

## After Delhi gay parade, Deepa Mehta recalls 'Fire'

'I wish, I could be there,' was Canada-based Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta's reaction when she learnt about the Indian capital's first gay parade.

And Mehta recalls all the turbulence her movie 'Fire' faced for the touchy subject of lesbianism.

'My heart swells with pride when 'Fire' is mentioned as a favourite film on alternate sexuality. If 'Fire' has inspired the homosexual community, I guess I have much to be proud of,' Mehta told IANS.

The 'Queer Pride' was held Sunday in New Delhi. The two-kilometre march began at the Barakhamba Road and ended at Jantar Mantar, both in the heart of the capital.

Mehta recalls with much fondness the vigil that Delhi's gay community kept when 'Fire' was released in 1996.

'They carried placards saying, 'We're Indian, we are Lesbian.' Till then some Indian moralists believed homosexuality, especially lesbianism, didn't exist in India. 'Fire' was a turning point for me as a filmmaker. I saw what responsibility was being put on my shoulder. To me, 'Fire' wasn't a film only about lesbianism.'

Starring Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das, 'Fire' faced vocal opposition from sections of the society.

Mehta recalled: 'I remember, I was in Dubai in 1996 watching A.R. Rahman's concert. I had put the release of 'Fire' behind me. I just thought it would come and go in India without creating a ripple, like all films on unconventional themes.

'I should've been warned. I got a call in the middle of the concert asking me to come to Delhi fast. They had just halted the screening of 'Fire'. I was aghast. It was my first brush with the moral police. Later, of course, I got used to of being bullied by extra-constitutional censors in India,' she added.

And 'Fire' had been passed without a single cut when it was submitted to the censor board.

'Not a single shot was cut. Not even Shabana and Nandita's lovemaking. And this was a decade ago. I was lulled into a false sense of security. I guess India has progressed, but a section of the moralists won't accept it.'

For years after 'Fire' there was no significant film on lesbianism. But now there are films like 'I Can't Think Straight' and 'When Kiran Met Karen'.

'I feel happy to see other filmmakers going into the theme. But, I repeat, I wasn't making a film on lesbianism. It was about subjugation and repression. My new film 'Heaven On Earth' is also about the same film.'

*Subhash K. Jha* ( © IANS / India eNews)