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Films reflect public taste

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, May 6:

NONE of the present defects of the film industry in India is of its own making. When intellectuals tear their hair over Indian films what they do not see is that these are the products of the times and reflect the state of public taste, feels Mrs Devika Rani Roerich, one of the few in India who knows the industry since its inception.

In an interview today she said that the film industry at present was no promising ground for creative talents to flower out.

"Consider the odds," she pointed out. There is the distributor whose pockets have to be filled. There are the stars with temperaments to be pampered; and there is the sprawling retinue of staff whose payrolls have to be met, all out of the returns of the film.

So many demands

With so many demands which eventually boil down to a question of bread and butter, pure and simple, it takes rare courage for a producer to go in for experimentation and say goodbye to the box-office.

And that is not all, she goes on and adds somewhat indignantly: "Look at the film critics!"

Has anyone of these critics ever taken the trouble to patiently analyse a film and mention its good points?

The captains of the film industry are not an unresponsive lot, she says. They are not shut up in their own world out of touch with the voice of public opinion. And contrary to popular notions, they are eager to have live contacts with the people. "Let a film critic write 25 reviews in a row, mentioning just one good thing about every film he sees," she says. "And you will see that these isolated spots of goodness spread and set the tone for the entire industry."

Negative attitude

A critic in this country thought that his job was to criticise only, she said. This kind of negative attitude would produce only a negative response and harden the attitude of film makers, she said.

This was, of course, not to minimise the inherent shortcomings of the industry today, she admitted. Stars worked in five films at one time and, what was more, declared that they enjoyed it. They found it stimulating to skip from role to role at short intervals, she added.

"In my own days this was unthinkable," she says and recalls that in each of her films she had to learn five different versions of



Devika Rani

the dialogue. The word "yes" was required to be spoken and recorded in five different ways with a smile without it or with a suggestion of it.

She herself never worked in more than two roles at one time; and those two had to be diametrically opposite, so that she did not have the feeling of being repetitive.

And then, she says, today's film people are also much less educated and with much less background.

Good producers

But what is to be commended, she feels, is that out of this apparently hopeless environment some really good producers and

stars have come out. She named Raj Kapoor, Abbas, Shantaram and among the actors, Dilip Kumar.

These are a serious bunch of boys, she says. They have ideas, they have vitality and a tremendous urge to do better. And what is more they are never satisfied with what they have done.

The right attitude to adopt about the film industry, therefore, she says, is to keep these people who are really bright in mind. If they fall short of greatness, a good deal of it is due to the impossible circumstances in which they have to work. In the second place, their shortcomings reflect the prevailing standards of public taste, she says.