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Shared History and Diverse Cultures Find Voice as EKTA and Friends of South Asia (FOSA), in collaboration with Himal Association, Present Traveling Film South Asia 2004

SAN FRANCISCO – February 10, 2004 – Showcasing the groundbreaking work and emerging talent of non-fiction filmmakers from South Asia, Traveling Film South Asia 2004 (TFSA 2004) debuts on March 12 as the only festival of its kind in California. Organized by Ekta and Friends of South Asia (FOSA), in collaboration with Himal Association, the festival offers Bay Area filmgoers a rare opportunity to view a selection of 19 compelling documentaries that chart the shared history and complex lives of the people of the sub-continent. Covering a wide range of important political, social, and economic issues and giving voice to many of the region's people—women, religious minorities, and indigenous communities—the films focus the lens on life in contemporary South Asia, while celebrating its rich cultural diversity. Representing filmmakers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, this year's festival is a compilation of award-winning and thought-provoking films that include a selection of films from the 2003 Film South Asia (FSA) festival in Nepal, six films that screened at the recently concluded World Social Forum in India, and two films by the internationally acclaimed Pakistani filmmaker, Sabiha Sumar. The event runs from March 12-21 in San Francisco and from March 26-28 in Milpitas.

As the only such event solely dedicated to supporting contemporary South Asian non-fiction films, TFSA 2004 provides a unique platform for filmmakers to exhibit new works that examine critical and often provocative issues. This year's festival is particularly noteworthy because it screens three films that were censored by the recent Mumbai International Film Festival due to their anti-establishment content. The rejection of the films spawned a massive protest in the documentary film community, with over 170 Indian filmmakers threatening to boycott the festival. In a political climate that threatens freedom of expression, festivals such as TFSA 2004 play an important role in advocacy and social change. For this reason, Film South Asia—the festival that TFSA draws upon—has gained a deserving recognition in the international community as a world-class festival that gives voice to visionary documentary filmmakers. Since its beginnings in 1997, Film South Asia has traveled to more than 45 international venues.

TFSA 2004 will be held over three weekends in March at two Bay Area venues: at the Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco, during March 12-14 and March 19-21, and at the India Community Center, Milpitas, during March 26-28. The March 12 program opens at the Mission Cultural Center at 7 p.m. with a screening of Amar Kanwar's, **A NIGHT OF PROPHECY** (India, 2002). One of the films censored at the recent Mumbai International Film Festival but shown at the World Social Forum, this poetic documentary travels through different parts of India to reveal how poetry and music can unify a nation's people even in the face of severe conflict and oppression. The program continues with the groundbreaking **RESILIENT RHYTHMS** (India, 2002), a dynamic and truthful portrayal of India's caste system and the Dalit response to their marginalization. Gopal Menon, known for his compelling and acclaimed documentary, *Hey Ram: Genocide in the Land of Gandhi*, directed the film.

Reflecting the current political situation in India, religious fundamentalism and the need for tolerance was a powerful and recurrent theme explored by many of the films. In **GODHRA TAK: THE TERROR TRAIL** (India, 2003), director Shubrudeep Chakravorty investigates the Godhra train burning and subsequent rioting that killed 2000 Muslims in Gujarat, India in February 2002. Chakravorty retraces in chilling detail the route of the first batch of *kar sevaks* from Gujarat to Ayodhya and back and carefully reconstructs the terror they unleashed en route leading to the Godhra fire and the riots that followed. In a climate of increasing religious divides, directors Jayasankar and Monteiro provide a glimmer of hope in their film, **NAATA – THE BOND** (India, 2003). The film is a moving tale of two friends who work on promoting communal harmony in Bombay's largest slum. Naata was one of the films removed from the Mumbai International Film Festival, but shown at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in January 2004.

From body image to struggling for personal freedom in a male-dominated society, some of the most outstanding films of the festival focus on women's issues. **SKIN DEEP** (India, 1998), by Reena Mohan, is an exploration of body images and self-perception among contemporary urban, middle class women in India. The film is a playful, engrossing, and articulate rendering on women's complicated and contradictory relationships with their bodies. **SWARA – A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER** (Pakistan, 2003), by Samar Minallah, is a hard-hitting commentary on the Pakhtun practice of giving minor girls in marriage to an "enemy family" in reparation for serious crimes committed by male members of the girl's family. The issue is now before the Pakistan's Supreme Court and Minallah is hoping that legislation is brought soon to ban the practice of "swara." Also from Pakistan, is director Sabiha Sumar's film, **DON'T ASK WHY** (1999). Based on a diary, the film takes us into the life of Anousheh and provides a moving account of the dreams and fears of a 17-year-old girl growing up in a conservative and patriarchal society. Most of Sumar's films are banned in her native country.

Two films from Bangladesh reveal that the nation's freedom struggle of the 1970s continues to be an important theme for its filmmakers. In **WORDS OF FREEDOM (MUKTIR KOTHA)** (1999), directors Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud tell the story of musicians traveling through refugee camps and war zones during the Liberation War in 1971. The film blends documentary and fictional genres in a musical structure to follow the birth of a nation and the ideals of secularism and tolerance on which it was founded. In **TALE OF THE DARKEST NIGHT (SHEI RATER KOTHA BOLTE ESHECHI)** (2001), director Kawsar Chowdhury recreates the horror of the massacre by the Pakistani army in Dhaka University. The film won the Second Best Film Award at Film South Asia 2003.

Other important themes explored in the films include the harmful effects of migration, displacement of rural and indigenous communities due to large development projects, and environmental degradation.

Ekta and Friends of South Asia (FOSA) present the festival, in collaboration with Himal Association. Ekta is a local nonprofit organization that provides a platform for social change through art, dialogue, and education within the South Asian community. FOSA is a Bay Area group that works towards a peaceful, prosperous, and hate-free South Asia. Located in the Kathmandu Valley region of Nepal, Himal Association is a nonprofit organization whose goal is to raise awareness of local, national, and international issues among Nepali people. Festival co-sponsors include the Center for South Asian Studies (University of California at Berkeley), the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the California Institute for Integral Studies, and the India Community Center.

For a complete list of films and show times, further information, or to purchase tickets online, visit <http://ektaonline.org/tfsa> or email tfsa@ektaonline.org. Tickets per show are \$6 online (\$9 at the door) at the Mission Cultural Center. For screenings at the India Community Center, tickets are \$5 (at the door or online). A festival pass that covers films at both venues can be purchased online for \$25.

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