**For immediate release**

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*3rd i's* **17th Annual San Francisco International**

**South Asian Film Festival**

**Nov 7-10 in San Francisco; Nov 16 in Palo Alto**

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*From art-house classics to documentaries, from innovative and experimental visions to cutting-edge Bollywood, 3rd i Films is committed to promoting diverse images of South Asians through independent film.*

*3rd i's* **17th Annual San Francisco International South Asian Film Festival: Bollywood and Beyond(SFISAFF)** launches at the New People and Castro Theaters in San Francisco from November 7-10, moving to Palo Alto a week later on November 16. The five-day Festival will screen over a dozen programs of narrative and documentary features and shorts by independent filmmakers from South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora, including stories from India, Sri Lanka, UK, Italy, and the USA.

A highlight for this year coming straight out of TIFF and Venice Critics’ Week is Gitanjali Rao’s animated feature ***Bombay Rose*** (India/UK/France/Qatar, 2019). In the rich, colorful and layered hand-painted animation there is an ethereal brightness to the chaotic Mumbai streetscapes where Bollywood cinema is both satirized and romanticized, and small town folks in the big city can be crushed by its mean streets, or redeemed by love. The film moves seamlessly between a documentary feeling of present day struggles in Mumbai, to the lusciously designed dream sequences set in ancient India and inspired by Mughal folk art. Yoav Rosenthal’s original score merges swooning ballads with **traditional Bollywood music** and a haunting Latin love tribute.

Class and political commentary are subtle and second to the visual evocation of this story about unsung heroes struggling for survival, who live and love across time and memory. Part network narrative, part city symphony, part meditation on longing, ***Bombay Rose*** will entrance you.

This year we bring a special focus on **Young Voices** with a host of films that feature stories with strong youth characters. Dar Gai's ***Namdev Bhau: In Search of Silence*** (India, 2018)is a witty, off-beat take on the road movie, set against the breathtaking landscapes of Ladakh. The film features an inter-generational storyline about the relationship between a young boy and an elderly man, as they head for the peace and tranquility of the Silent Valley, leaving the hustle and bustle of the city behind. Filmmaker Gai, a philosopher by training and originally from Ukraine, has made India her filmmaking home and is touted as an exciting new voice in Indian cinema.

Also part of this youth focus is Rima Das' ***Bulbul Can Sing*** (India, 2018), which also doubles as part of our continuing regional focus on the northeast of India, with films from the burgeoning **Assamese New Wave**. Following on the heels of last year's magical *Village Rockstars*, Das' film takes us back to the timeless beauty of the northeast in this bittersweet narrative that draws inspiration from her own experiences of growing up in the Assamese countryside. This is no simple rural idyll however; in Das' deft hands, the film transforms into a deeply compelling exploration of love, loss, and adolescence. The film premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, and was hailed for engaging “the pure language of cinema”, harking back to the masters like Satyajit Ray.

Safdar Rahman’s heartwarming story of young ***Chippa*** (India, 2018) features Sunny Pawar (award-winning child star of *Lion*). Chippa sets out into night-time Calcutta looking for a father he has never seen, finding a city of migrants who speak in a curious mix of languages and a “marvelous realism” that is akin to the works of literary giants such as Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Chippa is not oblivious to the grim reality and communal suspicion surrounding him, but chooses to encounter this world with a mixture of bravado, curiosity and humor. Seen through his eyes, the road ahead is full of adventure, surprises and hope.

Another film in the youth category is ***The MisEducation of Bindu*** (USA, 2019) screening in Palo Alto, which premiered at Mill Valley Film Festival. It follows a day in the life of formerly homeschooled Bindu as she endures an American high school and tries to graduate early. Her mother (Priyanka Bose, *Lion*) does her best to keep Bindu on track while maintaining her South Asian heritage, and her clueless stepfather (David Arquette, *Scream*), tries to give Bindu advice on boys and high school life in America. Paying homage to Bollywood rock with one fantastical Bollywood dance number, Bindu dreams about escaping and longs for her home in India. Director Prarthana Mohan will be present for an illuminating Q&A.

Rounding out our youth films in Palo Alto is romantic comedy ***Bangla***(Italy, 2019), with Phaim, an awkwardly charming 22-year-old Italian-Bengali who panics when he falls in love with an impulsive and spirited Italian girl. The attraction between them is immediate, and Phaim will have to figure out how to reconcile his love with his life full of rules. Echoing the best of recent cinema hit *The Big Sick*, the film takes a unique look at the multicultural experiences of second generation South Asian Europeans in the Italian context. This whimsical lens on the clash of cultures is based on the director’s own life, who as the lead plays a fictionalized version of himself. Highlighted in Rotterdam’s International Film Festival in the Big screen competition.

Another stellar narrative in Palo Alto is Rohena Gera's ***Sir*** (2018), which premiered at Cannes Film Festival. A nuanced and sensual film, it explores the forbidden attraction between Ratna, a maid, and her employer Ashwin, a wealthy Mumbai bachelor, with each character quietly yearning to break free from the narrow bounds of their class and gender-based expectations. Gera achieves a particular delicacy in her directing, combining an appealing, understated sweetness with an edge, and thwarting all expectations and stereotypes of a typical Indian love story.

The festival features **stories of addiction,** which includes acclaimed black and white photographer Ronny Sen's indie ***Cat Sticks*** (India, 2019). A gritty and haunting narrative, the film follows the stories of several addicts looking for the high of halogen, a synthetic brand of heroin that created havoc in India at the turn of the millennium. Hailed as one of the “most gorgeous and affecting films” screened at the Slamdance Film Festival, *Cat Sticks*' bewitching score works in tandem with the evocative imagery - in lush monochrome and grey silhouettes, to create a work that is a must-see on the big screen.

The other film in this focus is Bhaskar Hazarika's quietly shocking ***Ravening (Aamis*)** (India, 2019), which opened to great acclaim at the Tribeca Film Festival. An unforgettable meditation on taboo and transgression, the film blends gentle romance and body horror into a unique cinematic experience. Hazarika masterfully concocts a tale of love and addiction that builds slowly – from a lilting rhythm to a pounding finale.

While this year's program predominantly showcases narrative features, **Documentaries** are also part of the lineup as always. Equal parts comedy, and self-discovery, Laura Asherman's intimate doc ***American Hasi*** (USA, 2019) is a portrait of Indian-American comedian, Tushar Singh. In an attempt to accelerate his career, Singh maps out a 35-day tour in India (with his mom in tow), taking part in India’s flourishing stand-up scene. In the process he discovers the challenges of cross-cultural comedy and confronts his hybrid identity head-on. Part verité road trip, part character study, this refreshingly candid doc features interviews with influential comics such as Russell Peters, Bill Burr, and Vir Das.

Comedy also features prominently in this year's edition of Coast to Coast, 3rd i's signature shorts program which brings California filmmakers into conversation with filmmakers from South Asia and the Diaspora. The program includes Varun Chounal's ***Gabroo*** (USA, 2018) about a young Sikh boy's complicated relationship with his hair, Mahesh Pailoor's portrait of Pakistani-American comedienne, ***Mona Shaikh*** (USA, 2017), and Andrew Sturm's political satire on the border wall, ***31 Foot Ladders*** (USA, 2017), along with a variety of short docs, narratives, and music videos.

This year for the first time in the festival’s history 3rd i is thrilled to offer a **free Master Class** in filmmaking from the talented documentary filmmaker Nishtha Jain (*City of Photos*, *Lakshmi* *and Me*, *At My Doorstep*, *Gulabi Gang*). One of the most gifted and prominent independent filmmakers from India, Jain returns to SFISAFF to talk about her filmmaking process, to present excerpts from past work and the present, and to talk about the different social and political movements in India, and its alignment with her work. Jain’s work holds up a mirror to some of the most pressing concerns in India today, including **India’s #metoo women’s movement**.

**Women’s issues** are at the forefront of several other films in the lineup. Vasanth S. Sai’s ***Sivaranjani and Two Other Women*** (India, 2018) pays a cinematic homage to the “everyday” woman and is a deeply moving work that focuses a **critical lens on patriarchy**, with outstanding performances by each of the lead actresses. The film captures the micro awakenings of identity and self-worth when family dynamics, early marriage, and pregnancy threaten to usurp the individuality of three women, unfolding across three different time periods.

The festival is pleased to welcome back acclaimed Sri Lankan director Prasanna Vithanage screening the historical epic feature ***Children of the Sun (Gaadi)*** (Sri Lanka, 2019) about a Sinhalese Buddhist woman in the 1814 Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, stripped from nobility who subverts the destiny forced upon her. His searing masterpiece is a period drama that takes on **caste conflict** and British colonial influences in Sri Lanka in the early 1800s. Director Vithanage will join a panel discussion following the film.

Among the voices to amplify, the festival is excited that **LGBTQ+ themes** feature prominently in Poonam Brah’s ***Home Girl*** (UK, 2019) about a British lesbian woman’s coming out story while navigating her mother’s death in “Coast to Coast: Mumbai to the Mission”, 3rd i’s shorts program, as well as Ronny Sen's ***Cat Sticks*** (India, 2019) illuminating the life and trials of a transgender sex worker, and Rima Das’ engaging youthful exploration ***Bulbul Can Sing*** (India, 2018).

Castro Passes ($35) are only available online until Nov 5. Tickets to individual films are $11/online and $13/at the door. More information about the festival, including expanded program, guest and ticketing information, will be available on our website by mid-September at: [**www.thirdi.org**](http://www.thirdi.org/)