

Entertainment

'Road to Sangam' espouses Gandhi's tenets at Cannes

Cannes (IANS): *Road to Sangam*, a reality-inspired fictional account that draws elements from the last days of Mahatma Gandhi's life, is one of the more interesting films on view at the India Pavillion in Cannes. And filmmaker Amit Rai says it has caught the eye of many at the film market here.

"Gandhi-ji's message of peace and harmony is as relevant today as it was when he first articulated it," said Rai.

Rai screened the film for prospective international buyers in the Cannes Film Market. "The response has been encouraging indeed. Many have been moved by it," the director said.

The cast of *Road to Sangam* is headed by veterans Paresh Rawal and Om Puri. The film also has Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Tushar Gandhi, playing himself.

Road to Sangam, set in present-day Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, hinges on the character of Hashmatullah, a Muslim mechanic who rebuilt an old car to ferry an urn containing Gandhi-ji's ashes to commemorate his death anniversary.

Rai is a theatre professional who was associate director of the internationally-acclaimed Marathi film "Tingya". *Road to Sangam* is his first film as an independent director.

"I was lucky to have actors of the calibre of Paresh Rawal and Om Puri. They made my job very easy," he said. "I was clear that I did not want the film to be emotionally high-pitched. The impact has to stem from the message that the film conveys."

He added: "The car which ferried Gandhiji's ashes from Allahabad city to Sangam in 1948 is now kept in a museum in Allahabad. A few years ago, it was run within the museum campus after its engine was rebuilt by a Muslim man called Hashmatullah. This incident, coupled with a news item about an urn containing Gandhi-ji's ashes being found in a bank vault in Orissa a couple of years ago, set me thinking."

In Rai's film, when the car is used to take the urn through Allahabad in a procession, it runs into fierce opposition from the Muslim-dominated part of the city where Hashmatullah lives.

"This film is my tribute to the values and principles that Gandhi-ji espoused during his lifetime," Rai said.

The film is scheduled for release in India in July or August. The English and French subtitling of the film has already been done for international distribution.

For more info log on to ... www.roadtosangam.com