

# cinema



✱ From above: Scenes from *Shahid*, *The Quartet* and *The Master*, the varied works being featured at this year's Dubai International Film Festival.

## Dubai festival celebrates centenary of Indian cinema

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

**T**he ongoing Dubai International Film Festival is celebrating 100 years of Indian cinema. Though 2013 is actually the centenary year, with Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* having hit the screens in 1913, many festivals have tried to be one up on the other.

The just concluded Marrakech Film Festival had a huge Bollywood bash with no less than Big B himself leading the Indian delegation. It looked more like an Olympic contingent.

Dubai's India package includes a "unique line-up of the country's talent", which will bring "fans close to some of the latest cutting-edge movies with some of the finest stars and directors". So reads the Festival's publicity material.

Nashen Moodley, the Festival's Director of Asia Africa Programmes, said: "To commemorate 100 years of Indian cinema, we have selected a collection of remarkable films that reflects the richness, flavour and essence of the nation's movie-making. Over 1,000 films are made every year in India and the platter is huge and diverse which is a testament to the movie-making excellence we see year after year."

And here is what is in on show. One of India's best regarded helmers, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, pays homage to the celebrated cultural icon, poet-dramatist-essayist Rabindranath Tagore, on his 150th birth anniversary by presenting 13 short films on 13 of the bard's poems.

The first quartet of the 13 is: *The Flutist*, *The Pond*, *The Dark Maiden* and *The Station*. Dasgupta — who is himself a renowned poet — chose to turn these poems of Tagore into celluloid poetry for two essential reasons. One, they fetched the poet his Nobel Prize. Two, the verses take the reader "along a secret second world".

Apart from Dasgupta's movies, Hansal Mehta's *Shahid* plays at Dubai. Recently acclaimed at Toronto, *Shahid* is inspired by the actual story of the slain human rights lawyer, Shahid Azmi, "an ordinary citizen with an extraordinary commitment to justice". Mehta calls his work "a small movie with a big heart".

Actor-turned-director Joy Mathew's debut feature, *Shutter*, is a Malayalam satire that follows the lives of three men, a film director, an expatriate from the Gulf and an autorickshaw driver. Bengali actor-director Kaushik Ganguly's *Shobdo* (Sound) is about a Tollywood artist, whose life gets inextricably intertwined with the sounds he has been producing for years.

Also in the Indian basket are Ashim Ahluwalia's *Miss Lovely*, Rajan Khosa's *Gattu*, Sourav Sarangi's *Char...The No-Man's Island*, Anand Gandhi's *Ship Of Theseus* and Nishtha Jain's *Gulabi Gang* among others.

One of the most anticipated documentaries in the Festival is the complex and disturbing yet heartening story of *Gulabi Gang*. The documentary follows the pink sari-clad vigilante women of the *Gulabi Gang* in India, committed to protecting women against social malpractice, corrupt

administrators, and abusive husbands. These are women who have refused to accept domestic violence and decided to strike back.

Part of India's "unique talent" will be the presence of actress Frieda Pinto as a juror. Pinto, who shot to fame with her very first film, Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2008, will be working with renowned jurors like Michael Apted, Kerry Fox, Bruno Barreto, Chang Dong Lee, Fatemeh Motamed-Arya and Nayla Al Khaja. Pinto will judge shorts as part of a panel, headed by the Screen movie critic, Mark Adams.

Boyle spelt luck for Pinto. *Slumdog Millionaire* won several Oscars, including those for Best Picture and Best Direction that helped the Mangalorean actress garner attention. She bagged several films after that, including Woody Allen's *You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger* (premiered at Cannes), Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna* (On Thomas Hardy's *Tess*) and Julian Schnabel's political biography, *Miral*. Except for *Miral*, where Pinto gave a memorable performance as a Palestinian teenager caught in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, she has not been impressive in her other roles.

But, where is Dev Patel, who co-starred with Pinto in *Slumdog Millionaire* and who is supposedly her boyfriend? He appears to have been a one-film wonder.

Beyond India, we have the much-anticipated adaptation of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* (really a great work), Bill Murray starring as President Franklin D Roosevelt

in *Hyde Park on Hudson*, Dustin Hoffman's directorial debut, *Quartet*, Wayne Blair's musical drama, *The Sapphires*, about a group of Australian Aboriginal singers, and Paul Thomas Anderson's long-awaited *There Will Be Blood*.

The Festival is also spotlighting the new wave by a group of young directors in Asia. Musa Syeed lets us peep into the still troubled Kashmir in his *Valley of Saints*. He documents how the lovely Dal Lake (remember Shammi Kapoor on a shikara trying to woo Sharmila Tagore?) has suffered because of human callousness. Mostofa Sarwar Farooki's latest feature, *Television*, narrates the conflict arising out a village headman in Bangladesh trying to implement a ban on the idiot box.

Sri Lankan helmer Asoka Handagama's latest work, *Him, Here After* tells the story of a former militant's struggle to begin life on a new note.

From award-winning Sri Lankan film director, screenwriter and visual artist Vimukthi Jayasundara comes his latest work a short titled *Light In The Yellow Breathing Space* which focuses on a young boy being with his father on his dying day.

His first feature, *The Forsaken Land* won the Caméra d'Or at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival, making him the only Sri Lankan to win the award.

Also from Sri Lanka, director and writer Suba Sivakumaran presents a beautifully shot short that was in competition earlier this year at Berlin. *Too Have a Name* explores what it means to be a woman in a world where men are absent and where both political, religious and social freedom is lacking.

Dubai is about the last on the calendar of Festivals, though smaller such events will unfold before the year is out at Chennai and Bangalore.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is covering the 9th Dubai International Film Festival, and may be contacted at gautamanb@hotmail.com)