producer of the film directed by Myanmar-born Taiwanese filmmaker Midi Z.

Back in 2011, when Lamba eyed the production space, dabbling in indie cinema was like walking into the woods with a million uncertainties, and dodging the giant beast called Bollywood. But he went ahead and partnered with German producer Katharina Suckale, who had over 20 years of experience in producing French and German films, thus giving birth to Bombay Berlin Production. "She brought with her what we needed most: global perspective and international talent," says Lamba.

What is Indie?

Both Lamba and Suckale were clear that the sole aim of their venture was to tell good stories, and to dispel the misconception that indie cinema obfuscates storytelling to look artsy. "Making independent films is liberating. It eliminates self-censorship, which mainstream films are infected with due to commercial priorities," shares Lamba.

For Suckale, who has produced several indies in Europe before making her foray in India, the idea of independent cinema is clear. "It's all about making films passionately without having a clue about distribution, its commercial viability or any logistics beyond filmmaking. Much like a personal project," says Suckale, who has been in living in Mumbai since 2009.

Under the Bombay Berlin banner, the duo has produced several "off-beat films". *Road to Mandalay*, their latest project, tracks the journey of two illegal migrants who cross the border from Myanmar to Thailand, and along the way find their fates intertwining. Their previous films *LOEV* (2015), takes the gay narrative in Indian cinema to an uncharted territory where homosexuality isn't viewed as out of the norm. "We tell stories we want to tell. They just happen to fall in this category called indie cinema," adds Suckale.

Cross-cultural work

"A good story needs equally good talent to foster it," says Lamba. The idea of Bombay Berlin Production was born out of desire to bring in diverse talent to India, while giving Indian films a platform abroad. "When we take one of our films to Europe, they take us seriously because they see a German co-producer onboard. We line produced *Prague* (2013), for which we did the entire production set-up in the Czech Republic. We were pioneers at our time to take benefit from this co-production structure," he adds.

Suckale got a diverse set of professionals from overseas to work on several Bombay Berlin projects. "For instance, we had director of photography Sherri Kauk from the United States, who worked with us for *LOEV*," says Suckale, who also sends scripts to foreign filmmakers for a second perspective.

In the shadow of Bollywood, a growing number of indie films have received acclaim at international film festivals. *LOEV* opened at festivals previously unexplored by Indian cinema, like the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia and the South by Southwest film festival in the United States.

"Some independent Indian films do so well at these festivals in Europe and in the United States that when they come back, India just cannot ignore them," says Lamba, who believes international film festivals have played a significant role in giving his films visibility.

Money matters

“But international exposure is not enough to make money in this country,” confesses Lamba. He and Suckale have tried everything from finding corporate investors to raising money through crowd-funding for their previous productions.

The duo attempted to crowd-fund *LOEV* through Indiegogo, touted as one of the largest global sites for fundraisers. “We failed to raise money, though. We raised merely three thousand dollars,” says Suckale, who suspects that the film’s narrative on homosexuality may have been a roadblock. “One would think India is uncomfortable with the subject, but strangely we found it difficult to get funding in European countries as well,” recalls Lamba.

Despite the monetary hurdle, what drives the duo is their fervour for films. Their production house makes ad films, corporate documentaries and videos on the sidelines to help them stay afloat.

“Many of our crew members are renowned in their countries, but they work with us for a less amount because they believe in the work they do,” says Lamba. “It’s like pocket money that gives gratification,” adds Suckale.

The Bollywood bogey

When it comes to cinema in India, Bollywood is still the undisputed king. And Lamba, who dons the hats of both actor and producer, believes the spotlight mainstream cinema provides is far too alluring to let go.

After making his debut in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), he acted in *Fugly* (2014) and *Singh is Bliing* (2015). “I’m in talks to act in many more mainstream Bollywood movies, but I want to do films like *Kapoor & Sons* (2016), which has a message and is more than just song and dance,” says Lamba.

Interestingly, both Lamba and Suckale do not consider Bollywood as much of a threat as Hollywood, which is grabbing a higher market share in India every year. “I’ve seen Hollywood take over European theatres and now I’m seeing that happen in India,” says Suckale.

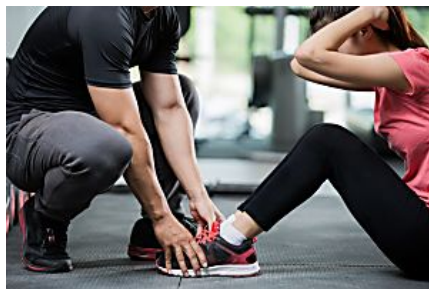
But interestingly, the growing interest in Hollywood movies also comes as a harbinger of hope.

“There have been a bunch of Indian films in English that found an audience. Likewise, people are also interested in Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali and Punjabi cinema now, more than ever before. This is a great sign for indie filmmakers, actors and producers. After all, it’s all about telling a good story,” grins Lamba.

FROM AROUND THE WEB



Know how a software engineer surprised his wife!
RummyCircle



Seven Fitness Gadgets That Every Modern Workout Can Use
iQ by Intel



5 healthy breakfast recipes.
Saffola Fit Foodie



Want to See How Celebrities Really Live? See Inside These Homes That Are Currently on the Market
Mansion Global by Dow Jones



Prince George is 3 – His Life in Pictures
Hidden Playbook



The London Estates Even the Queen Couldn't Afford
Mansion Global



In the Future, This Is How We Will All Virtually Dress [Video]
iQ by Intel



Employee wins cash online during his break!
RummyCircle



Here's the House Obama Will Live in After He Moves Out of the White House
Mansion Global

MORE FROM THE HINDU