



Press Release

For immediate release

THE OTTAWA INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL AWARDS ANNOUNCES A THRILLING PROGRAMME FOR ITS 3rd EDITION

Ottawa, May 31, 2019 — The **Ottawa Indian Film Festival Awards (OIFFA)** is excited to launch the rich and diverse programme of its 3rd edition. As previously announced, the Festival will open on June 11 with director Gaurav Bakshi's first feature film, *#Gadhvi (He Thought He Was Gandhi)*, launching 5 days of festivities centered around a strong competition of contemporary, independent Indian films. The Festival will take place from June 11 to 15, 2019, in the heart of Ottawa, at the Cineplex Cinemas Lansdowne & VIP as well as Aberdeen Square across from the Cinemas.

In Competition this year encompass 11 features (fiction), 4 documentaries (features and medium-length films) and 5 short films telling stories from all over India, from Delhi and Mumbai to Kashmir and Bangalore, as well as from the Indian diaspora. **OIFFA's** Special Events section also includes two out-of-competition features as part of a Special Screening and a Special Presentation, as well as its first Master Class. In total, the Festival is proud to welcome 1 international premiere, 3 North American premieres, 8 Canadian premieres and 3 Ottawa premieres. This is a unique, varied and eye-opening lineup made up of true discoveries, including no fewer than 12 first feature films (both fiction and documentary) as well as a remarkable number of female filmmakers, producers and artisans. Completing the programme is the 2nd edition of the 72-Hour Short Film Challenge. The Festival will again conclude with the **OIFFA** Closing Night Gala & Awards Ceremony, which will take place this year on Saturday, June 15, at the Fairmont Château Laurier.

Details about the whole programme follow.

OPENING AND CLOSING FILMS

As announced on May 27th, the Festival's Opening Film is Gaurav Bakshi's *#Gadhvi (He Thought He Was Gandhi)*, starring Bollywood and indie superstar Sanjay Mishra (star of last year's Closing Film *Seeking Happily-Ever-After/Angrezi Mein Kehte Hain*), who will attend the Festival. *#Gadhvi* tells a story of greed, pacifism and sticking to your principles. This sharp satire is just beginning its journey around the world; after stopping in Ottawa, the film will continue on its way to the London Indian Film Festival. The Festival's Closing Film, *KD* directed by Madhumita, tells the tale of a unique friendship between an old man fleeing the family who plans on killing him for the inheritance and a 10-year-old boy living on the street. Set in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar district, the film's starting point is the "Thalaikoothal" ritual, an illegal form of euthanasia where renal failure and fever are induced through excessive oil-massages followed by cold baths and coconut water ingestion. Though the film's trigger is a threat of imminent death, its ultimate aim is an ode to life and to the right to live—and to live to the fullest! Both films are also included in the Festival's Competition.

COMPETITION

Apart from the Opening and Closing Films, the Competition of **OIFFA's** 3rd edition includes nine (9) other FEATURE FILMS: set in the 1960s, Saki Shah's 2 *Band Radio* follows what happens to a duo of nemeses when an entire Kashmiri village falls under the spell of a radio; Jaya Jose Raj's *Abode (Idam)* focusses on

the loneliness of the elderly in modern society through the story of Bhanu, a 70-year-old woman evicted by her children from the only home she has ever known; *Baggage (Gantumoot)* by Roopa Rao is a simple yet intense high school drama about a transcending first love, wrapped in everything that makes up the life of a teenager; filmmaker Devashish Makhija brings us *Bhonsle*, the tale of the unlikely companionship between retired cop Bhonsle and his new Bihari migrant neighbours, as he defends them from being harassed by the boorish local political goon; with *Chippa*, Safdar Rahman proposes a coming-of-age tale told over the course of a single winter night in Kolkata, as we follow young Chippa on a quest to find someone who can read him a letter from his long-gone father; Kamakhya Narayan Singh's *Dawn (Bhor)* deftly captures the nuances of a girl's life in rural India through the eyes of Budhni, who dreams of pursuing her education despite the pressure of getting married; in *The Songs of Silence (Kedara)*, Bengali composer Indraadip Dasgupta explores a dying form of art, ventriloquism, through the story of a weak middle-aged man, Narasingha, who strikes up fictitious conversations with carefully chosen people from his past; eminent theatre director Anamika Haksar fuses documentary with magic realism, true and fictionalized stories, poetry and dreams in her feature film debut, *Taking the Horse to Eat Jalebis (Chode Ko Jalebi Khilane Le Ja Riya Hoon)*, a love letter to the syncretic culture of Old Delhi; and finally, in *Widow of Silence*, Praveen Morchhale portrays the painful struggles and suffering of Kashmiri half-widows (women's whose husbands have disappeared) and their children, but also their resilience and indomitable spirit.

The Competition also includes four (4) DOCUMENTARIES: *Lovesick*, by Ann S. Kim and Priya Giri Desai, follows an unlikely matchmaker, HIV/AIDS research pioneer Dr. Suniti Solomon, who has decided to help her HIV-positive patients find love—with each other; multidisciplinary artist Sapna Moti Bhavnani's *Sindhustan* tells the story of the largest cultural migration in history through the power of tattoos; in *Toxification*, documentarians Rehmat Rayatt and Leva Kwestany examine the plight of Punjabi farmers grappling with poisoned soils addicted to chemicals, a stark contrast to the once lush and fertile Punjab; and Beeswaranjan Pradhan's first documentary feature, *The Tribal Scoop*, sheds light on the unexpected pastime of the small town of Sundergarh, set deep in the quickly vanishing forests of Odisha: hockey!

Finally, five (5) SHORT FILMS are also included in the Competition: inspired by a true event, Shazia Iqbal's *Bebaak* pits a young, lower middle-class Muslim woman against a blatantly misogynistic education officer; Sohil Vaidya's *Difficult People* is the tender story of a man and his father, devoid of all of contemporary culture's stereotypes about masculinity; filmmaker and dentist Dr. Suyash Shinde's *Mayat*, a morality tale, follows Nama who breaks a taboo by collecting the coins at a funeral to feed his famine-stricken family; described by the press as "haunting," Abhiroop Basu's *Meal* sets its cameras on a dysfunctional family sitting together for their customary morning meal; and Prabal Chakraborty's *The Other Half (Sampurak)* takes a look at gender disparity as a man and a woman experience highly diverging personal outcomes after winning a joint prize.

A jury of three professionals—film critic Sandro Forte (*Cinetalk.net*), multidisciplinary artist Indrani and producer GK Reid—will award the Festival's various prizes, including Best Film and Best Director. The awards will be announced at the Closing Night Gala and the Best Film winner will receive a trophy specially created for OIFFA.

SPECIAL EVENTS

OIFFA is very excited to host acclaimed director Tigmanshu Dhulia, who will be present in Ottawa to attend a Special Screening of his beloved film *Paan Singh Tomar*, the true story of a gold medal-winning army athlete who became a dreaded *dacoit* (an armed bandit) in Chambal. Starring Indian and international megastar Irrfan Khan, the film won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in 2012. Following the film presentation, OIFFA is very proud to announce that Dhulia will also take part in the Festival's first **Master Class**. Festival-goers are invited to come hear Dhulia talk about the film, his work as

a filmmaker, his influences, his heroes, the Indian film industry, his advice to young people starting out in film, and much more. A brief Q & A will follow the Master Class. The film is presented on Friday, June 14, at 2:30 pm, at the Cineplex Cinemas Lansdowne & VIP. The Master Class will follow at 4:45 pm, in the same location.

As part of its Special Events, **OIFFA** is also happy to offer a Special Presentation of award-winning ***What Will People Say*** (*Hva Vil Folk Si*) from filmmaker Iram Haq. Based on director Haq's own experiences as a young Pakistani woman in Norway, it features an astounding debut by 18-year-old Maria Mozhdah, a nuanced performance by veteran actor Adil Hussain (*Life of Pi*), who will be attending the Festival, and OIFFA 2018's winner of the Best Performance Award, Ekavali Khanna (*Seeking Happily-Ever-After/Angrezi Mein Kehte Hain*). "The story of *What Will People Say* is my most personal so far," Haq says. "When I was 14 years old, I was kidnapped by my parents and forced to live for a year and a half in Pakistan. I have waited until I felt ready as a filmmaker and as a person to be able to tell this story in a wise and sensible way." Shot in Norway and Pakistan, the film examines issues that couldn't be more current—women's rights, immigrant identity and familial duties. *What Will People Say* was Norway's official submission for the Best Foreign Language Film category at the 91st Academy Awards in 2019. The film is presented on Thursday, June 13, at 7:30 pm, at the Cineplex Cinemas Lansdowne & VIP.

Also part of **OIFFA**'s Special Events, the **2nd official 72-Hour Short Film Challenge** took place from Thursday, May 30th, at 8:00 PM, to Sunday, June 2nd, at 8:00 PM. Registered filmmakers were required to produce a short film (write, shoot, edit and deliver) in exactly 72 hours, following three parameters (a theme, a specific length and a specific cultural reference) that was provided to the participants at the event's launch. All the films produced during the Challenge will be presented during the Festival at the Cineplex Cinemas Lansdowne & VIP, on Thursday, June 13, at 5:30 pm. A jury of professionals will award one \$2,000 top prize to the best film as well as name a runner-up, who will receive \$500 in cash. The winner will be invited to attend the Closing Night Gala & Awards Ceremony, where the winning film will also be shown.

OIFFA's celebrated **VIP Lounge** will welcome Festival-goers and guests throughout the event to mingle and relax between screenings. The VIP Lounge: entertaining crowds daily with music and surprises! Aberdeen Square, across from the Cineplex Cinemas Lansdowne & VIP. Open during screening hours.

The **OIFFA** Closing Night Gala & Awards Ceremony will take place on Saturday, June 15, at Ottawa's legendary Fairmont Château Laurier, on Rideau Street. Guests will be treated to a prestigious evening. Starting with a cocktail reception, followed by a lavish feast and punctuated by dance performances, the Gala will, of course, be dominated by the Award Ceremony. The evening will be hosted by international TV host, entrepreneur and former Miss Canada, Neelam Verma, a graduate of the Schulich School of Business at York University and former marketer.

GUESTS

OIFFA is proud to welcome distinguished guests Tigmanshu Dhulia (*Paan Singh Tomar*), Sanjay Mishra (*#Gadhvi*), Adil Hussain (*What Will People Say*) and Seema Biswas (*Abode*), as well as all the young filmmakers who took part in the 72-Hour Short Film Challenge. Requests for interviews, photos and the likes should be sent to the Festival's Director of Programming, Inderpreet Singh.

TICKETS AND TICKET INFORMATION

OIFFA's schedule and information on all the films, including trailers, are available online **NOW** at **oiffa.com**. Details about the entire programme can also be found online.

Tickets and passes for the event can be purchased on the Festival's website at oiffa.com.

The Delhi Pass is a 4-film package for \$45; the Bombay Pass, a 6-film package for \$65. Offered at \$350, the OIFFA VIP Pass gives access to all Festival screenings or activities (including Opening and Closing Films and Closing Night Gala & Awards Ceremony).

Single tickets will also be available for \$13 at the Box Office on Festival days, from June 11 to 14 (the Box Office will open one hour before the first screening of the day).

All screenings will take place at Cineplex Cinemas Lansdowne & VIP, at Lansdowne Park (325 Marché Way, Unit 107, Ottawa).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

OIFFA is made possible through the support of its many partners. The Festival wishes to thank its sponsors, media partners and community partners, all of whom can be found at oiffa.com on the homepage. **OIFFA** would also like to thank all its collaborators, suppliers and volunteers as well as all participating filmmakers and artisans for their precious contribution to the success of this 3rd edition of the Festival.

ABOUT OIFFA

OIFFA is the National Capital's and Eastern Canada's preeminent festival dedicated to Indian cinema. Now in its third year, the event is dedicated to cultivating an audience for Indian cinema and culture in Ottawa. It showcases Indian films, supports Indian filmmakers and promotes the diverse perspectives of the Indian diaspora. A five-day showcase of multi-genre Indian films, the Festival hosts a number of participating filmmakers as well as a roster of events, including a Special Screening followed by **OIFFA**'s first ever Master Class, a Special Presentation, the 2nd edition of the 72-Hour Short Film Challenge and the Festival's celebrated VIP Lounge.

For more information, go to oiffa.com.

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