



# Sparky Dubai Fest in offing

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

**T**he Dubai International Film Festival will walk the Red Carpet on Friday. This time, the carpet will be redder, brighter and perhaps, more enlivening than what it has been so far. For, the Festival celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and in a fitting tribute to the region that has helped in its decade long journey, the Festival will open with *Omar*, directed by the Academy Award nominated, Golden Globe winning Hany Abu-Assad from Palestine.

Abu-Assad returns — after his critically acclaimed *Paradise Now* — with an equally absorbing work, *Omar*, about a young Palestinian's dilemma caught as he is between the love for a girl and the pressure of having to rattle on his friend and possible brother-in-law.

An Israeli agent, Rami, arrests Omar. However, Rami offers to free Omar provided he says where his friend, Tarek, suspected of having killed an Israeli agent, is. *Omar*, which I saw at Cannes last May, highlights the Catch-22 situation faced by many Palestinians — who are fed up of being humiliated and are often seduced into turning betrayers.

That Dubai will start the Festival with a Palestinian movie is matter of joy: there have been occasions when Cannes has had a French work as an opener, and there have been times when Venice has parted its curtains for an Italian picture.

I have never seen the International Film Festival of India kick-start with an Indian movie; probably its takes “international” too seriously.

The Dubai show will end on December 14 with David O Russell's *American Hustle*, a crime drama with a galaxy of stars (Christian Bale, Amy Adams and Robert De Niro) centring on the FBI's sting operations in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. *American Hustle* will hit the theatres later this month.

Apart from these, the Festival will screen 174 features, documentaries and shorts, including 70 world premieres and 11 international premieres from 57 countries in 43 languages. The lineup will have 100 Arab films, indicating a renewed interest in the region and a flourishing industry.

With two Red Carpet galas every day, the Festival will have movies such as Jason Reitman's *Labour Day* (starring Academy Award winners Kate Winslet and Josh Brolin), *Factory Girl* by Mohamed Khan, featuring Yasmine Raees, Hani Adel and Salwa Khatib, *12 Years A Slave* by Steve McQueen, featuring Michael Fassbender and Brad Pitt, Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station*, Ben Stiller's *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty*, Lee Hancock's *Saving Mr Banks* (Tom Hanks, Emma Thompson) and Laila Marrakchi's *Rock the Casbah* featuring Hiam Abbass, Nadine Labaki, Lubna Azabal, Morjana Alaoui and Omar Sharif.

Beyond this seemingly exciting slate of films, Dubai plans to celebrate 100 years of Indian cinema. Since the Festival's first 2004 edition — which I covered — I have noticed Dubai's strong ties with India that have usually translated into the country's films being screened in edition after edition. Here are a few titles from a nation that produces more than 1000 movies year after year.

The Cannes screener, Amit Kumar's *Monsoon Shootout*, is a dark cop thriller narrated with stylish intrigue. Exploring



**OPENER:** The Festival will open with Golden Globe winning Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad's *Omar*.



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** *The Patience Stone* offers an enriching experience with Golshifteh Farahani making her presence felt.

the impact one's man choices may have on others, *Monsoon Shootout* plays out in Mumbai's mafia “mohallas” even as heavy rains mercilessly lash the city.

Adi, a gun-toting rookie cop learns to banish the moral conflicts from his head as he begins his first assignment. An ensemble cast of Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Viray Varma, Tannishtha Chatterjee and Neeraj Kabi, offer edgy performances in this rollercoaster ride of a film that blurs the line between right and wrong.

Independent helmer and writer Madhureeta Anand's hard-hitting feature *Kajarya* is about the struggles women in India face today. This shocking movie looks at female foeticide and infanticide. Armed with a feel of authenticity and shot in real locations with real people as characters, *Kajarya* captures honest emotions to bring these inconceivable stories to the screen.

Acclaimed filmmaker Suman Mukhopadhyay offers his adaptation of Tagore's much-loved novel *The Last Poem*, widely considered a gem in Bengali literature.

The plot revolves around Amit Ray, an Oxford-educated iconoclastic barrister, who falls in love with the strong-willed Labanya.

Their romance blooms on the misty hills of Shillong, aided and abetted by the poems they write to each other.

From Kerala, Shaji N Karun's *The Voiding Soul* also explores budding love between Unni and Nalini, their love ignited by their passion for the Chenda (a percussion instrument) and Mohiniattam (a classical dance form). However, even as Unni challenges traditional rules and explore forbidden territories, Nalini's sudden marriage takes the magic out of the romance.

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**Atiq Rahimi:** Last week, during an invigorating session I had with graduate students at the St Xavier's College in Goa's capital city, Panaji, some of them felt that film adaptations from literature never worked. The book was always better than the movie. In fact, this has been one of the stickiest points of conflict between an author and a film director.

Someone even as renowned as Adoor Gopalakrishnan (there have been others, of course) had his differences of opinion with the famous writer, Paul Zacharia, when one of his works was adapted to the screen. It was a

Mammootty-starrer called *Vidheyan* (Servile) that Adoor directed.

However, the question is will such a disagreement arise if the author and the helmer are the same. This is one of the issues I raised during a recent conversation in Panaji with the eminent Afghan writer, Atiq Rahimi. He directed *The Patience Stone* that was adapted from his own book with the same title. The movie was part of the International Film Festival of India, which ended in Panaji last week.

Asked which was his favourite — the book or the movie — Rahimi says that “they are like my children. I love both of them equally. I cannot choose one over the other”. However, there is a world of difference between words and visuals. “Pictures tell a story very differently from passages in a novel. It is very difficult to compare the two mediums. It is not even fair”.

But why did Rahimi, who had earlier authored the best-selling *Earth and Ashes* in the Dari language, go in for an adaptation of *The Patience Stone*.

“There were several reasons”, he contends. “First, I got a producer. Second, when I write, I do it alone. Sometimes I do not understand my own characters. I think a film helps me understand them better. I seem to discover them in all their three dimensions when they begin talking and moving on the screen”.

Also, a movie, unlike a book, is a team effort, with questions and cross-questions cropping up ever so often.

“My actress may ask me why she has to say these lines. She may want me to explain. My cinematographer may want to know why the camera ought to be placed at a particular spot”, Rahimi avers.

“In the course of these explanations, I have found my characters and situations taking on a new meaning. I seem to understand them even better than what I did while I was writing the story”.

Although the novel is in French, Rahimi decided to make the film in Dari/Persian, mainly because he wanted his own countrymen — most of who are illiterate and cannot read subtitles — to watch *The Patience Stone* (which is in Persian).

Rahimi — who left his native Afghanistan for France soon after the Russian invasion, but who now divides his time between Kabul and Paris — tells me that *The Patience Stone* (2008), was inspired by a horrific incident on the eve of a literary conference in 2005, when a young and famous poet was murdered by her husband. The conference in Kabul was cancelled.

*The Patience Stone* narrates the story of a young and beautiful Afghan woman (played by the extraordinarily talented Golshifteh Farahani, the Iranian actress, who also ran away from her home and has been living in Paris for the past five years), who is taking care of her comatose husband with a bullet stuck in his neck. Her long “conversations” with him — rather her monologues — get more and more daring and sexually explicit till they shake the man out of his unconscious state.

Rahimi concludes the interview with the quip: “I am not unsatisfied with the movie”, thereby cleverly avoiding a definite yes or a no to my question!

● Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered several editions of the Dubai International Film Festival, and will be there this year as well, and he may be e-mailed at gautamanb@hotmail.com