



# Soul of film festivals to remain intact despite evolving technology: Experts at MIFF Open Forum

## Panellists call for govt action to restrict 'fake film festivals'

Mumbai, 20 June 2026

Even as streaming platforms, digital technologies and changing viewing habits reshape the cinematic landscape, film festivals continue to hold their relevance as spaces for discovery, learning and collective experience, said speakers at the fifth and final Open Forum of the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) 2026 today.

Organised by the Indian Documentary Producers' Association (IDPA) at the festival, the session titled "Changing Technologies, Changing Audiences: Are Film Festivals in Transition?" brought together film festival veterans to examine how technology is transforming audience engagement while testing the enduring value of film festivals.



The panel featured Vidyashankar N., founder member and former Artistic Director of the Bengaluru International Film Festival; Prof. (Dr.) K.G. Suresh, Director of India Habitat Centre; film critic and festival consultant Premendra Mazumder; and Aditi Akkalkotkar, a key figure behind the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF). The discussion was moderated by filmmaker and IDPA President Sanskar Desai.

Opening the discussion, Vidyashankar N. talked about the evolution of film festivals since the digital revolution of the early 2000s. While technology has dramatically increased access to cinema, he argued that the fundamental purpose of festivals remains unchanged. "Film festivals are about experiencing cinema, not merely accessing information," he said. Drawing parallels with museums, he said that audiences continue to seek immersive cultural experiences despite the abundance of content available online. "The core values of cinema remain intact, and film festivals are among the few spaces that continue to sustain them," he said.

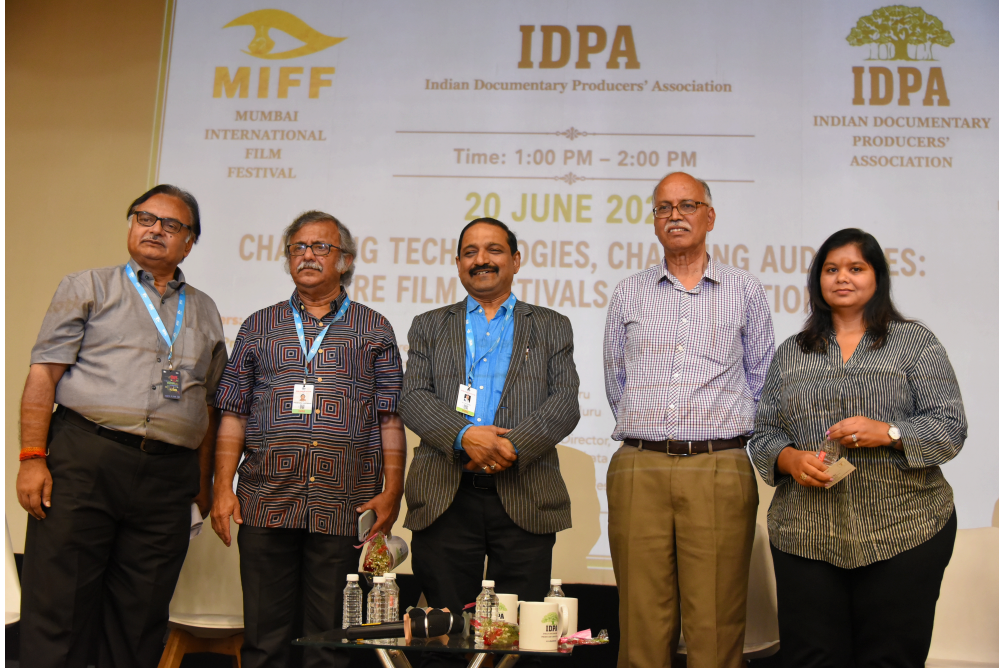


Vidyashankar said that while younger audiences attend festivals to explore emerging technologies and cinematic trends, older viewers are often drawn by nostalgia, creating a unique intergenerational cultural space.

Prof. (Dr.) K.G. Suresh shifted the focus from survival to relevance. Acknowledging the growing number of film festivals across India, he questioned whether sufficient efforts are being made to cultivate informed audiences.

"Film festivals are celebrations of cinema, but they must also be learning experiences," he said, and added that technology can only enhance cinema if quality content remains at its centre. Calling cinema one of the most powerful tools for education and behavioural change, Suresh advocated integrating film appreciation into educational institutions and introducing young people to cinema at an early age.

Sharing her personal journey, Aditi Akkalkotkar recounted how working with the PIFF expanded her understanding of cinema beyond mainstream entertainment. "Film festivals open doors to worlds audiences may never otherwise encounter," she said. Pointing out the role of students in organising PIFF, Akkalkotkar talked about the importance of interactions that happen beyond screenings such as networking by film enthusiasts, exchanges between filmmakers and audiences, and exposure to regional and international cinema.



Offering a critical perspective, Premendra Mazumder raised concerns about the unchecked proliferation of so-called film festivals in the digital era. While acknowledging that technology has made it easier to organise events, he warned that many 'fake festivals' have emerged, operating primarily as commercial ventures rather than genuine cultural platforms.

"These festivals often exploit filmmakers through pay-to-win award structures and operate without adhering to legal and regulatory requirements," he said, and added that stronger government oversight is needed to protect filmmakers and preserve the credibility of the festival ecosystem.

The discussion also highlighted the continuing role of film societies in nurturing film culture. Both Mazumder and Suresh stressed on the need to create informed audiences through educational initiatives, campus film societies and expanded film studies programmes.

The session concluded with a consensus that while formats, platforms and audience behaviours may continue to evolve, film festivals remain irreplaceable as spaces for cultural exchange, cinematic discovery and collective celebration of the moving image.

The Open Forum marked the conclusion of a five-part discussion series hosted by the IDPA during MIFF 2026, bringing together filmmakers, scholars and industry stakeholders to deliberate on the future of cinema and documentary culture in an era of rapid technological change.

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