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Tokyo International Film Festival offers a varied canvas

Some of the star attractions at the Tokyo International Film Festival included films such as Ashes on a Road Trip, No Choice, The Old Town Girl, No Choice and The Real Thing.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Nov 19, 2020, 16:32 IST


 Gautaman Bhaskaran
Hindustan Times


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A still from The Old Town Girls.

Most movie festivals, beginning with the inaugural Red Sea International Film Festival at Jeddah, had to be cancelled this year, given the havoc caused by the coronavirus pandemic. However, with some marginal letup in the rate of infections in Italy and Japan, both Venice and Tokyo held their annual events, the latter with a mix of physical and digital forms. Japan just did not want to mar its almost virus free-environment in October-November by inviting foreign guests. So, it offered digital rights probably to keep the continuity flowing.

After watching many films, one found some worked better for this writer than others. The only entry from India, Mangesh Joshi's Ashes on a Road Trip


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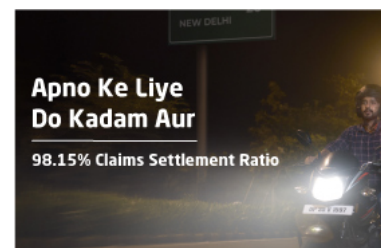
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reminded me of the 1998 Cannes title, Patrice Chereau's *Those Who Love Me Can Take The Train* -- a classic example of how people blurt out uncomfortable truths or fume at injustices they have been nursing. Chereau's work takes us to the funereal of a minor painter, and his relatives gather at his twin brother's home, where long buried secrets are openly tossed around. Similarly, Joshi's work is a subtle but powerful look at how human relationships begin to break after a death.



Mangesh Joshi's *Ashes* on a Road Trip

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Puru Dada is gone, and his three younger brothers, Satish Karkhanis (Mohan Agashe), Pradeep Karkhanis (Pradeep Joshi) and Ajit Karkhanis (Ajit Abhyankar), begin the rituals of cremation. Puru, on his death bed, had expressed his wish to have his ashes buried in their ancestral home and fields. So, the three men set out in a van driven by Dada's son Om Karkhanis (Amey Wagh). They are accompanied by their sister, Sadhana Karkhanis (Geetanjali Kulkarni).

The movie turns into an adventure-filled road trip, sweetly poignant at times and punishingly painful at other. There are moments of hilarity as there are of deep sorrow at a memorial meet, where Dada's kind gestures are praised by those who received his noble help.

Much like most Iranian movies, Reza Dormishian's *No Choice* uses minimalism to tell us a socially relevant story that is as distressing as it is elevating. The work gripped me with its powerful imagery, no-nonsense script and brilliant performances. With mostly female cast, the film could have been a little less than 108 minutes. But never mind, it presents a socio-legal thriller without exaggerated frills and mannerisms, and what a contrast this is to the kind of courtroom dramas or social narratives we have seen in Indian movies. An auteur with the most original of ideas, Dormishian tackles hugely disturbing happenings in Iran – the miserable condition of the homeless, who do not have an inkling of even what their basic rights are, the illegal trade in surrogacy and the misdeeds in the medical fraternity that go under the guise of community welfare.

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A still from Iranian film, No Choice.

Golbahar (Pardis Ahmadiyeh) is a pretty teenager who lives on the streets of Tehran and is recklessly used as a baby-producing machine by a pimp, Mojtaba (Mojtaba Pirzadeh). When she meets with an accident, has a miscarriage and has her fallopian tubes tied up during the procedure at the hospital without her consent, all hell breaks loose. This discovery is made when she and Mojtaba find out that she does not conceive after having sex with a rich man, whose wife cannot give him children. Social-activist lawyer, Sara Nedayi (Negar Javaherian) is tough behind her pleasing face, and brooks no nonsense. She defends Golbahar, taking on the powerful medical system and respected gynaecologist, Dr Pandar (Fatemeh Motamed-Arya), who is accused of harming the teenager.

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Japanese master Koji Fukada's offering *The Real Thing* is, well, a romance about a salaryman (as employees are referred to in Japan)! Scratch the surface, the film talks about in an endless back and forth form about the hero, Tsuji (played by Win Morisaki) and his Teen Deviyen. (Remember the Hindi film with Bollywood casanova Dev Anand hitting it out with Nanda, Simi Garewal and Kalpana Mohan?). First produced by Japan's Nagoya TV as a 10-episode series from a comic book and helmed by Fukada, *The Real Thing* has been condensed (if one may use this term) to nearly four hours for a theatrical opening. And in these 233 minutes, Tsuji flits from one woman to another – and then back to the first and the second in what appears like an endless game of musical chairs.

There was something about first-time feature film director, David Bonneville's (renowned for his shorts), *The Last Bath* that reminded me of the celebrated 1960s musical, *The Sound of Music*. Like Maria in this work, Josefina (played by Anabela Moreira) in *The Last Bath*, is all set to take her celibacy vows in order to become a nun in a convent near Porto (the second largest city in Portugal), when a tragedy pushes her away from this path. While in *The Sound of Music*, Maria is sent to take care of the widowed Captain Von Trapp's seven children, Josefina has to rush to care for her nephew when her father passes away. The

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15-year-old boy, Alexandre (Martim Canavarro) has been, in the absence of his mother, staying with his grandfather. Also, like Maria, who struggles to reconcile with Christ's calling in the face of her growing attraction to the captain (there is a beautiful scene here in which Mother Superior asks Maria whether she would love God less if she were to love Von Trapp), Josefina also faces an inner turmoil in her relationship with her young nephew.



The Last Bath is disturbingly complex, intense and even dark as we see a family on the verge of dysfunction. At her father's funeral, Alexandre weeps inconsolably and holds on to the hope that his mother, Angela (played by Moreira's real-life twin Margarida Moreira), would come back to fetch him.

Writer-director, Shen Yu, in his debut work, *The Old Town Girls*, weaves a rather sad story of a teenager, the shy Shui Qing (Li Gengxi), who having grown up with her father is both excited and scared when her mother, the hot-tempered Qu Ting (Wan Qian), returns home after many years. The girl gets all the more uncomfortable when she realises that her mother has come back with a heavy baggage – which is both emotional and financial. Obviously, there is gnawing tension that the movie underlines exceptionally well. There may not be many surprises in *The Old Town Girls*, but what is remarkable is Shui's innocence which keeps her hoping that her mother has but noble intentions. And the teenager is desperate for some kind of stability, harmony and joy, especially after the kind of raw deal she gets from her stepmother. There is a poignant scene in which we see a famished Shui returning home from school, but her stepmother asks her to stay out of the family meal.



In the midst of lurking sorrow, the director uses daylight and bright imagery for relief, and we are taken through a labyrinth of emotions which finally bind the mother and the daughter. Shui's factory-worker father's life is no less complicated, and this presents a third dimension to the plot and also serves as a reason for his placid neglect of his daughter.

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(Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered the Tokyo International Film Festival for several years.)

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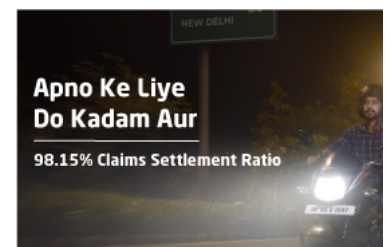
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Mira Nair's A Suitable Boy to be first-ever TV series to close Toronto Film Fest

The screening spans six hours, covering the entire series , with two intermissions for 20-minutes each for those attending in person.

WORLD Updated: Sep 20, 2020, 16:27 IST


Anirudh Bhattacharyya
Hindustan Times, Toronto



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Tanya Maniktala stars as Lata in Mira's Nair's adaptation of Vikram Seth's novel A Suitable Boy. (Image courtesy: TIFF)

f In an unusual year, the Toronto International Film Festival concludes on Sunday with an unusual choice: Its closing night presentation isn't a movie, but the TV series *A Suitable Boy*, adapted by Indian-origin director Mira Nair from Vikram Seth's classic novel.

🐱 The screening spans six hours, covering the entire series produced for BBC, with two intermissions of 20-minutes each for those attending in person.

🖨 Nair said she was "delighted" when TIFF chose to make this the first-ever TV project to close the festival in its 45-year history. Nair said this was the only format to do justice to Seth's monumental work: "A Suitable Boy cannot be a two-and-a-half hour film, it should not be. It should be at least six hours, in the way I've tried to do it but it could be even longer."

While the novel was first published in 1993, many of its themes remain relevant, including that of communal faultlines. In fact, Nair took the original "distillation" of the novel and "brought a lot of politics back from the story of the novel" rather than making it just one about the protagonist Lata having to choose from among three suitors.

"I love that part of it, but it was important for me to see Lata almost as the new India. So, as the country moved towards its first election, Lata moves towards finding herself."

The novel is set in the period right after Independence and syncretic culture is the foundation of the series.

"I did really want to hold a mirror in a way to the young of today to see what we were, even though we had just come out of the trauma of Partition," she said.

There was a "depth of relationships that today are really being threatened just by the politicisation of it all," she said.



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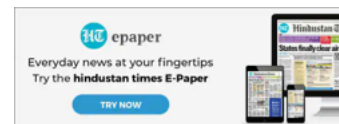
Nair has already been feted at TIFF this year with the Tribute Award, along with actors Kate Winslet, Sir Anthony Hopkins, and director Chloe Zhao.

Tanya Maniktala, who plays Lata, was chosen as one of TIFF's Rising Stars. Of casting the young actor in the pivotal role, Nair said that other than her hypnotic eyes and amazing smile, she had the kind of "fluttery innocence" that was difficult to find among young women these days.

The author has two meaningful words for the director about the series – "Thank you," Nair said of Seth's reaction.

"I don't speak for him, but I think he's very satisfied."

New York-based Nair was unable to make it in person for the closing night screening due to ongoing restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The series has been acquired by Netflix and Nair said she is hopeful it will be available to an Indian audience "very soon."



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TIFF documentary 76 Days gives unprecedented access into Wuhan's Covid-19 story

The 93-minute film, which has footage of the chaos and challenges faced within the Chinese city as the unknown virus wreaked havoc, had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival or TIFF.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Sep 15, 2020, 08:48 IST



Anirudh Bhattacharyya
Hindustan Times



A still from the documentary 76 Days showing medical workers limiting the number of patients admitted into a hospital during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China. (Credit: Courtesy 76 Days LLC)



Given the year, it may be fitting that the first documentary feature examining the coronavirus crisis is set in the city that is synonymous with its emergence – Wuhan. The 93-minute film, which has footage of the chaos and challenges

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faced within the Chinese city as the unknown virus wreaked havoc, had its world premiere at the [Toronto International Film Festival](#) or TIFF.

And given the information management Beijing has put in place to conceal its failure to warn the world of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, its creators have requested first viewers to “refrain from discussing identifying details contained in the film” so as to “avoid any potential government interference with the film, and with the filmmakers in China, before the film’s wider release.” As its production notes state: “China is imposing strict controls over the narrative of its COVID-19 response, and the footage contained in this film is unprecedented in its access.”

The film spans the period from January 23 to April 8, the extent of the lockdown in Wuhan, a city of 11 million in the Hubei province of China, after which the virus was initially named. As doctors, nurses and paramedics strive to control the stream of patients pouring into hospitals, the refrain from them is “Don’t panic.” It starts with the wailing of a woman, seeking to see her dead father’s corpse once last time, and focuses on a separate box created as the body count rises: ID Cards and Phones of the Dead.

Also read: [The Disciple only Indian film to make it to TIFF this year, director Chaitanya Tamhane says ‘would have been great to present it in person’](#)

The film was the idea of New York-based Hao Wu, who spent the Chinese New Year holiday in Shanghai as “a panic was setting in all over China.” As Hao said, “It became increasingly clear that the local government had lied and suppressed whistleblowers to conceal the outbreak. It also became apparent that the situation was dire in Wuhan – people were dying, hospitals were overwhelmed, and medical personnel did not have adequate protection so they were getting sick and dying too. The country was angry. I was angry.”

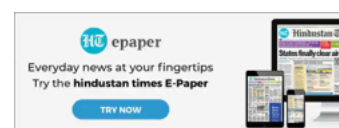
He collaborated with two China-based reporters Weixi Chen and a second just identified as Anonymous, “to avoid attracting attention.” As they filmed in four different hospitals and exchanged rushes with Hao online, the film came together, as one of human suffering and heroism of medical personnel amid the scale of the tragedy unfolding around them in a dystopian setting.

The directors, Hao said “risked their own lives to film in the hospitals, especially when the danger of the coronavirus was little understood in the early days of the Wuhan lockdown.” Like medical personnel they donned personal protective equipment that resembled space suits, as they entered the contamination zone. At one point, fearing for their own safety as China cracked down on non-official information being released, his co-directors quit the project. However, after the lockdown was lifted, they were persuaded to return to complete a documentary that TIFF’s artistic director Cameron Bailey described as “urgent, powerful filmmaking.”

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Chaitanya Tamhane bags Best Screenplay award for The Disciple at Venice Film Festival, loses Golden Lion to Nomadland

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After bagging the FIPRESCI award, Chaitanya Tamhane's *The Disciple* was also honoured with Best Screenplay award at Venice International Film Festival closing ceremony on Saturday. The Golden Lion was bagged by Frances McDormand's *Nomadland*.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Sep 13, 2020, 12:41 IST



HT Entertainment Desk



Director Chaitanya Tamhane and producer Vivek Gomber at Venice Film Festival.



Filmmaker [Chaitanya Tamhane's *The Disciple*](#) won the best Best Screenplay award at Venice International Film Festival during the closing ceremony held on Saturday. This is the second award the film got at the festival. Earlier, it was honoured with the International Critics' Prize awarded by FIPRESCI.

Chaitanya said in a statement, "Writing *The Disciple* was by far the most challenging and painful endeavour I have ever undertaken. This honour means a lot to me and it will encourage me to keep pushing my own boundaries even further. I want to dedicate this award to all the musicians, researchers, authors, and historians who helped open the doors to the incredible world of Indian classical music for me." In 2014, Chaitanya's marathi film *Court* had won the Best Film (Orizzonti) award and Chaitanya bagged the Lion of the Future Award.

Vivek added, "To win a Best Screenplay award amongst such stalwarts is just an incredible feat. I am really grateful to the jury and very proud of Chaitanya. It's the hardest and the loneliest job, but the final script was also what convinced me to back the film."

[Also read: Prakash Raj takes a dig at Kangana Ranaut: 'If one film makes Kangana think that she is Rani Laxmi Bai, then...'](#)

The Disciple was selected for the Best Screenplay award by the Jury for the Official Competition, presided by 2-time Oscar-winning actress Cate Blanchett, and comprising British director Joanna Hogg (*The Souvenir*), French actress Ludivine Sagnier (*8 Women*, *Swimming Pool*), Austrian filmmaker Veronika

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Franz (Goodnight Mommy), German director Christian Petzold (Undine, Barbara), American actor Matt Dillon (The House that Jack Built) and Italian writer Nicola Lagioia.

Chloe Zhao's Nomadland won the prestigious Golden Lion award at the festival. The film stars Oscar-winner Frances McDormand as the lead.

The Disciple was also selected as the only Indian film this year among the official selection of the 2020 Toronto International Film Festival.

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The Disciple only Indian film to make it to TIFF this year, director Chaitanya Tamhane says 'would have been great to present it in person'

After winning FIPRESCI International Critics' Prize at Venice Film Festival, Chaitanya Tamhane's *The Disciple* is going to Toronto International Film Festival. It's the festival's only Indian selection this year.

WORLD-CINEMA Updated: Sep 12, 2020, 12:16 IST



Anirudh Bhattacharyya
Hindustan Times, New Delhi



Chaitanya Tamhane's *The Disciple* is earning accolades all around.



Mumbai-based director Chaitanya Tamhane is currently in the first week of a mandatory quarantine regime in India, after he returned from Venice on Monday. That may be a small price to pay for being able to walk the red carpet

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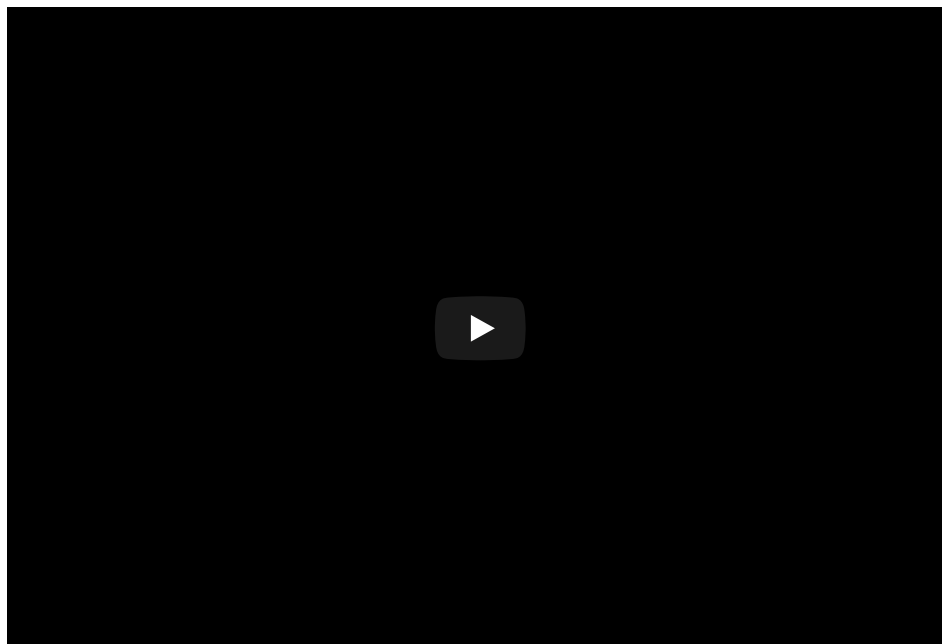
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at the Biennale as his feature, *The Disciple*, premiered at the prestigious Italian film festival. In a year that's been a downer for movies thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, *The Disciple*, is also the only Indian selection at the Toronto International Film Festival or TIFF.

"It was a bit of suspense" for Chaitanya to get to Venice since he required "special exception" to travel from the Ministry of External Affairs. It was the first Indian film since Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* in 2001 to be selected in the competition category at Venice. Chaitanya will have to visit Toronto virtually as restrictions on non-essential travel remain in Canada. As he said in an interview, "It would have been great to present the film in person but given this year and given the safety protocols that Toronto has in place, I totally want to respect that for my own safety and for the safety of others."

A deeply contemplative exploration of the evolution of a Hindustani classical vocalist in Mumbai, *The Disciple*, which is mainly in Marathi, is already being feted globally and won the FIPRESCI International Critics' Prize at Venice Film Festival. "We're just so grateful and relieved that the film premiered at Venice and is now in Toronto, just happy that even in this year we could get a film out and also for us this is a great start. We couldn't have asked for a better like fall festival launch," the director said.

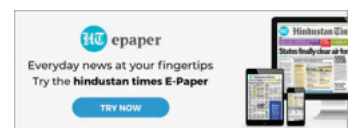


Chaitanya took four years to complete the film, including spending half that time on research. "When I started out, I was just fascinated with the anecdotes and the stories of eccentric geniuses and this idea of some secret knowledge and lost wisdom," he said. The cast comprises first time actors, mostly trained classical exponents, including the exceptional performance of Aditya Modak, who plays the central role of Sharad Nerulkar, a young man torn between the somewhat ascetic sensibility required for his art and the pressures of reality and modernity. Casting non-professionals was a "very very thorough" process

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for Tamhane, as he said, “Because you just need to make sure they have the screen presence they have an intuition for acting because they will be ultimately delivering scripted lines.”

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The meditative film is a slow burning flame spanning three time periods, as it tracks Nerulkar’s development. Making it special is the incredible music, including the vocal art at its core, making this a work where sound and sight complement and enhance each other.

This is Tamhane’s first feature since Court in 2014, and he was mentored by Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón, winner of multiple Oscars for films like Gravity and Roma. Cuarón is also the film’s executive producer, which for Chaitanya was “almost too good to be true.”

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